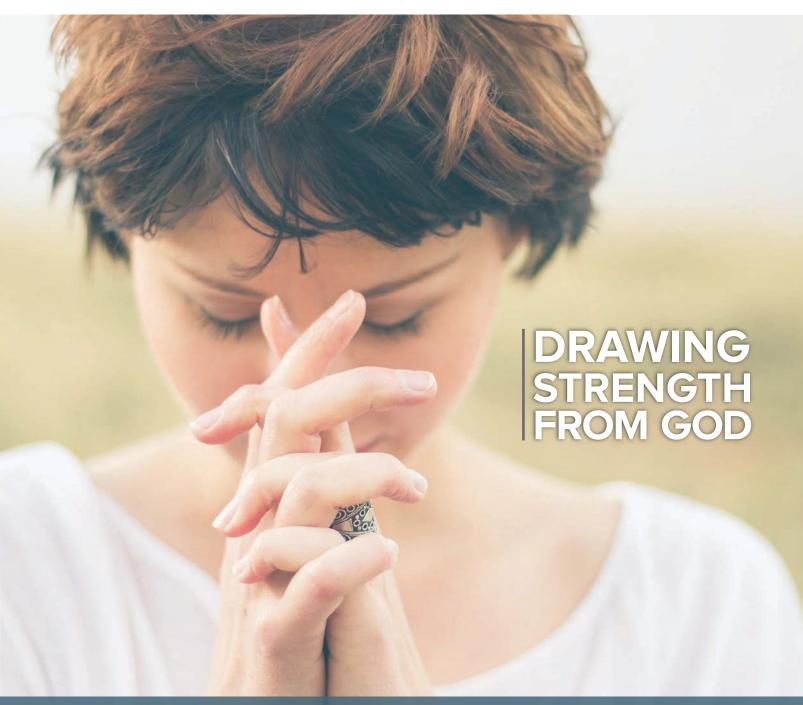
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FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE



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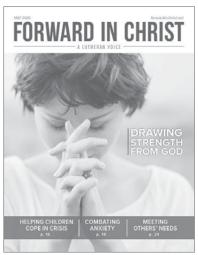


May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

Anxiety. We've all had our share of it over the last few months. Fear that we or our loved ones might get sick. Concern about the state of our finances, our church, and our nation's economy. Apprehension over what the news will report tomorrow. When we started working on this issue, "coronavirus" was just a whisper. By the time we finished, it was a roar.

Yet through it all, we can draw strength and comfort from God and his Word. That's the theme of Forward in Christ this month. On our pages, you'll . . .



COVER PHOTO | Lightstock

- meet a woman who suffers from anxiety and discover how she looks to God to provide comfort as well as what she needs to combat her daily struggle (p. 18);
- find tips to help your children cope during a time of uncertainty (p. 16);
- be reminded that Christ is our rock during the storms of life (pp. 9 & 31);
- see that even though Jesus isn't physically with us, he is constantly working for us (p. 26); and
- learn how we can use this time of crisis to meet the needs of others (p. 24).

Free digital access to this issue is available at nph.net/forwardinchrist. Share the link and let others know how we can draw strength and comfort from God.



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FEATURED ONLINE

See what goes on behind the scenes of Forward in Christ magazine in a new video series. Check out the interviews and other video content at forwardinchrist.net/videos.













THIS IS WELS

Here are some pictures taken during the first three months of 2020, including a few that reflect how ministry has changed around the synod during the coronavirus pandemic.

1 | Zion, Morrison, Wis. 2 | Heritage, Gilbert, Ariz.— Pastor Aaron Bublitz 3 | Global South Sudanese Committee 4 | Grace, Falls Church, Va.—Vicar Timothy Walsh presenting a Facebook Live devotion 5 | Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. senior Gabriel Bickelhaupt giving chapel 6 | Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis.—WELS President Mark Schroeder with Michigan Lutheran Seminary students 7 | Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis. principal Aaron Krause helping raise money for a gymnasium renovation 8 | Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada—new member welcome 9 | Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla.—taking home books for social distancing

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







Jesus is for the birds

"Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, LORD Almighty, my King and my God" (Psalm 84:3).

Peter M. Prange

MARTIN LUTHER REMINDS US in his explanation to the Third Commandment, "We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it."

When was the last time you despised preaching and his Word? Most Christians might be tempted to answer that question with an emphatic "Never!"

But despising our Savior's Word actually comes very naturally to sinners like you and me. By nature, we are, in fact, hostile to what God says about us and to us (Romans 8:7). Sinners can't help themselves. Even the most faithful Christians among us so easily nod with rapid agreement to what God says yet fail constantly to put his Word into practice. That's despising his Word. With the apostle Paul we are forced to confess, "What a wretched man I am!" and to ask, "Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24).

LEARNING FROM THE BIRDS

If only we could be like the birds! Apparently, Jesus has a special place in his heart for birds. In the gospels he referred to them more than once to illustrate his point. In reminding us how valuable we are to our heavenly Father, he compared us to two sparrows purchased for a penny (see Matthew 10:29-31). If the Father cares for them—and he does—won't he also care for us? At another time, Jesus urged us to be like the birds; they don't worry about their next meal. "They do not sow or reap or store away in barns," he observed, "and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

Luther was a bird lover too. As far as he could see, they were the world's greatest preachers, so filled with faith and joyful singing. "It is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the Gospel a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men," he once wrote. "We have as many teachers and preachers as there are little birds in the air. Their living example is an embarrassment to us. Whenever we hear a bird singing toward heaven and proclaiming God's praises and our disgrace, we should feel ashamed and not even dare to lift up our eyes. But we are as hard as stone, and we pay no attention even though we hear the great multitude preaching and singing every day" (Luther's Works 21:197).



The psalmist wished he could be like the birds. Why? Because they got to make the Jerusalem temple their home.

FOLLOWING THE BIRDS' EXAMPLE

The psalmist wished he could be like the birds. Why? Because they got to make the Jerusalem temple their home. What a privilege it would be to build a nest and have your young in "a place near [the Lord's] altar"! Like the prophetess Anna who would do the same, the birds "never left the temple but worshiped night and day" (Luke 2:37).

What love and mercy and forgiveness and peace our heavenly Father showers on us through his Word! We can't live without it. either now or forever. So. with what attitude should we hear it and with what spirit should we proclaim it? Gladly, with joy! Just like the birds.

Because, as silly as this may seem, Jesus truly is for the birds.



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

Having the right tools

I've done a lot of remodeling and woodworking projects over the years. Most of what I've done has been self-taught, and my lack of expertise means that projects take a lot longer than they should—and sometimes need to be redone. My motto is "There are no mistakes that can't be corrected or covered up." If I estimate a project to take three hours, my wise and patient wife has learned to expect it to take at least double the time.

But just as important as expertise is having the right tools for the job. When you have the right tools, the work gets done much more efficiently and with much less frustration.

The right tools are even more important when it comes to our worship life and our ongoing study of God's Word. Amazingly, within a period of

only four years, three new tools have become or will become available to enhance our worship and devotional life.



PHOTO | Mel Anne

In 2017, our synod produced and published a new edition of Luther's Catechism, replacing the previous catechism that had been in use since 1982. Unlike the 1982 edition, the new catechism is available in three versions: one using Scripture passages in the New International Version (NIV), one using the English Standard Version (ESV), and one using the Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV). The new catechism is different from the one it replaces in another important way. It is formatted and designed to be used not just by children in confirmation class but also by adults for personal and family devotions. Each section of the catechism features closer looks at biblical doctrines and practical applications of those teachings to our daily lives.

Another tool for personal Bible study became available last year—a new translation of the Bible, the Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV). The translation was the result of a six-year effort by an association of WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod professors, pastors, teachers, and laypeople. The goal was to produce a translation that is faithful to the original biblical languages and that speaks to readers in today's English. In addition, an EHV study Bible is available online in digital form. It's my prayer that having the option of the EHV will encourage more of our synod's members to feed their faith with daily reading of the Scriptures in a faithful and accurate translation.

Finally, Lutherans recognize the vital role that the hymnal plays in worship. Christian Worship, the current WELS hymnal, was produced in 1993. Now, after years of careful development, a new WELS hymnal is scheduled for release by Advent 2021. The new hymnal will feature several varieties of the liturgies that the Christian church has used for centuries that focus on Christ and unite our congregations in a common worship. It provides the hymns to sing in our worship—not only the old favorites, but also more recently written hymns. It includes psalms and prayers for public worship and private devotions. The new hymnal will be a valuable tool as we gather as congregations in God's house or as families around the kitchen table.

We can all be thankful to God for these new tools. What's important now is that we use them.

Mark Schrade Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President

LEARN MORE AT nph.net about the new edition of Luther's Catechism. Learn more about the Evangelical Heritage Version at wartburgproject.org. Learn more about the upcoming new hymnal at christianworship.com.



"WHEN I PREACH THE GOSPEL to people, people say, 'You're a stupid man.' I just smile, and next time I will preach again. It's my job. I'm a Christian."

Qiang Wang (pronounced Chee-ung), a former Buddhist from China, used to be the one who scoffed at Christians and the message of free forgiveness through Jesus. But now as a recent graduate of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI), he is the one sharing the good news of salvation as he reaches out to the Chinese population in Coquitlam, a growing city 31 km. east of Vancouver. British Columbia. Canada.

"The Word of God changed me," he says. "I have called [Christians] crazy people; now people call me stupid. But I don't care."

FINDING THE TRUTH

Qiang was an influential businessman when he lived in China; he says money gave him his identity.

"At the time, I thought I was a strong Buddhist, but now I think I just believed in myself," says Qiang. "The way I deal with Buddha: I gave him money; he gave me success."

But his success came with much travel and time away from his family. In 2013, Qiang; his wife, Susan; and their son Ricky immigrated to Canada for Ricky's education and for more time to spend together as a family.

That's when Qiang started hearing the gospel.

"When I look back, it's a miracle for myself. God loved me," says Qiang. "When I first landed in Vancouver, when I went to get an account at the bank, the person gave me the message of the gospel. When I went to insurance, when I went to the grocery store, they all give me the gospel message—you should go to a church. God surrounded me with people preaching the gospel." This type of personal outreach is normally unheard of in the Chinese community.

Three or four months later, a friend invited Susan and Qiang to hear a Chinese Christian pastor preach. "After the preaching, he called people forward to make a decision [for Christ]," says Qiang. "Susan raised her hand. I said, 'Don't do that! That's crazy people. Do you want to be with crazy people?' " Qiang still was hanging on to his Buddhist beliefs.

He even tried to teach others about those beliefs when he started attending a Bible class at a Christian church while his son went to English classes. "We argued, and I said, 'Okay, give me a Bible. I'll find your false teaching,' " says Qiang.

He continues, "I love reading, so I read the book and I found the truth. The Word of God changed me."

