

JUNE 2020

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FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE

A FATHER'S LOVE

A photograph of a man and a young boy sitting on a stone wall outdoors. The man, on the right, is wearing a dark grey long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The boy, on the left, is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt and blue jeans. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background is a blurred green landscape with trees and a bright sun in the upper left corner.

IS DEATH
NATURAL?

p. 14

WHOM DO YOU
BELIEVE?

p. 26

GETTING
PAST GUILT

p. 31



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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

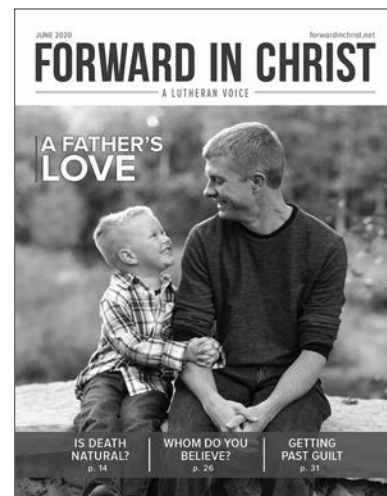
For the last few months it has been hard to know whom to believe—health experts, government officials, the local media, or that friend who always seems to know everything. Whom do you trust? Whom do you follow?

Luke Thompson reminds us that these questions become even more important when we are talking about our spiritual life. But he also assures us that the one whom we can trust—our triune God—is always with us in the Word and sacraments (p. 26). We just need to listen to him.

As we listen to our heavenly Father, he guides us on our journey in this life. That same Father provides us with other fathers to mold and shape and help us. Read more in Paul Wendland's poignant article (p. 10).

God also calls others—pastors, teachers, staff ministers—to serve us with the truth through the public ministry. Discover more about why public ministry matters on p. 28. Then read two real-life examples of how God used teachers to share his Word with their students (pp. 7 & 12) and marvel at how God fights for every soul to be with him in paradise.

Julie Wietzke



COVER PHOTO | Fresh Frame Photography

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ON THE COVER

Pictured on the cover are John Tiefel and his son AJ. The Tiefels are members at David’s Star, Jackson, Wis. Sarah Schlicht, a member at Grace, Milwaukee, Wis., took the photo.



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THIS IS WELS

The world changed this year with the outbreak of COVID-19. See how WELS churches, schools, and members adapted and continued to let their light shine. Read more on pp. 20-21.

1 | Drive-in worship at Grace, Spring Hill, Fla., including a children's message 2 | Easter Sunday worship at St. Mark, DePere, Wis. 3 | Morning devotion at St. Matthew Lutheran School, Spokane, Wash. 4 | Confirmation examination at Grace, Minot, N.D. 5 | Thanking teachers at St. Paul

Lutheran School, New Ulm, Minn. 6 | Palm processional at Gethsemane, Raleigh, N.C. 7 | Video editing children's devotions at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis. 8 | Chalk the Walk at Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio 9 | Holy Week worship kits at Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz.

SEE MORE AT ► forwardinchrist.net. Have a photo to share? Send it to ficsubmissions@wels.net or upload it at forwardinchrist.net/submit.



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Be gentle like Jesus

“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Isaiah 42:3).

Peter M. Prange

JESUS HAD EVERY advantage over her. A faultless life. A supreme understanding of God’s holy Word. From God’s chosen people. The Son of David. The Son of God. Perfection. In reality, he had every right to hold his head high and every reason not to give this Samaritan floozy the time of day.

And she knew it.

So, when Jesus requested a drink of water from her, she was beyond astonished. “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” St. John made sure to report that “Jews do not associate with Samaritans” (John 4:9). What he didn’t say is that Jewish men back then would not have been caught dead alone with a woman like this.

But Jesus was different.

JESUS’ GENTLE LOVE

Does that surprise you? It shouldn’t. Already centuries before, the prophet Isaiah described the gentle nature of our Savior in wonderful detail. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”

True, this woman was a bit more than bruised. She was broken. When Jesus asked her to go get her husband, she claimed to have none. How right she was. He replied, “The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true” (John 4:18). The Savior spoke the truth, yet he uttered it with such tender love and compassion.

And somehow, she knew it.

Call it a woman’s intuition, but she knew that this man cared. Perhaps for the first time in her life, she was talking with a man who cared. About her. A man showing gentleness. To her. A man being genuinely careful not to bruise or to break. Her. A man who brought healing, not hurt. For her.

And she knew it.

It would have been simple for Jesus to play the judge. He had her dead to rights, and she knew it. But “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17). He had asked the woman for a drink to quench his thirst, but he was far more interested in quenching hers.

So that’s what he did. Not only did this Samaritan woman come to know Jesus for the gentle, life-giving



PHOTO | iStock

Are we gentle like Jesus, or would we rather play the judge?

Savior he is, but she also spread the news of his gentle love with anyone who would listen.

She knew it, and she couldn’t help but share it.

OUR GENTLE WITNESS

Are we gentle like Jesus, or would we rather play the judge? Do we seek to bring healing or do we prefer to pile it on? Are we prepared to walk a mile in the shoes of the other person who may have not chosen as wisely as we did, or do we instead walk all over those who seem to make one bad life decision after another? Are we gentle, or are we judges?

Excuse sin? Of course not. But be gentle like Jesus? Always! Not only with those who know Jesus but especially with those who don’t. For how can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone telling them—gently!—with beautiful feet (Romans 10:14,15)?

So be like Jesus. Be gentle.



Contributing editor Peter Prange is pastor at Bethany, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

A lesson to be learned

As I write this in April, our world is in the midst of what most would agree is an unprecedented crisis. The COVID-19 virus has had serious effects on almost every aspect of our lives. Millions have become sick; tens of thousands have died. And what is most frustrating—and, perhaps, frightening—is that at least right now there is no certain end in sight. What will it be like when you read these words in June?

Today, I received an e-mail from a good friend, Professor Daniel Deutschlander. He is a man who has been blessed not only with deep Christian wisdom but also with the skill to express it. I took his words to heart, because they applied directly to me and to my own shortcomings and failures during these trying times. Perhaps his words will resonate with you as well. Here is part of what he wrote:

Something has been bothering me more and more as this health crisis grips the nation and therefore occupies an increasing amount of necessary attention from our pastors. I have noted in their messages that they are properly eager to strengthen and comfort our people with God's powerful and beautiful gospel promises.

But I notice that one thing seems consistently missing. In times of trouble in Israel, what was the first thing that the prophets had to say to the people? Repent! Jesus himself echoed that call throughout his ministry, but especially in answer to the question about tragedy in the death of the Galileans and the fall of the tower of Siloam (Luke 13:1-5). The epistles too point us always to the purpose of both God's goodness and his discipline (Romans 2:4, Hebrews 12:5). . . .

We do well to remember that God blesses the nation for the sake of the elect, of the church, of his believers. [Believers], therefore, do well to be first in bending before the throne of grace with prayers of repentance and then with the appeal for grace and grace alone on the nation in which we rededicate ourselves—to faithfulness to his Word and with the eagerness to proclaim both repentance and forgiveness to the fallen world. We cannot help but note that in the book of Judges, for example, when people were rescued and then again fell into still worse sins, God's judgment came again in an even more severe form. Don't we see it in our country? Each decade seems to have a worse trial. Each judgment is sadly met with less and less in the way of humility, much less of listening to the call of the Scriptures to repentance and then to the joy of restoration. But we should be in the lead of calling ourselves to repentance, recommitment, and renewed and grateful zeal when God's rescue comes. And in it all we hold still closer the point and purpose of everything in our own lives—the cross and the empty tomb and its promise of eternal rescue.

I have applied these wise words to myself. I renew my trust in the goodness and grace of God, confident in the promises that he has made. I understand again to put first things first and come before God with a repentant heart for the sins I have done and the good I have left undone, for trusting in my own strength rather than God's.

When the events that God allows bring us first to repentance, he has accomplished his purpose. When we realize that, we will appreciate his grace all the more.



Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President



PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs



CONFESSIONS *of faith*

After attending a Lutheran school and getting a chance to study God's Word in depth, two brothers become members to prepare for adulthood. | Rachel Hartman

PHOTO | Lightstock

"AT THE TIME, I didn't appreciate it fully," says Anthony Leonart, reflecting on his time studying at a Lutheran high school. "After graduating, I could see how devoted the teachers were and how they were really the essence of the Great Commission."

Anthony and his older brother Alex first had a chance to study the Bible consistently while attending Divine Savior Academy (DSA), Doral, Fla. Now in college, the brothers appreciate the chance to have spent their high school years surrounded by teachers devoted to God's Word. The brothers also attend church to maintain their relationship with God and grow in their faith.

A CHRISTIAN START

Alex and Anthony were raised in their parents' home in Miami Springs, Florida. "We didn't grow up going to church," Alex says. "I knew who Jesus was, but he wasn't a main focus."

Starting at kindergarten, they attended a religious school in their area. The school offered a religion class and church service once a week. During those early years, the brothers heard vague references to the Bible and its characters. "I thought the Bible was full of stories and myths," Anthony says.

When Alex neared the end of eighth grade, he had to decide where to attend high school. One option was the local public high school, just two blocks from his house. "My mom told me of another school that was similar in size to the one I had attended from kindergarten to eighth grade," Alex says. The school was Divine Savior Academy, 20 minutes away.

Beginning with his first day at Divine Savior Academy in 2010, Alex noticed the kind attitude of the teachers and students. He also realized his religious studies would be different at this school. "We had a religion class every day, and during it we studied the Bible. We looked at passages and what they meant," he says.

Devotions for students were held twice a day, and chapel once a week. "Every day, the Word of God was present in the school," Alex says.

A TIME TO GROW

After Alex attended Divine Savior Academy for one year, Anthony joined him there. Anthony also quickly realized that religion was a main part of the school's curriculum. "They talked about Jesus and the Word of God differently," he says. "I heard it in a certain way—it opened my eyes."



Alex (left) and Anthony (right) Lleonart and the WELS campus ministry group they attend at the University of Florida in Gainesville (center).

The brothers enjoyed their time in high school. Alex was part of the second high school class to graduate. As a sophomore, he joined the boys' basketball team. "It was the first time I had been on any basketball team," he says. It was his first season, and the team's second. The previous year, the team hadn't won any games. During Alex's first year with the team, they didn't take home any wins either. The following year, however, the team had its first win. It ended the season with a total of three wins. "I liked the camaraderie and the training, pushing ourselves every day," he recalls.

Both brothers viewed academics at the school as a rigorous regime. The dedication of the teachers made learning easy. "I was in a music class at DSA and learned to read notes and even play the ukulele," Alex says. He took some honors classes and found the subjects intense and useful. "The academic basis was great and helped me at college." He also took a web design class and learned the basics of coding. Anthony also enjoyed basketball, track, and serving as treasurer on the student council.

But for both brothers, the religion classes continued to be especially meaningful. "Each year the religion topic was different," Alex says. The first year of high school included a look at the gospels, the second year covered the Old Testament, and the following years delved more into doctrine and maintaining faith during the college years.

COMING TO CHURCH

Alex's religion classes had created faith, but he had not learned the importance of attending church. The church associated with the school was located on the same campus, but he had not yet gone to any services. But looking ahead to college, Alex realized he wouldn't always be surrounded by Christian teachers

and daily doses of God's Word built into the school day. "During my high school years, I had learned from the teachers to take care of my faith and not lose it. In the second half of my senior year, I knew I wanted to nurture it so it wouldn't go away," he says. "I decided to go to church to thank God for what he's done for me and also to grow in my faith."

One Sunday during the final semester of Alex's senior year, he told Anthony he was thinking of going to church. "I asked if he wanted to come along, and he agreed."

Making an IMPRESSION

Christian teachers have the chance to make a lifelong impression. Even if students don't react immediately to a Bible lesson, the impact of sharing God's Word can come to light later. "As time goes on, I can reflect on my past experiences in high school," Alex says. "I can see the devotion of the teachers to reach out to all the students."

