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FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE

A close-up photograph of a man and a young girl reading a book together. The man, on the left, has a beard and is looking down at the book with a gentle smile. The girl, on the right, has her hair in two buns and is also looking down at the book, smiling. They are both wearing red clothing. The background is softly blurred, showing other people in a similar setting.

A LIFE OF THANKSGIVING

**CHANGING
PEOPLE'S HEARTS**

p. 12

**THE IMPORTANCE
OF BIBLE READING**

p. 14

**WHEN JESUS
RETURNS**

p. 28

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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

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever" (Psalm 136:1).

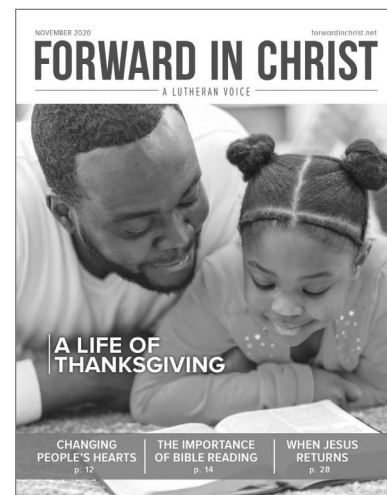
In our cover article, Aaron Robinson reminds us that we have many people to be thankful for in our lives, but God and his love are at the top of the list (p. 10).

The Bible teaches us about that love—a love so strong that God gave his only Son for us. That's why David Scharf in his Q&A this month discusses the importance of staying in the Word (p. 14).

Through his Word, God talks to us and gives us what we need for life—both now and eternally.

On the flip side, prayer gives us an opportunity to talk to God. Two parents this month offer ideas for instilling a strong prayer life in children (p. 16).

Strengthened in our relationship with God, we then are ready to reach out with his love to those who are trying to argue or cause divisions. As Nathan Nass writes, "Jesus' grace changes our mindset in our interactions with others." Don't miss his article "Overcome evil with good" (p. 12) to encourage you to share God's Word so others can see Jesus.



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Julie

Julie Wietzke

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p. 5



p. 7



p. 18

CONTENTS

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>4 THIS IS WELS
Photos from WELS members</p> <p>5 DEVOTION
But you promised!
<i>Daniel J. Habben</i></p> <p>6 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
Thankful—even now?
<i>Mark G. Schroeder</i></p> <p>7 CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
While weighing the responsibilities that children bring, a father looks to the church for direction.
<i>Rachel Hartman</i></p> <p>10 GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD
We are children of God filled with gratitude for many blessings.
<i>Aaron T. Robinson</i></p> <p>12 OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD
As divisions and hatred rage in our world, Christians overcome evil with good.
<i>Nathan C. Nass</i></p> | <p>14 Q&A
Do I really need to read the Bible to have a relationship with God?
<i>David G. Scharf</i></p> <p>15 BIBLE STUDY
The need for the Bible and worship
<i>David G. Scharf</i></p> <p>16 PARENT CONVERSATIONS
What are ways to foster a rich prayer life in children?
<i>Laura Schaefer & Jonathan Bourman</i></p> <p>18 MY CHRISTIAN LIFE
A new hymn brings comfort to the heart.
<i>Jeremy Bakken</i></p> <p>20 NEWS
What's happening in WELS</p> <p>26 PLEASE EXPLAIN
Why is Jesus taking so long to return?
<i>Kenneth L. Brokmeier</i></p> | <p>28 THE LAST JUDGMENT
All of us are going to face not just the evaluation of society in the world today but also the judgment of God on the Last Day.
<i>Philip M. Moldenhauer</i></p> <p>30 A THOUGHT
Change
<i>John A. Braun</i></p> <p>31 BIBLE STUDY
The Book of James
<i>Richard E. Lauersdorf</i></p> <p>32 COMMUNITY
Notices and your opinions</p> <p>34 EDITORIAL COMMENT
Wedded widows and widowers
<i>Snowden G. Sims</i></p> <p>36 CHRISTIAN LOVE IN POLITICS
Remember who you are as you conduct yourself during this political season.
<i>Bethany Siegel</i></p> |
|---|---|---|

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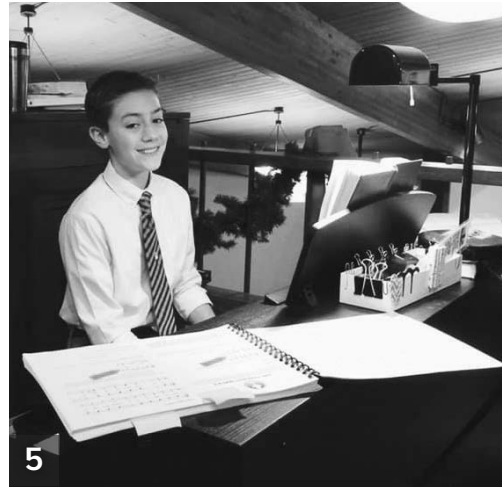
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6

THIS IS WELS

WELS members are using their gifts of music, art, and theater to spread God's Word and serve their Savior.

1 | Alex and Natalie Ritter, St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich. 2 | Women from Trinity, Crete, Ill., Advent by candlelight 2019 3 | Rachel Russow, Faith, Tallahassee, Fla. 4 | Missionary Terry Schults works on drawings to teach Christian doctrine to low-literacy groups 5 | Micah Vanderhoof, Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis. 6 | Seventh-grade students at St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis., created this Post-it image of Jesus. 7 | Gerald Geiger (right) creates wooden artwork to commemorate important events; also pictured is Matt Bauer, Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D. 8 | Alex Plocher, altar triptych for Living Hope, Commerce City, Colo.

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7



8

But you promised!

“Where are your former mercies, O Lord, which you swore to David in your faithfulness? . . . Remember the scorn with which . . . they have scorned the steps of your Anointed One. Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen” (Psalm 89:49,51,52).

Daniel J. Habben

“BUT YOU PROMISED we’d go on a cruise this winter!”

“But you promised you’d clean your room!”

When others make a promise, we expect them to keep it. If they don’t, we remind them: **“But you promised!”**

HOLD GOD TO HIS PROMISES

Ethan, the songwriter-author of Psalm 89, reminded God of his promises—promises to sustain King David and maintain his line of descendants. As far as Ethan could tell, God had either forgotten those promises or had changed his mind. The nation was going through a difficult time. Enemies had broken down and plundered their fortified cities. They mocked God’s anointed ruler, and Ethan too seemed to be suffering.

Despite these dire circumstances, God hadn’t changed his mind about his promises of love and protection to David and his people. “I will not alter what comes out of my lips,” said God through the psalmist (89:34). I love that verse. It reminds me that God is not like a kid on the playground who changes the rules mid-game for his own benefit.

When God makes a promise, he doesn’t say later, “Oh, I was only kidding,” or, “You shouldn’t have taken me so literally.” That’s why, when we’re in the midst of a rough patch and can’t see evidence of God’s mercy, we can cry: **“But you promised, Lord!”** God loves it when we hold him to his promises—not that he needs reminding. God has promised to work everything out for our eternal good, and he will.

WALK AWAY REFRESHED

God doesn’t need our reminders, but something good happens to us when we hold God to his promises. Look how it made our songwriter, Ethan, change his tune. In verse 51, the psalmist laments the scorn being heaped on his king and says, **“But you promised, Lord!** Where are your mercies now?” Then, in the very next verse, he praises God! (Go ahead, read the verses again.) Why the abrupt change in attitude between the verses?

Well, I do something similar when my car starts to rattle and whine. I take it to a trusted mechanic and describe the problem. When I’m done “complaining” about my car, I leave it with the mechanic. I don’t pull out my little Home Depot tool kit and try to fix it my-



PHOTO | iStock

God loves it when we hold him to his promises—not that he needs reminding.

self. Nor do I give that expert mechanic advice. No, I trust that the mechanic will take care of my car. My problem has become his problem.

Isn’t that what the psalmist does in the closing verses of Psalm 89? After unloading his concerns to the Lord, he walks away refreshed. It’s not because his problems have suddenly disappeared but because he trusts that an expert is on the job! The best thing about this divine expert, the God of the Bible, is that he guarantees all his fix-it jobs. The empty tomb of Jesus makes that clear.

What promises has God made to you that he doesn’t seem to be keeping? First make sure they are his promises and not only what you imagined. He does promise great things. The Bible is full of them, including promises to provide your daily bread and promises to send his holy angels to protect you and your family. Then go ahead and say to God, **“But you promised!”** and hold him to those promises. Trust that the divine expert is on the job. And, like Ethan, walk away refreshed.



Contributing editor Daniel Habben is pastor at Mt. Calvary, Flagstaff, Arizona.

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

Thankful—even now?

The apostle Paul was under arrest in Rome for the second time. His first arrest had ended in his acquittal and release from prison. The second time would end differently. Paul knew that it would end with his death at the hands of his Roman captors.

You might think that Paul's heart would be heavy and filled with fear, but Paul's second letter to his young coworker Timothy shows something different.

He wrote, "I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did." He thanked God for Timothy, for Timothy's faith, for the instruction given to Timothy by his mother and grandmother. He recalled his own suffering for the sake of the gospel and pointed to God's grace—filled with thanks for what God had done for him in Christ. He looked down at the chains confining him but said with gratitude, "But God's word is not chained." He looked back on some of the sufferings he endured as he proclaimed Christ—but thanked God for rescuing him from all of them and praised God for delivering him "from the lion's mouth." Even now facing death, he wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day" (2 Timothy 4:7,8). In the most difficult times, Paul wrote from a heart filled with sincere thanks to God for his gracious blessings.

The year 2020 has been unlike any in our memories. Yet just as the apostle Paul viewed his dire surroundings and his past struggles as opportunities to see and rejoice in God's grace, so we have much to be thankful for even in these difficult times.

God has worked in us a renewed appreciation for worship and fellowship with our fellow Christians. Congregational leaders across the synod developed innovative ways to ensure that worship and the weekly proclamation of the gospel could continue. Throughout the synod, God's people have not neglected their thank offerings that support the work of their congregation and synod. New mission opportunities continue to open up before us even as the nation and world have shut down. We appreciate the freedom to worship when in the past that freedom was easily taken for granted. We value more than ever the blessing of work and a job.

Children are looking forward to school like never before. We've experienced family closeness and communication. We've been reminded of just how much we depend on God to keep us safe and healthy and what a blessing it is when he does. In a nation in political and social turmoil, we are motivated to express our values through our participation in the political process. And looking at all of those things that have gone so terribly wrong, we also hear the Shepherd's voice calling each of us to repent, to turn to him, and to treasure his daily forgiveness.

Yes, in many ways this has been a year we may want to forget. But in so many other ways, despite the chaos and confusion and uncertainty, we will say and sing again, "Now thank we all our God!"



Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President



PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs



CONFESSIONS *of faith*

While weighing the responsibilities that children bring, a father looks to the church for direction.