Qiang was baptized and joined a Chinese Christian church, but what he heard there was a lot of law. "Law preaching is really suitable for Chinese culture," says Qiang. "Chinese culture says nothing is free; you have to do something."







Left to right: Qiang Wang (far left) and a Bible study group at his home in Coquitlam; Susan and Qiang Wang; Qiang Wang studying with Pastor Geoff Cortright.

Some teachings also conflicted with what he was reading in the Bible.

Qiang had many questions about the Bible's teachings, but his pastor didn't want to answer them. Says Qiang, "I was stuck in Isaiah, and I read it again and again and again."

That is until Susan came to him one evening late in 2014, telling him about a pastor holding a Bible class in their apartment's lobby.

That pastor was Geoff Cortright from Saviour of the Nations, Vancouver. "I don't think it was an accident that we met the way we did," says Cortright. "I had been praying for months that God would give us a Chinese leader before that night." Cortright had just moved to Vancouver that summer to serve full time at Saviour of the Nations. which had an active ministry to the Chinese in the area.

Cortright answered Qiang's questions and continued to teach the gospel to him and Susan. They were confirmed in September 2015.

GROWING IN THE TRUTH

Qiang continued to study God's Word, now devouring People's Bible commentaries and other religious books he borrowed from Cortright.

When he first started his PSI studies, Qiang thought he would just work on the first level so he could serve as a church elder. "I never tried to be a pastor," he says. "I just wanted to serve."

Yet his studies kept going, even when he had doubts about continuing. "I tried to quit many, many times. But Geoff [Cortright] had a strong faith. He told me, 'You can do it.' " says Qiang. "Every time I try to quit, he just said, 'Let's pray.' Geoff is my blessing God sent me."

Qiang studied for four years—including learning Greek and Hebrew—with Cortright and seminary professors. He began serving as an evangelist for Saviour of the Nations in 2016, thwarting any opportunity to return

to his business in China. "My family in China didn't want me to [study in the PSI]. They thought I wouldn't have enough money to sustain my life. I would have to lower my life level," says Qiang.

He also lost many friends and business relationships from China. "They see me as a foolish man because I gave up all my beliefs. Now they don't have contact with me," he says.

But that didn't stop Qiang. He completed his PSI studies in December and is set to graduate this month.

Some of his family have changed their tune as well. "I baptized my mom and dad and my mother-in-law," says Qiang. "My family now are proud of me. They see I changed—a new man."

SHARING THE TRUTH

Qiang was ordained and commissioned as pastor at



On Christmas Day 2019, Qiang baptized Richard; Richard's wife, Sabrina; and their daughter Martina. Richard—an atheist—was the one person Qiang knew in Coquitlam when the Wangs moved there in 2019. They had been classmates in the early 1980s in communist China. Qiang continually shared the message of the gospel with Richard and his family, even when they weren't interested. "Now they say that this is our church," says Qiang.

READ MORE about Richard's story in WELS Missions' publication Faces of Faith, wels.net/facesoffaith.

Abiding Love, Coquitlam, in January 2020. Saviour of the Nations—with funding help from WELS Joint Missions and WELS–Canada—started this new mission church to reach the growing Chinese population. Qiang and his wife moved to the area in July 2019.

"I felt excited, but most of my feelings were scared," says Qiang. "We only knew one family there—they were atheist" (see sidebar).

But that didn't stop Qiang and Susan. "I go to the barber, I introduce myself. I go to the community center, I introduce myself. We buy a lot of furniture, so we go to different places, not because we don't know what we should buy but because we want to talk to people—that's our strategy," says Qiang.

Susan also got involved in social circles in the area. She spends five or six hours a day texting people to show her Christian care and concern.

The Wangs built a list of more than 350 prospects within six months. Qiang began offering English as a Second Language classes in his home, followed by a Chinese Bible study. It began with just his atheist friend and his family attending, but more have come since. Qiang also makes dumplings several times a week—he is known as the "dumpling man"—to make further connections. "If you want to make people loyal members, build the congregation into a warm home," he says. "Love and care for your members, not only sharing God's Word but also delicious food."

The going is slow. Many Chinese people attend the gatherings to "give face," a Chinese cultural concept that governs relationships in which they want to show respect and not embarrass a person. Oftentimes, however, they do not show interest in the gospel message. Qiang also was planning on starting Bible information classes in February, but COVID-19 restrictions are hampering the meetings and ministry.

"We're frustrated every day," says Qiang. "In the morning, we pray that we have more energy to do it again. It's all in the hands of the Lord. It's not I do—God provides.

"We just stay faithful to the Word. The gospel is powerful. It's not we who can persuade people or push people to do something. We just tell the truth."



Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ magazine.

LEARN MORE AT wls.wels.net/pastoral-studies-institute about the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Ministry TO THE SOUTH SUDANESE

Saviour of the Nations, Vancouver, and Abiding Love, Coquitlam, are part of a multi-site ministry served by Geoff Cortright and Qiang Wang.

Besides reaching out to the Chinese in Coquitlam, Saviour of the Nations also has started a third site in Surrey to minister to the South Sudanese Nuer population living there. After years of conversations and meetings and multiple visits and Bible studies with South Sudanese leaders, Saviour of the Nations held its first worship service in Surrey in July 2018 (pictured). Since then, Cortright has baptized many children and adults and brought 11 people through confirmation class. He is also doing elder training with three of the South Sudanese leaders.

READ MORE about one of the South Sudanese leaders from this congregation at wels.net/faces-of-faith-bidit.



STRUGGLE

We are to forgive others, but the journey can be difficult.

I NEEDED TO FORGIVE my father. But for the life of me, I could not figure out how.

TRYING TO SETTLE THE SCORE

When I was young, my father was abusive to my mom and sometimes to us kids as well. I was infuriated when I saw him hit her in the face. I screamed at him to stop, but he refused to listen. Sometimes he left us for months at a time, moving to another state for a while, just because he felt like it. He was usually out of work but would get a part-time job to save up money—usually to spend on himself. My dad also had addictions besides being incapable of thinking about anyone but himself.

So my mom did it all. She worked full time, came home, and started dinner. She did the laundry and mowed the lawn. She was his opposite. I remember one cold fall day. It was so windy and rainy outside. My mom needed to get the plastic up on the porch windows to help keep the heat in. As the rainy, blustering wind blew in, her hands freezing, she covered those windows. She was an example of endurance. She still is.

Eventually my mom talked to the pastor, and my parents got a divorce when I was ten. It was a huge relief. For the first time we had peace. I came home from school every day with a sense of freedom. We were finally free from the drama.

But unfortunately, it didn't last long. My dad started causing trouble again. Every time he came over, I would scream at him. If he brought his laundry. I would take it out of the washer and throw it on the lawn. If he came for dinner, I would put it back in the fridge. I was angry at him for all he had done, and I thought I had to settle the score.

Years passed, and it was time for me to go to college. I moved on with my life, never speaking to my dad and avoiding him at all costs. I became an adult. When I got married, he was not invited. I had children, and I made sure they never met him.

BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS

For about 15 years, I managed to avoid my dad. I would have avoided him forever if I could. But then I worried that he might make it into heaven somehow. How could we exist together in heaven—forever? To me, this problem was impossible to wrap my head around.

Then in a Bible study, the topic of forgiveness came up. My dad popped into my mind. I felt like God was telling me it was time to forgive. A few

weeks later. I heard a sermon on forgiveness. The pastor said, "Forgiveness is not saying it's okay. It's NOT okay. God does not condone sin. He is as upset about it as you are."

At that moment in my mind, it was like a stone wall collapsed. It was such a huge relief to know that God was not asking me to let everything slide and let it go. That was not what forgiveness was about. I learned that God and I were on the same page! I felt a release inside. That was the first step. I realized later that God

my father than the illness I was experiencing. I had said I didn't want him in heaven with me. But God did not want to send my father to hell. He doesn't want to send anyone to hell. He made me understand forgiveness from his perspective.

I came to see that I wouldn't wish even this on my father. And I was able to release my hard feelings about the past. If God could forgive him, so could I. I gave up my hatred and my vengeance and finally forgave my dad.

I realized God had been working on him over the past couple of years, taking away everything my father had and filling the empty space with God's grace.

was a just God. I didn't have to say that everything my dad did was okay and just sweep it under the rug.

But that was not quite forgiving him yet. I found that I had a couple more walls. I knew I was still not ready to face my dad, yet I feared that God would want me to face him.

But our heavenly Father is so gentle and kind. He did not make me do it . . . vet.

The next year I achieved another milestone on my forgiveness journey. It was through an illness. I had the stomach flu. It was so awful. I was exhausted. Every cell in my body felt wrong. I prayed for healing every time I threw up. Eventually all I could do was lay there and ask for help. I said to God. "Please, you came to earth and healed so many people. I know you can do this for me. Please. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy."

But that thought shocked me. I wondered, Would I wish this on my father? This was a crack in my anger and resentment. God made me think about how much worse hell would be for

From that point on, I began to feel better—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. God was carefully guiding me on the path of forgiveness.

So was I ready to face my father now? Not quite. I was still uneasy about opening up any doors of communication. So I waited on God.

OVERCOMING THE FINAL BARRIER

The next summer, I got a phone call from my sister. She said, "Dad's not doing very well. He's in a nursing home, and they don't think he is going to live more than a day or two."

I was overwhelmed with the feeling that I had to go to him. I could not let him leave this earth without telling him that he's forgiven. God was setting the stage.

Within an hour I was on the road. I spoke to God the whole time, trying to process my thoughts and organize what I was going to say. I didn't know what my dad would look like; it had been 15 years. I didn't know if he would be awake or asleep, but it didn't matter. I had to tell him he was forgiven.

I felt God was with me on this mission as I pulled up to the nursing home. The nurse showed me to his room. My father was asleep. When I saw him, I wanted to ask if this was really my dad. He used to be a big man. This man was reduced to almost nothing. He was a skeleton with skin. I barely recognized him and saw only a slight resemblance in his face. The nurse gave me privacy, and I briefly looked around his room. Only a few belongings. Just a card or two from my mom. I sat down next to him and took his hand. Surprisingly enough, I started with, "I'm sorry."

Tears began to flow, and I confessed all my regret about the past: "I'm sorry I didn't invite you to my wedding. I'm sorry I didn't tell you I had children. I have two boys. They like baseball, like you. I'm sorry I never came to see you. I was afraid to face you. But I want you to know that you are forgiven. I forgive you. Jesus forgives you. And I want you to know that God wants you in heaven with him. I want you in heaven too. God loves you, and he wants you." I cried as he lay there.

I was able to release my hard feelings about the past. If God could forgive him. so could I.

I looked around the room and saw bulletins from the chapel. Apparently, he had been going. I read him the verses. I sang him a song. I found a Bible on the windowsill and read it to him. I realized God had been working on him over the past couple of years, taking away everything my father had and filling the empty space with God's grace. God was the only thing my father could turn to. He was reduced to nothing. His vices, his will, his freedom, his health—they were all gone. I just wanted my father to know that he had God's forgiveness.