To instill lasting lessons, teachers can:

- Make God's Word part of the classroom every day.
- Talk to students about what they are facing from a spiritual basis.
- Help students think ahead to the future and their own faith life as an adult.

Making a CONNECTION

Christian schools can naturally lead students to church.

Anthony and Alex started out as students at Divine Savior Academy. Then they started attending Divine Savior Church, the congregation associated with that school. At first, they simply wanted to learn. Then their faith grew, and the connection to the church also grew.

Churches can encourage students and their families to learn more about God by:

- Issuing regular invitations to attend services.
- Creating a welcoming, open environment to enter church.
- Holding special, Bible-based events just for students and their families.

wels.net/tellingthenextgeneration
about a program called *Telling the Next Generation*, which helps congregations with planning, assistance, and resources for implementing outreach strategies using their Lutheran elementary school and/or their early childhood ministry.

Anthony found church to be a natural progression after his school studies. "During my junior year, we went through the finer points of the Bible's teachings and WELS, and I found my faith was in line with what I learned. It made me want to go from being a guest at church to becoming a communicant member."

The two brothers took membership classes and joined the church.

STAYING CONNECTED

After graduating from high school, Alex remained in the area for the following two years, getting an associate degree at a nearby college. When Anthony finished high school, the two of them headed to the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida.

The move would take them away from their home congregation, but the brothers were prepared to continue their church attendance. "During senior year in religion class when we were discussing ways to maintain our faith, we had to look at a church we were interested in attending that was near the college we were enrolled in," Anthony says. "I knew I was going to the University of Florida, so I looked for a WELS church near it."

He found Zion, which also had a campus ministry. After moving to Gainesville, Alex and Anthony started attending Zion and became involved in the campus ministry. "We meet once every two weeks and read books together. Sometimes we watch a movie and evaluate it from a spiritual basis," says Alex. Anthony serves as president of the campus ministry.

The chance to stay close to God's Word helped Anthony with the transition into college. "Moving to Gainesville meant I was living for the first time on my own at 18 years old," he says. "Things have changed, and college brings new challenges, but the campus ministry has kept me grounded."

While the two don't know exactly what the future holds, they are grateful to have a firm foundation in the Word of God. "It's a blessing to be part of two churches and have the peace of God," Alex says. "God loves us no matter what. We don't have to worry about classes or how things are going. My identity is not defined by what my grades are—God loves us regardless."



Rachel Hartman is a member at Divine Savior, Doral, Florida.



As a *father* HAS COMPASSION

Our brother Jesus teaches us about his Father so we can be better fathers.

Paul O. Wendland

THE OTHER DAY, someone told me one of the saddest stories ever. A little boy has a mother who doesn't want him. She has a new boyfriend. His dad is not part of the picture. His last memory is not of a loving father but of the new boyfriend chasing him away from his mother's house.

The world is not big enough to contain that sorrow.

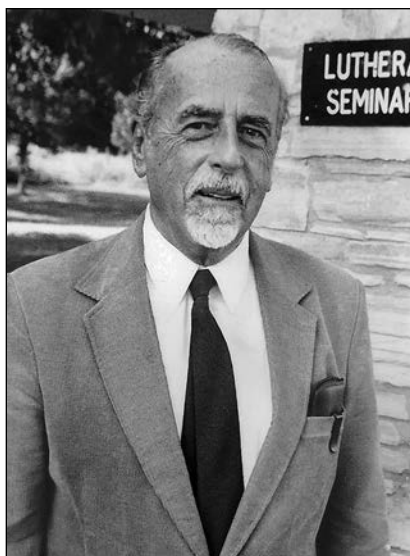
Everybody needs a dad. At least one. Even better, many. And a mom too, obviously, but that's not what this article is about.

MY FATHER'S RICH BEQUEST

When I was a young missionary in Zambia, a friend of mine once said to me, "*Mulichete bazyali bavubi!*—you have rich parents!" He didn't mean they were rich in material things. He meant they had a wealth of wisdom and grace to pass onto their children.

A father is a model for the child and the child, as the old saying goes, is father to the man. Security, values, and a sense of self-worth are largely the bequests parents pass down to their children. What the child's father was is seen in the child when he grows up. People have told me that they see my father in me even though I am not consciously imitating him. And so it goes, down through the generations.

I had a wonderful father. A great deal of what I know of God's grace came through him. His preaching



Everybody needs a father. For sure a heavenly one. Earthly ones too.

I'll always remember. But it was more than words. He loved me. He spent time with me, busy though he was. Wisdom, patience, integrity, honesty, and careful speech—all these were virtues I saw in him and learned to value from him. As I consider my own life, I must confess, sadly, I have not done as well as he.

I remember once I was in a stormy passion about something. I burst into his office and said things. Hard things. Things calculated to hurt. A tsunami of words. He heard me

out. Like a rock in the middle of an ocean storm he let my waves pound him relentlessly. When the storm was spent, he looked at me, unperturbed, and with a shrug and a smile said, "Well, maybe someday you'll feel differently."

MY OTHER FATHERS

Everybody needs a dad. At least one. As many as you can get.

I've had many fathers. Older men who simply took note of me and took the time to give me a hand. At a funeral recently I said goodbye to R. G. Cox, my former "bishop" in Zambia. He had supervised me during my vicar training year there. One time, after looking over a sermon I had written, he gave it back to me and said, "Paul, you have a lot of good ideas here, but they're scattered around like buckshot." I'll never forget that line. "Like buckshot!" It was funny. It was true. I needed to hear it. Thanks, Dad! See you in heaven!

And on and on these older "dads" live in me as I remember them. I can hear their words. I can see their faces—concern, compassion, and kindness radiating from them all. I think of them, and no matter where I am, I feel I'm safe at home again.

Of course, Father's Day always brings with it a deep sense of my own failures and shortcomings in the dad department. The times I spoke when I should have listened.

Times I stormed and raged over people much more vulnerable than my father. Times I overreacted and scattered my words around like buckshot. Times I just wasn't there when my children needed me.

That's why I'm so glad I have another Father. The one from whom all fatherhood is known. A kind, wise, heavenly Father, who is not as uncertain as an earthly father can sometimes be. He is never in a position where he cannot help or does not want to help. As a Father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on us (cf. Psalm 103:13). He does not withhold his very own Son, but freely gives him up for us all. And with him, he gives us all things. Forgiveness. Life. Hope in the hard days of despair. Courage in the ages of anxiety. Strength when ours is gone. Security when everything else is falling down. My brother Jesus told me about him. And he wouldn't lie. He says, "When you pray, say, 'Father'" (cf. Luke 11:2).

BEING A FATHER

Everybody needs a father. For sure a heavenly one. Earthly ones too. You really can't have too many. I could show you the statistics and the studies, but they won't tell you any more or say it any better than common sense and what the Scriptures amply affirm.

The sad fact is, we have baby daddies aplenty. We have men who oh-so-casually preside over the destruction of their marriages, thinking that a few days of court ordered quality time with their children can make up for the heat and burden of quantity time. And of course, I know some suffer divorce rather than seek it. I do not say these things to heap guilt on tragedy.

God sees. God knows. And God has a few things to say about the widow and the fatherless. About his compassion for them when no one else seems to care. He cares. And our Father wants us to care. Our Father wants us to notice. Our Father wants us to step up. Could it be that God has blessed us with a wealth of parents so that we could be, in turn, a blessing to others?

In fact, it seems to me the best way to honor your father is not necessarily to send him a card or a mug with "Best Dad in the World" emblazoned on it. That's fine, of course, and we dads appreciate it. But better still: Look to be a father yourself—that is, be a principled, compassionate man of integrity. And be that for children who need it, wherever you might find them.

Everybody needs a father. At least one. Better many.

And if you're hurting because you've not been the best father in the world or because you've never known the compassion and interest of an earthly father, let our brother Jesus introduce you to your Father again. He knows. He cares. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on us. He will delight over you with his love. He will comfort you with his everlasting kindness. And even if he has millions of children, he always has time for you. You are the apple of his eye! Go talk to him. And when you do, call him Father.

In his house, you are "no more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home."



Paul Wendland, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



Paul Wendland and his family today.



Paul Wendland (left) and Missionary Raymond Cox in 1977 in Lusaka, Zambia, where Wendland served his vicar year. Cox served as his supervising pastor.



Paul Wendland and his family at Paul's confirmation in Zambia in the 1960s. Paul is in the center holding his confirmation certificate.



PHOTO | JennLynn Photography

The memories of kindergarten linger as a school year abruptly ends.

Jennifer R. Otto

One day they brought you to me. They hugged you and kissed you and said good-bye. I reached for your little hand, and we walked together into our classroom. And the door closed behind us.

NEW EXPERIENCES

The days brought a world full of new experiences for you. Do you want to know a secret? It was a world unlike any I have known too, unlike any I have created with the other classes I have taught. That is the magic of a classroom. Each kindergarten world has a personality of its own, a special blend of voices, smiles, and even frowns.

At first we kind of bumbled around like random balls in a pinball machine. We traveled our paths and bumped each other from time to time. We were a bunch of individuals, a crowd of strangers, closed in together.

But that is how it always begins. A bunch of strangers who share something small. It's found in the togetherness of chanting the same response to the teacher's "Red Robin . . ." call. It's in the laughing so hard we roll on the carpet when our teacher sings the wrong words to the good morning song. It's the quiet smile across the table when another chooses the same snack. It's the running until we are exhausted. It is the silent understanding when we all carry out the same morning arrival routine. It's in the independence of being part of a society, a culture, that belongs only to us every day . . . when the door closes behind us.

OUR SPECIAL FRIEND

More than all that it is finding a common friend. For every morning, we gather in our Savior's lap. He talks to us in his Word, and our hearts feel warm. He walks

among us as we learn about the world he created and about the life we lead. As we discover more about ourselves and our feelings. As we dare to try new things. He is there. We talk about him. We love him, and somehow in loving him, we start to love each other. Every morning he walks in with us, and the door closes behind us.

And one day it happens. Someone is absent, and the others notice. Someone compliments a classmate's picture or sits near another to read a book. Someone falls down, and a friend cares. We don't know exactly when it happened, but somewhere among the small shared experiences, somewhere in the lap of the Savior, we are transformed from a crowd of strangers to a band of friends. Friends who can't wait to meet each other every morning as the door closes behind us.

AN ABRUPT ENDING

One Friday, you skipped out the door to your weekend. You left paintings drying on the drying rack—"You'll get it Monday." You left a smear of butter on the table from the cinnamon rolls we had made. You all screamed out, "We'll be right back, kindergarten world. We're just going home for a quick weekend." I said, "Bye, Bub!" piled my van with the books I needed, and followed you out of the parking lot. And the door closed behind us.

It was supposed to open again to the world we love. The world where we all know who is a morning person and who needs a little space. The world where we laugh at knock-knock jokes that don't make any sense. The world where we pray for each other. The world where we were just about to hear the greatest love story ever—the story of Jesus who died on the cross and rose again.

The door closed behind us. Just when all our hard work was starting to make us feel successful. We were enjoying the surprise of finding out we can read! We maneuvered our room like a bunch of bees, swooshing past

each other in perfect harmony, silently handing the tape to the one digging for it, bringing an errant water bottle to a lunch neighbor, and checking our sandwiches for peanut butter to protect our nut-allergy friend.

But the door closed behind us. And I had no idea that “Bye, Bub” would really be our kindergarten farewell. I was ready to walk you down the path to all the things we had been preparing for. We were going to run a lemonade stand. We were going to enjoy spontaneous reading time in the shade of the playground tree. We were going to complete an Earth Day challenge and run around the property picking up trash wearing green capes. We were going to make Easter cards for people who were too sick to leave their homes. We were going to take surprises to the other teachers for Teacher Appreciation Week. We were going to hunt Easter eggs and make Mother’s Day gifts. I had such big plans for you. And you were going to love them.

And then I was going to secretly size you for your graduation gown when no parents were around so that they would catch their breath when they saw you in it the first time. I was going to prepare you for your next step, your next school. On the last day I was going to proudly walk you to the front and call your names, my graduates. I was going to smile and laugh with you and not let you see how your leaving was breaking my heart that day. And I was going to whisper a prayer for you as you walked out so big and strong and the door closed behind you.