Rachel Hartman

PHOTO | Lightstock

DURING HIS GROWING YEARS, Brad Harris had some ties to different religions but never attended church on a regular basis. After getting married and welcoming a new daughter, however, Harris found himself contemplating spiritual matters. “I started thinking about my future and afterlife,” he says. The quest eventually led him to taking Bible information classes, getting baptized, and becoming a member of a WELS church.

SEEDS OF RELIGION

Harris was raised in the Atlanta, Georgia, area. In his household, his mother was a Methodist, and his father was a Mormon. While religious in name, “we were never part of a church,”

Harris says. The family occasionally attended services at a Methodist congregation in the area.

Over summer vacations from school, his parents sometimes sent Harris to a vacation Bible school. While he enjoyed going to the classes and learning, he didn’t become absorbed in the religious teachings. During some of those events, there were opportunities to be baptized. “I never felt like getting baptized,” Harris says. “I just did not feel ready.”

In the years that followed, Harris didn’t maintain strong ties to any church or religion. He had biblical touches enter his life once in a while, though, and he took notice of them. “A girlfriend in high school gave me a Bible with

my name engraved in it,” he says. “I kept it on the shelf, and we would occasionally use it.”

Harris’ mother also kept a Bible at home. For special times, like holidays, she would pull it out and read it to the family. “It was a special Bible to us, and my grandmother would read the verses of Jesus’ birth and the story of the wisemen at every Christmas,” Harris says. “When she passed away, my mom would read it and then also other family members. It became a tradition.”

SEEKING GOD

When he left home and started out on his own, Harris continued to have spiritual thoughts but didn’t connect to any particular church. “I felt a cultural

drawing to the Lord and prayed, but I didn’t understand what I was doing,” he says. After getting married and starting a family, however, he started focusing more on religion. He recalled the traditions of his childhood and started thinking about what he wanted for his young child and growing family.

“I have a daughter who turned two in February 2020,” he says. “She is the light of my life. Like a lot of new fathers, it made me start to think more about church.”

Harris came across some podcasts that covered spiritual themes and began tuning in to one called “The Godcast.” While listening to several episodes, he learned about the Lutheran church.

“I felt a cultural drawing to the Lord and prayed, but I didn’t understand what I was doing.”



(Left to right): Brad Harris and his family at his baptism. Angela, Brad's wife; Brad, holding his daughter Harlow; Brad's sister; and Brad's father. | Harris, his daughter Harlow, and Pastor Lucas Bitter. | Bitter baptizing Brad Harris at Intown, Atlanta, Ga.

UPLIFTING WAYS TO CARRY OUT ONLINE *gospel outreach*

Shifting from an in-person gathering to an online format may alter traditional outreach plans. Regardless of the setting, “the gospel always works,” says Lucas Bitter.

Here are several ideas to keep in mind when reaching out in a digital way:

INCREASED AVAILABILITY. With many working from home or staying home, you may find that people have more flexibility than before. They may be more ready and willing to talk over the phone or through a video chat. They might also sign up for online classes that they can now make because of their schedule changes.

THE BLESSINGS OF CONNECTING. Even if it's through Zoom, people may appreciate the chance to communicate with others and share experiences. In a Bible-focused setting, these connections can be even more meaningful.

INDIVIDUALS ARE STILL SEARCHING. Visitors who attended church physically prior to COVID-19 may not have walked into a service for months, but they might have the same questions that initially brought them. Going through a prospect list could make it possible to start and continue gospel-centered conversations with these individuals who have expressed interest in church.

He also heard of Martin Luther, along with some of the religious texts that Luther wrote. Through these listening sessions, Harris agreed with Luther's teachings and outlook, which made him consider finding a Lutheran church. “I decided Lutheran churches have what I want, like Scripture and community,” Harris says.

STUDYING THROUGH COVID-19

“One evening my family and I went out to dinner at a block of restaurants,” he says. “There was a brewery close by, and we walked over to it after dinner. At the brewery, I met this young Lutheran pastor with two young kids.” That pastor was Lucas Bitter, pastor at Intown Lutheran church, the WELS mission in downtown Atlanta.

The brewery was designed to allow families with children to relax and connect. An outdoor patio provided games like bean bag toss that kids can play while parents chat. Through his conversation with Bitter, Harris learned he could take a Bible Basics class. The timing seemed right: Harris had been hoping to join a church and was interested in learning more about Lutherans.

Shortly after their initial conversation, Harris learned his neighbor had also met the same Lutheran pastor and was planning to host the Bible Basics class at his house. “My neighbor also has a young daughter and lives right across the street from me,” Harris says. “It couldn't have been more synergistic. It was divine planned.”

The group started meeting together, and right from the beginning Harris appreciated the material. “It's amazing how naturally it all came together. I was looking for an opportunity for a Bible Basics class, and I was able to learn answers to the big questions I had about the Old Testament and New Testament,” he says.

The course began just as the coronavirus pandemic was entering the United States. “After about the third week of studies, we had to switch to Zoom meetings for the rest of the class,” Harris says.

Even in digital form, the weekly online gatherings continued to help Harris soak in more about God’s Word. “The Bible can be daunting for someone new to religion,” he says. “It’s a big book with teeny little words, divided into all these different books. It’s got such clout that comes with it.”

Poring through it, however, enabled Harris to understand different Bible stories and to choose some verses that quickly became favorites. “There are cool little quips and quotes in the Psalms, and the book of Romans and the gospels are full of real and relevant stuff that we are going through today,” he says. “You can get insight on where to start and where to go—it specifically points out the path.”

“It’s so important to stay positive throughout all of this. I’ve been grateful for what I’ve been able to find in God’s Word.”

This knowledge was especially applicable to Harris, as he found himself going through a transition period related to his work. He kept in touch with Bitter throughout the class. He often received Bible-based messages and prayer support from Bitter and other members.

When the class finished, Harris felt he had insight into both the Bible and the Lutheran church. “We really got the Reader’s Digest version of the Bible. I kept my folder from that class and became a member just a few weeks after the class ended.”

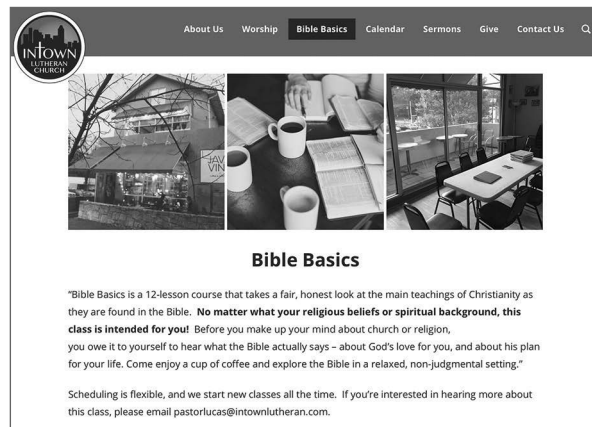
Harris wanted to get baptized, but due to the number of COVID-19 cases in the area, the congregation was still meeting online and streaming worship services. Finally Bitter was able to arrange a time when Harris could come with some guests to get baptized during a service. “I invited my family to come,” Harris says. “The congregation watched online.”

Getting baptized and being able to become a member through the pandemic was helpful for Harris’s perspective. “It’s so important to stay positive throughout all of this,” he says. “I’ve been grateful for what I’ve been able to find in God’s Word.” Being able to connect with other members of the Lutheran church helped him feel supported. He appreciated belonging to a group that would pray for each other and share encouraging Bible passages with those going through hard times.

GREAT WEBSITES STILL MATTER

“People are always looking,” says Lucas Bitter. These days, those searches may be taking place online more than ever before. To make sure members and visitors can easily access church services and resources, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- **Make services easy to access and watch.** Sending out a Zoom invite for a church service could potentially limit the number of individuals who are able to attend and worship. Instead, public platforms like Facebook or YouTube can allow anyone to quickly access and share content.
- **Keep websites user-friendly.** Visitors to your site should be able to seamlessly locate information about church services and Bible studies. Contact information in a visible place can also be helpful.
- **Maintain the right keywords.** Including phrases that are specific to your area, such as the city name, can help lead locals to your site. Solid keywords could be included in your site’s name, as well as the content listed and service information provided.



Harris hung the framed baptism certificate in his home right away. “It reminds me of my gratitude to the church and to my newfound faith,” he says. “With church comes community, and with community comes a strong foundation.”



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



PHOTO | iStock

We are children of God filled with gratitude for many blessings.

Aaron T. Robinson

Psalm 136 starts simply enough, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.” The second part of the verse becomes a refrain throughout the psalm, “His love endures forever.” When I was asked to write about giving thanks, God’s love is first. Jesus Christ and his work of redeeming me is at the top of the list.

But I could not claim Jesus as my Lord or believe in him without the work of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit who worked faith in my heart that believes in Jesus is also right there at the top of the list.

But I thank God for so much more. I want to take a look back into the Garden of Eden for the next thing on my list: I am thankful for other people.

It was in the garden that God created Adam and allowed him to recognize that he was the only human being. He was alone. I don’t know what that would have been like for Adam. He was in a perfect place with a loving God and he himself was perfect. Yet

he noticed something was missing. In the second chapter of Genesis, God says, “It is not good for man to be alone.” God went on to create Eve so that Adam would not be alone.

I am not alone either. I thank God for my Eve and for all the other people who are a part of my life. Yes, I want to give thanks that I am not alone in so many ways. I am thankful for the people whom God has placed in my life.

Parents: The first people I knew were my parents. When God brought Adam and Eve together, he instituted marriage and family. What a wonderful blessing. I want to give thanks to the Lord who gave me parents. Unlike Adam and Eve, we were all blessed with parents. Parents like Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who prayed that God would give her a child. Parents like Mary and Joseph, who, although surprised by the birth of their son, raised Jesus as their special child. Fathers like Jairus, who trusted that Jesus could heal his daughter. Parents who, I pray, do the best that they can as they love us and raise us. Thank God for mothers who carried us in their womb and took care

of us when we could not take care of ourselves. Parents who in the best circumstances loved us enough to share the love of God that endures forever with us. Parents who took time for us from the day we were born to make sure we had the best they could give. Parents who let us know that we are part of a family that is larger than the people who reside inside our homes. We are part of God's great family of believers. I am so thankful for my mom and dad.

Siblings: Families expand, so I give thanks to the Lord for my siblings. Many of us are blessed to have brothers and sisters. Siblings like Joseph, who was able to forgive his brothers for how they treated him. Siblings like Andrew, who went and told his brother Peter when he found the Messiah. I thank God for my brother and sister who helped to shape me into whom I have become (whether they would admit it or not). They were there to help get me in—and out—of trouble. Consider the number of times that you disappointed your parents or as parents when you disappointed your children. Consider the many times siblings unintentionally hurt one another physically or emotionally. If it were not for the ability to forgive someone who doesn't deserve it—to show grace—families would never survive. When I describe grace—forgiveness and support—I am thankful for my brother and sister.