I talked to my father for a couple of hours. He only made noise when the nurses repositioned him. I believe all he could do was listen to me. I talked to him until the rest of my family got there, and then it was time to leave. But I was able to say everything I needed to say. God is so good. My sister and mom stood behind me as I spoke my last words to him. I said, "I will see you there with Jesus." And with that I kissed him on the forehead. I turned, and my mom looked like she had been released from 30 years of guilt. I had a feeling this was an answered prayer for her too.

He died two days later. We went to his funeral, and during one song, my mom, my siblings, and I held hands as a family. To me this symbolized that we made it through. This was closure. The past was no more, and for me the future held hope and understanding—all because of God's boundless forgiveness.

The author's name is withheld at her request to protect the privacy of her family.

READ MORE on pp. 14-15 about the importance of forgiveness.

FORGIVING WHEN IT IS **DIFFICULT TO FORGIVE**

From the Bible: "When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots" (Luke 23:33,34).

The lesson: God's forgiveness includes all humans, even those who crucified Jesus and mocked him. Jesus teaches us to forgive others even when they hurt us deeplu.

Further reading: Genesis 50:15-21. Consider how Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into Egyptian slavery.

WHEN WE FAIL TO FORGIVE

From the Bible: Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:17-19).

The lesson: Often when we do not forgive others, we harbor a desire to pay back evil for evil and seek revenue. But Jesus wants us to forgive others from our heart and to turn from hatred, discord, jealousy, outbursts of anger, and envy and turn toward patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:19-23).

Further reading: Matthew 18:21-35. The parable of the unmerciful servant encourages us to forgive repeated sins and to forgive as we are forgiven.

JESUS' FORGIVENESS CHANGES US

From the Bible: Luke 7:36-50. This story tells how a woman came to anoint Jesus while he was eating dinner at a Pharisee's house.

The lesson: Jesus explains that her great act of love came about because she was forgiven.

Further reading: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

THEROCK We stand secure in the storms of life when we stand on Christ. | Samantha J. Huebner

PHOTO | Lightstock

I'VE HAD THE EXPERIENCE of traveling to both the East Coast and the West Coast of the United States and dipping my toes into the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It is an exhilarating experience to know that you are surrounded by a body of water that stretches farther than the eye can see.

Some days the waves come crashing into shore, throwing themselves against the rocks, the spray going everywhere. The wind is whipping your hair to and fro; you're holding onto your hat lest it blow away in the gale. These are the days the ocean is mighty, strong, and fierce.

Amidst the trials, our Savior stands firm for us.

But on other days the waves are slower, calmly rolling onto shore, lazily lapping circles around your ankles. The sun is shining brightly, the birds are calling to one another, and the ocean breeze softly kisses your face. You can imagine it, right? A perfect day at the beach, and all seems right in the world.

These two images are as different as night and day, each overwhelming in its own way. Isn't the same concept found in our own lives? We have days when all is well in the world and nothing can bring us down from cloud nine. But other days we are thrown back and forth like a boat on the sea.

Jesus often uses water imagery. This makes sense because the fishermen he called as disciples lived and breathed life on the water; their livelihoods depended on the catches of fish they brought in by their nets.

One of the most famous biblical accounts involving water is of Jesus walking on water, proving himself as both God and man. Just as life's waves of doubt and unbelief strike us when we are unprepared, this storm caught the disciples unaware. They saw Jesus walking

on water and were terrified. Peter took a bold step. He asked Jesus if he could walk on the waves too. But you know the story. "When he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' " (Matthew 14:29,30).

Aren't we just like Peter? We think we are strong enough to do everything on our own to prove our worth but flail when a little wind blows. Then we sink.

Yet amidst the trials, our Savior stands firm for us. He catches us when we fall, picks us up, and reminds us he loves us and will guide us no matter how difficult the path. He reaches down from heaven with love and compassion because we are his children.

Nothing in life is certain. Circumstances roll in and out like the ocean's tide. We can't always stop or control things that come our way. Too often they are like the ocean's tide. The waves of life can seem overwhelming on days when nothing is going right. We feel as if we are swept away by despair, doubts, anxieties, and fears. These negative thoughts cloud our perspective and dim our hope.

But we can let God's love, mercy, and promises flow over us. As the waves of sin crash relentlessly against our feeble human faith, let us take a stand on Christ, the solid rock, the relentless Savior who lets his power wash over us in love and forgiveness. We are renewed by Christ's sacrifice and cleansed by his blood shed on the cross for us.

We can stand firm in his promise of salvation for it is most certainly true.



Samantha Huebner, a 2019 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.



I know I need to forgive my wife because in the Lord's Prayer we ask that God forgive us "as we forgive those who sin against us." But how can I forgive and forget?

FORGIVENESS IS OUR GREATEST NEED

C. S. Lewis once wrote, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive" (Mere Christianity). It is hard to forgive.

In Jesus' parable (Matthew 18:21-35), a servant owed a king an unpayable debt. The king wanted him to pay up and told him that if he did not pay, he would imprison him until he could. The servant obviously could not pay, so do you know what the king did? He forgave the debt and let him go. The lesson is clear. God is the king, and we are the servant who owed an unpayable debt. What happened to the debt? The king took the loss; he forgave the debt.

Every one of us can relate to Barabbas. He was the one sitting on death row with Jesus on Good Friday. Sitting in his cell, Barabbas was waiting for crucifixion when he heard the guard's footsteps. The door opened, and the guard told him the same thing God says to every one of us: "You're free. Jesus is dying in your place." Jesus filled your greatest need by forgiving you.

FORGIVEN PEOPLE FORGIVE

That forgiven servant in Jesus' parable found someone that owed him far less by comparison and refused to forgive his debt. The king heard about it, summoned him, had him tortured, and threw him into prison forever. Then Jesus speaks those haunting words: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35).

When Jesus says to pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us," he is

not conditioning your forgiveness on whether or not you forgive. He is simply making this point: Forgiven people forgive. We struggle to do that sometimes. It might help to understand that there is a huge difference between struggling to forgive and refusing to forgive. Maybe you have a hard time wrapping your heart around what your head already knows.

So how will you get the strength to forgive your wife? Think of how you feel when you hear God say, "You're free. Jesus has died in your place." Remember that your wife stands right next to you. Turn to her and say, "You're free. I forgive you because Jesus forgave me."

FORGIVE AND FORGET?

Is it possible to forgive and forget? Does God forgive and forget? God does not forget. Instead, he does something far more powerful. He chooses not to remember (see Isaiah 43:25: Hebrews 10:17,18). He chooses not to call it to his mind—ever. The psalmist says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). God simply refuses to bring our sins back to his mind; we are forgiven.

It may be impossible to forget the hurt that someone caused you. However, you can functionally forgive and forget. Moved by God's "forgetful" memory when it comes to your sin, you can choose not to bring your wife's sin to mind again. You can treat her as though that sin never happened. Far from saying the sin did not hurt, you are showing her what Jesus has done with her sin. He has forgiven it!

ASK A QUESTION AT forwardinchrist.net/submit.



David G. Scharf

THERE IS A STORY about a much-loved pastor who carried the burden of a secret sin he had committed years before. He had repented but still had no peace, no sense of God's forgiveness. In his congregation was a woman who deeply loved her Savior and who claimed to have visions in which Jesus would speak to her.

The pastor was skeptical, so he gave her this test: "The next time you are with Jesus, I want you to ask him what sin your pastor committed while he was in the seminary."

The woman agreed, and a few days later, the pastor asked, "Well, did Jesus visit you in your dreams? What did he say when you asked him what sin I committed?"

"He said, 'I don't remember.' "

Why is it hard to understand that God forgives and chooses not to remember our sins?

I NEED FORGIVENESS

You know the feeling; I know you do. You are a disciple of Christ, but there, whispering in your ear, is the past, reminding you of moments when you forgot you belonged to him. That awful lie. That business trip you took that led to so much temptation. The time you exploded in anger. That day you were needed but didn't respond. That jealousy. That habit. That grudge. You cannot forget. You and I need forgiveness.

Why is it that sometimes the hardest person to forgive is yourself?

Jeremiah 31:34 says, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins

no more." God doesn't just forgive. He chooses not to remember. He erases the board. He destroys the evidence. He clears the computer. For all the things he does do, this one thing he refuses to do: He refuses to keep a list of my wrongs! The common word for "forgive" in the Bible literally means to "send away." This is what God does with your sin.

Read Leviticus 16:6-22.

As you read about the Day of Atonement and the two goats, what is God teaching about how he forgives?

THE PEOPLE WHO SIN AGAINST ME NEED FORGIVENESS

Why do we struggle to forgive? It's because we have been wronged, and we need to be repaid. In fact, "debt" is one of the pictures Scripture uses for sin. Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12).

When others sin against you, it is not okay! I tell my kids they are not allowed to say, "It's okay," when someone apologizes. Instead, tell them what you are really doing: "I forgive you." I am sending your sin away! Why will I do this? It is because of how much more greatly God has forgiven me!

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

What are practical ways you can show others you forgive them (i.e. you forgive and "forget")?

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

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

As the editorial staff developed the May issue of Forward in Christ, the mandatory quarantines had just begun. We had no way of predicting what would be taking place when this issue is being read. Yet no matter what, the information that Sarah Reik shares here can be applied to so many situations as we parent our children. Since the fall into sin, life has a tendency to be unpredictable. How we react to that—and teach our children to react to that—is one of the most important lessons I believe we can share with our kids.

— Nicole Balza

HOW CAN PARENTS REASSURE CHILDREN DURING AN UNCERTAIN TIME?

WE ALL GO THROUGH times in our lives when we face uncertainty. and in the last few months we have experienced how unsettling that can feel. As difficult as uncertainty can be for adults, it can be even more of a struggle for children. Here are four words to remember as we seek to help our children cope during uncertain times.

CALM

Children are often sensitive to our emotions and respond to them, even when we don't express them directly. We are not immune to fear and anxiety during uncertain times just because we are adults. Because we have the power to set the tone for our children, it is important that we are intentional about calming ourselves so that we don't project our own fear onto our children.

If you are struggling with your own anxiety, share your concerns with another adult before you talk with your children. Practice relaxation and deep breathing. Go to God and "cast all your anxiety on him" (1 Peter 5:7). Plan what you want to say and practice it ahead of time. Often just talking at a slower pace using a quiet, reassuring tone speaks volumes, even more than the actual words you are saying.

We can't give our children a life free from uncertainty, but we can model and encourage calm during uncertain times.

When our dog was sick and it seemed like she might die soon, I shared my fears with my friends and the vet and cried in the shower. When I finally talked to my children about the possibility of losing her, the tears still came, but I was able to express hope that she might get better and that if this was her time, she had lived a great life with us.