OUR FINAL DESTINATION

But before that day, there would have been a moment. Sitting together on our carpet, we would have heard the story of Mary and Martha. Martha had so many important things to do. And Mary wanted more than anything to stay close to Jesus. We would have dreamed about the things you would become—teacher, truck driver, astronaut, vet, mommy, daddy. I would have told you I was so excited about the way Jesus made you and that I love to imagine all the amazing things you will do. And then I would have leaned close to you, smiled into your eyes, and begged you from my heart, “Whatever you do, stay close to Jesus.” I would have told you that someday we will see each other in heaven. We will finally hug the Friend we love the most, the Friend who brought us together.

We do still remember our kindergarten days. We will think about those days of wonder for the next 80 years. And then we will live in heaven with Jesus forever, because the door will close behind us.



Jenny Otto, a teacher at Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nevada, is a member at Mt. Olive, Las Vegas.



Kindergartners and 4K students from schools around WELS: Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev. (opposite page); Bethlehem, Germantown, Wis.; Sola Fide Academy, Lawrenceville, Ga.; and Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.



Q&A

WITH DAVID SCHARF

All of my life, I have heard the phrase “Death is natural.” I never questioned its truth until I watched my grandma pass away. Even though she believed in Jesus, it did not look or feel natural at all. What does the Bible say?

SAYING THAT DEATH IS NATURAL IS A WAY TO COPE

“God has made death a natural part of life.”

A person can understand why someone might want to believe it. If death is a natural part of life, then we should embrace it instead of run from it. However, this contradicts the human experience. The vast majority of people want to live and will go to great lengths to eke out a few more moments here on this earth. Yoda said in *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, “Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them do not. Miss them do not.” In other words, his advice is “Get over it!” This phrase is a coping mechanism for death.

We live in a culture that embraces the philosophy of secular humanism. It believes that humanity is capable of morality and self-fulfillment apart from God. How does a person do that when it comes to death? We must whistle past the graveyard and pretend there is nothing to be concerned about. A secular humanist would be comfortable saying that death is natural. It’s part of the circle of life, and there is nothing to fear when it comes to death. But no solid hope for that thinking exists.

THE BIBLE GIVES A BETTER ANSWER

God tells us why there is death and what God did about it. The Bible says, “Sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people” (Romans 5:12). God created the world without death, but because of sin we will all die one day. Death is not natural.

It is important to realize this so that we search for God’s answer to death. God’s answer is his Son’s resurrection. The apostle Paul says, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Death is not natural. But because Jesus died for every sin and because Jesus rose from the grave, death will not be the last word for you. It will not be your final defeat. Because Jesus lives, you too will live. It is vitally important for everyone to have this view of death.

NOW WE ARE READY

When I served in a parish, I would visit Christians in the hospital who would soon die. I sometimes asked them a simple question, “Are you ready to meet Jesus?”

It was amazing to see how people opened up when that question was asked, because deep down we all know that death is not natural. They would express their regrets and sins.

Then I would tell them what God did about those sins. He paid for them. I would tell them what Jesus did to death. He defeated it. And I would tell them what Jesus was going to do for them soon. He would take them to heaven.

We will miss those we love who go to heaven, but Jesus reminds us that death is only a sleep and he will awaken us (John 11:11).

ASK A QUESTION AT forwardinchrist.net/submit.

God provides victory over death!

David G. Scharf

FIRST, IT IS IMPORTANT to answer the question, "What is death?" Very simply, death is separation. The Bible speaks of three types of separation: physical, spiritual, and eternal.

- Physical death is the separation of body and soul. "The dust [the body] returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit [the soul] returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).
- Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).
- Eternal death is the separation of the soul from God's presence and blessings forever in hell. "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matthew 25:41).

Evaluate the statement: "This life is hell!"

WHY DEATH AND WHAT IS GOD'S PLAN?

The death rate is 100 percent because all people are sinful (Romans 5:12). When Adam and Eve fell into sin, Martin Luther called it a "divine and holy irony. God is good and hates evil. They are evil and hate good."

Because God did not want Adam and Eve to remain evil and hate good, he cast humankind out of the Garden of Eden so they could not eat from the tree of life and live forever in a sinful condition. God had a better plan. God took the sting of sin out of death by crushing death with Jesus' resurrection!

For what reasons is the phrase "God has made death a natural part of life" so dangerous?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20,22,55-58

Respond to someone who says, "You don't need to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus." (Be sure to explain the comfort you have because Jesus is risen!)

WHAT WILL ETERNAL LIFE BE LIKE?

Read Philippians 3:21 and 1 Corinthians 15:35,54. Our resurrected bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual . . . but what will we look like? We don't know, but it will be like a Christmas present from people you love. You may not know what it is, but you know it will be good because they love you.

Read Revelation 21:3,4

It is interesting that the Bible often describes what will not be in heaven (i.e., death, mourning, pain, tears, etc.), and then tells the one thing that will be there: Jesus. Why? Because we have no experience to compare with heaven. It is a comfort knowing that the effects of sin will be gone and we will be face-to-face with our Savior!

Agree/disagree: The Christian doesn't fear death. Explain your answer.

Contributing editor David Scharf, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm.

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

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This month's column might not be what you are expecting. It doesn't include endorsements for the latest security apps to keep your child safe online or to measure how much screen time your child is amassing. What it does include are the perspectives of two parents on what is working for their families. It's why this column is called "Parent conversations." We're not here with all the answers. We're here with support and to share our experiences. Maybe these methods won't work in your situation. Maybe you have another perspective to share. If that's the case, we'd love to hear from you. Just e-mail fic@wels.net.

By the way, if you do have concerns about your child's online experiences, take a look at the colored box on the next page. It includes some great information from a professional counselor who works with young adults (and is raising three as well).

— Nicole Balza

HOW MUCH SHOULD I MONITOR MY CHILD ONLINE?

EVEN IN THESE CRAZY coronavirus times, we all know the rules: Limit kids' screen time. Regularly check their social media. Keep the computer in a shared space so you can supervise.

They're wise and practical rules. And we don't keep any of them.

IF KIDS ARE TRUSTWORTHY, TRUST THEM

It's not just because of COVID-19 either. Sam, our 17-year-old, has always been on his computer a lot, and he's on it alone in his room. We follow him on Instagram, but we don't do regular checks of Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok, or WhatsApp.

Are we negligent? Naïve? I don't know. He gets good grades, and he's busy with sports, student council, choir, and a job. He seems emotionally healthy and his teachers say nice things about him, so we think he's doing okay. Also, we don't want to give up the living room.

I can hear myself being a little defensive, but I'll keep going.

We do talk about the dangers of the internet. We talk the poor kid to death about the online bullying some insecure kids do and the sinister grooming some depraved adults do.

When we hear about kids sending each other nude photos, we unflinchingly explore the immorality, the disrespect, the long-term consequences, and the basic stupidity of that.

As long as he keeps earning our trust, we will keep trusting him.

When a community is alerted about violent threats found in a student's messages or posts, we talk about that too, primarily about how that student must be in a lot of pain.

But we're not strict. Should we be?

Maybe if Sam were younger, we'd establish stronger boundaries. In fact, I can hear myself encouraging all three of our kids someday to eschew screens completely with their chil-

dren—my grandchildren!—at least for the first few years of their precious little lives. All that screen time messes with kids' synapses and vision and attention span and other things we don't even know about yet. But after giving that unsolicited advice, I'll have to admit, "I know, I'm a total hypocrite. Screens were a huge part of your childhoods! You were raised at least 30 percent by Walt Disney."

Maybe if Sam were the kind of teen who craved the adrenaline spike of risky behaviors, we'd worry more and then enforce more rules. But he's not. He's a risk-averse young adult who'll be on his own at college in a year. So as long as he keeps earning our trust, we will keep trusting him.

BEING ONLINE IS SECOND-NATURE TO TODAY'S KIDS

Today Sam and almost every other kid in America is doing online learning full time. He's holed up in his room doing quadratic equations, writing a paper on fake news, attending a Google Meet for his eco-

nomics class, and listening to “The Age of Aquarius,” which his choir was going to sing in their now-cancelled trip to Disney. I’m sure he’s also watching YouTube videos of basketball players and sharing mildly humorous Snapchats with his friends. Later, he’ll probably play NBA 2K with a couple of them.

Sam is going to be in his room for most of the day, on his computer, unsupervised. And we’re okay with that.



Laurie Gauger-Hested and her husband, Michael, have a blended family that includes her two adult children and his teenage son.

I LIKE SHORTCUTS and life hacks. Anything that makes life easier and gets me through my tasks more quickly so I can get on to things I really love. But sometimes shortcuts don’t work. Sometimes, slow and steady wins the race, and fast is slow and slow is fast. That certainly seems to be the case with raising responsible, godly children. There’s no secret recipe, no life hack where if you just do this one thing they’ll magically turn out perfect.

I want a longer term fix to keep my kids safe while still respecting their privacy.

So too, when it comes to keeping our kids safe while at the same time respecting their privacy, I don’t think there are any quick fixes. To be sure, safety is an issue, especially in today’s digital world. There are scams and cyber bullies as well as images, videos, and websites no one should see, let alone kids! And those are just the threats “out there.” I also want to keep my kids

WARNING SIGNS your child is experiencing problems online

- **He becomes secretive or defensive if you ask him whom he is talking to/ what he is doing online.**
- **She begins substituting online activities for previously enjoyed offline activities.**
- **School, family, or social functioning deteriorates.**
- **He experiences increased irritability or anger (especially if separated from his devices, i.e., phone, tablet, or computer).**
- **There is a significant increase or decrease in need for sleep.**
- **There is a significant change in eating habits.**
- **She isolates herself.**
- **He has difficulty concentrating or making decisions.**
- **She is preoccupied with or frequently talks about death/dying.**

If you’re noticing these warning signs or other behavior that concerns you, contact a professional counselor.

Compiled by Laura Reinke, a marriage and family therapist at Christian Family Solutions, christianfamilysolutions.org.

safe from *themselves*: from being the bully, from wasting their time on things that don’t edify, from losing the ability to socialize without electronics, and from having their brains rewired by too much screen time.

So what to do? I suppose I could download some monitoring software for my kids’ phones. I could install a keylogger to run hidden in the background of their laptops. I could listen by the door when they talk on the phone and shadow my kids in

the streets. But at what cost? Such “shortcuts” would only teach my kids they are being watched. What happens when they leave home and Mom and Dad aren’t monitoring?

So I want a longer term fix to keep my kids safe while still respecting their privacy. I have a two-pronged solution that we’re attempting at our house.

First, we’re limiting our kids’ screen time. That certainly doesn’t make us popular parents when “everyone else” gets unlimited time because “their parents trust them.” But it does teach them that they can go outside, talk to friends in person, and play games that use cards and dice instead of pixels.

But our second prong is the most effective in the long run, as someday they’ll leave home and be in charge of their own screen time, their own chats, and their own lives. We spend time teaching our kids God’s law and what he says about bullying and what type of entertainment is pleasing to him. We apply God’s gospel—the forgiveness that is theirs in Jesus—which motivates them to live productive lives for him and serve him in thanks. We daily share that law-gospel message, and we trust that God will keep our kids safe as they grow to make good decisions for him.

We rejoice as we watch them grow and mature and see the opportunities they have, even on the internet, to bring glory to God! “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6 Evangelical Standard Version). There’s no shortcut for that.



Rob Guenther and his wife, Becky, are raising four boys in New Ulm, Minnesota.



A pastor reflects on his battle with cancer as a teenager and how his experiences helped shape him and his ministry. | Gabriella Blauert

MYCHRISTIAN *life*

GROWING UP, Paul Jansen fondly remembers a great home life, strong relationships at school, and a close relationship with his Savior. All those positive experiences of the first part of his life provided a firm foundation.

That foundation received a shock when Jansen was diagnosed with cancer during his junior year of high school.