Friends: The Lord continues to grow my circle of people. I give thanks to the Lord for friends who are like family. Friends who risk their lives like Jonathan did for David. You may have met them in the neighborhood, classroom, or workplace. Each of us has that person whom we trust and talk about like family. I am blessed to have friends whom I've known since kindergarten who are still part of my life. Despite what I have said or done, those friends

have stayed by my side. I'm thankful for the shared experiences that helped to shape me more than I might know. His love endures forever. I am so grateful for friends who love me enough to be honest with me.

Teammates: I am not alone, and I give thanks to the Lord for teammates. Barnabas was a teammate to Paul. Together they journeyed on that first missionary trip and shared the enduring love of God in Jesus. Every ministry effort that I have been blessed to be involved in was a team effort. It may be a husband-and-wife team that holds together as you serve the Lord. It may be a classmate or fellow missionary as you begin a ministry. It may be a faculty or staff member who lifts you up as you teach the future generation. As part of that team you worked hard to achieve a goal, to accomplish a task, or just to get through the difficult times. Teammates encourage you, push you, challenge you, and lift you up.

Teachers: Finally, give thanks to the Lord for teachers.

The word *teacher* is really too generic for those people in our lives who have opened up our minds and shaped our knowledge and behavior. I have learned from teachers who loved their subject. I am grateful for the teachers who have loved me and wanted to see me grow and succeed. Mostly I am grateful for the teachers who love the Lord. They have guided me and so many others.

Psalm 136 reminds us to give thanks for so many things. Take the time to read it and remember all the Lord has given you. But especially remember: His love endures forever.



Aaron Robinson is
pastor at Fairview,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD.

His love endures forever.

GIVE THANKS TO THE GOD OF GODS.

His love endures forever.

GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD OF LORDS:

His love endures forever.

HE REMEMBERED US IN OUR LOW ESTATE

His love endures forever.

AND FREED US FROM OUR ENEMIES.

His love endures forever.

HE GIVES FOOD TO EVERY CREATURE.

His love endures forever.

GIVE THANKS TO THE GOD OF HEAVEN.

His love endures forever.

—Psalm 136, select verses



**As divisions and hatred rage in our world,
Christians overcome evil with good.**

Nathan C. Nass

OVERCOME EVIL *with good*

PHOTO | Lightstock

A YARD OF someone you consider a friend is covered with campaign signs for the *wrong* candidates. Your coworker uses language that hurts your ears. Divisions and disagreements rage all around us about everything, don't they? Every conversation—every interaction—provides more proof of how different we all are.

And we're supposed to love our neighbors. How? It's hard enough getting along with people at church. Out there? It seems impossible. How do we love our neighbors when they are so different from us? How do we deal with people who don't seem to agree with us about anything? What do we say when our insides are screaming, "We are not the same!"

NOT WINNING THE ARGUMENT

I know what I want to do: I want to win the argument. I want to be right! In my free moments, my mind wanders to how to crush other people's ideas. Does your mind do that too? I imagine how I will shoot down whatever arguments they make. Expose their opinions as foolish. Win. It feels good to be right. It feels good to crush imaginary opponents' opinions in my mind!

But one verse from the Bible keeps wriggling into my thoughts: "Overcome evil with good." Have you heard that? There's more: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. . . . Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with peo-

ple of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. . . . Do not be overcome by evil but *overcome evil with good*" (Romans 12:14,16-18,21).

Those verses hit home in my heart. Overcome evil with good? Too often, I try to overcome evil with arguments. It doesn't work! Have you argued someone into faith in Jesus? I haven't. Or I try to overcome evil with evil of my own. Insults. Sarcasm. That never ends well either.

Maybe God is on to something: "Overcome evil with good." When God tells us not to repay evil with evil, it's because Jesus already paid for all evil with his death on the

cross. All of it. That includes your sins and my sins and your neighbor's sins—forgiven! Every single one. The answer to evil and sin isn't an argument. It's Jesus. On his cross, Jesus overcame evil with good.

"Bless those who persecute you." Remember what Jesus said to the soldiers who crucified him? "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). "Be willing to associate with people of low position." Remember the common accusation against Jesus? "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). When you hear that, say, "Yes! That means Jesus loves me."

Overcoming evil with good starts with Jesus filling us up with his grace. Jesus' grace changes our mindset in our interactions with others. It's not about trying to win an argument or prove ourselves right. We want others to believe in Jesus as their Savior too.

CHANGING HEARTS

Think about this: If a person doesn't have faith in Jesus, it really doesn't matter what they think about abortion or creation. If a person doesn't have faith in Jesus, it really doesn't matter what their sexual lives are like or what language they use or what political party they vote for. Our primary goal isn't to change people's opinions or behaviors. It's to change their hearts. Right?

So how do hearts change? Where does faith in Jesus come from? You know! "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17). Only a changed heart can lead to a changed life. So the Bible encourages, "Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). We

Christians have one tool. Just one weapon. What is it? The Word of God! Want to change hearts? Share the gospel. Get to Jesus!

I've found that this takes a lot of patience and personal relationships. God's Word works, but it doesn't work according to our timing. Like a seed growing under the ground, God's Word works in hearts in ways that we can't see. Trust it! And that seed of God's Word is best planted in a personal relationship. God uses Christian love shown over and over again to break down defenses. To open doors. Don't think in terms of days or weeks. Think in years. It's worth it!

Our primary goal isn't to change people's opinions or behaviors. It's to change their hearts.

A pastor once had a member make a bet with him: "I bet you a case of beer that my father-in-law, Bob, will never join your church. He's too stubborn!" Years later, Bob ended up in the hospital. The pastor visited him. He went back the next day, and the next day too. When it was time for Bob to go home, the pastor offered to keep visiting him. Bob shrugged and said that would be okay. The pastor kept teaching him the Bible. Guess what? Little by little, it changed Bob's heart. He came to faith in Jesus. He joined that Lutheran church. And his son-in-law brought the pastor a case of beer! God's Word worked through a patient, personal relationship.

Whose life could you touch? Don't share that nasty blog post. Share a verse from God's Word. Don't argue about political opinions. Share some

food, a smile, and a reason for hope in Jesus. Don't get easily offended. Don't be surprised at sin. Don't expect a changed life before there's a changed heart. Instead, with God's grace pulsing through your veins, "overcome evil with good."

Because those people who seem so different from you really aren't. Actually, we all have way more in common than we think. We're all sinful. We prove that every day! But we're also all loved by Jesus who died for us. When you see that person and hear their ideas, when your insides scream, "We're not the same!" remind yourself, "Yes we are! We're sinners loved by Jesus."

A man once called our church and said, "I'm at the hospital. My wife is dying. I don't know if she believes in Jesus. Please come and help her believe in Jesus." So I went to the hospital. The man told me her story. She had problems with alcohol and drugs. In his words, she hadn't been a very nice person. But as he watched his wife die, he had one thing on his mind: "Pastor, you have to tell her how Jesus has forgiven all of her sins. Tell her that Jesus died to forgive her for everything. I just want her to be with me in heaven!" That's how you overcome evil with good. It's a man in tattered jeans saying, "Jesus loves you. Jesus forgives you." Over and over again. How needed is that? As divisions rage in our world, Christians overcome evil with good!



Nathan Nass is pastor at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a two-part series on dealing with others in love.



Q&A WITH DAVID SCHARF

I always hear that I should be reading my Bible. I pray every night. Do I really need to read the Bible to have a relationship with God?

THE NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ISN'T ENOUGH

It's true. We can know some things about God without the Bible. We call that the natural knowledge of God. When I look at nature and the immensity, order, beauty, and complexity of it, I can know that God is big, orderly, beautiful, and complex. When I do something wrong and feel guilty, my conscience tells me that God is just.

However, there's a problem with this natural knowledge. It doesn't tell me about Jesus.

THE BIBLE TELLS ME ABOUT MY SAVIOR

I need the Bible to tell me about Jesus. The Bible says, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). The way that the Holy Spirit works that conviction in my heart is through his Word: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17). Jesus said how important his Word is—it is life! He said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Perhaps you are thinking, *But I already know what Jesus did. I don't need to read about it more.* Yes, you can know the facts about salvation and not forget them. But Jesus tells us that the demons know those things too (James 2:19). Christianity is not just about knowing facts; it's about having a relationship. It's about trusting the facts God tells us in his Word.

Imagine your spouse only talked to you once a year. You may still know many facts about your spouse, but you wouldn't have that same strong relationship as when you talk every day. Hebrews

1:2 says, "In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe." Wow! The Creator of the universe wants to have a relationship with you and talk to you through his Word! When you read his Word, he reminds you that you are forgiven, loved, and in the palm of his hand. In other words, he gives you exactly what you need for this life and the one to come. He doesn't want you to forget that by not listening to him.

REGULAR BIBLE READING EQUIPS ME FOR LIFE

You mentioned that you pray every night. That is wonderful! However, it is only one side of a conversation. Prayer is your words to God. It's not God talking to you. God speaks to us through his Word. Only praying would be like a child saying to his parents, "No, I don't want to hear you talk. You just listen to me." Every parent would respond, "I want to hear from you, but it's important for you to hear from me too!"

Hebrews 3:13 says: "Encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Sin will harden us so we don't listen to God. But God's Word strengthens our faith and helps us see Jesus and his forgiveness. The Bible is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

So keep talking to God in prayer, but also remember to listen to his voice in the Bible.

ASK A QUESTION AT ➤ forwardinchrist.net/submit.

The need for the Bible and worship

David G. Scharf

IN THE Q&A we discussed our need to be listening to God's voice through his Word, that is, the Bible. Imagine you live in a world exactly like our own but with one exception: The Bible does not exist. Armed only with the natural knowledge of God, discuss what you would know about the following questions and then contrast that with the answers you know the Bible gives to those questions.

How does God view me?

What do I know about God?

How do I get closer to God?

What does God want me to do with my life?

How do I get to heaven?

WE NEED ENCOURAGEMENT AND TO ENCOURAGE

Although individuals have personal faith, the Bible speaks of our life with Jesus as communal. Christianity is about the church's relationship with Christ. Just add up all the "one another" passages in

the New Testament. Nearly 60 of them tell how to act toward each other!

We are baptized into the body of Christ. So, when we address having a "relationship" with God, we need to also address our relationship with God's people.

Read Matthew 18:20 and Exodus 20:24.

What happens when we worship together with our fellow Christians?

Read Hebrews 10:25.

List some ways that we encourage one another in worship. (The word translated "meeting together" is literally "going to synagogue," which was a weekly event.)

THE BLESSINGS OF GATHERING WITH FELLOW BELIEVERS

Take a couple of minutes to think of examples that demonstrate how God designed humans to face life not as rugged individuals but with the encouragement and assistance of others.

Read Acts 2:42-47.

The early church is a great example of the blessings that come from gathering with fellow believers. List all the blessings God provides as a result of joining together in worship.

