

Evangelism



Resource

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Fear in Evangelism



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EDITOR'S NOTE

"Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

I PETER 3:13-15



Why do we feel fear?

The reason is simple: we feel unable to meet the challenges of life in a sinful world.

Why do we fear evangelism

There are many reasons. In this issue of *Evangelism Resource* we will identify and discuss these three: 1) A perceived lack of knowledge; 2) The possibility of rejection; 3) The possibility of failure.

Should we succumb to this fear???

The Apostle Peter offers this wonderful encouragement: **"Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."** Peter reminds believers that there is no reason to fear what unbelievers fear. After all, the Lord is the true power in the universe. His power and love guide and govern every event of the believer's life. Though the enemies of the Lord—the devil, sin, unbelievers—try to harm believers, these enemies have no power to overpower the Lord or his Word or His Mission to make disciples of all nations.

How can we be sure of this?

Jesus Christ, God's Son, came into the world as a sinless human being. He lived a holy life. In his holy life he resisted the devil's temptation and never succumbed to any sin, evil, or fear. If anybody had reason to fear it would have been Jesus. The devil had Jesus square in his sights all the time. For instance the devil came to tempt the fasting Jesus in the desert. Despite the fact that Jesus was physically weakened by fasting for forty days, He remained strong in his trust of his Father and made the good confession. Using His Father's powerful word, he defended himself: **"It is written..."** The devil fled.

Although temptation would continue to pester him and cause him to suffer as he refused it, Jesus did not give in—ever. When he arrived at the cross, He offered up his innocence at the cross, and bore our sins in our place. When our redemption was complete, he cried out, **"It is finished!"** and gave up his spirit. Then Jesus Christ rose again and ascended! This proclaimed his victory over the devil, sin and death! His victory is the victory for all who believe!

How can we fight against fear?

We cast our anxieties on the Lord and he forgives and he strengthens and he emboldens us through His Scriptures and Sacraments. The Bible says, **"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that by endurance and encouragement in the Scriptures we might have hope"** (Romans 15:4)

In the victory of our Lord Jesus, we live as salt (a preservative) to keep pure the Word of truth. We also hold up the gospel light in this dark world as a beacon of hope for all to see. By God's gracious Spirit people will take notice. When they ask of our hope, we can speak more to them about our Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed us! This is evangelism.

In this issue of Evangelism Resource

To prepare ourselves as his witnesses, this issue of *Evangelism Resource* will address the topic of **fear in evangelism** and how we can **overcome it** in the Lord Jesus.

Fear in Evangelism



Why do we feel it?

How do we overcome it?

By Rev. Brad Kerkow

“How do I talk to my Grandmother who is sick?”

“My co-worker expressed concern that her family needs a church, but I didn't say anything about mine or invite her. Why didn't I?”

“Our Evangelism Committee is conducting a special advertising campaign for our church and they need volunteers. I know it's really important - there are so many people who need to hear of Christ's forgiveness, and our church has been “dwindling.” Part of me knows I should help, but I am afraid and so I don't.”

“There is a loudmouth at work who obnoxiously speaks out against Christianity to workmates at any chance he gets. Yet I remain silent, though strongly disagreeing with him inside.”

“How do I witness to my Father who has cancer and is dying? Why am I afraid?”

“WHY AM I AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT JESUS?” Have you ever asked yourself this question? I know I have.

At the 2007 ELS Convention, seven discussion sectionals were held to wrestle with the question, *“How does Satan work to hinder my witness?”* Below are the raw responses reported to the convention floor by each of the sectionals:

Sectional Group 1 “Self-conscious. Afraid to fail. Lack of knowledge and confidence.”

Sectional Group 2 “Inadequacy/knowledge. Speaking to family members concerning faith – how will it affect the relationship? Don't know what to say.”

Sectional Group 3 “Don't know what to say - Ignorance(?). Fear– not equipped; rejection; reception.”

Sectional Group 4 “Personal discouragement – ineffective in my witness; self-doubt. Fear of being looked in a negative light (associated with J.W. or salesman)”

Sectional Group 5 “Fears... Theological ineptitude. Not knowing all the answers. Lack of confidence.”

Sectional Group 6 “Fear, the worry of not saying right things and fear of rejection”

Sectional Group 7 “The fear of not being well enough equipped. Moses complex – fear that you are not able to speak. Fear of failure.”