COMMUNICATION

Whether you are sharing facts and information or simply listening to your child ask questions or express emotions, setting aside time for communication is crucial during uncertain times. I've found that bedtime is often a time that my children want to talk—although it may just be a delay tactic.

It's helpful to check in about how our children are feeling and let them know that we will stop what we are doing to listen if they need to be heard. Devotion time is an opportune time for encouraging deeper thoughts and more open communication. Asking our children what prayer requests they have can give us some insight into how they are coping and what their concerns might be.

Some children aren't as eager to talk but might be willing to write back and forth with you in a notebook or text what they are feeling. Whether you have a chatty child

like my 11-year-old daughter or a not-so-chatty child like my 13-yearold son, the message that you are available and listening is powerful and reassuring.

CONSISTENCY

In uncertain times, it's helpful for our children to have as much consistency as possible. Any type of routine that is familiar will be comforting. What is possible will depend on the situation, of course, but usually some aspects of life can stay the same. From mealtimes to naptimes, from school routines to bedtime routines, consistency communicates stability, even amidst great change.

When schools were first closed because of COVID-19. my children's teachers worked tirelessly to provide some consistency amid the chaos. They may not have communicated it in so many words, but my children definitely found comfort in the fact that even though so much was uncertain, they still needed to complete math assignments and research projects. We can tell our children that God knows our need for consistency too, and he has promised, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Genesis 8:22).

CONTROL

God extends his promises to us during times of uncertainty. The devotion I just read last night encouraged this prayer: "Ask God to remind your heart of three things: that you are not in control of your life—only he is; that he loves you far more than you love yourself; and that he is infinitely wiser than you are about what is

best." What a wonderful message to share with our children during uncertain times!

Setting aside time for communication is crucial during uncertain times.

I grew up in a pastor's family, and we often had times of uncertainty. My dad received 11 calls when I was in grade school! We wondered if he would take a call and we would move. Yet we were always encouraged that God knew what was best

de guide to helping kids through crisis

WLCFS—Christian Family Solutions created an illustrated guide to help parents navigate a conversation about the coronavirus with their young children. It offers great tips for how to handle any difficult conversation in an age-appropriate way. Visit christianfamilysolutions.org and search for "coronavirus."

and would guide us toward the right decision. When we made the move from Colorado to Wisconsin after my eighth grade year, the message from my parents was clear and reassuring: "We may not know what our lives will look like, but God is leading us in this direction, and it will be an adventure that will work for our good." During uncertain times, we can confidently assure our children that the God who loved them enough to die for them knows and controls the present and the future and that he is guiding us all toward a life with him in heaven.

We can't give our children a life free from uncertainty, but we can model and encourage calm during uncertain times. We can communicate our love to them through our presence and an eagerness to listen. We can establish consistency when possible, and we can assure them of God's control. After all, it was during one of the most uncertain times in Israel's history—when God's chosen people were exiles in Babylon—that God gave his people one of his most comforting promises: "'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11).

I can't think of anything more reassuring than that!

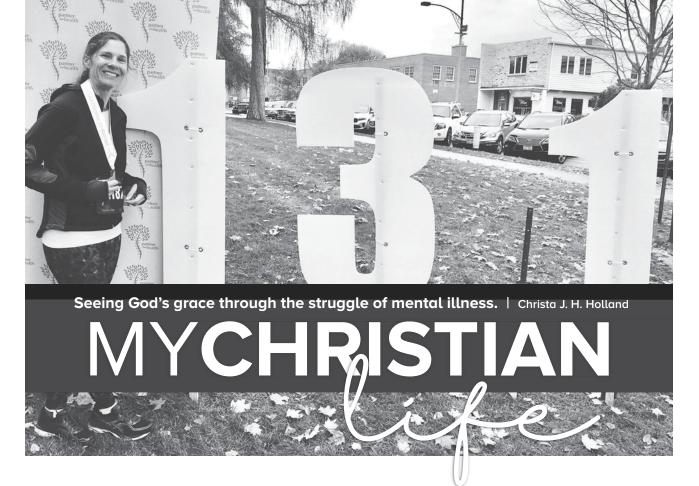




Sarah Reik and her husband, Dan, have four grade-schoolaged children. Sarah is a licensed professional counselor with

WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions.

¹The Meaning of Marriage: A Couple's Devotional by Timothy and Kathy Keller, p. 77.



I STRUGGLE MIGHTILY with my mental health. To most people I look healthy; I am a vegetarian who runs about 40 miles a week. What most can't see are the panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and the anxiety with which I struggle daily. Only my most immediate family members and God know the intensity of my struggles.

Like the apostle Paul, this seems to be the "thorn in my flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) that I've been asked to bear.

THE BEGINNING

As a child, I remember crying because I felt like I couldn't stop thinking about certain phrases or parts of songs. Then I worried that I wouldn't be able to turn my mind off and get to sleep. Those instances, while disturbing, were not debilitating.

It wasn't until I was 15 that the battle really started. It was during my second week as a foreign exchange student in Germany. When I was staying on the sixth floor of a hotel during a field trip, I was gripped by the horror of my brain telling me,

"You are going to jump out of this window and never see your family again." Repulsed, I ran to the restroom as dry heaves coursed through my body. "But I don't want to do that," I vehemently disagreed, my breathing frantic, chills and sweat taking turns alternating throughout my body. Why am I thinking this?

His grace is sufficient even in my weakness.

I carefully moved myself toward my bunk, letting my shoes slap down to the bare wooden floor. Curling myself into a sheet cocoon, I sobbed until I fell into an exhausted sleep. "Please let this be gone in the morning" was my whispered prayer.

When I woke up, the thoughts had not gone away; in fact, they expanded and intensified. I was terrified of what my mind told me. Those thoughts took over everything. I could barely eat or sleep; I cried gallons of tears, racked up an enor-

mous phone bill, and prayed thousands of prayers. I managed to do all the rest of the sightseeing, and I made it through in survival mode.

By God's grace, I arrived safely back home. But I had been so traumatized that I spent the next week sleeping on the floor of my parents' bedroom at night (at age 15!). I was constantly crying because of the thoughts. I hardly ate and then worried that somehow I was going to kill my dad, even as I argued with myself that I didn't want to do that!

I also didn't know how I was going to return to school that fall. Some of the seats in the science room were near the Bunsen burners—what if I turned on the gas and made the room explode?

Eventually, I went to counseling and started medication toward the end of summer. Things were a little more under control.

LIFE GOES ON

I did graduate from high school and college. My worries were still there but didn't seem to be as powerful.

When I met the man who would become my husband, my worries shifted toward him. I was terrified that I would purposely do something and would never see him again.

Eventually we got married, and about eight months later I was pregnant. I glowed during that time. My fantastic baby girl arrived, and I exuded happiness for about an hour. Then my happiness dropped with my hormonal changes.

Now my worries shifted again. My head told me that I would hurt my baby on purpose, even though that thought disgusted me. With changes to my medication, God once again helped me climb out of that pit. Even after my dad's unexpected death, I was okay.

I was able to go off medication for about six years. I leaned on God's promise that all things work for the good of those who love him.

ANXIETIES RETURN

With God's help, the anxieties no longer seemed to have as much of a grip. That is until a few years ago when everything started to fall apart again. One day, I felt like I was going to pass out and die at work. The feelings continued, and just like before, they increased and intensified each day. For almost nine months, I was sure that I would pass out and die at any moment. I have had panic attacks like these almost daily, and yet God has sustained me. His grace is sufficient even in my weakness.

Time and time again before work, I was face down in prayer on my bed or floor in the early morning or over my steering wheel as I pulled into the parking lot at work. "Please keep these thoughts from me today if it is your will. Please grant me strength to deal with them if I must." I repeated the passages "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" and "Be still and know that I am God" on my walk to the building. As I climbed the stairs to my office, a high school choir song passed through my mind: "My Father, let this cup pass from me. But not my will, but yours be done."

Multiple times, multiple days, I reminded myself, "You won't die before you get to the gas station on the corner. God is with you. The flowers of the field and the birds of the air do not worry. You are worth more."

These thoughts countered the scary thoughts that, unwanted and without warning, raged through my consciousness. These thoughts sometimes took my breath away, bringing me to tears. Even after reminding myself that I have felt this way before, there was a whisper that this time it was really going to happen. It was hard to ignore "symptoms" that my brain presented to me as reality.

I have analyzed and rationalized the causes. I rooted though my mind, feeling that if I can just figure out the true source I can pluck it out and be released. Time and time







Christa Holland, including a picture of Christa with her sisters.

PASSAGES OF

Christa shares that she reads an encouraging Bible verse every morning right after she wakes up. Here are some of the passages that give her comfort and reassurance:

"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken" (Psalm 34:17-20).

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging" (Psalm 46:1-3).

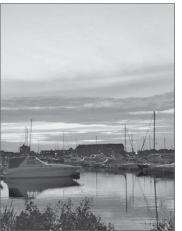
"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).









The above photos are some of Christa's favorite places where she likes to unwind.

again, I have come across something that seems promising. For a moment I felt something akin to relief, but then other thoughts have taken their place. With each episode. I thought that nothing could be worse than what I was thinking right now . . . until something else somehow worse replaced that.

I have picked, pulled, yanked, pried, wrestled, tried knocking these feelings out. I have tried body slamming my racing, anxious thoughts. I have tried stomping on them in my mind. I have tried to peel them away like a stubborn piece of chewed gum on an intricate shoe sole. I have tried to gently put them down and tiptoe away before they notice. I have agreed with them, disagreed with them, pretended they were birds overhead that I wasn't going to allow to nest in my hair . . . and so much more. So far, they remain. Why? Why? Why?

I have asked God why so many times, and while I won't know this side of heaven for sure, maybe the "why" is to help other people who are struggling. Maybe it is to encourage them to reach out if they feel this way and help them realize that they are not alone either. Perhaps it is to help them understand that this is an issue with brain chemicals and not because of weak faith. Or maybe it is to help them see that it is not solved by being told, "Just

stop thinking that," or, "Be glad you don't have something worse." Maybe it is that it is okay for them to decide that they want to try medication or even come to the realization that they need it, just like someone with high blood pressure. It also could be to raise awareness for others who do not have these ailments so they can better understand the suffering that those around them might be enduring.

This is not just a mental battle; it is also a spiritual one.

DEALING WITH ANXIETY

After being off of medication for so long, I first tried every non-pharmacological remedy I could think of to combat my anxiety. I continued to run, I gave up caffeine and alcohol— I just take a tiny sip at Communion— I learned new breathing techniques, and I have tried essential oils. I went back to therapy. Yet the destructive thoughts remained. Some days I cried out, "Why are you doing this to me?" lapsing for a moment in trusting God's promise that all things will work together for my good.

After a few months of suffering, I realized that God gave us skilled practitioners and medications as blessings and concluded that I might need medication again.