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

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

It’s a familiar passage, and it’s also my goal for my children. This month hear from two other parents who share the desire to pray continually and hear their thoughts on how God can use us to build up our children’s prayer lives.

— Nicole Balza

WHAT ARE WAYS TO FOSTER A RICH PRAYER LIFE IN CHILDREN?

I RECALL SITTING IN A friend’s basement discussing how to help kids have a strong prayer life with a group of young moms. We got together every week for Bible study while our brood of preschoolers played. We shared tips like the five-finger prayer (each finger reminds you of a group of people to pray for) and the ACTS acronym from confirmation class (Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication). I shared that I nudge my children along with the prompts I remember from morning prayer meetings at Camp Phillip: “God, thank you for . . . ; God, you are really great because . . . ; God, please help . . .”

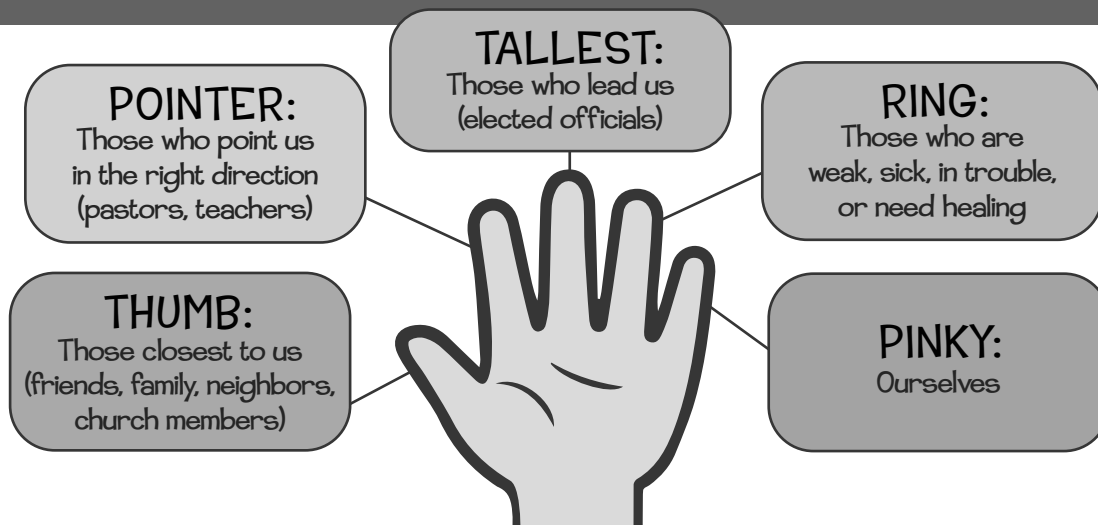
These tools are good and helpful, but in the end, the desire in our kids to talk to their heavenly Father will grow just as their desire to talk to their father on earth. They’ll come to God the Father in prayer because they love him—a love that grows because he loved them

first—just as they come to their dad because they love him. They’ll come because they know God cares; they’ve experienced how he meets their needs; they know he wants what’s best for them; they want him to know everything going on in their lives and in their hearts; they feel guilty when they do something wrong so they confess to him, knowing that he will surely forgive them and still love them.

But how do we teach our kids to know God so well—his love, his will, his commands, his perfect track record—that they desire to talk to him like they do their earthly fathers? We model. Just as our children pick up on our likes, dislikes, interests, and habits, they also pick up our spiritual habits and learn to value what we value. So as they see us in God’s Word and hear us pray—whether it’s out loud with them at bedtime or overheard

THE FIVE-FINGER PRAYER

Use this visual as a reminder of people for whom your family can pray.



by them as we pray with our spouses, friends, or Bible study groups—they are encouraged to get to know God better and talk to him more often.

My fifth-grade daughter still remembers those basement Bible studies. She remembers the chaos, noise, and snacks, but she also recalls observing my friends and I chat, laugh, cry, and study the Bible together. She remembers being shushed or shooed away while we bowed our heads and prayed aloud for each other and for friends, family, acquaintances, and the world. More recently, she thought it was cool that my husband and I let her use a video messaging app so that she could have devotions and pray with her friends while being at home during the pandemic.

The majority of prayer time at our home takes place at bedtime. Some nights words flow freely, and some nights the kids need those prompts. Some nights the kids are so tired that we just encourage them to direct their thoughts to God as they fall asleep. Some nights so many thoughts are swirling in their heads that they can't put them into words, and we reassure them that God knows what they need before they ask him and that the Holy Spirit will intercede for them.

We pray that our children will learn to pray by practicing and grow in their desire to pray as they learn more and more about God's great love for them.



Laura Schaefer and her husband, Will, are raising three young children in Lannon, Wisconsin.

.....

I REMEMBER HUGGING her small body in my arms. I'd take her chubby little hands into mine, clasping them together for her. Only after I was holding her like I knew her Father did would I speak God's promises to her and pray them back to God for her.

I did that because that's how I imagined Zechariah did it. Another man, who like me thought he'd never have a child, ended up holding his child in his arms. Can't you just see John in Zechariah's arms, hearing words from the Spirit pouring from his fatherly heart? What promises! Read them there in Luke! "You, my child . . ." (Luke 1:76).

I have tried, in my daughter's life, to wrap up her whole life in that kind of prayer. Before we go to school, we pray together. Before we take trips, we pray together. Before eating, we pray together. Before bed, we pray together. Before surgeries, we pray together. While sick, we pray together. While enjoying a sunset, we pray together.

Prayer punctuates our lives. We call on God, bless God, thank God, and claim his promises. It's the capital letter and the period of the sentences we live in our family life.

We work hard not to make it hard. Our daytime prayers are short. At night, we take more time, and we all pray. We started that early. As her father, I wanted my daughter to know from the earliest age that she had the privilege to talk to her Father. At first, we had to wait a bit for her to form something or just give her words to repeat, but after a few months, she started to get the hang of it. Now she's always ready with something. Sometimes she prays something from her heart. Other times, she likes to read the prayer at the bottom of the Bible book we just read. Mom goes next. I pray last.

Prayer punctuates our lives. . . . It's the capital letter and the period of the sentences we live in our family life.

I always close with the same prayer: Luther's Evening Prayer. I'm intentional with that. Traditions are important. They create habits that are invaluable for doing the work of prayer. They also have the power to run so deep over time. I want that for her, not to mention for myself and my wife. The Lutheran church is a rich resource for that. In the Small Catechism, there is a whole devotional routine proposed. We follow it. You know how far I go? After I say Luther's Evening Prayer, my daughter now repeats with me the words that follow in the catechism with a huge grin on her face: "Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully." Not a bad thought for a child who needs to get to bed for school the next day!

Are we perfect? Nope! We must believe at our house as much as anyone else has to that our Lord Jesus Christ prays for us when we're not praying and should've been. "We have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1).

Right now, we're working to lead her to pray all on her own at school. She went back just this week. I asked her yesterday, "Did you pray at lunch?"

"Yeah, Dad! I remembered! Mom sent me a note in my lunchbox to do it."



Jonathan Bourman and his wife, Melanie, are praying regularly with their seven-year-old daughter in Aiken, South Carolina.



A new hymn brings comfort to the heart. | Jeremy Bakken

MY CHRISTIAN *life*

WE ALL HAVE FAVORITE hymns to sing. They become our familiar friends as we worship and our companions when we experience joy, sorrow, doubts, or trouble. Their familiar melodies and truths make them treasures on life's journey. We love to sing them and hear them.

I have found a new hymn that reminds me of truths I treasure on my life's journey. I'm a musician. I love to sing and hear music that gives expression to my fears or my joyful praise. My love for music has sustained me through long hours of practice and study, including the earning of graduate degrees and hours of worship planning and rehearsals. It has also brought me to Northwestern Publishing House as the worship editor and given me the opportunity to help with the next hymnal for our congregations.

A new hymn that has quickly become a favorite for me—"Jesus, Ever-Abiding Friend"—has found a place in the next hymnal. This modern hymn was written by Keith Getty and Steve Siler. To introduce this and other new hymns to people in our worship services, the Com-

mission on Worship launched a program for college and high school choirs to perform arrangements of these hymns in their concerts, record them, and then make them available through Northwestern Publishing House.

"Jesus, Ever-Abiding Friend" caught the attention of the Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) choir director, Dr. James Nowack, and he wanted to use it for his choir. I am a WLC graduate and once sang in the choir, so Dr. Nowack asked if I would arrange the anthem so his choir could perform it on its spring 2020 tour.

I was happy to do it and listened with pleasure to the first few performances before the tour began. Months later, however, the hymn became even more deeply meaningful as I reflected on the circumstances surrounding those early performances of the anthem.

"EVER-ABIDING FRIEND"

The WLC choir's first performance on its tour was in Tempe, Arizona, on March 8, 2020 (pictured above). I was there for that concert. When the choir performed the anthem, no one

knew what lay ahead, but soon life as we knew it would be upended. We were on the precipice of a world pandemic and its fallout. The members of the choir would find themselves learning remotely. Graduating seniors would miss all the year-end activities that would celebrate their undergraduate careers and achievements. All this and so much more was just over the horizon.

On that day, the choir sang about perpetual truths that would be needed in the months ahead. The choir reminded me and all those who attended that Jesus remains our ever-abiding friend. As Getty and Siler put it, Jesus is the rock of heaven, our strength and shield, by whom our wounds were healed. In the face of all temporal challenges big or small, only these truths truly sustain, comfort, and calm. The hymn brought comfort and strength to my heart as the events that followed at the end of March unfolded.

"COMFORT THROUGH MY DEEPEST PAIN"

Appreciation for that hymn deepened because of another event. WLC

President Dan Johnson was on hand to introduce the choir as it performed its first tour concert. But he wasn't just on hand to fulfill his duties as a college president; he had come to visit his dying father. Many in the choir and audience were aware of the dual purpose of his visit. And as Jesus would have it, his father went home to heaven the afternoon of that first concert.

The words of the hymn spoke to us all, highlighting that Jesus is "comfort through my deepest pain" and "my soul's peace forevermore." Those words were much more meaningful that day, as the pain of death touched the Johnson family. We need to hear again and again why Jesus came for us. The death of a Christian brother or sister wounds our hearts. It is at that moment of deepest pain—death, the ultimate reminder of our natural condition, the only wage we are able to earn or ever deserve—that the words of this hymn are most comforting. The one who has died in Christ and those who remain behind in Christ have eternal peace because Jesus is our "ever-abiding friend, [our] soul's rest and journey's end." He is the "blameless one, who erased my sin for eternity."

"CONSTANT, CARING, REDEEMING LORD"

Sitting in front of me at that concert were several longtime WLC faculty members. Many of them were retiring at year's end. They probably didn't anticipate ending their careers in the midst of a pandemic. But having served at the college for decades, they no doubt could look back on their careers and see many trying challenges. It would be easy for them to count the academic headaches, scheduling difficulties, interpersonal frustrations—their unfortunate sinful words and actions as well as those of others. Perhaps they too could remember the deaths of colleagues, students, and alumni.