Summarizing, the seven sectional discussion groups, each working independently from the others, listed fear as a reason. Most groups listed it as the *number one reason*.

As God's redeemed children who want to tell others about Jesus our Savior, this is helpful to know. Just think about it. The first step to overcoming a problem is to identify it. To overcome fear in witnessing requires us to admit that we are afraid and WHY. If we can do this, then we can identify solutions to overcome.

HERE'S THE QUESTION: *What makes me afraid to speak to others about Jesus?*

I have identified three causes:

- *A perceived lack of knowledge*
- *The possibility of rejection*
- *The possibility of failure.*

Let's discuss them.

I. A PERCEIVED LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Many Christians are afraid to witness because they feel that they will not know what to say. They think that they do not possess enough knowledge of Scripture to witness. They may feel they do not know how to describe the Gospel of Christ or their faith. They may not know how to best "go about" witnessing. Self-doubt causes many Christians to remain silent.

This self-doubt may be based in *fact* or it may just be a *perception*. For instance, an adult convert, fresh from instruction class, may *genuinely* not have a good grasp of the whole Christian doctrine to articulate his or her new faith on every point. (Why do infants need to be baptized? Why does my church practice close communion?) But it is also possible that the recent adult convert *does* have a firm grasp of the truths of the faith, but simply is not confident about what he or she knows.

WHAT DO I KNOW?

We are always to be growing in our faith. Confirmation and adult confirmation class should be the beginning of a life long journey into the Scriptures. It is my contention that for many Christians their "lack of knowledge" is only perception. (They do know it, but they don't *think* they know it.) When we know the Christian basics ("I am a sinner" "Christ died for me" "He rose again" "I am going to heaven one day" "I am saved through faith alone" etc.) and *why* they are essential, then we really have the fundamental knowledge for witnessing. In its simplest form, witnessing is describing to someone what you believe and why you believe it so that *they* may believe it!

Not even a seminary professor would claim to have the whole scripture memorized and be able to perfectly articulate it at any

given moment. Perhaps you have heard stories, perhaps you have witnessed it, how effective a little child's witness can be in boldly speaking his or her faith in the simplest of terms: "I was baptized and Jesus washed my sins away. You should be baptized too!"

Many Christians lack confidence in saying *what they do already know*. With a minimal amount of practice, Christians can express the saving knowledge they have inside their heads and hearts.

HOW MUCH DO I NEED TO KNOW?

It is not necessary to know *all* the facts about the Christian faith before one can be an effective witness. In fact, this would appear to be a nice deception for Satan to employ to prevent a Christian from *ever* witnessing. After all, when will we ever be know all the facts, in every passage of Scripture?

Robert Kolb writes in his book, *Speaking the Gospel Today*, "Often we think that the people to whom we witness will be able to offer more formidable objections to our testimony that they can, or that they will demand an uncommon degree of knowledge." (Page 262). In my ministry, I have learned this lesson. I have taught many adult instruction classes where a simple answer was all that was necessary to satisfy the student's question.

What can we Christians do to overcome our fear about a lack of knowledge, whether that lack of knowledge is real or perceived?

First of all, have faithful confidence! You probably already know what to say, and indeed, Jesus has promised to give us the words to speak. **"Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20).**

Second, listen to God's word in 1 Peter 3:15: **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."** The Lord tells us that we should *prepare* to witness. This verse is not just addressed to professional evangelists or missionaries, or pastors, but to every Christian. What are we doing to prepare ourselves? Preparation in any aspect of life takes effort. Think of the effort it takes to prepare to go on a camping trip for a week. The planning, the packing, the work to set up camp so that you can enjoy roasting marshmallows around the crackling campfire. So too, the Christian needs to prepare for witnessing to enjoy seeing the fire of the Spirit spark and give spiritual life to another. Having said that you will probably be surprised at how a little preparation produces a lot of confidence. Make use of worship and congregational Bible study. Make the effort to read your Bible every day, a little every day, and commit some key passages to memory. Ask your pastor to lead some training classes on witnessing.