Throughout these struggles I have not been alone. God has been by my side, and I have been blessed with an understanding support system here on earth.

But this is not just a mental battle: it is also a spiritual one. The enemy wants to take away my joy and would cheer if I blamed God and turned my back on him. It is frustrating, especially when my anxiety flares up at church, which "should" be a safe place. Instead of fighting it, I try to give it to God. As I soldier on, I read an encouraging Bible verse right after I wake up (see sidebar on p. 19). I pray for myself and others who are struggling. I also think of the wisdom one of my sisters shared, "You are trying to fight the battle against your flesh that Jesus has already won for you."

I am thankful that God has given me medical professionals and medications to ease these ailments. These tools are blessings from God. But despite the amount of relief that I sometimes feel right after taking my medication, I am careful to remind myself that it is not my savior—Jesus is.



Christa J. H. Holland is a member of First, Racine, Wisconsin

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Celebrating MLC seniors

Each year MLC Day brings together all who support the WELS College of Ministry around the world. Martin Luther College (MLC) supporters send messages to the college, pray for its ministry, share its ministry with others, and give gifts to assist in carrying out its mission. MLC students then share their stories and thanks with supporters.

This year on May 6, MLC Day will highlight family connections even more, especially focusing on MLC seniors.

"With students continuing to study off campus due to COVID-19 restrictions, our seniors are missing out on many end-of-year activities and celebrations," says Bill Pekrul, MLC director of public relations. "We decided to focus MLC Day on them this year and have photos and videos aimed at their reflections and encouraging

others to send messages of congratulations and encouragement to these future called workers."

Pekrul offers the following suggestions on how everyone can participate:

- Current students can share prayers, blessings, encouragement, and thanks to a graduating senior.
- MLC seniors can offer their thanks to those who encouraged and supported them throughout their time



at college as well as their advice to incoming students.

- WELS families, schools, and congregations can record short videos or submit photos with notes of encouragement and prayers for a graduating senior. MLC will provide signs and message prompts to help the creative process.
- WELS members can offer prayers and monetary support for MLC's ministry. All gifts will go toward the Congregational Partner Grant Matching Fund, which directly supports students.

LEARN MORE AT mlcday.com. There you can also access resources and message prompts as you consider how you can show your support for MLC and its students on May 6.

SIMPLY LUTHERAN

Simply Lutheran: A Practical Guide to Lutheran Teachings is a versatile book that has something

to offer readers of all backgrounds. The book gives a fantastic overview of the Lutheran approach to scriptural interpretation and then immediately puts it to work. More than just a summary of the Bible, *Simply Lutheran* shows the reader how every piece of the puzzle fits together as part of God's perfect plan.

Though clearly written from the perspective of a confessional Lutheran, this book is not just a commentary on or a recapitulation of the Lutheran Confessions. Instead, the author simply points the

reader back to Scripture as the foundation for every concept presented in the book. From the very nature of God to the saving work of Jesus Christ to modern life in a secular society and everything in between, *Simply Lutheran* guides the reader back to the Bible and away from the unreliable sources that have infiltrated other church bodies.

Simply Lutheran manages to strike a balance between its impressive scholarship and its accessi-

bility to readers of all backgrounds. It is useful as a refresher and study tool for those who have spent decades in the church. It is also a thorough, yet concise, offering for anybody in your life who wants to know what Lutherans really believe and teach.

In the preface, the author declares, "I will attempt to do what Luther would do if he were living today; I will try to explain Christian teachings and their relationship to one another and the challenges and issues of this era so that laypeople can

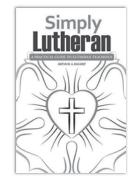
better understand them." Mission accomplished.

Simply Lutheran is one worth reading, worth sharing, and worth keeping on your bookshelf.

Chris Lambrecht, Pewaukee, Wisconsin

Price: \$20.99. Also available for Kindle and Nook.





Go and TELL

WELS Multi-Language Publications has officially changed its name to WELS Multi-Language Productions (MLP). This change reflects how the work of MLP has evolved with technology and has expanded beyond printed books to websites, social media, videos, and worship music all to share the aospel message with people all over the world.

One of the productions from MLP is TELL (Think, Evaluate, Learn, Lead), an English-language online Bible-based training platform developed to bring the gospel to English-speakers around the world. Modeled after the Spanishlanguage Academia Cristo model, TELL comprises a Facebook page with more than 1.2 million followers, selfled Bible study courses, and deeper studies with a live online instructor.

TELL targets English speakers outside the United States. "We looked at the top spoken languages in the world. Spanish is in the top four; English also is in the top four. If you include secondlanguage learners. English is bu far the most spoken language in the world," explains Nathan Seiltz, MLP director.

Dan Laitinen was called as a full-time TELL missionary and began serving MLP in November 2019. He's currently producing content and cultivating relationships on the Facebook page. Additional Facebook content is provided by Lutheran pastors from around the world with whom WELS shares fellowship. This helps contribute to the intended global feel and reach of TELL.

MLP recently launched apps for both TELL and *Academia Cristo*. The apps are android based, with plans for iOS compatible apps in the future. As of March 31, the TELL app had over 14.000 downloads. MLP also released its mobile-first website, tellnetwork.org, to offer an option for those who don't have enough memory on their phone to download the app. Both the website and the app include three Bible courses; each course has eight to nine video-based lessons accompanied by a guiz. After a user completes the selfled courses, they are invited to participate in a live online class.

Seiltz saus that in the next six months he hopes at least a couple hundred people have signed up for TELL online courses, and, God-willing, within two years, people who have taken the courses are implementing what they learned to bring God's Word to their communities.

LEARN MORE AT tellnetwork.org about TELL. Learn more about WELS Multi-Language Productions at wels.net/mlp.

WORLDWIDE REACH

Nathan Seiltz, director of Multi-Language Productions (MLP), shares the top ten countries MLP is reaching through TELL.





Serving their Lord faithfully

Theu've been referred to as "a model of can-do blindness"—and those who know Sue and Larry Povinelli would certainly agree with that description. Sue, a federal government employee, and Larry, a disability rights attorney, are active members at Lamb of God, Madison, Ala. They are using their experience and knowledge to advocate for others who, like them, are visually impaired.

One way the Povinellis serve is to ensure that Lamb of God is an "inclusive congregation"—providing the resources and support needed for those with disabilities to be engaged in ministry and participate fully in worship. At Lamb of God, that means ensuring that Sue had access to a Braille version of the worship service folder. In addition, the couple collaborated with their pastor on a Bible study on blindness to help Lamb of God members better understand and be comfortable with those who are visually impaired.

The Povinellis also have taken their service beyond the walls of their home congregation. Since 2013, they have been members of the WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired. As part of the committee, they are passionate about supporting other Christians who are print impaired by improving the spiritual resources that are available through the blessings of technology. These resources can now be conveniently accessed via computers and other devices. Sue encourages those looking for volunteer opportunities—especially younger people—to help convert print materials into accessible formats for people who are print impaired. "With so many new technologies, you can help serve in this way right from where you are," she saus.

What advice do the Povinellis have for congregations to be more inclusive? They urge, "Have a true conversation with the people you are truing to reach, whatever their differences are. They might not come forward, so approach them and simply ask, 'How can we serve you? What are your gifts?' Work to create those relationships."



Larry and Sue Povinelli

And what advice do they have for those with disabilities in our congregations? "Please don't be afraid to speak up for yourself," Larry says. "Tell your congregation what you need."

He adds, "People with disabilities often find that others decide for them how they can and cannot participate in church life, even though they have as much interest in the work of the church as those who are fully abled. If we fail to include and accommodate people, both the church and the excluded person suffer."

Sue and Larry Povinelli may be visually impaired, but they don't want to be treated differently. They just want to serve their Lord faithfully with the gifts he has given them—and they want all members of the body of Christ to have the same opportunity.

DID YOU KNOW?

WELS offers a variety of spiritual resources for those unable to read normal print. Resources include large-print and audio versions of Forward in Christ and Meditations (Meditations also is available in Braille), along with other materials from Northwestern Publishing House. In addition, the WELS website, wels.net, is compatible with Internet readers used by people who are visually impaired.

LEARN MORE AT wels.net/mvi. Or contact the WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired at welsvisimp@wels.net; 651-291-1536.

▶ WELS Connections

Decision on district conventions

WELS President Mark Schroeder shares the following about the June district conventions:

After thorough discussion and with great reluctance, the Conference of Presidents (COP) has concluded that the district conventions, scheduled for early June, will be canceled due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 virus. Even though it might seem somewhat early to cancel the conventions, a decision needed to be reached now to enable districts to cancel their contracts with convention facilities with no penaltu.

The COP did consider whether the conventions could be postponed until later in the summer or early fall. However, several districts would not be able to hold district conventions at a later date due to unavailability of meeting facilities and accommodations for delegates. The COP also discussed whether virtual conventions could be held, but several districts concluded that a virtual convention would not be practical. The COP agreed that if some districts could not hold conventions, none should.

On the positive side, a benefit of canceling district conventions will be a significant cost savings. This is in keeping with synodwide efforts already undertaken to reduce expenses in the coming year.

Even though we cannot hold "regular" district conventions as the bylaws state, we will continue to walk together in our common confession of faith and shared mission. It is our commitment to the truths of Scripture and our commitment to carry out God's work that will guide us in times such as these—times that constitutions and bylaws could not have foreseen. Even without specific guidance from bylaws, we are committed to moving forward in a united way, striving to do all things in good order.

With no district conventions, normal elections will not be able to be held.

Instead, we will plan to have elections for the district officers conducted electronically. The details of how this will be done are still to be worked out, but we have been assured that called worker delegates and congregational delegates will be able to participate.

Once the district officers are elected. we will follow the bylaw that gives responsibility to the district presidents, with input from the other district officers, to appoint people to serve in offices in which elections would have been held at the conventions. The district presidents will appoint those currently serving to continue in their positions until the next district conventions if they are willing to serve and if they have not reached the time limit for serving. For vacant offices in which there is no incumbent, the district presidents will make appointments using the information that the district nominating committees have assembled.

The decision regarding the proposed changes to the synod's retirement program will likely be deferred to the 2021 synod convention. The planned discussion of the document "Male and Female in God's World" also will not happen at the district conventions this summer; rather, discussions and study will continue in pastor and teacher conferences.

A digital version of the *Report to* the *Twelve Districts* as well as other important materials will be made available to each congregation and to district convention delegates.

We pray for the day when lives return to something like normal.

READ MORE about what's happening in the synod in WELS' weekly Together e-newsletter. Subscribe at wels.net/subscribe.

Meeting the needs of others

In his book The Rise of Christianity, Dr. Rodney Stark estimates that Christianity grew an average of 40 percent per decade for the first few centuries of its existence. To put that in perspective, if WELS grew at that rate, in two generations we would have over two million members.