“At a young age, when you think you’re invincible, you quickly find out that that’s not the case,” he says.

CLINGING TO CHRIST

Jansen’s journey with cancer began when he felt severe pain in his leg that wouldn’t go away. He eventually went to the doctor and had a biopsy done to see what the problem could be. This biopsy was completed on a Friday, and from there, everything in his life changed drastically.

On the Monday after his biopsy, Jansen received his final diagnosis. He had osteogenic sarcoma, a rare type of bone cancer. Each year, about 800 to 900 new cases are diagnosed in the United States; about half are in children and teens.

Things moved quickly, and before Jansen and his family even had time to process this major change in their lives, doctors implanted Jansen’s port on Wednesday and began his chemotherapy on Thursday.

Sickness, perhaps especially cancer, can become a period of struggle with God and create questions and doubts. But Jansen took a different approach. He trusted God as he battled bone cancer over the next two and a half years. “I don’t know how people go through this without having an anchor of faith,” he says. “The faith that I had was my anchor and my grounding through this difficult time.”

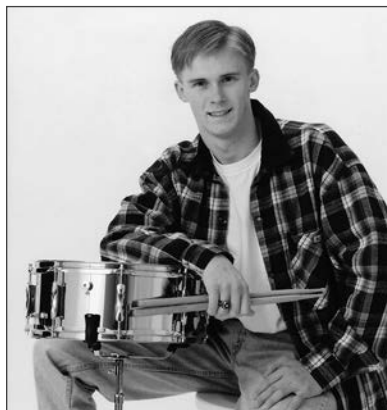
The treatments he underwent were both mentally and physically draining. He began with a five-week treatment cycle that included different forms of chemotherapy, infusions, and monitoring periods. The number of days he spent in the hospital totaled more than the days he spent outside the hospital—245 days in all during that first year. During the periods he was allowed to go home, he had to be isolated because his immune system was compromised.

Going to school became something he desperately wanted. It was a place to stay connected, a place where he could feel a sense of normalcy again. “When you’re told you can’t go, you start to crave that family and the community and friends,” he explains.

Jansen did his best to keep up with his academics and extracurricular activities at Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis., but there were times when his treatment had to take priority. He had to drop out of school because he couldn’t regularly come to class. He still attended whenever he could until he resumed full-time status the following March.

STAYING POSITIVE

Through this time, his teachers and fellow students provided priceless support. All the thoughtful gestures they made are moments he will never forget. When Jansen could not attend his junior banquet, his classmates didn’t forget about him during this exciting night. Six of the students came and visited him in the hospital to wish him well before they attended the banquet. “My faith family was amazing,” he



(Left to right) Paul Jansen in 1995, right after his first round of chemotherapy; Paul and his brother a few months later when Paul was at his weakest; Paul and his wife, Ruth, in 2019.

remarks. "It meant so much to me that they thought of me during that time, prayed for me, and visited me."

His classmates and the Luther High faculty who regularly reached out to lift him up all echo that Jansen actually encouraged them at this time. Paul Wichmann, his former principal, emphasizes how Jansen was and continues to be a shining example of Christ's love. "He saw all of his life as being in the Lord's hands and knew that he had a plan for him," Wichmann says. "For someone who was facing such a serious illness, Paul was the epitome of living the Christian life."

This was Jansen's attitude through all his cancer treatments. His positive attitude continued even in October, when his leg had to be amputated. To Jansen, this was actually a moment of hope. He realized after the surgery that he would beat cancer and live.

BLESSING OTHERS

When reflecting on what to do next with his life, Jansen thought about what would be most meaningful. Eventually, he decided to pursue the pastor track at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., so he could share the comfort and confidence he had in Christ with others.

His first day at Martin Luther College was just days after his final treatment for cancer. He recalls with a laugh his initial identity at the college: "I was the pale, bald, one-legged guy on campus." But just like be-

fore, he didn't let these things discourage him or slow him down.

Jansen dove right in and enjoyed his college experience. After all he had been through, he easily overcame the college freshman fear of being different or standing out. Instead of being worried about others' perceptions, he was just himself. He raised his hand regularly in class and got excited about his coursework. "I've never regretted my decision to become a pastor," he says. "It was the greatest decision I could have made."

After graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., in 2006, he was called to Holy Scripture Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Ind. In 2014, he accepted a call to be the pastor at St. Michael's, Fountain City, Wis.

His old high school in Onalaska, only 45 minutes from Fountain City, asked Jansen to read a devotion for the school after he had moved back to the area. Many of his former teachers were still serving at the school. He shared his high school experience with the current students and how it strengthened his faith. This opportunity also allowed him to share what a blessing the high school was to him.

Today, Jansen serves as pastor at Salem, Ann Arbor, Mich. He says that his experiences have made him empathetic to the members of his congregation. He can relate to individuals who are going through cancer and understand the intri-

MADE PERFECT IN weakness

Paul Jansen's favorite Bible verse is 2 Corinthians 12:9: "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

In this passage, the apostle Paul talks about suffering from a thorn in his side. Instead of focusing on the great discomfort, he chose to concentrate on the grace of Christ and all it enabled him to do in his life. Jansen has used this passage as a comfort in his own life and shares it with others who are enduring trials such as cancer.

cacies of patient care. He continues to bless people through each interaction, shining as a light for Christ.

His former principal describes him best when he says, "He's clearly a blessing to all who have known him and continues to be a testament to God's love and an example of Christian perseverance in all things."



Gabriella Blawert is a member of Shepherd of Peace, Powell, Ohio.

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the

Spur one another on

WELS congregations, schools, and members continue to find creative ways to meet together and spur one another on despite changing circumstances due to COVID-19. Here are just a few examples:

- 1 More than 30,000 people have watched the synodwide Easter evening worship celebration “Together at the Empty Tomb.” Included in that service was a recording of WELS members singing “I Know That My Redeemer Lives” from their homes.

Watch the service at livestream.com/wslive/togetherattheemptytomb.



- 2 Many congregations recorded or streamed live worship services, sometimes getting creative so they didn't feel like they were preaching to empty pews. (Pictured: Grace, Falls Church, Va.)

- 3 Whole congregations as well as small groups started meeting through online meeting applications, including a women's Bible study in Wisconsin, and the confirmation class with Vicar Mark Zondag at Beautiful Savior, College Station, Texas.



- 4 Several WELS congregations, including Living Savior, Asheville/Hendersonville, N.C., conducted drive-in worship services, broadcasting through an FM transmitter so members could hear the service on their car radios.

- 5 Light of the Valleys, Reno, Nev., even reported a baptism being conducted during Palm Sunday worship at a member's home, with the pastor and congregation participating through Zoom. This included members filming themselves at home offering support. Read the full story at wels.net/baptism-blessing.

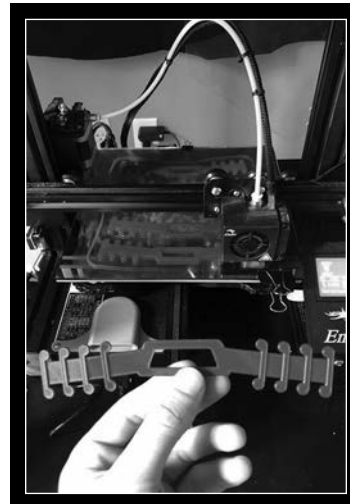
- 6 St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis., held a “drive-thru” food pantry. More than 100 families drove to the church and received two bags of food each, some waiting over

an hour in the car line-up to get the food. “We received names and addresses of over 90 new families who have never been to our church before,” says Nathan Nass, pastor at St. Paul. “I’ve already followed up with them to let them know that Jesus loves them and our church cares for them.” Members of St. Paul and other area WELS congregations continue to donate food. St. Paul is planning to offer the drive-thru pantry every two weeks, especially focusing on the Hispanic community, which has been hard-hit.

- 7 Women from Zion, Bristol, Wis., (a few are pictured) sewed face masks and hung them on a tree outside the church for anyone to take for free. They have sewn and given away more than 700 masks in a few weeks.



- 8 Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb., provided free weekday noon meals for those in the community who needed them, especially seniors or those with compromised health.

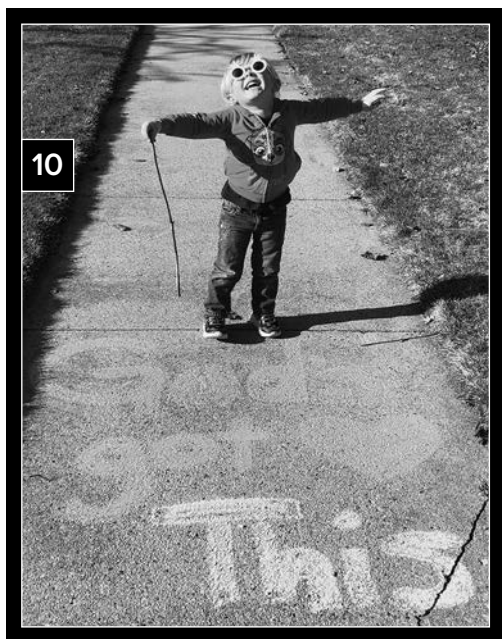


- 9 WELS members found multiple ways to make “ear savers,” especially for those who needed to wear masks for essential jobs. Jennifer Poston and her son, Connor, members at Atone-ment, Milwaukee, crocheted more than 160 “mask mates” and “we have more to go because the demand is high!” says Jennifer. Dillard Solomon, a 2020 graduate from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., printed them on his 3D printer.

- 10 Three-year-old Autumn, daughter of Ben and Kim Hoff who are members at Immanuel, Greenville, Wis., shows the attitude Christians can have, even during these trying times.

SEE MORE AT forwardinchrist.net. Have a photo or story to share? Send it to ficsubmissions@wels.net or upload it at forwardinchrist.net/submit.

and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24,25).



God's showed his great love for us. Now we have a chance to use his example and help others.

—Carol Cummings, Zion, Bristol, Wis.



We are happy to be able to show love to others like Christ has asked us to, especially during this difficult time.

—Jennifer Poston, Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.



This is all part of connecting Jesus with people in our city.

—Nathan Nass, pastor at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.



"Providing these meals for our neighbors who need them is a small way of saying 'thank you' to them. We may be a small school, but we have big hearts!"

—Steven Bremer, principal at Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.





Fighting the loneliness epidemic

How are you doing in the midst of this epidemic? I'm not talking about the COVID-19 epidemic, but another one which has been around much longer. It doesn't claim as many lives, disrupt the economy, or put us in panic-mode, like the coronavirus. But it's there. It's what many psychologists, such as Lisa Firestone, call the "loneliness epidemic." And it's startlingly real. Firestone writes,

In the United States, loneliness is currently at epidemic levels. A recent Cigna study of 20,000 U.S. adults found that nearly half of Americans feel like they are alone. Only slightly more than 50 percent of respondents said they had meaningful in-person social interactions on a daily basis. A smaller but still surprising number of people (20 percent) said they never or rarely feel close to people, and 18 percent felt like they have no one to talk to.¹

As a Christian living in a predominantly Christian country, this ought to seem odd to you. It's the opposite of the type of community Christians create, or at least Christ created. Jesus just didn't preach and teach. He socialized. A lot. In fact, it often got him into hot water: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'" (Luke 7:34). And remember when Jesus meets Zacchaeus, a social outcast with no friends?

Jesus invites himself over to Zacchaeus' house for dinner! The gospel creates communities. It's one of its major fruits. Reuniting with your spiritual Father leads to reuniting with your spiritual brothers and sisters. And families socialize, celebrate, party together.

I serve at Illuminé, a campus ministry in Canada. We do a lot of preaching and teaching. But we also do a lot of socializing. At the heart of our ministry is a weekly event we call our "Illuminé social," designed specifically to take on this loneliness epidemic. We get together for a family-style dinner, we have a study, and then we socialize. We start at 5 P.M. We sometimes don't end until midnight.

Nick Reepschlager, Illuminé's student coordinator, puts it this way: "[The socials] give a home/family feel. This really helps newcomers (like I was) feel like they are a part of this big group of friends or family."