In John 8:32, Jesus said, **“If you continue in my Word, you are my disciples indeed, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”** The Christian becomes prepared to witness, first and foremost, by “continuing in Christ’s Word.” There are also many witnessing tools and programs that are also available through the ELS Board for Evangelism (www.learnaboutjesus.com). His Word brings freedom in His forgiveness, freedom in the gift of eternal life, freedom to keep trying, knowing that it is never in vain.



II. THE POSSIBILITY OF REJECTION

Another cause of fear in evangelism is the possibility and reality of rejection. Sometimes rejection to Christian witness can result in *physical abuse*, putting the Christian’s safety at risk. Rejection of this sort has often occurred in the history of the Christian Church and is still happening in certain countries today (see the Voice of the Martyrs website:www.persecution.com). But, in the United States, this is extremely rare. In fact, we probably don’t know anyone that has been harmed physically because they witnessed. However unlikely it is, Christians may have fear for their physical safety if they witness.

More likely is *social rejection*. Social rejection prevents many Christians from sharing their Savior. After all, few of us enjoy social conflict. It is not pleasant to experience confrontation or to create a situation where ill feelings result, especially with friends and family members. We also fear social rejection when, we help out with an evangelism project for our congregation, a neighborhood canvass for instance.

Added to this, many Christians are aware of the trend in our society toward universalism, which teaches that all religions have truth and that “all roads lead to heaven.” Alongside this trend is another trend, to condemn Biblical Christian witness as “intolerant” and “close-minded.” Christians do not enjoy being labeled this way, simply because, in love, we proclaim what Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6)

Scripture says much about all these fears. In fact, Scripture tells us that we cannot and should not seek to avoid some level of persecution as His disciples. Jesus said, **“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”** But He also tells us that we are blessed when this happens and we should rejoice, because we have an awesome reward of grace awaiting us in eternity.

SOME BIBLE PASSAGES FOR ENCOURAGEMENT!

NIV Matthew 5:11-12 **“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**



God also promises you that he will never leave you, even when people reject you. NIV Hebrews 13:5-6 **“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”**

God promises us that He is always with us. Psalm 46:1 **“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”**

NIV Matthew 10:28 **“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”**

NIV 1 Peter 3:13 **“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’ 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.**

God is uniquely with us as believers. Our iniquities had separated us from God but Christ has reconciled us to God. 1 Peter 3:18, **“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.”**

In fact Jesus ties his presence specifically with our/the Church’s work of making disciples in the Great Commission. Jesus said,

“Go and make disciples... And I will be with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-19).

III. THE POSSIBILITY OF FAILURE

The third cause of fear in evangelism that I have identified is the *possibility of failure*. Some Christians have noted that it is easier to talk about Jesus to a complete stranger than to a close friend. Why is that? Perhaps if rejected by a stranger you can walk away, no strings attached. You will probably never see that person again. You may never think about them again. However, if rejected by a friend or family member, the consequences are far more personal. We want our loved one to believe in Jesus so that they can escape hell and enter heaven! The Apostle Paul had this attitude about his Jewish countrymen, **“I have a great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.” (Romans 9:2,3)**. Simply we don't like to feel we that “blew it” with someone we love.

Here's something that we need to keep in mind: initial “failure” is often the Lord's recipe for future success. Maybe that fallout will turn out to be a blessing of conversion later on. The law of God stings and many will not acknowledge the truth of their sin immediately. But the Lord is always working through his witness. No, not everyone will come to faith. Remind yourself: the reason for this is not our failure in some way. Remember that Pharaoh, after witnessing the Lord's hand in Egypt, only hardened his heart. Yet God assures us of His powerful and effective word, and it will achieve his purpose!

NIV Isaiah 55:10-11 **“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”**



It is the Holy Spirit that converts the heart working through the word; we are simply God's instruments. 1 Corinthians 12:3 **“Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”**

It is reassuring to know that God does the heavy lifting in evangelism. It is a relief that Holy Spirit is the Great Converter! WOW! He simply commands us to sow the seed – He will take care of the outcome.

CONCLUSION

Do you feel guilty over your failing to use a witnessing opportunity? The questions that were asked in the introduction to this article may remind you of guilt that you have over failing to witness. The Lord does not want our failure to witness to cause us to lose hope in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the comfort in our failures and in our fears. Christ forgives all of our sins, failures and guilt, by his precious and innocent blood shed on the cross. He brings us eternal victory through his resurrection. He brings us his forgiveness and eternal victory personally through the Word of God, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Remember these words of Jesus when we have fear, **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust also in me” (John 14:1)**.