How did that happen? Christianity was started by misfits from the armpit of the Roman Empire. Christians didn't worship in opulent temples. Early believers worshiped in homes. Christianity had no sociological advantages. Becoming a Christian made it likely you would experience ridicule or even persecution. How does Christianity explode in those circumstances?

The gospel. The gospel was entirely unique. Plenty of religions talked about powerful gods who demanded you offer sacrifices to them. The gospel told of an all-powerful God who became weak and sacrificed himself for you. Other religions offered some version of life after death, but it was always conditional. Do a good work; get a good eternity. The gospel offered physical resurrection and eternity in paradise entirely on the basis of Christ's work, not your own.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world" (1:6). The supernatural power and beauty of the gospel—that is what caused the early church to explode.

However, that doesn't tell the whole story. It wasn't simply that the early Christians proclaimed the gospel. They gained an audience for the gospel by the way they lived their lives.

A good example of this occurred during a pandemic. In the early fourth century, the historian Eusebius wrote about a plague that was rolling over the eastern half of the empire. Healthy people fled the cities for the safety of the countryside. But one group largely stayed behind—Christians. "All day long, [Christians] tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them." Eusebius states that as people witnessed this compassion, "[the Christians'] deeds were on everyone's lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians." There are dozens of examples of history noting how Christians took care of the sick.

Christians were known to care for the poor too. The Roman Emperor Julian wanted to wipe out Christianity and re-institute emperor worship. After a few years of trying, Julian wrote a letter to a pagan priest in which he explained why he now believed Christianity would take over the empire. "[Christians] support not only

How have you or your congregation been letting your light shine during the pandemic? Let us know. Send it to ficsubmissions@wels.net or upload it to forwardin christ.net/submit. We'll feature more stories next month.

their poor, but ours as well. All men see that our people lack aid from us." Christians showed levels of mercu and benevolence that won them an audience. When people would ask Christians, "Why do you do what you do?" they could share the gospel.

COVID-19 is undeniably awful. Many thousands have died. The economies of the world are in shambles. However. COVID-19 is also an amazing opportunity. It is, first and foremost, an opportunity to serve Christ by serving others in whatever way they need.

As we seize those God-given opportunities to serve our neighbor, perhaps Christ will give us another opportunity—to share why we do what we do . . . to share the hope we have.

If Americans are caught in a nexus of needs and fears, fine. Let us be the ones who step up first to meet those needs. Let us be the ones to explain why we need not fear anything. Let us do this simply because we are the body of Christ. We do what he would do. And we want him glorified.

> Jon Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW WELS CONGREGATIONS AND MISSIONS ARE SERVING OTHERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

APPLETON, WIS.

Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis., gathered food donations and turned its community book lending library into a community food pantry.





SOUTH ASIA

Sunday school leaders in South Asia made masks for themselves, their families. and for the Sunday school children to prepare for COVID-19. They also shared the masks with their Muslim neighbors. Currently the Sunday schools and the churches are no longer meeting. Pastors of the house churches are delivering food and catechisms to families in isolation.





GEORGIA | NEW YORK





Pastor Jon Scharf, Vicar Jon Lehmann, and Pierce Burton filled a truck with supplies in Georgia (top), which Burton then delivered to Sure Foundation, Queens, N.Y. (bottom).

Four congregations in Georgia—Abiding Grace, Covington; Faith, Sharpsburg: Beautiful Savior, Marietta: and Sola Fide. Lawrenceville—sent a 16-foot truck to Sure Foundation, Queens, N.Y., filled with supplies to help those in need.

Jon Scharf, pastor at Abiding Grace, shares that Pierce Burton, a 25-year-old member, came up with the idea to gather supplies after seeing a news story on Elmhurst Hospital, a Queens hospital on the front line of fighting the coronavirus. He discovered that Sure Foundation was located just blocks away.

"It's so encouraging," says Tim Bourman, pastor at Sure Foundation. "I got a call from a member at Abiding Grace, and he just had it on his heart. He said, 'I want to help New York.' And I was like, wow, what an answer to prayer."

Many of Bourman's members work in the gig industry, driving taxis or Ubers or working in people's homes as nannies or cleaners. They are now unable to work and don't fall under unemployment—making it difficult for many to afford even staple supplies.

Members from the four Georgia congregations donated money and food within days of discovering the need. Burton then drove the truck to Queens to deliver the supplies. "People want to do something to help," says Scharf. "It's wonderful to give people the opportunity, and they have jumped on it."

Bourman delivered the donated supplies to the doorsteps of those who needed them.

"I know the Lord will bring us together as a church," says Bourman. "I'm hopeful that we will be able to provide the resources people need as well as the spiritual connection."



How can Jesus be our friend if he isn't physically here on earth? | John M. Koelpin

SIMEON CARRIED BABY Jesus in his arms. John reclined next to Jesus during their last Passover together. Others reached to touch him. What a blessing it was for Jesus' family, friends, and followers. Their friend and helper was right there with them. But it was only a short glimpse in history that God himself was physically present on earth.

He's not here anymore . . . not in the physical way he once was. What kind of a helper can Jesus be for us who live after his ascension? How can he be our friend when we can't see him or touch him?

THE PROMISE OF THE **HOLY SPIRIT**

Jesus anticipated the time he would leave this earth. On the night before his death, he spoke multiple times about his leaving. He assured his close followers that it was good for him to leave this

earth and return to heaven. Jesus' departure meant an additional gift or blessing: "Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

Jesus fulfilled that promise for those disciples in a spectacular way on Pentecost. What a remarkable change we see in the disciples after Pentecost. While Jesus was physically present with his disciples, they often appeared misguided and sometimes timid. But after Jesus left and sent the Holy Spirit, the disciples were filled with unmatched zeal and courage for their ministry.

Like the post-ascension disciples, we no longer have Jesus' physical presence, but we do have his promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the

good news of Jesus' forgiveness preached in the Word, poured out in Baptism, and proclaimed in the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit still does his powerful work of "calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying" the church. Sitting at the right hand of his Father, Jesus continues to make sure that nothing less than divine power and grace are showered on us through the Holy Spirit whom he promised to send.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter or Counselor. As Jesus predicted, the Holy Spirit spends his time testifying about Jesus (John 15:26). When we need help to overcome our guilt, the Holy Spirit whispers "Jesus" into our hearts. When we need a friend to lean on, the Holy Spirit reminds us of the love Jesus has for us

It is true that Jesus is no longer here like he once was. But we believe him when he says his departure was for our good. And how can we disagree when our friend and helper daily supplies us with the Holy Spirit?

THE PROMISE OF HIS OWN PRESENCE

Jesus' gift of the Spirit does not mean that Jesus has abandoned us. In ways beyond our understanding, Jesus has promised his own presence with us still today.

Let's begin with Jesus' most general promise of his presence. At his ascension Jesus made a series of stunning statements about his power, our purpose, and his presence. Among other things he said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus, the God-man, can be present everywhere. Therefore, even though we can't walk or talk with Jesus like his disciples once did, he is present with us. Whether we are in the United Arab Emirates or the United States of America or any place in between, Jesus is with us. How's that for a friend and helper?

Jesus also promised his special presence to his church. At the end of a discussion about sin and forgiveness, Jesus said, "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). The best friend we can have is one who cares for our eternal souls. When God's people gather to call human hearts to repentance and faith, Jesus is with them.

Jesus saves his most sublime presence for the individual in the Lord's Supper. Within the celebration of the Lord's Supper Jesus promises, "This is my body," and, "This is my blood of the new covenant." At the altar, in, with, and under bread and

wine, Jesus gives us his real presence. It looks and tastes like bread and wine, because it is bread and wine. But Jesus gives us himself, present in a way we can comprehend only by faith, but present, nonetheless. The Lord's Supper is real; we can smell it, taste it, touch it. The Lord's Supper is personal; Jesus says, "For you." When troubles mount or guilt intensifies, we need friends who won't hesitate to show us the depths of their care and concern. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus tells us in the most personal way that he loves us and forgives us. He doesn't send a proxy to say it on his behalf. He comes with his real presence.

In ways beyond our understanding, Jesus has promised his own presence with us still today.

THE PRESENCE OF HIS POWER

I am looking forward to the day when I get to shake Jesus' hand—literally shake his hand—and thank him for the eternity he secured for me. I'm guessing you are too. But that day isn't today! Unlike the people of Jesus' day, we will have to wait until judgment day to walk and talk with our best friend.

But I'm not sure which Jesus I would rather have: the Jesus whom people could see, suffering and dying on a cross, or the Jesus whom people cannot see, sitting at the right hand of his Father.

The resurrected Jesus did not ascend into the heavens for a vacation. No, he is busy at work. Your friend and helper hears your prayers and an-

swers them according to his Father's will. "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13,14). He intercedes for you before the heavenly Father, reminding him of the cross and the empty tomb and all that those mean. "Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that. who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34). He has prepared heaven for you with an eye toward that time when you will join him. "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2,3).

We may envy those New Testament believers who held Jesus in their arms, walked with him along the dusty roads, or listened to his preaching. But Jesus has not left us alone. In so many ways Jesus has promised us his presence. He is still Immanuel, God with us.



John Koelpin is pastor at Calvary, Dallas, Texas.

READ MORE on p. 28 about the Holy Spirit and his work.



By the ordinary means of the Word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit has made us believers and children of God.

Aaron H. Goetzinger

If only we had been there. If only we could have heard the sound of rushing wind. If only we could have seen the tongues of fire dancing on their heads with our own eyes. If only we could have heard the sound of all those foreign languages being spoken at once that day. If only we could have experienced Pentecost.

FEELING THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE?

Many Christians long for their own Pentecost experience. They want to feel the excitement of being Christian. But Christendom has such diverse views on the Holy Spirit. Some Christians claim to experience the Spirit directly through ecstatic outbursts. Others ecstatically speak in tongues. Still others think the Spirit is an impersonal force. And while some Christians claim to feel the Spirit's presence, others think he is distant.

For us Lutherans, all this talk of the Holy Spirit may make us uncomfortable. Who is the Holy Spirit and what does he do? The excitement of charismatics makes us wonder. Perhaps we may be a little intimidated by their enthusiasm. It may be easier for us to leave the Holy Spirit for those on the fringes of Christianity. We may roll our eyes at fellow Christians speaking about the Spirit in such emotional ways. We may even rationalize our dismissal by thinking, In Christ alone my hope is found.

On one hand we do recognize the excesses, while on the other we secretly want a direct experience with him. Who would not want some sort of personal experience with the Divine? A personal experience with the Spirit would be exciting. It would be transformational, because then we would no longer need eves of faith or God's promises for that matter. We would have our own experience to stand on. And there is the problem.

RECOGNIZING THE SPIRIT'S WORK

Each Sunday we confess, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." We confess him as the third person of the Trinity who is one in essence with the Father and the Son. Rather than being a power emanating from God or an impersonal force, he is personal. Rather than working arbitrarily or in spurts of excitement or ecstasy, he works on us consistently.