He shares other opportunities Illuminé provides to socialize: "Film nights, book clubs, and guest speakers have always drawn in people looking for intellectual or philosophical debate and are also a very non-intimidating way to introduce friends to ideas that might make them think. Parties, game nights and community service projects encourage friends to look into our club."

Since the COVID-19 lockdowns and physical distancing measures, we at



Illuminé Campus Ministry holds weekly socials, which include a family-style dinner, Bible study, and fellowship time.

Illuminé haven't been able to meet in quite the same ways. But through apps like Zoom and Google Hangouts, we've still kept our socials, film nights, and book clubs going. But there's no question we're itching to be around a dinner table again soon.

Until then, maybe you can join us in finding more ways of tackling loneliness in our churches and communities and sharing the gospel through social events, so that we might say of our own friends and families what Jesus said of Zacchaeus' home: "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

*Luke Thompson
St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada*

SEE MORE > about the topic of loneliness in a presentation Thompson made at the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership. Watch his and other conference presentations at lutheranleadership.com.

¹psychalive.org/how-to-fight-the-loneliness-epidemic/

New mission online event set for this month

WELS Missions and the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) are partnering to offer Taste and See, a first-of-its kind free online mission event, from June 27–July 11.

This new opportunity to learn about and support WELS home and world mission fields came about after two in-person summer events—LWMS' national convention and WELS Missions' Taste of Missions—were canceled due to COVID-19 uncertainties.

"Yes, it does make us sad, but we have to be responsible. We didn't feel it wise to put our members at risk," says Cynthia Natsis, LWMS president. The LWMS convention, originally scheduled to take place in Athens, Ga., this year, usually draws almost one thousand attendees. She continues, "I pray that this new online event will fill that void of not being able to go and meet with your sisters in Christ."

Taste and See will begin and end with livestreamed worship services hosted

at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Opening worship is scheduled for 11 A.M. CT, June 27, and will be followed by the LWMS flag presentation, a mainstay at its conventions. Closing worship at 6 P.M. CT, July 11, will feature the commissioning of new missionaries.

In between, free consume-at-your-own-pace content will be offered online, including

- mission-themed video devotions;
- recorded missions presentations that had been planned for the live events, including updates from mission administrators;
- short video updates from home and world missionaries;
- live question-and-answer panels;
- cooking tutorials and recipes from missionary families; and
- family-friendly activities such as missions-themed scavenger hunts; coloring pages; and create-a-card opportunities.



Event organizers are encouraging people to participate in challenges and activities on Facebook and the event website. Participants also can submit mission questions for the live panels.

"While we are certainly saddened that the physical events have been canceled, we know that God's plan is unfolding just as he's planned," says Sean Young, director of Missions Operations. "We are looking forward to an even larger audience than we could have hoped for out of a live event!"

LEARN MORE AT ► WELStateandsee.com.

BOOK NOOK

IN GOD'S ORCHARD

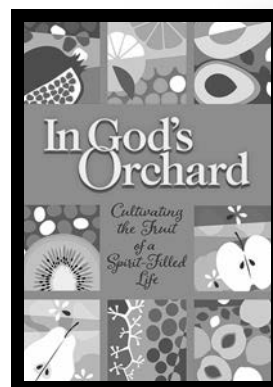
In God's Orchard: Cultivating the Fruit of a Spirit-Filled Life may not be the first Bible study ever written about the fruits of the Spirit, but it has a lot to offer for a short book. This Bible study for individuals or small groups does a wonderful job of weaving in how God's grace and forgiveness produce our fruits of the Spirit.

This book was written by several different authors, but with a common formatting. I appreciated that each author brought a unique voice to their section but that the book still had a unified feel to it. The authors never miss an opportunity to point you to Jesus, who lived all these fruits of the Spirit perfectly for us and who can give us strength to live a fruit-of-the-Spirit-filled life. This connection to Jesus and to forgiveness is repeatedly emphasized and is a strong theme of the study.

Designed for small groups, this Bible study includes opening and closing prayers and discussion questions

and answers. I felt the questions really made me think. I feel that in a group setting these questions would lead to fruitful discussion. The whole study is very accessible and could be successfully led by leaders of any experience level.

This study managed to strike an excellent balance between refreshing me with God's grace and challenging me to live a life more filled with the fruit of the Spirit. I would highly recommend it for women who are looking for a study that encourages them in their faith life.



Price: \$14.99

Melissa Brander
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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

New family devotions available

WELS Commission on Discipleship is offering devotions developed for the entire family to use. The devotions coincide with the previous Sunday's Bible readings. Each devotion is complete with a set of questions for different age groups, a prayer, and hymn verses that can be sung or spoken. Downloadable printable versions are available as well.

Started while most families were staying at home due to COVID-19 restrictions, these devotions provided opportunities for parents and children whose calendars were suddenly empty to spend spiritual time together.

"The foundation of the Christian family begins at home. What an opportunity for parents to commit to starting and sustaining a good and godly habit," says Donn Dobberstein, director of WELS Commission on Discipleship.

These family devotions will continue

to be offered three times a week. Dobberstein says this should more likely set up families for success. "We didn't want families to feel like they are failing if they miss a devotion. The goal is to create a doable program to help families who may have no devotional life or who struggle to keep it going. With this model, families can use the devotions as they have time throughout the week."

He says other goals for the devotions include to assist parents and children in the spiritual life at home, to encourage people to follow God's instructions for home devotional life, to teach families how and when to have home devotions, and to encourage congregations in their support of their member families.

LEARN MORE AT wels.net/family-devotions.
Subscribe to have the devotions e-mailed to you at wels.net/subscribe.

Serving those who serve their country

One of the many groups served by WELS Commission on Special Ministries is military service members and their families. One way the commission does this is through military contact pastors—pastors who serve WELS members and other Christians stationed at nearby military bases in addition to serving a congregation.



Paul Schulz conducting a wedding for a military member.

Paul Schulz, pastor at Risen Savior, Chula Vista, Calif., is one of approximately 120 military contact pastors who serve U.S. military members with the reassuring gospel message. He is the contact pastor for five different Marine and Naval bases in the area.

Schulz has been at Chula Vista for five and a half years. "I knew the congregation was made up of a lot of military members, and I always had a high respect for people who serve our country in that way," says Schulz. "It was a real appeal to me to be able to serve military families."

Schulz says one of the first challenges was getting on base. "We want to let the chaplains on base know who we are and that if they come across any WELS members they can send them our way so we can serve them," he says. "It's really, really hard to get on base. It's a challenge unless you have the right contact person."

Now Schulz leads a service every Sunday at the Marine Corp Recruit Depot in nearby San Diego; anywhere from 25 to 65 recruits attend, many of whom aren't WELS members. They're young, and it's usually their first time away from home. For the first time, they're taking ownership of their faith. "It's been one of the most incredible experiences and blessings in my min-



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istry to be able to bring the Word to those recruits,” says Schulz. “The spiritual needs are the same for all of us, whether it was the farmers and ranchers I served in South Dakota; the engineers in Peoria, Ill.; or the military members here. We’re all sinners who need to be reminded of our Savior and take comfort in his promises.”

Military families, however, are faced with their own set of unique and challenging circumstances. “Each family may be going through this for the first time, and they desperately need the comfort and assurance of God’s Word,” Schulz says. “They’re torn apart in so many different ways. It’s a blessing to assure them, especially those who will be deployed, that the Lord is with them in all things and in all ways.”

Schulz stresses that for him to be able to share God’s comforting Word with WELS members stationed in his area, he needs to know about them. WELS Military Services has an online referral form, wels.net/refer, that service members or their families can fill out. WELS contact pastors use the information to contact military members stationed across the country.

LEARN MORE AT wels.net/military.

RESOURCES

FOR THOSE SERVING MILITARY MEMBERS: A new online training module from WELS Special Ministries offers tips and encouragement on how to best serve in military settings. Download at welscongregationservices.net/c005.

FOR THOSE IN THE MILITARY: The new *Christian Service Members’ Handbook* provides worship resources for Christian military members who may not have access to a WELS civilian chaplain. After June 15, copies will be available for free to active military members who complete or update a referral form at wels.net/refer or for purchase from Northwestern Publishing House, nph.net.

New director for Christian Aid and Relief

In June, Dan Sims will begin his work as the new full-time director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

“As much as I will miss parish ministry, I’m really excited about this new call,” says Sims, who has served the last four and a half years as pastor at Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis. “Christian Aid and Relief is doing a lot of great work, and I’m excited to increase the opportunities and extend the reach.”

The mission of Christian Aid and Relief is to reflect Christ’s love and compassion to souls suffering from disasters and hardships. The organization works with congregations and mission fields to offer humanitarian aid as well as boots-on-the-ground service to people who need help, all the while sharing the gospel message that inspires the work.

“Our Savior tells us to show compassion to those who have needs—whether that need is a humanitarian need or from some disaster,” says Sims. “One of the great impacts of carrying out our Savior’s plan is that it gains us opportunities to talk to them about their greatest need and the one who fulfills that need—their Savior.”

The past several years, a five-man commission—with a chairman who also serves as a full-time pastor—oversaw the work. The Synodical Council decided last fall to call for a full-time director who will continue to work with the commission to develop policies, establish action plans, review humanitarian aid projects, and discuss grants for people facing extreme medical and financial challenges.

“Calling a pastor to serve as the director emphasizes the spiritual aspect of our relief ministry,” says Robert Hein, chairman of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. “He is well suited to preach at congregations, prepare materials, and make presentations to pastors and other leaders to promote the biblical basis for our ministry of compassion.”

Having a pastor serve in this position full time will allow more time to develop an intensive program—including a printed training manual and video materials—to train congregations in disaster response before a disaster hits. Another goal is to establish and equip disaster relief coordinators in each district to assess and oversee local disaster relief work.



Left to right: Dan Sims; his wife, Jennifer; and their three kids, George; Josie; and Marcus.

But Sims wants to do more than just respond to disasters; he wants to create a compassionate spirit in WELS congregations to help those who are suffering in their communities. He says that not only does that follow Christ’s command to “do good to all people” (Galatians 6:10), but also “if [the neighborhood residents] can see WELS congregations and people as caring and active in helping with physical needs, then we gain more opportunities to talk with them about their spiritual needs and their Savior.” Sims looks to partner closely with WELS areas of ministry to provide training and examples of ministry opportunities.

Sims, a 1997 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., has served as the Western Wisconsin district secretary as well as secretary for the WELS Hymnal Project.

LEARN MORE AT wels.net/relief.