I Don't Understand It, But I'm Glad It's For Me!(and You!)

Imagine sitting an ant down in an advanced math class and trying to teach the ant a complex formula that was written on the whiteboard. Of course, it would not be possible for the ant to understand the formula. It would be beyond its comprehension.

Like that ant, there are some things in life that we have difficulty understanding. For example - How large is the universe?

There is something that we also cannot fully understand, that is also very wonderful – God’s peace.

You see, we are natural enemies of God. We are born and conceived in sin. We desire and carry out actions which God tells us not to do. And we often ignore that which God wants us to do. In our natural condition you and I are enemies of God.

Here is the part we cannot understand – despite humankind’s enmity and sin toward God – he continued to love us. God carried out an act of love that was so awesome, it is beyond our understanding.

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The Almighty God allowed his one and only Son to become one of us, but without sin. Jesus Christ, a true man, was never an enemy of God – he was God!

Only this God/man could establish peace between God and humans, and the cost would be enormous – his life. It transcends our understanding, yet Christ suffered and died to save sinners – you and me!

Jesus arose from the dead proving that you have indeed been reconciled to God. In Jesus you are no longer God’s enemy!

What is more, God provides you with faith to trust in what Jesus has accomplished! He does

this through his Word and sacraments. Our peace is strong not because it is based on human reasoning or intelligence, but because it is established and provided by our loving heavenly Father.

We cannot understand this peace from God, yet it assures us that through Jesus we have a place reserved for us in heaven!

**The peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. –
Philippians 4:7**

THE GUIDING STAR TO THE WORLD'S SAVIOR

Stars. They sparkle above us on clear nights. Some people look to the stars as gods, believing they hold the answers to life. Sailors once depended on stars to steer their ships home. It is God who created the stars.

God once created a special star for a glorious purpose. Its purpose was to be a guide to someone important – the most important person in all the history of the world.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, the world's only Savior. God wanted everyone to know about Jesus.

We know the story of the wise men being led by this star to Bethlehem. While they were not Jews – God's Old Testament people – God still wanted them to know Jesus as their Savior. Being led by that star, they came a long way to worship Jesus – the King of the Jews, the world's Savior. They laid before him gold, frankincense, and myrrh.



God still wants everyone know Jesus, as He always has. He does this by means of a greater star, the written word of the Bible. The Bible is God's Word, leading us to Jesus like the star led the wise men. The Bible reveals Jesus to us by faith and teaches us all we need to know about Him. How we need Him! Our sins against God are many. For instance, who of us ever reads, knows and loves the Bible as we should? We sinners resist everything that comes from God.

Jesus did what no one else could to save us. As the Innocent One, He shed his human, yet divine blood to wash away our sins! Yes, the power of His blood has cleansed the whole world! We are saved through faith in Him, faith born of God's Bible word! We thank God for the Bible, our guiding star to the world's one Savior! It will never steer us wrong.

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

Matthew 2:1-2

Christ Shines in Our Hearts by Faith!

Throughout the Bible, the Lord uses contrasts to teach us truth about ourselves and about Him. Love verses hate. Good verses evil. Light verses darkness. What do we learn about ourselves and about the Lord in the contrast of “light verses darkness”?

Darkness is the absence of light, but Scripture also defines darkness as an absence of good. In other words, darkness is everything purely evil.

Question: Is “evil” a “who” or a “what”? Evil is a “who” AND a “what.” Evil beings do evil things. The devil is evil. Murderers, liars, thieves, and adulterers are evil, evidenced by their sins.

Since our finger is busy pointing right now, can we point out anyone else who is evil...?

Let’s do the hard thing and point the finger at ourselves. That’s right. Each of us is evil, full of darkness. How do we know this? We do evil things. We commit acts of darkness that come from our

dark hearts of sin. We may not murder, but we hate, which is the sin of murder in the heart. We may or may not have committed adultery, but we have lusted, the sin of adultery in the heart. Gulp.