At the same time, as servants of the Savior, they could rejoice in what the choir was singing—the constant care of their loving God, the ability to forgive and be forgiven rooted in the redeeming work of Christ. That promised care and gospel truth had changed them, had seen them through their years, and will be their hope in retirement and for eternity.

"NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES"

We all have a unique name and identity. At the same time, our connec-

**Jesus, ever-abiding friend,
My soul's rest and journey's end.
Blameless one, who erased my sin
For eternity.**

**Comfort through my deepest pain
Love that sees beyond my shame:
Christ, the sweetest dearest name
That my heart has ever known.**

**Jesus, Savior, with crown of thorns,
My soul's peace forevermore.
Constant, caring, redeeming Lord,
Life abundantly.**

**Rock of Heaven, strength and
shield,**

**Perfect holiness revealed:
Christ by whom my wounds were
healed,**

Name above all other names.

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LEARN MORE > about the new *Christian Worship* at christianworship.com. To hear the WLC choir singing "Jesus, Ever-Abiding Friend," visit nph.net and search for the song by title.

tion to Jesus, our ever-abiding friend, brings us together. This one and only Savior of the world is our closest, ever-abiding friend. The Author of life is our source of abundant and eternal life. The eternal Jesus is our comfort in all pain, our peace at all times, the constant caregiver of our souls now and for eternity.

It's easy to see how this hymn had special meaning to those who sang it and heard it on March 8, 2020. By God's grace, this hymn—along with many others old and new—will continue to draw eyes and hearts to Jesus. He is the ever-abiding friend of all who believe in him.

As Getty and Siler put it, may he be your soul's rest and journey's end, the comfort through your deepest pain, the sweetest and dearest name your heart has ever known.



Jeremy Bakken is involved in Branches Band and Trinitas (pictured), a worship ensemble at his congregation. He also is a member of the Hymnody Committee and chairs the Musician's Resource Committee for the WELS Hymnal Project.



Jeremy Bakken is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

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Moments WITH Missionaries

I'll miss the mission

I'll miss the mission . . . but I am so thankful that I didn't miss the mission.

Almost 37 years ago, I was given a chance to do something that most Christians can only dream of doing. God called me to leave my fork and spoon behind so I could learn to use chopsticks. God asked me to lay aside English to learn one of the most complicated languages Babel ever produced.

I'll miss the mission. When my wife and I arrived in Taipei, Taiwan, we were met by a family with whom I have now served for 36 years. No one could have prepared me for the exhilaration of being able to sing "Jesus loves me" in another tongue. No one could have gotten me ready for the deep thankfulness to God I felt over the first convert in my work that he allowed me to see. God used me to help nurture a national church that is now a sister church with WELS.

Seventeen years ago, God called us to Hong Kong. I have had the chance to live in a Chinese culture that was stir fried with British colonialism. I followed up on work done by great men who had gone before. The part of the city where we lived and worked was called Kowloon—literally "nine dragons." These dragons may be a symbol of power, but one Lord is greater in power than them all—and filled with a grace found only in him. South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM), our sister church in Hong Kong, stands with us in proclaiming this truth.

I'll miss the mission. I've had the chance to help nurture church leaders in East Asia. They endure much pressure from the outside as well as challenges from within. While Christianity is gradually on the wane in much of the world, seeds planted by many faithful workers continue to expand.

But will the mission miss me? I retired this past summer, and it made me wonder, *Will they miss me? Will the work go on without a hitch?* Deep down my human nature wants to believe things will slow down without me. I want to believe in my importance. But God doesn't see things that way. And thankfully he doesn't see me that way.

It has been so humbling to realize how little you actually accomplish in several decades. It's also awe-inspiring how much God can do through the people he has chosen to use. To whichever continent God leads them, your missionaries share in this kind of experience. This is the shared experience of all who follow God wherever he leads them.

God makes sure that the mission won't be lacking when one man retires. When God raises up a leader, he already has in mind the servant who will follow. We sow the seed. We water the new life that sprouts. We harvest as God pleases. And then another follows. Moses and Joshua. Paul and Timothy. Your retired missionaries are followed by new men with new gifts for a new age. And we all serve one Lord.

I'll miss the mission, but she will go with me wherever I go. And God's kingdom will come.



Recently retired, Robert Siirila now lives in Austin, Texas, but is still teaching online classes for Asia Lutheran Seminary as well as coaching leaders in East Asia.

Let your light shine

GOD'S WORD CONTINUES TO BE SPREAD IN OUR CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES, EVEN DURING THE PANDEMIC.

David Russow, pastor at Hope, Andover, Minn., shares how God's work continues in the local nursing home:



Pastor Emeritus Will Neumann (pictured at his 90th birthday with Russow, right before the pandemic shutdown) is a resident at Edgewood Senior Living, Blaine, Minn. I had been conducting weekly Sunday chapel services at the facility for about 20 to 30 worshipers, including Pastor Will. When outside access to the facility was no long

possible, Pastor Will gathered 8 to 10 others together and read hard copies of the sermons I sent him. The proclamation of the Word goes on!

Congregations have become creative so they can continue to reach more with the gospel.



Mt. Olive, Lincoln, Neb., set up an altar outside and began offering outdoor services during the summer to provide additional options for families to worship. Services were broadcasted through an FM radio station for those who wanted to remain in their vehicles. "Instead of focusing on the negative challenges created by this pandemic, we prefer to consider the positive/creative opportunities we have to bring God's good news to a frightened world," says Tim Kemnitz, pastor at Mt. Olive.

The congregation also used the venue to host youth group movie nights, which several neighborhood families attended.

Churches across the country are reaching out in love to families in their communities.

St. Mark, De Pere, Wis., held a Fill the Bus School Supply drive to collect supplies for families at a local elementary school, while Cross of Christ, Boise, Idaho, distributed bags filled with groceries to those who needed them in their community.

In Texas, two congregations handed out backpacks and back-to-school supplies to neighborhood families. Read on . . .

Our Savior, San Antonio, Texas (pictured), has been holding a Load Up for Learning event for several years. This year, the congregation hosted two events: one on the central campus location and one hosted by the core group of the congregation's second campus (see p. 24). "We also turned our events into drive-through events," says Nate Sutton, pastor at Our Savior.



About 75 percent of the students attending the schools near the congregation's central campus come from financially disadvantaged families. "This year more than ever, families relied on Load Up for Learning to make sure their children were ready for the start of school," says Sutton. "Families began lining up three hours before our event. These events enable us to make connections and build bridges within our community."

In Killeen, Texas, members at Abiding Savior handed out backpacks, thermal water bottles, and thermal lunchboxes to more than 100 families. "From children of lower income homes to children in homes hit hard by the COVID pandemic, each backpack impressed others with the kindness of Christ," says Tim Soukup, pastor at Abiding Savior.

He shares that people were happy—and surprised—to see Christian love displayed in this way. He heard comments like, "We didn't know how we were actually going to get these supplies, and then we came across your generous offer. People—churches—rarely love like this anymore! It's all really free!"

Says Soukup, "Abiding Savior now has a new contact list of 90 families to follow up on and send gospel blog posts and e-devotions. And our church family members themselves were recharged by the love of Jesus in being able to serve others in this way."

Both congregations, along with Christ, Denver, Colo., and Risen Savior, Lakewood Ranch, Fla., received humanitarian aid grants from WELS Christian Aid and Relief to help buy supplies.

READ MORE ➤ about humanitarian aid projects at wels.net/relief.

New videos encourage married couples to “take a moment”

“Marriage is foundational to so many things in our society, including our congregations,” says Donn Dobberstein, director of WELS Discipleship. “If we want solid congregations, healthy marriages are so important. Yet biblical marriage is under intense attack in our current culture.”

Tom Kock, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and an advisory member of WELS Commission on Discipleship, agrees. “Every marriage has its moments,” notes Kock. “Moments of boredom or even some not-so-good moments. So every marriage needs moments of encouragement and refreshment. That’s the thought behind *Marriage Moments*.”

Marriage Moments is a new series of videos in which one marriage thought is briefly explored and then



one question or “for further thought” exercise is added—all in two minutes or less. Kock hosts the videos and uses Scripture to anchor each lesson. One new video is released each week, so couples can focus on that one aspect of their marriage for the week.

Karrie and Dave Balza, members at Divine Savior, West Palm Beach, Fla., have watched several of the videos together. “In our hectic, over-

scheduled lives, it’s nice to have a bite-sized piece of God’s Word to place on your heart,” says Karrie. “We think the questions are the best part because they are a great way to dig deeper and really connect with your spouse.”

Although the videos were originally designed by the Commission on Discipleship for individual couples to use at home, Dobberstein encourages congregations also to consider how they could use these videos in their ministry, including as a tool for pre-marriage or marriage counseling or in small group Bible studies.

LEARN MORE ➤ and subscribe to receive *Marriage Moments* videos in a weekly e-mail at welscongregationalservices.net/marriage-moments.

BOOK NOOK

ANOTHER TOOL IN YOUR TOOL KIT

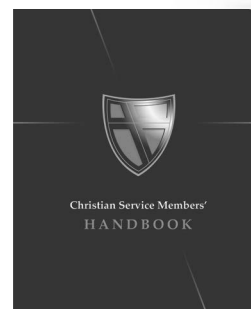
The *Christian Service Member’s Handbook* is excellent for any Christian as a daily companion. However, the book is explicitly organized for military service members fulfilling their vocation to the nation and their Savior. It is small enough to fit in a uniform cargo pocket but large enough in content to accompany a service member through unique daily challenges.

The book is nicely divided into five sections: prayer, meditations and devotions, Scriptures, hymns, and the Small Catechism. The prayers and devotions are written with service members and some of the challenges they face in mind, yet they do an excellent job of focusing on the Christian and not elevating service members as more than any other Christian who struggles as a daily saint and sinner.

The Scripture, hymns, and Small Catechism inside the *Christian Service Member’s Handbook* are practical for using during mealtime with the family as well as bedtime with the children. For deployed service members, it is an excellent resource for pulling out some words of comfort when a fellow service member is hurting, providing an opportunity to share the Word with others.

Although I would never leave my pocket-size Bible behind, the *Christian Service Member’s Handbook* is a small enough book to keep on me at all times and pull out while “hurrying up and waiting.” Besides providing me nourishment, it allows me to share God’s grace when people ask what I am reading.

If I’m being shot at, I want someone to tell me where the enemy is and where friendly forces are. This book is another tool in the kit bag to communicate where the eternal friendly force is and how he already saved us from the war zone.



Price: \$6.99

Michael Hefti
Mount Olive, Overland Park, Kansas

The *Christian Service Members’ Handbook* was developed by WELS Special Ministries, the Lutheran Military Support Group, and Northwestern Publishing House to help believers in the military stay strong in their faith in places where a pastor or fellow believer might not be available. Military members can receive this book for free by filling out a referral form at wels.net/refer.