 WELS Connections

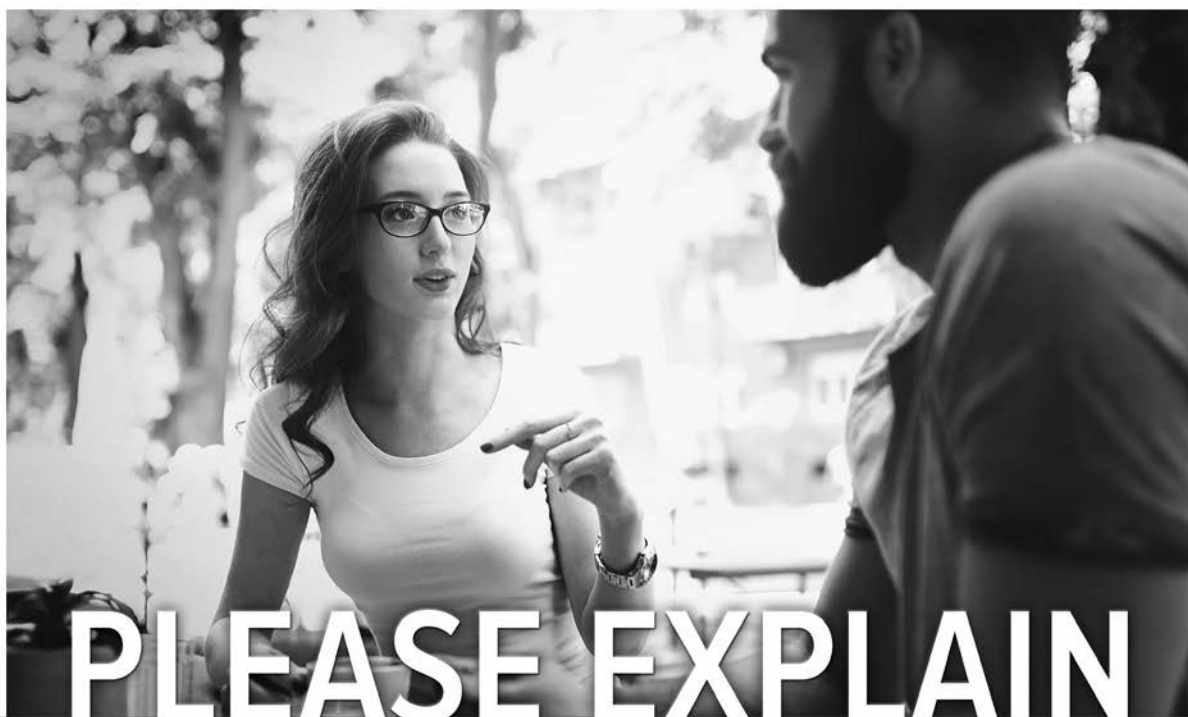


PHOTO | iStock

PLEASE EXPLAIN

How do I know whom to believe now that Jesus is gone? | Luke G. Thompson

HAVE YOU EVER found yourself on your own: leaving home to launch your adult life, traveling in a foreign country, or losing a spouse or parent? What did it feel like to be alone, making your own decisions with no one to turn to but yourself?

When we step back and think about it for a minute, we rely on and put our trust in a lot of people. We trust parents, police, pilots, financial advisors, teachers, news outlets, politicians, salesmen, scientists, and doctors. We trust them to help us make decisions. We also know that the world is full of people we should not trust, people who want to manipulate us, take advantage of us, and use us.

Whom and what are we to believe? Nowhere is this more important than with the spiritual people in our lives. Then it's not our money or temporal health at stake. It's eternity.

Just for this reason, wouldn't it have been awesome to have been one of Jesus' disciples and have God's own Son, the Messiah, right there to give you all your spiritual answers? You'd have no reason to wonder if he is twisting God's Word. No reason to wonder if he knows enough to understand. No reason to wonder if he's got another agenda. It's Jesus!

LISTEN TO JESUS. HE'S NOT REALLY GONE.

But even for his disciples, a time would come when they would be on their own. Jesus often reminded them of this. He spent a lot of time getting them ready to be on their own. In fact, one of the most beautiful sections of Scripture is Jesus' last words to his disciples (John chapters 14–17), before he was arrested on Maundy Thursday. He told his disciples that he was going away (John 14:2,28; 16:5).

If you were a disciple on that night, what would you be worried about? "Jesus, when you're gone, how will I know whom to believe? How will I know I'm continuing the right way in the faith?" Could you imagine being one of these disciples wondering how to go on after Jesus was gone?

Jesus also told them, "I will not leave you as orphans" (John 14:18). He explained things in more detail. After he would leave, "the Spirit of truth" would come and "guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own . . . He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you" (John 16:13,14). In other words, Jesus was not going to leave them. Not really. Jesus would continue to be with his disciples and to speak to his disciples, building them up, instructing them, and guiding them. He would do it

through the Spirit of truth who would “speak only what he hears” (v. 13).

And that was exactly what happened. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples, and they spoke as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continued to move them, and they continued to speak, write, and teach.

And the result of all that work of the Holy Spirit? The Bible. When you open the Scriptures, your Jesus reminds you that he’s not gone. He’s right there. We need to remind ourselves of this truth every day. And the best way to find the path through all the different opinions is to listen to Jesus—to read his Word.

LISTEN AND COMPARE

“But,” you say, “so many people read the Bible and come up with so many different interpretations! How can I know which is the right one?” Jesus himself warned the disciples, “Watch out for false prophets” (Matthew 7:15). Jesus prepared his disciples for a world where many people would be claiming to speak for God, convinced that they knew how best to understand the words of God. That’s what the world is like today as well. People who call themselves Christians teach so many ideas as if they are true. In fact, there are at least two hundred groups who call themselves Christian in North America alone! How can we possibly navigate all of this?

After Jesus told his disciples to watch out for false prophets, he then said, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16). A prophet is someone who claims to be speaking for God. The word *prophesy* simply means to speak something otherwise hidden, like

a message from God. What’s the most obvious fruit that prophets produce? What they say. And so somehow, we ought to be able to recognize them by what they say. How? We simply compare what they say to what Jesus says, to what the Holy Spirit has given us.

That’s obviously easier said than done. But as hard as it may be to do that, the principle is really that simple. Jesus once said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” How do the sheep know they’re following the right shepherd? Jesus says, “Listen to my voice” (John 10:14-16).

The best way to find the path through all the different opinions is to listen to Jesus— to read his Word.

You can get to know your Shepherd’s voice too. Think about it: How well would you know the personality of someone you talked to just a couple hours every month? Now, how well would you know that same person if you talked to him daily? Wouldn’t you know him better if he daily was telling you stories about himself and if he was always pouring out what was on his heart to you? Eventually, wouldn’t you become exceptional at spotting anyone trying to impersonate him? It’s no different with Jesus.

LISTEN TO YOUR SAVIOR’S VOICE

Here’s an example: Some people teach that you have to make a decision to become a Christian. “After

all,” they might point out, “when someone asked Paul, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ Paul said, ‘Believe.’ See? You have to decide to believe to be a Christian.” That sounds right. After all, they’re simply quoting Scripture! But are they right?

Let’s listen to the voice of our Savior: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). Your Shepherd says you don’t decide or do anything. It’s all by grace, undeserved love, that chooses us. The more you read the Bible, the more you’ll understand that Jesus chose you, not the other way around. Your faith is 100 percent a gift, given to you by the Holy Spirit himself. But don’t take my word for it. See for yourself what Jesus says.

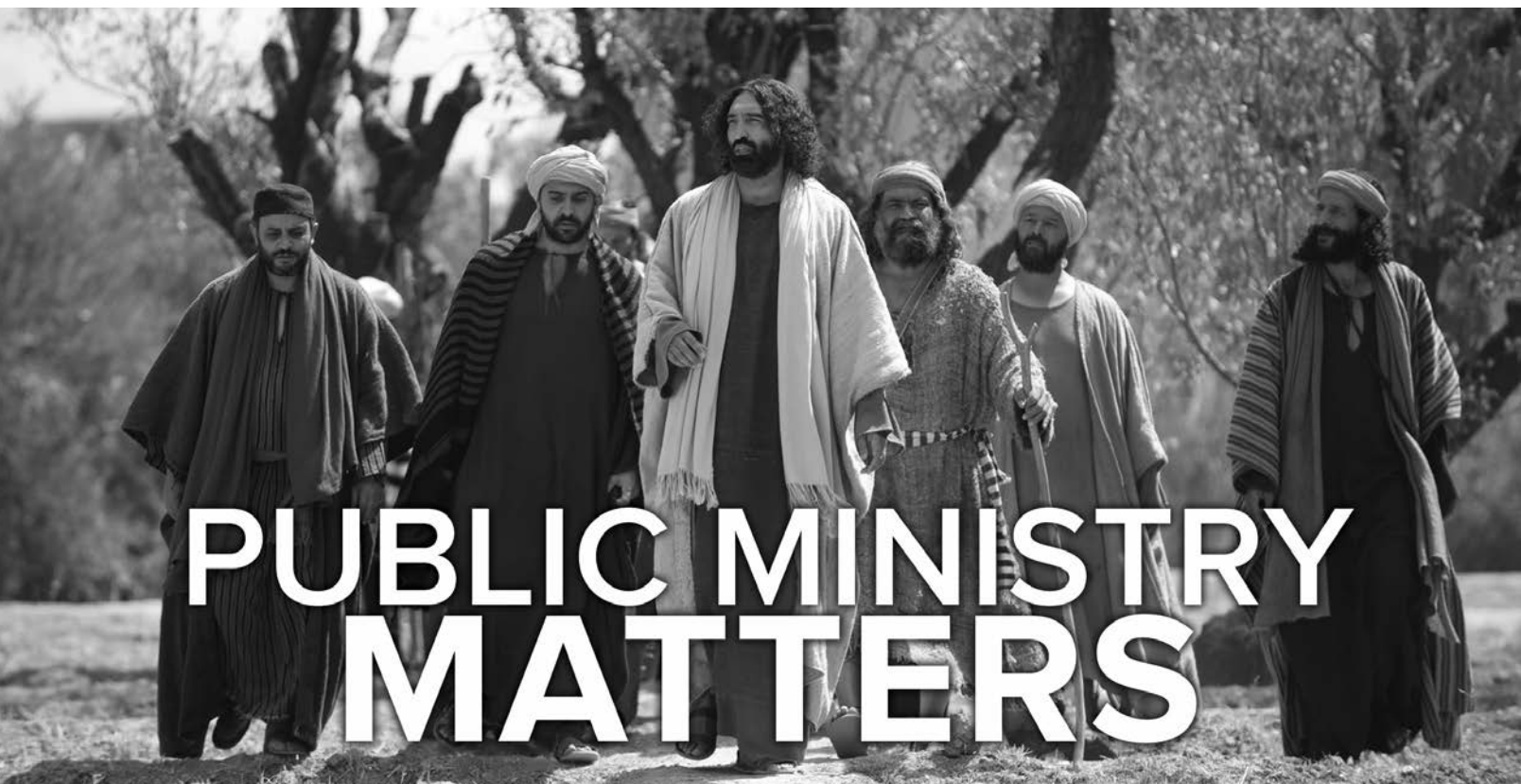
This teaching takes a lot of pressure off this work of sorting through all the noise to find the voice of Jesus. Because it’s really not a question of whether you need to find him. He’s found you. And he won’t leave you. He wants to talk to you.

And for those times when you don’t know whom to turn to, just remember: He never really left you.

He’s right there, in his Word, waiting to talk.



*Luke Thompson is pastor
at St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada.*



PUBLIC MINISTRY MATTERS

All believers have a ministry, but we call it “public ministry” when believers ask or call someone to serve them.

Michael J. Borgwardt

To understand what public ministry is and why it matters in the world, it might help to start with a real-life example: St. Matthew’s account of his own call into the public ministry (Matthew 9:9-13).

THE CALLING OF MATTHEW

Jesus based his early ministry in the Galilean town of Capernaum. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector in that same town. You might picture him sitting in his tax booth, admiring the impressive stacks of coins on his counting table, and making careful notes in his ledgers, when an unexpected visitor interrupts. He thinks, *What? A rabbi? Here? Can’t be. They all curse this place.* He rubs his eyes and reopens them, only to recognize that rabbi—it’s the one whose words and wonders draw crowds and drive Pharisees crazy. *But what business does Jesus have here?*

Jesus isn’t alone. Behind him, as if

afraid to follow him closer, is the cadre of recruits he’d been gathering. They are an odd bunch, including at least one of those radical revolutionary Zealots and several others who mostly just smell like fish. But none of Jesus’ recruits raise more eyebrows than Matthew—or Levi, as he is sometimes called.

People had other names for him. They can’t be printed here, but they all said the same thing: “That guy is bad news!” It wasn’t just that people didn’t like paying taxes. It was where those taxes went—to Rome, the heart of an empire that sprawled from Judea all the way to Britain. To ensure control over all those resentful subjects, Rome maintained standing armies across the empire, ready to march at the first hint of rebellion to crush it with brutal, bloody efficiency. All that force wasn’t cheap. Where did the revenue come from? From the conquered peoples themselves, of course.

When Matthew collected taxes, he was compelling his own people to pay for the privilege of being oppressed by Rome. His own tacked-on fees could be as much as he

wanted—he had all the muscle of Rome behind him. There was nothing anyone could do but curse him behind his back as a thieving, thug-gish traitor. Jews called tax collectors the vilest of sinners. They barred them from their synagogues. Their rabbis considered them lost causes, beyond repentance or salvation.