We evil people need pure light if we are going to see the light of heaven. We need the LIGHT OF THE WORLD, Jesus Christ! Jesus, the world’s light, is not evil in the slightest way. Jesus, holy God himself, shrouded his glory in sinless human flesh and went to the cross, and died for sins. For three days He allowed His life to be extinguished so that evil people like us could see the light of heaven. But now He is arisen! His light will never go out!

Today His light shines out in the world through the Bible! Through the Bible, Jesus THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD seeks to shine in our hearts by bringing us to faith! He is the light of holiness and forgiveness which saves us from our dark sins! Whoever believes in him shall see the light of his glory in heaven!

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

—2 Corinthians 4:6



Lent is about Dealing with Sin

For many people, this is the worst time of year to go to church. Not because it's so cold on Sunday mornings, or for outside factors. It is because this is the time of year that we deal with sin so seriously. We call this season of the church year Lent, and focus on the suffering that Jesus Christ had to do because he paid the punishment for sin.

Dealing with sin isn't fun. In fact, it can be downright depressing. Many churches have even come up with the idea of not talking about sin because they are more interested in high attendance numbers. It is an easy temptation for all of us not to have to deal with sin.

Jesus once told a parable about dealing with sin. In the parable, a young man asked his father for his inheritance so he could lead a life of partying and pleasure. He desired to leave the hard working lifestyle behind and go have some fun. In fact, there were many people that quickly became his friends, more than willing to help him spend his money on wild living.

After the money ran out, so did his friends. It became so bad for the young man that the only job he was able to find was feeding the pigs. He was so hungry that he craved the slop that the pigs were eating. Finally, he decided to go back to his father's

house and was going to ask him to be a worker there.

When the father saw the boy coming home, he ran up to his son and threw his arms around him and held a huge banquet. He spoke these words, "For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15: 24)

Dealing with sin for this young man was not fun. He had to swallow his pride. He planned to go and ask his father to act like a servant in the household. Instead, the father rejoiced that his child had seen the error of his ways and that his son was alive again to him.

For us this message is the same. We too have sinned and done things that we regret. On our own, we often face problems that we cannot solve. But there is hope. It comes from Jesus. He wants to take our sins away, throw his arms around us, and celebrate the life that only he can give us in faith. Jesus took away your sins in his passion and death on Good Friday. On Easter Sunday his resurrection shows you that you also are alive again through faith in him!

That is the message of Lent! Putting it in that perspective, church doesn't sound that bad!

"For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

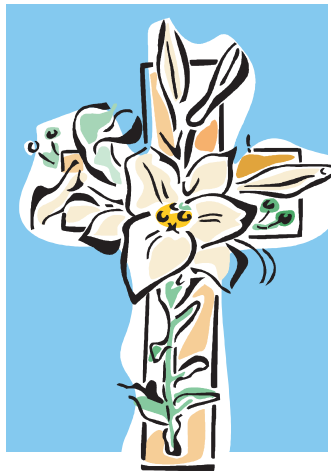
—Luke 15: 24

Jesus Rose Bodily on Easter!

No doubt you have heard the recent buzz about the television premiere of *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*. The premise behind the film is that one of the ten ossuaries found might contain the bones of Jesus.

The Bible states however, that Jesus bodily and physically rose from the dead and therefore his bones will never be found. That people reject this message should not surprise us. The passage below states, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”

The stone of course, is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has been rejected by many people down through the ages. He was rejected by his own people, including Jewish high priests and the members of the Sanhedrin, his own official representatives. He was rejected by Gentiles, the Roman government who put him to death. He continues to be rejected by people who make false claims about Jesus and deny that He rose from the dead.



Yet, let's not forget this chief cornerstone has been rejected by us too. It's possible that we can make our hearts “rock-hard” when it comes to receiving the message that Jesus is our Savior. When we cast aside the tough teachings of Jesus and the miraculous, we reject our Lord. When we rely on our own good works to earn merit with God, we reject Jesus. Anyone who rejects Jesus also rejects his forgiveness. Anyone who rejects Jesus remains in sin and the wrath of God remains on that person. Don't be that person! Rather confess your sins to God and trust in Jesus' forgiveness, which he won for you on the cross!

Jesus' mission was to rise from the dead and become the chief cornerstone. His resurrection proves that our sin-debt has been paid and our ransom secured. God the Father has accepted the sacrifice His Son made on our behalf. Jesus' mission was to be our Savior and His resurrection from the dead proves that He is! This good news is indeed “marvelous in our eyes!”