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

Home Missions continues its mission of sharing the gospel

WELS Board for Home Missions met at the end of September and authorized funding for three new missions as well as two restarts. An additional congregation will receive support from Home Missions but no funding.

“Moved by the love of our Savior, Home Missions wanted to move forward because we know the Lord hasn’t directed us to just share the gospel when life is humming along but to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in difficult times as well,” says Keith Free, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions. “Regardless of the circumstances in this world, God’s people know what their Lord has directed them to

do—tell more people about the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. We ask the Lord to bless us to do just that.”

The new missions being funded are located in Amarillo, Texas; North Liberty, Iowa; and West San Antonio, Texas. The restarts include Dix Hills, N.Y.; Santa Clarita, Calif.; and Burlington, Iowa (unsubsidized).

The board also celebrated the news that two current home mission congregations launched worship services this fall—Hope, Houston, Texas, and Sure Foundation, Brandon, S.D.



Ten families from Our Savior, San Antonio, Texas, make up the committed core group at this new mission, which began worshipping together in March 2020. They held three in-person services at an elementary school with an average of 40 people in attendance before the pandemic hit. “My heart goes out to our young mission churches because they lost some momentum in reaching out to people who had shown interest in learning more about their Savior,” says Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions. “But our missionaries are resourceful and persistent and found ways to stay connected to them and reach out in creative ways with the gospel.”



Hope, Houston, Texas, received funding in May 2019, and Andrew Nemmers was assigned to serve as its home missionary later that month. Hope began worshipping this September in a local dance studio. Nemmers notes, “Even though this was not how we anticipated starting worship—several core group families unable to join in person, everyone wearing masks and social distancing—our first service was definitely successful. After months of not being able to gather in person, it was incredibly uplifting to be able to gather together around the Word again.”



Located 130 miles from the nearest WELS church, a group of 15 WELS members form the core group reaching out in Amarillo, Texas. The WELS pastor from Lubbock, Texas, comes to Amarillo twice a month to serve the members with God’s Word and the sacraments.



Sure Foundation, Brandon, S.D., held its grand opening worship service at a local hotel on Sept. 20.



North Liberty, Iowa, is a multi-site ministry with Good Shepherd in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A dedicated core group of 20 members began worshipping in July 2017 at the North Liberty Community Center.

Preserving a priceless spiritual treasure

For many Christians, hymns are woven into the fabric of our faith lives. “Jesus Loves Me” may be the first song we learn as a toddler; “Amazing Grace” may be the last song that passes our lips before Jesus carries us home. Hymns have the power to convict and comfort, to instruct and inspire.

In 2012, the WELS Commission on Worship discussed the importance of preserving our rich hymn heritage—ensuring that the next generation of believers doesn’t lose this priceless spiritual treasure. In response, the Hymns for Life Committee was established to craft a three-year hymnology curriculum for WELS teachers to use in their primary, middle, and upper grade classrooms. Content from the curriculum can also be incorporated into Sunday school programs.

“The Hymns for Life curriculum is designed to impress the biblical truths expressed in hymns on the hearts and minds of young believers,” says Jeremy Bakken, publishing editor of the project. The title of the curriculum sums it up simply: Hymns learned in childhood will stay with children for an entire lifetime. Bakken continues, “Our prayer is that students will appreciate these hymns and recall their spiritual truths in every stage of life.”

The curriculum helps students learn from and appreciate all components of a hymn: from its scriptural truths to the poetry of its language to the joy and beauty of its music.

Kevin Bode, teacher and music director at Emmanuel Lutheran School, Tempe, Ariz., understands the need to connect young believers with hymns: “Hymns are a powerful blessing God has given us. They keep us close to him amidst all the chaos and evil around us.”

In fact, Bode, who served as the curriculum development chair of the Hymns for Life Committee, has put the curriculum into practice in his own classroom. Each week, he introduces students to the content of a hymn, which is then sung each day. Once students are comfortable with the melody, Bode adds musical variations or physical movements: “They are simple to do, keep the hymn fresh, and students find them fun to do,” he adds.

According to Bode, two powerful ele-

The Hymns for Life curriculum has been developed to coincide seamlessly with the new *Christian Worship*, which will be released in 2021. “It’s no accident that the curriculum is being released in conjunction with the release of the new WELS hymnal,” says Jon Zabell, chairman of the Commission on Worship and pastoral editor for the Hymns for Life curriculum. “The theme for the hymnal project is ‘For a Generation Unborn.’ Our Hymns for Life curriculum will serve the next generation well, so that believers young and old may join together in worship to proclaim our Savior’s gospel good news in song.

LEARN MORE > about the new hymnal at christianworship.com

District news

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

Beautiful Savior, Carlsbad, Calif., was on the verge of closing its grade school at the end of the 2019–20 school year. Total enrollment was 14. God worked through changes that Beautiful Savior put in place to help its grade school begin the 2020–21 school year with an enrollment of 52. Twelve new school families are enrolled in Bible information class.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

The CORE, Appleton, Wis., part of 922 Ministries, began worshipping at its new site on Sept. 20.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

AZ-CA—On Aug. 23, Carlsbad Christian Academy, Carlsbad, Calif., celebrated the 25 years that teacher **Becky Dyrrsen** has served the school.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; NW—Dennis Kleist.

ments come together in the curriculum: music and biblical teachings. “Music moves the soul and has a way of touching our emotions, and we want to give students the chance to experience this. And we know the power of biblical truths and the words of Jesus,” he says. “Hymn lyrics remind students what God has already done for them, is doing right now, and will continue to do for them until they are safe in his arms.”

LEARN MORE AT > nph.net/hymnsforlife. Read an example about how a hymn provided comfort and hope (p. 18).



Kevin Bode teaches his students hymns using the Hymns for Life curriculum.



PHOTO | Lightstock

PLEASE EXPLAIN

Why is Jesus taking so long to return? | Kenneth L. Brokmeier

YOU WORKED DILIGENTLY to make the arrangements. It wasn't easy, but the dignitary you booked is someone famous. Now it is time to begin the celebration banquet. But the guest of honor has not yet arrived. The buzz among the naysayers starts to spread: "Are you sure you gave him directions or the right address? Are you sure you told him the right time and date?"

Waiting for that one person to arrive, especially if that individual is to be the most important person in attendance, can be emotionally exhausting. In a matter of moments, the rumor weed, being spread by those pessimists, has not only sprouted but is bearing fruit. You can just hear it: "This person was probably never invited in the first place," or, "If they were invited, they probably changed their mind when a better offer came along," or, "You made the whole thing up just to get

us here." The thought can even enter your mind to join the ranks of that cynical camp who has been doubting you all along.

JESUS IS COMING BACK

Already in the first century, Peter prophesied that many individuals, especially in the last days, would travel down this road of questioning Jesus' return. To be clear, Jesus had told his followers that he was going to come back in power and glory to judge the world (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). Since he didn't say exactly when this glorious event would happen, his followers were to watch and be ready at all times. Some who had heard this caveat from Christ's own lips had it reinforced at his ascension when those two men dressed in white heralded, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Jesus is coming back!

The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and even the Athanasian Creed (you know, the one we don't use too much because it's so long) all state that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. For centuries, Christians have believed and confessed the imminent return of their Savior. Why? Because the Bible tells us he will come again. And God always keeps his word!

Still, many scoff at the idea of Jesus coming again on the Last Day. But such thinking should not actually surprise us. A couple of hundred years before the creeds were penned, in fact, only a couple of decades after Jesus' ascension, Peter warned, "You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as

it has since the beginning of creation' " (2 Peter 3:3,4).

And the skeptics of today demand, "Explain to me. What is taking Jesus so long to return? Did he forget or change his mind? Or are you just trying to scare me with all this judgment day talk?"

HIS DELAY GIVES US TIME

Once more the Scriptures respond with a rather straightforward answer, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:8,9).

The trumpet call of God has not yet sounded so that God can continue to display his immeasurable patience. He doesn't want anyone to perish.

Why the delay? He waited for us so that we could be included in the Lord's kingdom two thousand years later. And now he waits to give people of our generation time. He gives us time to witness. Jesus told his disciples in numerous places that they were to go and preach the good news (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). The Son of God has not yet returned. That means we can and must continue to tell lost and dying souls that Jesus is the Light of Life.

Jesus has not yet returned with all his holy angels because the Lord also wants more people to repent—that is, to have a change of mind so they have a clear understanding that their sin is a stench in the nos-

trils of God—and to turn to the sweet grace of God in Jesus.

But even more, the trumpet call of God has not yet sounded so that God can continue to display his immeasurable patience. He doesn't want anyone to perish. Instead, he wants all not only to feel the burden of their sins but also to cling in faith to Christ who bore all the guilt and punishment for their transgressions.

We are subject to time and space. God is not. For us a thousand years seems like an "eternity." For our eternal God that same amount of time seems only like a day. But make no mistake. Jesus will come again one last time.

WE MUST BE READY

The Sundays of the Christian church year typically come to a close before

Thanksgiving. Many churches in our circles celebrate that with the four Sundays of End Time including Last Judgment Sunday and Saints Triumphant Sunday. That same theme of Christ's return carries over into the Advent season. The message rings loudly. Jesus will come again. It is imperative to keep watch and be ready, even if waiting for that return seems to be taking a very long time.

We can't peer directly into the mind of God to know the reason for the delay of Christ's return. But Peter does give us some pretty strong hints. It might be that God wants your friend, your relative, or even that skeptic who many times might

FOR FURTHER — study

Read Matthew 24:4-14. Make a list of the signs in society, nature, and the church that Jesus shares with us. Notice how those signs have all been fulfilled. Jesus can return at any time.

be a "thorn in your flesh" to come to repentance.

"Why is it taking so long? If Jesus is coming again, when will it be?" Prayerfully we can turn those questions into golden opportunities for us to respond respectfully and gently with an answer for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15). We can bust open our Bibles and point the skeptics to the many passages that speak of Jesus' first coming. Then direct them to the fulfillment of those prophecies so they realize that those Old Testament believers also had to wait hundreds or even thousands of years to see their fulfillment.

God doesn't tell us about judgment day to try and scare anyone into believing in him. Instead, his goal is lovingly to announce warning signs so that no one needs to die eternally. He has promised in his Word that judgment day is a day that he has clearly marked on his calendar. And one thing is for certain: He has a proven track record of always keeping the promises he makes.



Kenneth Brokmeier is pastor at Our Savior, Brookings, South Dakota.

READ MORE ➤ about God's final judgment on the Last Day (pp. 28-29).



THE *last* JUDGMENT

All of us are going to face not just the evaluation of society in the world today but also the judgment of God on the Last Day.

Philip M. Moldenhauer

"If you were to die tonight and stand before God and he were to ask you why he should let you into heaven, what would you say?"

This was a popular evangelism question some time ago. It was supposed to be asked on someone's doorstep. The question cut to the chase and helped you figure out if that person trusted in Jesus, in their own works, or in something else. But the question makes a big assumption. It assumes that there is going to be a day of judgment.