Yet here is Jesus calling to Matthew: “Follow me.” Without hesitation, he stands up, follows Jesus away from his booth, and never looks back. Those two words from Jesus tell Matthew that even he is not a lost cause. But how can this be?

He won’t have to wait long to find out. Later that night, at Matthew’s house, the Pharisees are scandalized to see Jesus hanging out with Matthew’s friends—a Who’s Who of lost souls. “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” they demand (9:11). Jesus’ reply? “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. . . . For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (9:12,13).

Matthew had his answer, and it’s not what he expected: He truly is a lost cause—as lost as anyone ever

could be. Yet the bad news of Matthew was nothing compared to the good news of Jesus. If Jesus' sacrificial mercy and forgiveness could reach Matthew, it could reach anyone. Celebrating that gospel and reaching anyone and everyone with the good news that had reached him was what the rest of Matthew's life would be.

What was true for Matthew is true for us and for all believers. When we have been called by the gospel, it naturally becomes our calling to share it individually wherever God has placed us in life.

THE START OF PUBLIC MINISTRY

This also raises a question: If this gospel ministry belongs to all believers, why do some have special titles like *pastor, teacher, staff minister, missionary, or principal*? God calls some of his people to another form of ministry. We call it public ministry whenever someone serves as a public representative of God's people—usually a specific group of people in a specific place like a congregation or a school.

This is not merely a human arrangement. God himself calls people into public ministry. Jesus did this in his ministry. Many people followed him as disciples. But for Matthew and 11 other disciples, Jesus made it clear that he had a special calling for them. He made them eyewitnesses of everything he said and did. He was constantly teaching, training, testing them.

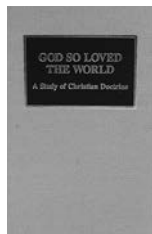
All the while, Jesus knew that one day, soon after his death and resurrection, he would send all his disciples into the world to "make disciples of all nations." These 12 would be ready to stand as leaders of this band of believers and to serve them as public ministers.

Before the New Testament was completed, they would teach them the very words they had heard Jesus speak. They would lead them in

For several years, WELS has had an increasing demand for more pastors and teachers. Do you know young people whom God has blessed with the talents to be pastors, teachers, or staff ministers? Encourage them to consider studying for the public ministry. And pray for all those who are studying so they can serve you with the gospel in years to come.

Submit names of possible ministerial candidates to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., at mlc-wels.edu/go/recommend.

FOR FURTHER study



God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine,
L. Lange,
pp. 370-386



Simply Lutheran: A Practical Guide to Lutheran Teachings,
A. Eggert,
pp. 244-246

These books are available from Northwestern Publishing House, nph.net, 800-662-6022.

seeking the lost with their eyewitness testimony. They would baptize the new believers and administer the Lord's Supper. They were called *apostles*, "sent-out ones." Theirs was a public ministry in every way. But the Apostolic Age ended when the Lord called these faithful servants home.

WHY PUBLIC MINISTRY MATTERS

What if public ministry itself ended when the apostles were gone? Without called workers administering the means of grace on behalf of God's

people—without pastors, teachers, principals, missionaries—what would the church look like today? Forget two thousand years of church history. Just try to imagine your church.

- Who would preach? Preach what? Teach what? Who would be qualified?
- Who would baptize? Everyone? All at once?
- Who would administer the Lord's Supper?
- How could Christian schools operate—on any level?
- Who would carry the gospel to other peoples and countries?
- Who would care about the sick, the straying, the dying?
- If all these are always everyone's responsibility, are they finally anyone's responsibility?

Think about that for a bit. It's hard to imagine, isn't it? There is a reason for the public ministry. It's just that instead of Jesus calling them directly, as he did Matthew and the rest of the Twelve, he simply began to call them through his church—the believers in one area.

He still calls today. We need called workers as much as we have ever needed them to fill our pulpits and teach in our classrooms. Who will they be? Do we know? Did anyone know that Matthew would become St. Matthew?

Yes, there was One who knew. The Voice that called Matthew did not fade when Jesus vanished into the clouds on the day of his ascension. That Voice speaks wherever his good news is preached and taught. What could possibly matter more?



Michael Borgwardt is pastor at Crossroads, Chicago, Illinois.

PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs



Good job!

Good job and thank you!

I thought this but couldn't say it to everyone I thought should hear it. As I write this, we have been asked—mandated—to avoid unnecessary contact with others in order to limit the spread of the virus. So I'm working remotely exclusively these days.

But many people must work and come into contact with others. Those are the people I want to commend. The health care personnel—doctors, nurses, orderlies, and all those others behind the scenes who allow them to function—willingly step up to care for those infected. They are putting themselves in danger to help those who are infected as well as the rest of us who have escaped infection so far. Some do so out of Christian faith in response to the command of Jesus to love others.

I wish that those who help us here in this world and do not know Jesus would see what I see.

I include the researchers around the world who are working to find some way to halt the virus. Their task is difficult and challenging. They too are placing themselves in harm's way for the rest of us, and we hope and pray that they will be successful in the months ahead.

But there are so many others—our political leaders, police, fire, military, and government agencies who keep us safe and make sure essential services are sustained now and always; the store clerks who help us with our essential needs; the truckers; and the corporations that have assumed additional responsibilities for hospitals, clinics, and for us all.

I can't name them all. But I can include them all in a word of thanks. Whether their services come from Christian motives or not, I say: Good job! Well done!

We should commend those who think of others first and contribute to the greater good of others. As a Christian, I benefit from their sacrifices. I appreciate them all.

Life in this world is filled with trials and imperfections. We need each other to stretch our vision and to do what can be done to make it better here. We need to work to improve our world and relieve pain, suffering, and injustice. That is a helpful vision. I share it.

I only wish that some could extend their horizon. In spite of the good here and the good that others do for us, there is also much sorrow and trouble. It will endure beyond this crisis, as history painfully makes clear. Life here is not always good.

I am part of this and see it all. My eyes are the same as everyone else's, but as a Christian, I have been given a vision beyond what I can see here. The Holy Spirit has opened my eyes so by faith I see beyond the horizon of this life. God has shared that vision by revealing it in the Scriptures. There I learn of God's enduring love, even when I am confused by what I see here. In the Scriptures, I learn that Jesus has come not only to give me and everyone else the power to love and help others but also to give me life beyond the limitations of flesh, blood, and breath here.

I wish that those who help us here in this world and do not know Jesus would see what I see. I pray for that and work for that. I want to commend all of them for their good deeds for us, but I also want them to see that those good deeds are not enough to open the door of heaven. Jesus has already done that by his suffering and death for us and by his resurrection from the dead.


John A. Braun | FIC Editor

USING BIBLE STORIES TO EXAMINE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD THAT WE NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT, CHARACTERISTICS THAT APPLY TO WHAT WE'RE FACING RIGHT NOW.

A BIBLE STORY

just for me

Gregory C. Lyon



PHOTO | Lightstock

YOU ARE NOT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

She stood in the doorway with the alabaster jar of perfume. The guilt of how she paid for that jar of perfume haunted her steps. Then, couple that with the fear of what she planned to do with it. How would he react? Would he cast her out like so many others had before? This was a pre-conceived plan, but the outcome was anything but planned. He had shown love to outcasts in the past. But did he have enough compassion for her? Did he know who she was and what she had done? At this point—in her mind—the two had become inseparable . . . she WAS what she HAD DONE.

FILLED WITH GUILT

For just one moment, I'd like you to think like her.

Read Luke 7:36-50, especially considering everything that had occurred between verses 37 and 38.

What are you thinking as you head to the house of the Pharisee? What's driving you to bring this alabaster jar to the house? Knowing that Jesus is there, what are you hoping to hear from him? What's the best-case scenario? What's the worst-case scenario?

Can you feel what she must have

felt? Can you feel the daggers staring you down . . . the judging eyes that say, "What is she doing here?" Can you feel those judging eyes that are causing you to ask the same question of yourself, "What am I doing here?"

Guilt has a way of showing itself. It comes in many forms: anger, fear, anxiety, gut pains, seclusion, and everything in between. This woman's guilt was real because she was a sinner. She knew it and so many were likely to remind her of it. But what would Jesus say? What would Jesus do?

SET FREE TO LIVE

She made it to his feet and what did he say? Nothing! He didn't cast her out. He didn't reject her. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping. The only person in the room that mattered saw her sorrow, her regret, her guilt. Her actions cried out, "Lord, have mercy."

Can you find Jesus' first words to the woman? After sharing a simple parable with Simon, he finally speaks to her in verse 48: "Your sins are forgiven." That's all she wanted. That's all she needed. That's everything. She wasn't forgiven because of her alabaster jar. She was forgiven because of who Jesus is.

She came to him a broken sinner. He forgave her. He set her free to live

without the burden of sin and guilt weighing her down. Would others still judge her? Maybe. Would she still struggle with the days where she wishes she hadn't done what she had done? Maybe. But here's the reality. She's free!

And through Christ, so are you. You are not what you have done! You are a beloved child of God through faith in him.

So bring your guilt to Jesus. Confess your sins and guilt and then listen for those most comforting words: "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."

As you consider Jesus' grace for this sinful woman and for you,

COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE:

This account shows me that Jesus has _____ FOR ME.

May this be a reminder to you of the reality of your complete Savior.



Contributing editor Gregory Lyon, campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a six-part series on applying biblical narratives to our lives.

LEARN MORE AT forwardinchrist.net, including additional food for thought and potential answers.

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THINGS TO NOTE

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Berg, Jeffrey, to retirement
Bratz, Dennis, to retirement
Connell, James, to retirement
Hagen, Kurt, to Zion, Kingston, Wis.
Jenkins, Paul, to Trinity, Woodbridge, Va.
Lopahs, Martin, to retirement
Neitzel, Mark, to retirement
Olson, Steven, to retirement
Priebe, David, to retirement
Radunzel, Steven, to retirement
Schlomer, Lloyd, to Zion, Akaska/St. Paul's, Mound City, S.D.
Siirila, Robert, to retirement
Thompson, Glen, to retirement
Zarling, Mark, to retirement

Teachers

Bader, Connie, to retirement
Bakken, Debra, to retirement
Bilitz, Betty, to retirement
Bock, Marilyn, to retirement
Borree, Kaitlin, to Bethlehem-North, Germantown, Wis.
Bubloz, Amy, to retirement
Bumhoffer, Dolores, to retirement
Callies, Emily, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Cochran, Randy, to retirement
Cross, Julia, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.
Dierker, Monica, to retirement
Dittrich, Nathan, to Immanuel, La Crosse, Wis.
Duncan, Rachel, to St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.
Galecki, Abigail, to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio
Gaulke, Abby, to St. Peter, Helenville, Wis.
Gibson, Joshua, to Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.
Gibson, Nicole, to Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.
Gronholz, Linda, to retirement
Gurgel, Susan, to retirement

Harris, Mary, St. John, Saginaw, Mich.
Hein, Rebecca, to retirement
Helwig, Amy, to Small Steps Academy, Port Orange, Fla.
Hoppe, Lauren, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy-Santa Rita Ranch, Liberty Hill, Texas
Huebner, Cheryl, to retirement
Huebner, Richard, to retirement
Hussman, Rebecca, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Inniger, Tracey, to retirement
Jackson, Patricia, to retirement
Kahrs, Louisa, to Little Lambs Learning Center, Danube, Minn.
Killinger, Jessica, to Bethel, Bay City, Mich.
Klatt, Cynthia, to retirement
Kleinke, Nancy, to retirement
Klemp, JoAnn, to retirement
Klug, Kevin, to Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis.

Knobloch, Barbara, to retirement
Knoblock, Sandra, to retirement
Kolbow, Debra, to retirement
Krause, Justin, to St. Paul, Mount Calvary, Wis.
Kruger, Heidi, to Grace, Kenai, Alaska
Kujath, John, to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.
Kujath, Na Bin, to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.
Lauber, Pamela, to St. Mark, Lincoln, Neb.
Leckwee, Dennis, to Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School, Wauwatosa, Wis.
Leitzke, Mark, to retirement
Lillo, Jeffry, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Loescher, Hope, to Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.
Maas, Linda, to retirement
Maas, Michael, to retirement
Miller, Brian, to Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Mittelstadt, Melissa, to Crown of Life, Hubertus, Wis.