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”

— Psalm 118:22-23

God's Prescription to Make You Well!

Let's say there is a woman who is very sick. She is so sick that she cannot even get herself to her doctor. The doctor comes to her, and, after a careful examination, writes a prescription. Does that make her well? Not yet! Someone must fill the prescription for her—and thankfully—someone does. Does that make her well? Not yet! The woman must actually take the medicine to get well!

We sinners are saved like this. We are so sinful—completely infected—that we have no strength to get ourselves to God. God, the Great Physician, came to us—first with a diagnosis, then with a prescription. By his Commandments, such as, “*You shall have no other gods*”; “*You shall not use my name in vain*”; “*Honor your father and mother*”; “*Do not commit adultery*”; “*Do not steal*”; He gives us a diagnosis, which honestly, is very difficult for us to swallow: we all have sinned and are doomed to hell! But like the doctor who visited the sick woman, God filled a prescription to heal us from sin and save us eternally! He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die in order to forgive our sins, and then rise again to bring us eternal life!



Okay. But like the woman, we too have to take the medicine in order to be healed; we need to believe in Jesus as our Savior! How can we bring ourselves to believe? We can't. That's in God's hand too, God the Holy Spirit! The Apostle Peter once told his countryman, the Jews, “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*”

What is the gift of the Holy Spirit? Peter is talking about the most important gift of Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit gives us faith to believe in Jesus, and He gives it through baptism! This truth Peter learned from Jesus himself! As Jesus says, “*No one can enter the kingdom of God unless He has been born of water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5)! And also, “*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved*” (Mark 16:16).

Pentecost comes up later this month, and it is the Christian celebration of the Holy Spirit. Let's use the opportunity to learn more about the Holy Spirit's gift of faith to us through baptism and thank him for it!

“Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

— Acts 2:38

Someone To Dry The Tears!

Illness. Sudden loss. Unexpected change. Loneliness. Uncertainty. Death. At some point we all need a shoulder to cry on because of these.

Finding that shoulder is the easy part, actually. When we need to cry, there is usually a shoulder nearby. Our spouse. A parent. A good friend. What is the hard part then? Finding someone who can make the tears stop. There is really only one who qualifies. That someone is Jesus! He gives us a shoulder to cry on, but he does much more. He has the power to dry our tears and give us hope.

We learn this from Jesus' ministry, on the day when He entered a town called Nain. As he approached the town a dead person was being carried out, the only son of a widow. She was crying. Though a crowd was around her—among them friends—no one in that crowd had power to stop her tears. Then Jesus went to her and said, **“Don't cry.”**

When we were young, our moms and dads often told us, “Don't cry.” Maybe it was over a scraped knee. But their loving words didn't make the pain in our knee go away. This widow was suffering from a bigger wound. And Jesus too said, **“Don't cry.”** But when it is Jesus saying, **“Don't cry,”** that makes all the difference!



You see, Jesus came into the world to know pain and death. Jesus would soon know the worst pain ever suffered: the pain of his cross, where he would suffer hell for the sins of all. Then he would endure death. His body would be laid in a tomb. Truth is, this is the death we all deserve because of our sins—even the dead son of the widow deserved it. But Jesus wouldn't remain in the tomb. He would rise again to life! Death never had any power over him. So when Jesus went to the widow's son to comfort her, he went to her with power over death. After comforting the woman with the words, **“Don't cry,”** he then spoke words of life to her son. **“Young man, I say to you, get up!”** And he did! Jesus had given him the gift of life!

While we can't expect every pain to be healed so dramatically, there is always HOPE in Jesus! His cross tells us that all of our many sins are forgiven! The empty tomb tells us there is eternal life for every sinner who believes in him! This is the one and only “tear-drying” hope! Thank you, Jesus!

**“When the town was with her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don't cry.”
Luke 7:13**

The Still Small Voice of God

We've all had bad days. Bad hair days, bad days at work, trouble with the kids; we've all had them. Sometimes, it is a cumulative effort that makes it a bad day, where many things have gone wrong in succession. Sometimes a day can become a bad day by one big thing going wrong.