As Christians, we know that is true. God created every one of us, and he is going to continue dealing with every one of us for all eternity. The only question is whether he will deal with us in grace or in wrath. On the day Jesus returns, he will separate

people like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32,33).

I think it's fair to say that today if you knocked on someone's door and asked them the question about what they'd say to God, some will tell you they don't believe they will have to answer to him at all. They might go on to tell you that each person should live according to what works for them and that no one should go around passing judgment on others. "Be yourself" and "Acceptance, not judgment" are as universal virtues as any nowadays.

NO JUDGMENT?

So, what do you say to someone whose creed is "no judgment"? Maybe it would help to probe a bit. Is it really true that acceptance rules the day? The yard signs say, "Love is love," but in sexual matters even the most out-there folks would agree that some things are still just plain wrong. When someone crosses one of those lines, is there really no judgment? Society lines up not only to

judge but also to vilify and then dismiss them forever. Culture, simply, cannot exist without judgment being passed.

The problem with such judgments is that they are based on little more than popular opinion. If the majority of people think one way, then it must be right. People are even willing to stake their judgments on what they perceive popular opinion will be in the future, appealing to being "on the right side of history." So, it's probably more accurate to say that for most people, judgment is alive and well. However, the judge is no longer Jesus seated on his throne; it's what is leading in the polls.

Doesn't this explain why it's not really enough to just be yourself? Posts are crafted and shared on social media not just to show one's true self to the world but also to receive validation and affirmation for it. Yard signs are put out so that those who pass by will see and approve. People yearn for approval, but keeping up with the shifting

winds of popular opinion is a merciless grind. It is hard to trust that you have the approval of others if you think it may change tomorrow.

A SURE JUDGMENT

Whether anyone believes it or not, all of us are going to face not just the evaluation of society but also the judgment of God. He has told us that each person will stand before the judgment seat to give an answer for the deeds done while here on this earth (2 Corinthians 5:10). Since that is so, wouldn't it be wonderful to know exactly where you stand and what the verdict will be? Wouldn't it be nice to know that there is a judgment that you can trust and that will never change? Wouldn't it be helpful to know the mind of God regarding you?

It would—if you could be convinced that the prospect of God's judgment isn't utterly terrifying. After all, does an all-knowing God have the ability

to see through all virtue signaling? If the Lord Jesus has books, what do those books include? Do they include everything you have done? Said? Thought and desired? On second hand, maybe it is better to chase after the latest fad. Whose confidence and faith in God is really so secure that their knees would not shake a little bit at the thought of what it will be like to come face-to-face before the heavenly court? What we need is to find out beforehand the verdict that will be handed down at the last judgment.

Rather than being hesitant or fearful about the judgment, we learn to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus.” We welcome his return.

Actually, that is just what God has given to us. Week in and week out, at church, God proclaims his judgment about us. We stand before the court and plead guilty as we confess our sins. In response, the Judge hands down his ruling: I forgive you all your sins! Keep in mind that these words are spoken aloud. God's judgment, it seems, really has broken into this world already. There really is “now no condemnation” (Romans 8:1) because we are in Christ Jesus.

A PUBLIC JUDGMENT

If that is so, what about the way God's Word describes the final judgment? Think about it like this: On that day, the present reality that for now remains unseen will finally be revealed. We have indeed already crossed over from death to life (John 5:24), yet the day has not yet come when our true life will be revealed, and death will be set aside forever. We have already received the forgiveness of sins, but that is not something that we can see or that marks God's people as visibly different from unbelievers in this world.

On the Last Day, that judgment will become clear to all. Christ will declare that we were chosen by him to inherit salvation before the creation of the world (Matthew 25:34). He will even proclaim his approval of the fruits produced by faith, though such fruits go unrecognized even by those who do them (Matthew 25:35-40).

So don't think about the Last Day as an event we will have to fear because someone is coming to get us. Instead, it is the return of Christ that we are awaiting! And it is Christ himself

who has been appointed to be our judge (John 5:22). If we have to stand before the throne of God, who better to judge us than the one who shed his blood for us? The one who makes our defense and the one who judges is the same Lord Jesus. Since that is so, the outcome is guaranteed.

So rather than being hesitant or fearful about the judgment, we learn to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus.” We welcome his return. And on the day of judgment we will lift up our heads and receive the salvation that has been given to us by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.



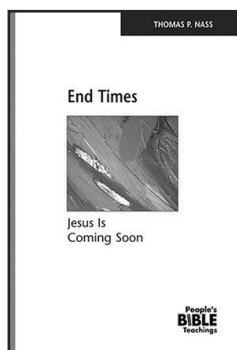
Philip Moldenhauer is pastor at Our Redeemer, Madison, Wisconsin.

Wondering when Jesus will return? **READ MORE** about the coming of judgment day (pp. 26-27).

FOR FURTHER *reading*

***End Times: Jesus Is Coming Soon* by Thomas P. Nass.**

Available from Northwestern Publishing House, nph.net; 800-662-6022.





Change

We spent a couple of days in the northern part of Wisconsin. The leaves were green at home when we left. When we arrived, the trees were mostly green except for a couple of high branches changing color. It was a short break, but I remember the leaves changing almost overnight on those four days. Each day a few more leaves turned. I don't recall a time when I've noticed those changes happening before my eyes.

With the shorter days and cooler temperatures, change happens. But more than the leaves and weather change. Most of the time we don't notice. We're busy. Then suddenly we pause to notice that something has changed.

Children change before our eyes too. We don't notice those changes until some significant event. Perhaps it's the start of school. The little one who has run through the yard and house now runs on a playground with others. Changes continue until they no longer live under our roofs and we miss not just the childish banter but also the mature conversation. Looking back we think, *How quickly things change.*

As you face life's changes, pause and give thanks for all your blessings.

The mirror reveals our changes, but we usually ignore the daily subtle ones. That is, until the first gray hair sprouts at our temples. We are getting older! Then the little aches and pains come. At first they are only nuisances, and we move on, learning to live with the changes. But of course, they don't stop. We discover it's impossible for us to do what we once did.

Politics and government change too. Justice and equality often demand changes. Sometimes we see new faces, and things change quickly like the leaves. At other times the changes happen more gradually. Some of the changes in nations around the world can signal revolution, war, and hard-

ship. We often have little influence over those changes but simply watch them unfold on the news.

In some places natural disasters bring sudden drastic changes, destruction, and death. Fires destroy acre after acre and leave smoldering homes and lives in their paths. Hurricane winds blow away trees and houses. Flood waters leave behind mud and rebuilding challenges.

Most changes we cannot control. The seasons continue without our efforts. We may influence the growth and development of our children, but we cannot stop them from becoming adults any more than we can change our own advancing years. Our votes can change leaders, but history is often charted by events out of our control. The sun rises and sets as God directs.

Yet in all we can and cannot change, we still have much to do. We take all our cares and worries to the Lord in prayer, recognizing he controls what we cannot. We trust that all will work out for our good as he promised. We trust his control, even if we do not understand it and wish—and pray—things were different.

We have more to do as the seasons change and the years race by. Each day is an opportunity. We love others. We show compassion and kindness to all in need. We live as disciples of Jesus, trusting our Good Shepherd. We are thankful for all the Lord gives us, content with what the Lord provides (Philippians 4:11)—whatever that may be. Our thanks and praise include taking advantage of every opportunity he gives us to do good (Galatians 6:10).

As you face life's changes, pause and give thanks for all your blessings. Trust your compassionate Lord to control what you cannot. He knows and does what is best for you and all of us.

John A. Braun | FIC Editor

the book of James

A BLUEPRINT FOR LIVING OUT OUR LIFE OF FAITH

Richard E. Lauersdorf

PHOTO | iStock

PEOPLE NEED A DAY of thanksgiving. Like children, clutching new presents, they need the reminder, “Say thank you.”

Christians can forget their words of thanks too. Their backs can become so bent from picking up life’s pennies that they need a reminder to praise God “from whom all blessings flow.” James offers us such a reminder. No, he doesn’t use the word “thanksgiving” in this portion of his blueprint for Christian living. Instead he points us to the great Giver of all and to his greatest gift of all.

THE GREAT GIVER OF ALL

When giving thanks, we need to lift our eyes in the right direction—up to God. From him comes no temptation to evil, but only and always “every good and perfect gift” (1:17). With this, James tells us what to expect from our God: a constant, continuing stream of good and perfect gifts. Or to put it another way, all good things come from God and from God come only good things.

How can anything but good come from him? Look at his very nature. He is “the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (1:17). To our eyes the stars vary in brilliance, the moon waxes and wanes, and the sun casts shifting shadows. But with the great

Giver of all we expect no variance or shadow caused by change. Always he shines on his children in undimmed love. Through the precious pearls of his gifts runs the permanent silk cord of his unchanging goodness.

Faith knows where to look when giving thanks. Certainly, the various earthly blessings we have received should cause us to thank him. Yet limiting our thanks to such items makes for little more than a turkey-drumstick-and-pumpkin-pie sort of Thanksgiving. It’s in the spiritual realm that we find his greatest gift.

THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

A proper view of God’s greatest gift takes us beyond Thanksgiving Day. Back before the beginning of days, God willed to save us. In his marvelous grace, without any worthiness in us whatsoever, he chose us in his free will out of the mass of humanity to be his children and heirs of his heaven.

Then came the day when God “chose to give us birth through the word of truth” (1:18). At the baptismal font or through the spoken Word he made us his “firstfruits” (1:18). Just as the first sheaves of harvest grain were set aside for him in the Old Testament, so he has set us aside to be his very own. Others may be his crea-

tures; we are his children. The world may be his goods; we are his treasure. Again and again, through that same Word of Truth, he resurrects our faith when it fails or renews it when it falters until we will stand at his side in heaven, his firstfruits forevermore.

For this greatest gift of all, our free salvation, faith says a perpetual “thank you” to our God.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Read Ephesians 1:3-6; 1 Peter 1:3; and John 15:16. What additional comfort can you find from God’s election of us by his grace?
2. Read Psalm 100:5 and Isaiah 26:4. What comfort does God’s unchangeableness bring us?
3. What do Romans 10:17; Colossians 1:5,6; and Ephesians 1:13 tell us about the function of the gospel?



Contributing editor Richard Lauersdorf is pastor at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin.

This is the fifth article in a series on the book of James.

LEARN MORE AT forwardinchrist.net, including potential answers.

COMMUNITY

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THINGS TO NOTE

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Arndt, Jonathan, to St. John's, Newburg, Wis.

Berg, Jeffrey, to St. Mark, Salina, Kan.

Fleischmann, David, to Prince of Peace, Yuma, Ariz.

Lindner, Daniel, to mission counselor for WELS Campus Ministry

Slaughter, Daniel, to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.

Swanson, Mark, to Trinity, Eugene, Ore.

Thiel, Jason, to Peace, Boulder, Colo.