CALLED TO *eternal glory*

A reporting of deaths of called workers as noted in the call report.

READ MORE AT > forwardinchrist.net/obituaries.

TEACHERS & STAFF MINISTERS

CARMICHAEL, GARY G.
Aug. 12, 1933—April 8, 2020
EHLKE, LORNA J.
May 30, 1934—March 15, 2020
HAAR (NEE HAHN), MARY H.
Dec. 12, 1929—March 3, 2020
LISCHKA, LUCILLE M.
Sept. 29, 1930—Jan. 29, 2020

PASTORS

BRUG, PAUL D.
March 2, 1972—April 20, 2020
CARTER JR., JOHN C.
May 30, 1957—March 17, 2020
SPAUDE, JEROME E.
Sept. 1, 1928—April 19, 2020

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED.

— Matthew 5:4

Moeller, James, to retirement
 Moldenhauer, Martin, to retirement
 Nass, Leah, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
 Ogg, Peggy, to Trinity, Bay City, Mich.
 O'Haver, Kelsey, to Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.
 Pagel, Robert, to retirement
 Pagel, Susan, to retirement
 Pautz, Kathleen, to retirement
 Picchiottino, Juliana, to retirement
 Pierick, Laurel, to retirement
 Radue, Gina, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
 Rahn, Carina, to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.
 Reinhardt, Bradley, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
 Roepke, William, to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.
 Schaefer, Wendy, to retirement
 Schafer, Sharon, to retirement
 Schafer, Stephen, to retirement
 Schroeder, Jean, to retirement
 Schulz, David, to retirement
 Seeger, Kurtis, to retirement
 Sellnow, David, to retirement
 Siegmann, Starla, to retirement
 Sims, Jennifer, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.
 Steffenhagen, Denise, to retirement
 Szep, Nancy, to retirement
 Tatge, Gilbert, to retirement
 Taylor, Kenneth, to retirement
 Thiesfeldt, Steven, to retirement
 Tierney, Joan, to retirement
 Toth, Steven, to retirement
 Trimmer, Brittany, to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.
 Uecker, Deborah, to retirement
 Uecker, Scott, to retirement
 Wagner, Elisabeth, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.
 Wendland, James, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.
 Wendland, Louise, to retirement
 Wenner, Katherine, to Prairie-Upper Site, Fairfax, Minn.
 Westendorf, Kadie, to Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.
 Wichmann, Elizabeth, to retirement
 Wichmann, Paul, to retirement
 Wilk, Cathlyn, to retirement
 Wilsman, Karen, to retirement

THROUGH MY *Bible* IN 3 YEARS

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Acts 7:44–8:4 | 11. Ac. 12:1-24 | 21. Ex. 14:1–15:21 |
| 2. Ac. 8:5–25 | 12. Exodus 1, 2 | 22. Ex. 15:22–16:36 |
| 3. Ac. 8:26–40 | 13. Ex. 3:1–4:17 | 23. Ex. 17 |
| 4. Ac. 9:1–19a | 14. Ex. 4:18–6:9 | 24. Ex. 18 |
| 5. Ac. 9:19b–31 | 15. Ex. 6:10–7:25 | 25. Ex. 19, 20 |
| 6. Ac. 9:32–42 | 16. Ex. 8 | 26. Acts 12:25–13:12 |
| 7. Ac. 9:43–10:33 | 17. Ex. 9 | 27. Acts 13:13–43 |
| 8. Ac. 10:34–48 | 18. Ex. 10, 11 | 28. Acts 13:44–52 |
| 9. Ac. 11:1–18 | 19. Ex. 12:1–36 | 29. Acts 14:1–12 |
| 10. Ac. 11:19–30 | 20. Ex. 12:37–13:22 | 30. Acts 14:13–28 |

JUNE 2020

READ MORE AT wels.net/bible3

Whitney, Daniel, to retirement
 Wrobel, Beth, to retirement
 Zarnstorff, Cindy, to Peridot-Our Savior's, Peridot, Ariz.
 Zarnstorff, Thomas, to Peridot-Our Savior's, Peridot, Ariz.
 Staff ministers
 Bollinger, Rodney, to retirement
 Enter, David, to retirement
 Priebe, Benjamin, to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.
 Assignment made permanent
 Schoenbach, Megan, to Shepherd of the Valley, Menasha, Wis.

UPCOMING EVENTS MAY BE POSTPONED OR CANCELED DUE TO COVID-19. Please check the event organizer's website or contact the event organizer directly for the most up-to-date information.

ANNIVERSARIES

Winona, Minn.—St. Matthew's (100). June 6–7. June 6. Commemoration of the adoption of the constitution and cornerstone laying of the church and school, 6 P.M. June 7. Worship, 9 A.M., community outreach celebration and outdoor picnic follows. Sept. 19–20. Heritage hymn sing. Sept. 19, 6 P.M.; Sept. 20, 9 A.M. 507-454-5440.
Kenosha, Wis.—Mt. Zion (75). Sept. 20. Worship, 8 and 10:45 A.M.; luncheon to follow. RSVP by Aug. 15., to Char VanSant, cvansant@wi.rr.com. Place in subject line, "75th Anniversary Celebration."

COMING EVENTS

Concerts—Canticum Novum: A WELS Chamber Choir. Theme: "Let it shine." Website, canticumnovumwels.org.
 • June 18, 7 P.M., Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.
 • June 19, 7 P.M., Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.
 • June 20, 7 P.M., Faith, Antioch, Ill.
 • June 21, 8:15 and 10:45 A.M. worship, Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.
WELS Night at Miller Park—July 24. Brewers vs. Pirates. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210 or e-mail ficsubmissions@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

SEE MORE AT welsrc.net/bulletinboard.

PREMIUM HOLIDAY

The WELS VEBA Commission is offering a one-month premium holiday for the WELS VEBA Group Health Care Plan ("WELS VEBA"). No premiums will be due for WELS VEBA medical benefits for the month of August 2020. This will result in a savings of about \$4.2 million to participating organizations. Premiums for voluntary benefits, such as dental, life, and optional long-term disability, will still be due and payable for the month of August 2020, as will any premiums due for WELS VEBA coverage prior to August 2020. All sponsoring organizations will receive communications with more details. Benefit Plans, bpo@wels.net; 414-256-3299.

Getting older. Getting closer.

Glenn L. Schwanke

As a young boy, sometimes I'd think, *In the year 2000, I'll be 45 years old. Wow, that's old!*

Guess what? My perspective has changed—in part because the year 2000 is little more than a fast-receding blip in our temporal rearview mirror. This month I'm going to be . . . well, I'll let you do the math.

When I was that boy who thought that 45 was ancient, I smiled when I heard older folks observe, "My, how time flies!" But now that I'm one of those older folks, I find myself echoing my elders when it comes to the passing of time.

We're not just getting older, but also closer—closer to the goal our Lord intended for each of us when he sent his Son Jesus into this world as the Savior.

Yet, lamenting the rapid passing of time will do little good. It's what we do with the time given us that counts! Benjamin Franklin once quipped, "Lost time is never found again." How true. Ben also observed, "You may delay, but time will not." True again.

So how will we Christians make wise use of our time? In quite a few different ways—ways that reflect our interests, our careers, and our stage in life. Some of us are going to buckle down on an exercise regimen that may help us regain upper-body strength or help us cope with the chronic aches and pains of aging. Others will invest extra time in a hobby. Still others will seek to sharpen professional skills. That, of course, will be different for each of us.

Your wise use of time may differ from mine in many ways. And yet, I pray, it will be exactly the same in one key respect. How so? The apostle Paul also observed the rapid passing of time. That's why he urged, "It is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because

our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost over, and the day is drawing near. So let us put away the deeds of darkness and put on the weapons of light" (Romans 13:11,12).

Notice how Paul compares our life to the passing of a night? If we're blessed with a peaceful night's rest, we don't notice the passing of the minutes or the hours. All we notice is our alarm clock rattling its way across the dresser at 6:10 A.M. The night itself flies by.

So also our life flies by. That means "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." We're not just getting older, but also closer—closer to the goal our Lord intended for each of us when he sent his Son Jesus into this world as the Savior.

We're getting closer—closer to an end to chronic pain, depression, loneliness, sadness, worry, tears, and fears. We're getting closer—closer to that place where our Savior will be our light throughout eternity.

Are we ready? Only the Lord knows the moment when he will take us home (Psalm 31:15; Psalm 39:4; Matthew 24:44). And only by faith in Jesus will you and I be ready to take hold of our Savior's hand and cross over from this life into eternity (John 5:24; Mark 16:16).

It's no wonder that the apostle Paul urged us all to "make the most of your time. . . . Be filled with the Spirit by speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (singing and making music with your hearts to the Lord), by always giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:16,18-20).



Contributing editor Glenn Schwanke, pastor at Peace, Houghton, Michigan, also serves as campus pastor at Michigan Technological University.

The Scripture references used in this article are from the Evangelical Heritage Version.

F R E E D O M

Called to Be Free – Galatians 5:13

What an amazing blessing and privilege it is that God has called us to be free! Through Christ, we are free from sin, death, and the power of the devil. This summer, embrace this wonderful freedom with these new and timely resources from Northwestern Publishing House.



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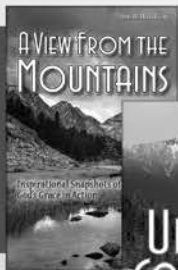


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To die is gain

Although her time on earth was short, Jodi lived as an example of God's love. Twila Fickel

JODI GOT THE diagnosis the summer after her first year in college—it was cancer. She had always wanted to be a nurse. At 19, she had come home for the summer to work and stay with family.

Ovarian cancer was NOT in the plan, but her reaction was positive. “It will make me more able to relate to my patients and a better nurse.” After a year of surgery, chemo, and a hiatus from school, she returned to school and got her degree. Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., even offered her a position. She had won numerous awards for her skill and dedication in school.

She made plans to move to Minnesota, but God had other plans. Shortly before graduation, the cancer returned. She got the news, and the next day her boyfriend proposed. Nothing would stand in their way—even cancer.

Jodi went through another surgery, chemo, and radiation. She put Mayo on hold.

Five months after the diagnosis, the doctor told Jodi and her fiancé if they wanted to be married, they had better do it now. The families quickly organized a wedding. Jodi and her fiancé picked out her wig together. Jodi, too weak to dance, sat and watched as friends and family celebrated their love.

Four short weeks later, she went to the Savior's wedding banquet. At her funeral, her wedding picture stood at the altar instead of a casket. She looked radiant. Her husband sent out wedding thank-you notes along with thank-you cards for the condolences.

Jodi fought to the very end. She had so much to live for and so much to do. But she also had Jesus as her Savior. When she died, it was the best day of her life. She didn't have to worry about “dying with dignity.” Jesus had given her all the dignity she needed. Regardless of the ravages of her disease, when she entered heaven, God greeted her as his own chosen, beautiful, loved child.

Death is the devil's short-term success. He brought death into this world when he turned our first parents against God. With death, he rips hearts and lives apart and brings sorrow and tears. But it is only a short-term success. God takes away the sorrow of death by giving his children eternal life. Those who



Regardless of the ravages of her disease, when she entered heaven, God greeted her as his own chosen, beautiful, loved child.

fall asleep with his promises in their hearts set aside pain forever. Those who remain and have those promises in their own hearts find comfort and hope that they too will fall asleep only to awaken to a seat at the Lord's banquet table.

Jodi knew that. Although her time on earth was short, she lived as an example of God's love. Sometimes, I wish she was still here to remind me of that when I forget.



Twila Fickel is a member at Grace, Seward, Nebraska.

“FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST AND TO DIE IS GAIN” (PHILIPPIANS 1:21).