Elijah was a man who was used to bad days. An evil King (Ahab) and an even more evil Queen (Jezebel) were in charge of his country. They had brought in false prophets for their false religion and had converted many people to their lies. Because of this, the Lord had punished the land for several years with a drought. Finally, God issued a challenge through Elijah to prove which God was the true God. God sent fire from heaven to prove that He was the real and only God. Jezebel was furious and promised to kill Elijah. Elijah was afraid, so he ran and hid in a cave. In Elijah's mind: a bad day!

We are often like Elijah. We let something get us down, even when so much is going well for us. At times, it may even appear like an insurmountable challenge, something we can't get past. Our sinful nature often causes us to doubt God's promises to be with us and help us.



Instead of doing something "big" for Elijah, God came to him and comforted him. In a still, small voice God reminded Elijah he wasn't alone, that God was protecting him and that nothing could hurt him.

Just like Elijah, God has done big things for us. Jesus paid for the sins of the world. He suffered and died so that we could go free. It is amazing how quickly this can seem unimportant to us in our daily lives and we focus only on the newest problem that we face.

God answers us in a still small voice: "I am with you." "I have done all things for you." "Behold, I make all things new." He tells us that He is in charge and that Jesus has come to pay for sin by sacrificing Himself. Just listen.

**“ And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire, a still small voice.”
1 Kings 19: 12**

God Forgives Your Trespasses

“No Trespassing!” A sign like this in front of your path should make you stop. “Is there danger? What are the consequences if I keep going? Will I get hurt or will somebody fine me?” These are questions you might consider before proceeding and would probably prompt you to turn away.

In the Bible God gives us many “No Trespassing” signs. Many of these are for our good and protection.

For example God says, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY. Don’t go there. Don’t cross that line! Love your wife and protect your marriage.”

Or “DO NOT STEAL. Don’t go there. Don’t cross that line. Love your neighbor and protect his or her goods.”

Our inherent sinful nature prompts us to question the sign. “Should I really not cross the line? Will it really hurt me? It looks good over there. I can see short term pleasure! I can see worldly gain!” So often we ignore God’s signs and we cross the line.

Besides the earthly consequences, unfortunately there are also severe spiritual fines for trespassing God’s moral law – including ultimately, eternal death in hell.

Colossians 2:13 tells us, “And you, being dead in your trespasses... He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

When God raised his Son Jesus Christ from the dead on Easter Sunday, he demonstrated that he had forgiven all trespasses. His innocent Son Jesus (who had never crossed the line) had made the trespasses of others his own. He died on the cross with our trespasses and paid the fine for them with his own blood.



Believe in Jesus! Trust his message! It is what gives you spiritual life and allows you one day to cross the line that God wants you to cross - into his Heaven.

“And you, being dead in your trespasses... He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

Colossians 2:13

God's Persistence, Our Repentance

In Luke chapter 18 Jesus told a parable about two men: a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee was proud and felt that he did not need to repent of, or feel sorry about, anything. In fact, he thought he was better than other people, including the tax collector. The tax collector, on the other hand, beat his breast and cried out, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Which of these two do you think was repentant? Of course, the correct answer is the tax collector. To repent is to be sorry about our sins and to trust that Jesus is our Savior from sin. He wants us to confess our sins to Him and to trust in Him for the forgiveness of our sins.

The passage below reveals that the residents of heaven are happy when a sinner repents and has faith in Christ for his salvation. We are not to trust in ourselves, as the Pharisee did, but in Christ alone for our hope of heaven. It makes God happy when, by the Holy Spirit's work, people own up to their sin and have faith in Jesus.

It can be difficult to focus on ourselves and confess our own sins. For those who are faithful churchgoers, it is easy to think of the absentees not in God's house. For those who have been faithful

ministers, it is easy to think of those who appear to be lacking in zeal and loyalty. For those who are tireless workers in their employment, it is easy to think of those who appear to be slacking off and wasting time.

However, the tax collector provides a good example for us. He focused only on himself and what he had done wrong, not what others were doing wrong.



**The
Pharisee
AND THE
Tax
Collector**

For those who do as he did and are willing to confess their sins, they should know that God is persistent about saving them. In fact, God is persistent about saving you! He is joyful whenever one of His blood-bought children trusts in Jesus' perfection—that His perfect life is credited to them. It gives Him great happiness whenever someone hears and believes that Jesus died on the cross in their place.