Teachers

Birnbaum, Nicole, to Green Valley, Henderson, Nev.

Dushane, Julie, to retirement

Mills, Alicen, to Divine Savior Academy-Santa Rita Ranch, Liberty Hill, Texas

Parsons, Bethany, to St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.

Tapani, Emilee, to Green Valley, Henderson, Nev.

Wilk, Cathlyn, to Christ Alone, Thiensville, Wis.

Staff minister

Nass, Peter, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 66th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 26–29, 2021, at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. The convention delegate fee, paid by the calling body the delegate represents, is \$275. The deadline for submitting memorials to be printed in the *Book of Reports*

and Memorials is Jan. 15, 2021. Memorials submitted after Jan. 15 and approved for convention consideration will be posted on the convention website, wels.net/2021synodconvention, if they are received by June 15, 2021. Further directions can be found at wels.net/2021synodconvention. Send memorials to the President's Office, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; carla.martin@wels.net.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The synod Nominating Committee will meet in January 2021 to propose three candidates for each of the following positions to be elected at the 2021 synod convention:

- Board for World Missions: chairman (pastor)



National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

save the date

**AUGUST
3–6, 2021**

**CARTHAGE COLLEGE,
KENOSHA, WISCONSIN**

Registration will open next spring. Interested in participating?
Apply to be an instrumentalist or singer at the conference.

*Plans are contingent on the pandemic status in the coming year.

wels.net/worshipconference

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. For your CMO payment to be included in reported receipts for the month, it must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 8, 2021, will be credited as 2020 CMO, if accompanied by a 2020 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

THROUGH MY *Bible* IN 3 YEARS

1. Romans 9:14-29	11. Rom. 16:1-16	21. Ex. 32
2. Rom. 9:30-10:21	12. Rom. 16:17-27	22. Ex. 33
3. Rom. 11:1-10	13. Exodus 21:1-32	23. Ex. 34
4. Rom. 11:11-24	14. Ex. 21:33-23:19	24. Ex. 35:1-36:7
5. Rom. 11:25-36	15. Ex. 23:20-24:18	25. Ex. 36:8-37:9
6. Rom. 12	16. Ex. 25	26. Ex. 37:10-38:31
7. Rom. 13	17. Ex. 26, 27	27. Ex. 39, 40
8. Rom. 14	18. Ex. 28	28. 1 Corinthians 1:1-17
9. Rom. 15:1-13	19. Ex. 29	29. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16
10. Rom. 15:14-33	20. Ex. 30, 31	30. 1 Cor. 3, 4

NOVEMBER 2020

READ MORE AT wels.net/bible3

- Board for Home Missions: chairman (parish pastor)
- Board for Ministerial Education: three members (one parish pastor; one male teacher or staff minister from one of these districts: Arizona-California, Dakota-Montana, Nebraska, North Atlantic, Pacific Northwest, South Atlantic, or South Central; one layman)
- Martin Luther College governing board: chairman (parish pastor)
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All WELS pastors, male professors and teachers, and voting members of WELS congregations are authorized by the constitution to submit nominations by Nov. 30, 2020. Access position descriptions and the nomination form at wels.net/nomination-alert. The list of candidates will be posted online by May 15, 2021, at wels.net/nomination-alert. The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the 2021 synod convention.

ANNIVERSARIES

Cincinnati, Ohio—Beautiful Savior (50).
Nov. 1. Website, beautiful-savior.com.

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

SEE MORE AT welsrc.net/bulletinboard.

CALLED TO *eternal glory*

A reporting of deaths of called workers as noted in the call report.
Visit forwardinchrist.net/obituaries.

PASTORS

HOENECKE, ROY G.
Dec. 10, 1931–Sept. 16, 2020

TEACHERS AND STAFF MINISTERS

FUHRMANN, VERLYN A.
July 10, 1934–Aug. 15, 2020

SELL (NÉE GLAESER), LOIS M.
Feb. 22, 1933–Sept. 8, 2020

WOBECK, CLYDE W.
June 10, 1935–Aug. 27, 2020

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

— Matthew 5:4

NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP

Re: "Now I lay me down to sleep" [Aug.]

I am in my eighties, and the ending that I learned and still use [for this prayer] is this: "If I should live for other days, I pray thee, Lord, to guide my ways."

Ruth Holman
Waterloo, Wisconsin

I too have prayed the prayer "Now I lay me . . ." since childhood and will pray it again tonight. The words, however, have never created doubt about the certainty of my reaching heaven and of my salvation. I respect that Pastor Hoepfner has felt that way and agree that his revised version offers a clear positive confession of my hope. Nevertheless, I suggest that no one who prays the original version of the prayer should feel any doubt as they pray about God receiving their soul if they should die. . . .

Name withheld at author's request

RESULTS OF THE MEANS OF GRACE

I was surprised by the following statement in Peter Unnasch's article "The visible church" [Aug.]: "Where there is faithful proclamation and administration of the means of grace, there are Christians. We know this because the Lord has promised that his gospel does not return empty (Isaiah 55:10-13)." The Bible passage referred to ends with the following words: "But will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

I suppose since we know God wants "all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), the author assumes that would be the end result, but even though this is God's ultimate goal, we know it does not result in the salvation of all. I submit that we cannot know all his purposes, which might even be to convict hardened sinners of their sins. . . .

Ruth Kovaciny

The gospel is not irresistible and, of course, some will reject it. The point of Pastor Unnasch's sentence is that the gospel creates faith. It is the means of grace through which the Holy Spirit creates faith. Where it is proclaimed, there will be believers. At the same time, some may reject it.—ed.

Wedded widows and widowers

After God created Eve, he presented her to Adam. “The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23,24). Adam understood marriage and expressed it in a way that Christians still honor today, husband and wife become one flesh.

That one flesh is to remain until death breaks the bond. Many married couples have fulfilled this vow. But when death takes one, loss and sadness are felt by the one who remains. Then the questions come. What do I do now? How will I be able to go on? Who will I be able to lean on? Will I remarry? Can I? Should I?

The marriage of widows and widowers is a wonderful blessing from our gracious God.

The answers to these questions will differ from widow to widower. I have had members of the different congregations I have served remain unmarried following the deaths of their spouses. Those who have remained single rejoiced in the privilege and wonderful gift God gave in their spouse. They rejoiced to share life so intimately with another person. Some have said that no one could ever replace their deceased spouse. This is true.

It is just as true that widows or widowers can and do remarry. “A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39). I have former schoolmates, a former associate pastor, and members who were widowers and widows and wanted to remarry. They said that the blessing of marriage was so great that they wanted to enjoy it again. And the Lord in his grace blessed them with another spouse for this life.

A beautiful example of a wedded widow and widower is the later-life story of Avie, a widow, and Paul, a widower. They started dating years after their spouses died. They began sitting in church together. Members just smiled as they realized what was happening. Then they came to me for premarital counseling. I was honored that these older Christians wanted me to share God’s Word concerning marriage, even after they had been married before and longer than I was alive at the time.

I married them in August of 2012. The joy they shared was evident. They were as giddy as first-time newlyweds.

Paul and Avie continued to come to worship, Sunday Bible class, and a monthly seniors’ Bible class. They were at every church potluck or picnic. The cutest thing was that they were constantly joking with each other and holding hands wherever they went. They enjoyed holding hands—out of love at first, then out of necessity for support to keep their balance. They were with the one they loved.

The Lord blessed Paul with 98 years of grace on this earth and Avie with 95. They shared seven years of marriage grace before Jesus called Paul home to heaven in June of 2019. Avie was taken to heaven in February of 2020.

“The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ ” (Genesis 2:18). The marriage of widows and widowers is a wonderful blessing from our gracious God. When you see it happen, praise God for a living picture of Genesis 2:18!



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

Come let us adore him

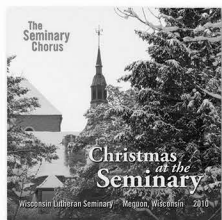
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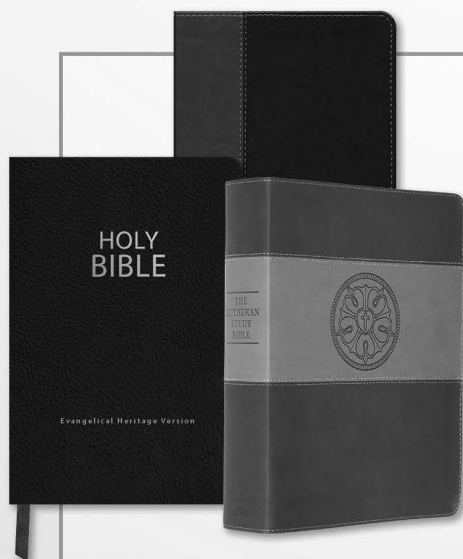
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CHRISTIAN *Love* IN POLITICS

Remember who you are as you conduct yourself during this political season.

Bethany Siegel

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EVEN THOUGH this is about politics, I'm not going to tell you who to vote for or try to convince you that Jesus would be supporting a particular side. But I want to offer some thoughts about attitudes during election times.

Here's an example of some things that trouble me. You see a post on social media from a friend whose reputation within the church is one that the apostle Paul himself would commend: church council member, Sunday school teacher, someone freely giving his or her time and talents to further God's work on earth. And yet, this person shares a video that shows a politician in a less-than-flattering, possibly slanderous, light. Maybe the message of the video is true—it's hard to tell these days. Maybe it's only edited to be inflammatory. In either case the video demonstrates how awful the politician is and how we should "wake up" to the truth. The end justifies the means, right?

And then what about the reports about those in authority or seeking office actively working to do us harm? Those posts suggest that God-fearing, law-abiding Americans have been lied to on a massive scale. Are we doing God's work by spreading this on social media?

There's another way. God, through the apostle Paul in his letter to the

Corinthians, is abundantly clear on how we should act in these very situations. For a little refresher: the church in Corinth was troubled with internal divisive arguments. Factions were emerging. Sound familiar?

Christian love means we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

So let us use those Scripture verses as we reflect on our actions as Christians in politics: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:4-6).

- Christian love means we are skeptical of biased reports that condemn the "other" side, and we do not perpetuate malicious stories that our itching ears want to hear.
- Christian love means we are ready to believe the best about others while carefully evaluating everything. We remember the plank in our own eye while we notice the speck in another's.
- Christian love means we are ready to respect others and make rational

judgments while still loving those who think differently.

- Christian love means we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, and we do not use our First Amendment right as Americans as an excuse to defame others or spread hate. That's hypocrisy and does not go unnoticed.

And so Christian friends, as Americans living in this election season, I urge you to fix your hearts and minds on the higher love of Christ and remember the words of Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment: "We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way."

What a blessing it is to discuss politics freely in our country! But what good is it to gain earthly political power, only to tear down and alienate other members in the body of Christ who hold different opinions? Do we hold our rights as Americans so sacred that we have forgotten our citizenship is in heaven and we are disciples of Jesus?



Bethany Siegel is a member at St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.