Elijah had to learn how the Lord works. He did not come to Elijah in an earthquake or in fire but in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12). He has not promised to burst suddenly from a blinding light. The gospel seems so ordinary, but the Holy Spirit works

Because of the Spirit there is real power in the ordinary.

through it. So, yes, in a very real sense you have had a personal experience with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God. He might seem ordinary, even hidden, but he is also powerful and amazing.

The Spirit didn't confront you directly with a decision to give your life to Christ, but if it weren't for the Spirit, you would still be trying to find God (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14). You would have had to search for God in nature or find him within yourself. Either way, the god you

would have found wouldn't be the true God. Instead, the Spirit broke through your hostile heart and brought you into the family of God. You are born again (John 3:3).

The Spirit hasn't provided you with some esoteric or secret philosophical knowledge, but if it weren't for the Spirit you would hold tightly to the wisdom of the world—personality tests, popular self-help books, or tarot—anything that would provide a solution to your perceived problems (1 Corinthians 2:9,10). Instead, the Spirit has given you insight into the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 2:14-16). In doing so he showed you what your greatest problem is—sin—and revealed to you the one solution to that problem—Christ.

The Spirit hasn't given you a perfect life in morality and circumstance, but if it weren't for the Spirit you would have no desire to love God. There would be no faith, no new person, to fight against the sinful flesh. Instead, you would have to mound up unending works to get in good with your lowercase "g" god and earn his love. The Spirit has given you an entirely new way of life and empowers you to produce good works, which flow out of the saving faith that he created in you (Galatians 5:24,25).

Maybe you don't see yourself as a "Spirit-filled" person who speaks with fire and power and always has just the right words to say. But if it weren't for the Spirit your simple witness to others could not turn someone from darkness to the light of Christ. The Spirit does the work of convicting hearts (John 16:8) and turning people toward God (1 Corinthians 6:11). And the Holy Spirit works through you and the gospel message to do it (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

The work of the Spirit is quite personal and powerful. Without the Spirit, pews and pulpits would be

empty. Without the Spirit, I would not hear the two-year-old in my congregation trying to recite the creed. Without the Spirit, loved ones wouldn't have Christian comfort on their death beds. Without the Spirit, I wouldn't be writing this article.

TRUSTING THE SPIRIT'S POWER

Do you still long to see the excitement on Pentecost day and hear Peter's powerful sermon? You might not feel so inspired after every wor-

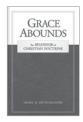


"Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on him, and have him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel...." (Large Catechism, II, par. 38).

READ MORE



God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine, L. Lange, pp. 122-124



Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine, D. Deutschlander, pp. 48-52



Holy Spirit: The Giver of Life, J. Vogt

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

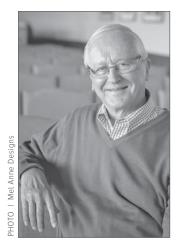
ship service, every Bible class, or every sermon. But the gospel "is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). In your ordinary pastor and his ordinary sermons, the Spirit is at work convicting you, encouraging you, and comforting you.

Do you long to have been there that Pentecost day to see what the disciples did to get three thousand people to come to faith? Maybe that's why we think that if we have just the right type of music or the perfect small group to meet the specific needs of our communities our churches will grow. In contrast, the Spirit works in ordinary ways to call people to faith and strengthen them in their faith. Through ordinary tap water poured on a child's head, he writes that child's name into the book of life (Titus 3:5). Through ordinary ink printed on paper from a tree, he gives the teen the courage and strength to face another day (Romans 5:3-5). Through ordinary bread, ordinary wine, and the spoken word, the Spirit seals forgiveness for us and strengthens us in the one true faith until life everlasting.

The Spirit works in rather ordinary ways, but his ordinariness is not a problem. He teaches us to put our faith in the promises of God, not in our experiences or emotions. Because of the Spirit there is real power in the ordinary. Through Word, water, bread, and wine, the Spirit comes into contact with us and changes us at our core. Through Word, water, bread, and wine, the Spirit is the heartbeat of our spiritual lives and our relationship with our Savior.



Aaron Goetzinger is pastor at Redemption, Watertown, New York.



In God's hands

As I write this thought, we are all concerned about the spread of a virus that has already killed thousands. Events and responses change day to day and sometimes even hour to hour. Of course, we have to prepare this magazine months before you read it, and I cannot predict what will happen in the meantime.

But I have a thought to share that comes from a sensitive grandson. He has not been insulated from the reports and concerns we have all heard. He noted that the people who are most at risk are older people, like his grandparents. At one point he turned to his mother and asked, "Are my grandma and grandpa going to die?"

We are, in all situations, in the hands of God, who loves us.

It's a question that, even if unasked, may be on the minds of many children. Almost certainly the question morphs in the minds of adults who think of their own older parents. It even becomes quite personal in the heart and mind of those who are at greater risk—the elderly with underlying health challenges.

This seems to be one of those teaching moments—a question that provides an opportunity to share some important truths. I think there are at least two.

First, the answer to his question is a simple "Yes!" Everyone's life comes to an end at some point. Grandparents die and leave ragged scars of loss and pain for all those who remain. But that answer is cold, heartless, and even cruel. It lacks sensitivity,

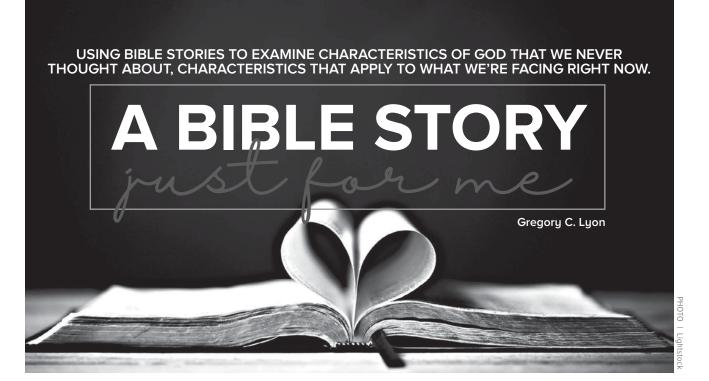
Another thought needs to follow: "Grandma and Grandpa know Jesus. So whenever he decides to take them home to heaven, they will be happy with Jesus even if we are sad they are gone."

Those thoughts, I think, should guide not just Christian children but also Christian adults of all ages. We all live here temporarily. The writer to the Hebrews wrote of the faithful who were "longing for a better country—a heavenly one" (11:16). "Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (13:14). The gyrations of the financial markets may shake that vision but not change it.

That brings me to the second truth. We are limited in what we can control. The storms of life happen with only the most immediate forecast of their arrival. Like the weather, long-range forecasting is vague and unreliable. The only things we might forecast far into the future are that someday we will die and that during our wait—long or short—we will have troubles. Paul reminded the new Christians on his first missionary journey, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

That response may be equally cold, heartless, and insensitive. But another truth needs to follow. We are, in all situations, in the hands of God, who loves us. His love is clearly revealed in his suffering and death for us unworthy and often wayward people. We call him our Good Shepherd (John 10 and Psalm 23), our fortress (Psalm 46), and our rock (Psalm 61) for good reason.

We may take these truths for granted when the sea is calm and the sun shines brightly on our path. But when the way is hard and long, we return to these truths to calm the storms within. Perhaps we need those difficulties to turn us again to treasure these important truths. Then we renew our goal to live as disciples, loving those dear to us while we have time and opportunity here on our journey home.



WHEN I DIDN'T FEEL SAFE ANYMORE

Feelings are not facts. Yet sometimes those feelings of anxiety are so real. Sometimes they are crippling. They keep you glued to your bed in the morning. They can pull the safe and secure footing right out from under you so that you're drowning even though your safety and security is right in front of you.

Anxiety can be a good thing when it triggers our fight or flight mechanisms, but for roughly 1 out of 5 people who suffer from clinical anxiety, this is something far more than fight or flight. This is a debilitating disease that threatens the everyday ability to exist.

For the other 4 out of 5 people who don't suffer from clinical anxiety, sympathy can be a challenge. They say, "Why don't you just snap out of it? Stop being afraid. Start looking at reality." But it's not that easy.

PETER'S ANXIETY

Read Matthew 14:22-33. Imagine that you are one of the "4 out of 5" disciples in the boat wondering why Peter is sinking even with his safety and security, his Savior, right in front of him. From that viewpoint, consider the following questions:

- Peter is always the bold one. Talk first, think second—that's Peter. Are you surprised by Peter's request (14:28)?
- Do you envision Peter jumping out of the boat or taking a step like it was thin ice?
- What is your reaction to Peter's first few steps?
- Do you understand why Peter began to sink, or do you think he should have known better?
- React to Jesus' question, "Why did you doubt?"
- Was there any point at which Peter was not actually safe?

Peter needed his Savior. He needed Jesus to rescue him. Peter's need became abundantly clear as he cried out, "Lord, save me!" (v. 30).

JESUS' CARE

Yet even as Peter cried out, he was still safe with his Savior as Jesus remained on the water as if on solid ground and reached down for him. The Savior responded to Peter's cry.

Feelings are not facts, yet all too often, the feelings within cloud the realities of the heaven that is ours through faith in Christ. Then anxiety sets in. But Jesus still reaches down to you. If you are the "1 out of 5," Jesus

will not take his eyes off of you. He supplies help through friends and family, pastors and teachers, medical and mental health professionals. He cares for you, as he always has.

If you are one of the "4 out of 5," be that friend and neighbor. Remember that Jesus will not take his eyes off of you either.

Whichever you are, cast all your anxiety on him and see how he cares for you. And as he does, don't take your eyes off of him.

Whether you are a "1 out of 5" or a "4 out of 5."

COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE:

This account shows me that Jesus was FOR ME.

May this be a reminder to you of the reality of your loving and caring Savior.



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

This is the fifth 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.

CONNECT | GROW

THINGS TO NOTE

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bitter, Mark, to retirement

Blaho, David, to Trinity and Our Savior, Ashland, Wis.

Buch, Nathan, to Good Shepherd, Benton Harbor, Mich.

Christie, Aaron, to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

Frelitz, Don, to Christ, West Salem, Wis. Hoff, Jacob, to First German, Manitowoc, Wis. Hunter, Philip, to new mission, Wesley Chapel, Fla.

Melke, John, to Good Shepherd, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.

Micheel, Jonathan, to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

Nitz, Joel, to Hmong Asian missionary Nitz, Paul, to WELS World Missions One Team counselor

Rosenberg, Mark, to Peace, Kokomo, Ind. Schubert, William, to Our Savior's, Zion, Ill. Schultz, David, to retirement

Sims, Daniel, to director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief

Suckow, Joel, to Our Savior's, Wausau, Wis. **Teachers**

Barksdale, Kari, to Calvary, Dallas, Texas Bauer, Megan, to St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. DeFrain, Richard, to Peace, Granger, Ind. Ellingboe, Hannah, to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.