The tax collector directed his attention to the proper place. He said, "God, have mercy on me..." He knew that only God could save him. He knew God would do what His Word says He is happy to do...save us!

"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

Luke 15:7

If I would take apart my wristwatch, tiny screw by tiny screw and tiny spring by tiny spring, and lay all the pieces before me on a table, I'm sure I could not put them back together again. I would be overwhelmed. I would feel very humbled. It would be best for me to leave my watch alone. Why get started on something that I can't finish?

Is our attitude toward the Bible like that? To study it seems like a project with too many pieces. *"If I start on this project, will I only get more confused? Why get started on something that I can't finish."*

The truth is that we do have trouble understanding the Bible. The Bible's God-inspired message is clear, but we don't easily understand it because of our sinfulness. In fact, without God the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't understand it at all. The Bible says, *"The man without the Spirit does not understand the things that come from the Spirit of God."* (1 Corinthians 2:4). This is humbling. But it is for our good. God leads us to realize that we are dependant on his help to understand. He provides the help!

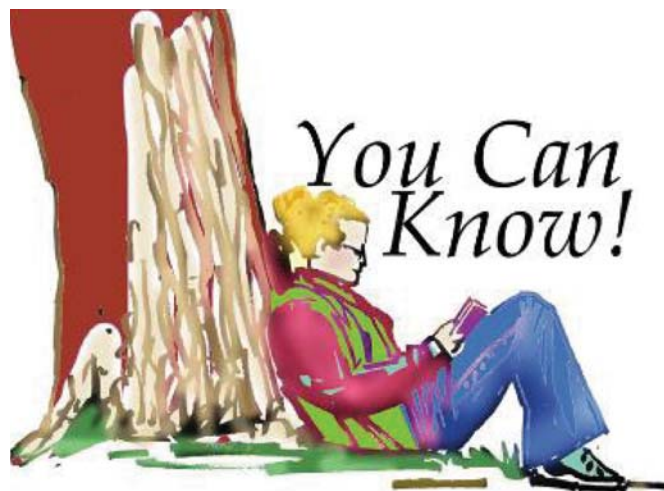
Long ago, in the Old Testament times, before Jesus came, the Lord said this, *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

God is the one who brings understanding to the mind and heart. He brings people to understand both his law and his new covenant. The law of God shows us our sins. By the law he leads us to confess our sins to him. The new covenant is his promise to save us through his son Jesus Christ. Jesus was born into the world at just the right time as a sinless human being and 33 years later died for the world's sins at the cross! When God leads us to confess our

sins and to believe in Jesus, we are saved! He becomes our God! We become his people! We are also set on the path of true understanding.

As we study the Bible with faith in the mind and heart, he leads us to an ever greater appreciation for the details of the plan he set in motion, even from

eternity, to save us from our sins through his son Jesus Christ! This is something God's people can never get enough of!



"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

—Jeremiah 31:33

In November, we start to think about one year coming to a close, and a new year starting. In fact, the new church year often starts during November.

Life is a series of beginnings and endings, some of these we look forward to and some of them we are sad to see come.

Students might look forward to graduation and also dread it because they will miss their friends. If we move a distance, we may both look forward to it and dread it. Some are purely exciting: a wedding day, the birth of a child, Christmas. Some transitions may be sad: the death of a loved one, for example.

During this time of year, the Christian Church also focuses on the end, or at least our end. Many people are terrified by death. Some people pay huge amounts of money to look young in health equipment and workouts. Others turn to surgery or medicine. Some even have taken steps to freeze their bodies at the point of death, hoping that someone will be able to eventually bring them back.



Others may not want to deal or talk about it until it comes.

Jesus doesn't want us to fear death. He came here to conquer sin, and its consequence, death. He doesn't want us to fear that transition, because for the believer, it is an entrance into something much better than anything we have here. He doesn't want us to fear it, but instead, to look forward to being with Him. We can look forward with confidence because Jesus conquered death for us on the cross as He poured out His life blood. He did it to forgive your sins and mine! Then three days after his death perhaps the most amazing transition ever took place - Jesus arose from the dead. Now we who believe in Jesus can look forward to the same transition after we die, when we enter into heaven!

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

2 Timothy 4: 8