Enstad, Sarah, to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis. Eternick, Justin, to Grace, Portland, Ore. Fricke, Rebecca, to St. Paul, Wonewoc, Wis. Gieschen, Lori, to St. Peter, Saint Peter, Minn. Greefkes, Kathryn, to Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.

Hahm, Rachel, to St. John, Red Wing, Minn. Hammer, Taylor, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Herrmann, Seth, to Abiding Word, Houston,

Hill, Stefanie, to Cornerstone Early Learning Center, Hugo, Minn.

James, Sara, to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.

Janke, Christina, to Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis.

Kampman, Kristin, to St. Paul, North Fond du Lac. Wis.

Koeppel, Rendell, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.

Krause, Harmon, to King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.

Krueger, Jessica, to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio Maggard, Melissa, to St. John, Pigeon, Mich. Markgraf, Daniel, to St. John, Wauwatosa,

Marguardt, Anne, to Victory Preschool, Jacksonville, Fla.

Mildebrandt, Andrew, to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.

Nommensen, Bradley, to St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

Ohm, Bethany, to Crown of Life, West Saint Paul, Minn.

Peek, Michael, to St. John's, Sparta, Wis. Prekop, Keely, to Trinity-St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.

Rath, Katherine, to St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.

Rockwell, Beth, to St. John, Libertyville, Ill. Roecker, Elizabeth, to Little Lambs Preschool, Saint Paul Park, Minn.

Rowe, Jodi, to West Lutheran High School, Plumouth, Minn.

Salzwedel, Terri, to Peace, Hartford, Wis. Scherschel, Luke, to Holy Trinity, Wyoming, Mich.

Schoenike, Susan, to St. John, Watertown,

Schroeder, Laura, to St. Paul, Livonia, Mich. Sievert, Mark, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis. Smith, Kristina, to St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.

A reporting of deaths of called workers as noted in the call report. READ MORE AT > forwardinchrist.net/obituaries.

PASTORS

MUELLER, ROBERT P. Oct. 31, 1931—March 5, 2020

WARNECKE, RODNEY W. Dec. 17, 1959—March 13, 2020

TEACHERS & STAFF MINISTERS

NELL, ARTHUR F. June 8, 1950-Feb. 23, 2020

VOSS, DAVID J. July 11, 1954-Feb. 21, 2020

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

THROUGH MY Bible IN 3 YEARS

ľ			III 5 I LAI
	1. Luke 21:1-24	12. Lk. 24:13-35	23. Ac. 2:1-13
	2. Lk. 21:25-38	13. Lk. 24:36-53	24. Ac. 2:14-36
	3. Lk. 22:1-13	14. Psalms 1, 2	25. Ac. 2:37-47
	4. Lk. 22:14-30	15. Ps. 3, 4	26. Ac. 3
	5. Lk. 22:31-46	16. Ps. 5	27. Ac. 4:1-31
	6. Lk. 22:47-62	17. Ps. 6	28. Ac. 4:32-5:16
	7. Lk. 22:63–23:12	18. Ps. 7, 8	29. Ac. 5:17-42
	8. Lk. 23:13-25	19. Ps. 9, 10	30. Ac. 6
	9. Lk. 23:26-43	20. Ps. 11, 12	31. Ac. 7:1-43
	10. Lk. 23:44-56	21 . Acts 1:1-11	
	11 . Lk. 24:1-12	22. Ac. 1:12-26	

MAY 2020

READ MORE AT wels.net/bible3

Springer, Benjamin, to Immanuel, Salem, Ore.

Springer, Michelle, to Immanuel, Salem, Ore.

Vilski, Justin, to Crown of Life, West Saint Paul, Minn.

Voss, Katherine, to St. Peter, Saint Peter, Minn.

Waldschmidt, Bethany, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.

Warnecke, Philip, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.

Warnecke, Staci, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.

Wasser, Justin, to Trinity, Nicollet, Minn. Wendt, Anna, to First German, Manitowoc, Wis.

Wordell, Andrea, to Christ Alone, Thiensville, Wis.

Zietlow, Rebekah, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.

Zuberbier, Thomas, to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, 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. 507-454-5440.

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.

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society annual convention—June 25–28. The Classic Center, Athens, Ga. Theme, "Vision for Missions." Website, lwms.org.

Taste of Missions 2020—July 11. Hosted by WELS Missions. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, wels.net/tasteofmissions2020.

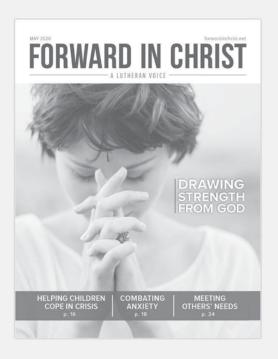
WELS Night at Miller Park—July 24. Brewers vs. Pirates. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

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

SEE MORE AT \searrow welsrc.net/bulletinboard.

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COMFORT IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

During this time of uncertainty, we want *Forward in Christ* to be a source of encouragement, so we are offering free digital access to the May issue.

Do you know someone who could benefit from spiritual comfort right now? This is the perfect time to share with them the strength from God's Word found in Forward in Christ.

ACCESS THE MAY ISSUE FOR FREE AT nph.net/forwardinchrist

Parenting parents

Snowden G. Sims

Families celebrate graduations throughout the nation this month. Young men and women are moving to another level of education or vocation. As parents, we can get tearu-eyed realizing that our baby is growing up and moving on. Yet we can rejoice in this wonderful blessing of raising children in the Lord.

As parents, weren't we overjoyed when we had our children? We sought to meet their every need. We fed them, changed their diapers until they were potty trained, corrected them when they did wrong, drove them to every event under the sun until they got their driver's license, and had them live with us until they got their own place.

We enjoyed watching so many firsts in their lives. We had dreams of what they would be when they grew up. We sometimes jokingly told our children to get a good job, so that they could take care of us in our old age. What was said jokingly, however, would become a reality for us as caretakers.

Personally, my wife and I got a little nervous but excited—about being "empty-nesters."

We would have more time to travel, to do more home projects, and to enjoy the company of each other. However, before our daughter graduated high school and went to college, we needed to bring my mother-in-law to live with us. The nest had a new occupant.

She has dementia and could not care for herself. A role reversal took place before our veru eyes. We needed to parent a parent. Everything Solomon reminds us of in Ecclesiastes, we saw happening: "When the keepers of the house tremble . . . and those looking through the windows grow dim; . . . and the grasshopper drags itself along" (12:3-5).

Parents age. They can't take care of themselves, so we seek to meet their needs. They can't cook for themselves, so we cook meals for them. They can't control their mouth, so we need to be their filtered voice. They can't

drive, so we take them to every appointment under the sun. They can't live alone, so we have them live with us.

My wife and I learned to put breakables out of reach. We learned to hide the sweets, so that they were not eaten up in one sitting. My wife learned new battle strategies at shower time so that clean clothes could be put on. The child became the parent, and the parent returned to childhood. Parenting parents affects many people in our society today.

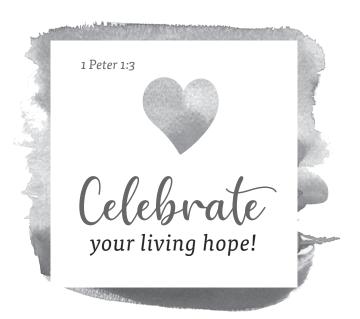
Parents age. They can't take care of themselves, so we seek to meet their needs.

What a blessing that the child gets to see some of the last things a parent does, but it is not easy. Remember the Fourth Commandment and Luther's explanation: "Honor your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not dishonor or anger our parents and others in authority, but honor, serve, and obey them, and give them love and respect." For as long as they live.

Children: Talk with your siblings about parenting your aging parents as a team and talk things over with your parents before the need arises. Spouses: Talk with one another about plans to address parenting parents. Everyone: Pray for an extra measure of patience and wisdom. Finally, trust in the Lord's promises that your parents are still his children and heirs of eternal life through faith in Jesus.



Contributing editor Snowden Sims, president of the Michigan District, is pastor at St. Paul's, Columbus, Ohio.





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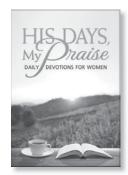
you're grateful for each day. By the end, you will have a year's worth of God's blessings to reflect on when you need encouragement. Hardcover, 150 pages.

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HE WAS LISTENING

A unique thank-you note reminds a mom that her son was listening. | Pamela K. Holz

PHOTO | iStock

IT WAS UNEXPECTED—the note in February from my 22-year-old college senior son. He admitted that it was a bit late.

It was a thank-you note for his Christmas presents. The note was sweet, but the thing that stood out was what he had included. Tucked into the envelope were two carefully cleaned and folded butter wrappers. He explained that the butter factory where he worked was creating its own line of butter and was including words of wisdom on each wrapper. The phrases reminded him of me because "if he had heard me say these phrases once, he had heard them a million times."

Now part of me thought he may have exaggerated a bit about the million times, but what did hit me was that he was listening.

This is my firstborn. My redheaded "active-always-busy-and-always-into-everything" son. From the day he was born the look on his face asked, "Are you sure you know what you are doing here, Mama?" It was for this child the phrase "Look with your eyes, not with your fingers"

was stated . . . again and again. This was the boy who always had questions: "Why, Mama, why?" And before I could fully answer one question, he was off on another project, plan, or scheme. And yet, it seems, he was listening.

The butter wrappers got me thinking: I wonder what else he was listening to.

He tells me that when he hears certain popular songs they are the soundtrack of his childhood. Not only did we listen to a lot of music when he was very little, but we also would sit in the rocking chair and sing the same songs over and over again. "I am Jesus' Little Lamb" was a particular favorite. He always wanted to be the one to shout "Happy!" during that third stanza. To this day, the whole family pauses and looks at him when we sing that song.

Every night, when that golden hour of bedtime finally arrived, he was tucked into bed with hugs and kisses and love and prayers. "Jesus, Savior, wash away all that has been wrong today. Help me every day to be good and gentle, more like thee." Not only

did I need these words of love and forgiveness for my shortcomings as a mom, but I also wrapped my little boy in this sweet benediction. And he was listening.

Getting to be a mom is my favorite thing in the whole world. Raising four unique children and teaching them as much as I could in the short amount of time I had them before they flew off into the world to make decisions and choices on their own has been the greatest joy of my life. The time went by way too quickly. "Enjoy them while you can," the wise women in my life had advised me. "The days may be long, but the years are short."

Are there some things I wish I could go back and do differently? Definitely. But looking back, the one thing I would not change was the constant repetition that framed his childhood. Those simple butter wrappers reminded me: He was listening.



Pamela Holz is a member at Beautiful Savior, Clarksville, Tennessee.

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:6,7).