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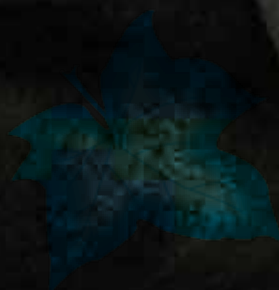
AMBASSADOR

I remember my affliction
and my wandering, the
bitterness and the gall.
I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast
within me. Yet this I call
to mind and therefore
I have hope:

Why SO Downcast

Because of the Lord's
great love we are not
consumed, for his
compassions never fail.

• Lamentations 3:19-22



Listen

BY JOAN CULLER



up

January always seems like a good time to start anew. That might include going back to the basics. What are some of the basics of a vibrant and growing life with God? Years ago when I took a spiritual formation course, our first retreat was entitled, “Attentiveness.” Attentiveness, I found, is just a fancy way of saying “listen” or “pay attention,” and it is one of the foundational principles of the Christian life.

Scripture commands us to be attentive. From the Old Testament, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) right into the earthly ministry of Jesus — when Mary is commended for sitting at his feet and listening rather than bustling about like her sister Martha — God is telling us to pause and pay attention.

Our first thought may be that if we attend worship services and study the Bible we *are* listening; and certainly this is a place where listening occurs. But true attentiveness goes a step further. We are called not only to listen, but to listen intently and connect that listening with what we do. Jesus himself says there are those who “seeing ... may not see, and hearing ... may not understand” (Luke 8:10). Listening for God’s direction should not stop when we leave the sanctuary or close our Bibles.

How can we continually listen for God? In this, as in all things, Christ is our model. There are many references to Jesus praying and even “going up on the mountain by himself to pray” (Matthew 14:23). However, reading through

the parables reveal how Jesus also connected with His Father in nature and the daily activities of life. He considered the lilies (Matthew 6:28). He served the people His Father placed in His path — the lepers, the widow whose son had died, the Samaritan woman. His disciples were the men He met — men with regular occupations of that time, not learned scribes. Jesus listened with His whole life, not just His ears.

If we are being attentive, we will find God present in our daily lives and the people around us. What opportunities are opening (or closing)? What are our gifts and talents and how can we use them? Who can we help? Who can help us? Where and how do we feel God’s presence? What gives us a deep sense of accomplishment and joy? Reflecting on these kinds of questions is a starting place for attentiveness.

Catholic social activist Dorothy Day once said, “Some people, lots of people, pray through the witness of their lives, through the work they do, the friendships they have, the love they offer and receive from people.” We can hear God through art, music, and literature. We can see Christ in the faces of our family, friends and co-workers. We can serve God in the normal things we do every day if we are willing to pay attention.

Are you listening?

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We should focus primarily on our own problems,
and require a strong burden of proof before
approaching others about theirs.

— M. Blaine Smith

Veneration and respect are always due to our blessed heavenly Father.
We are commanded to worship Him in the beauty of holiness, but for
Heaven's sake let's not lose the joy in the midst of it.

— Sherwood Eliot Wirt
“Jesus, Man of Joy”

The glory of God is a person fully alive.

— Irenaeus

All the persons of faith I know are sinners,
doubters, uneven performers. We are secure not
because we are sure of ourselves but because
we trust that God is sure of us.

— Eugene Peterson
“A Long Obedience in the Same Direction”



It is Enough



BY JASON NORLIEN

Winter is the time of year when many people suffer from depression. It has been estimated that between 5 to 25 percent of people will suffer from Major Depression in their lifetime. That seems like a lot of people! Many Christians may wonder, “Can Christians be depressed?” Indeed, we can.

In I Kings 19 we see that even a prophet of God gets depressed. Elijah had just experienced an astounding victory for the Lord by slaying all of the prophets of Baal. One would think that Elijah would be filled with joy after such a great feat for God. But he wasn’t. Jezebel was angry and vowed to hunt Elijah down and kill him. Elijah was

threatened and fearful. Verse 3 says, “And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life to Beersheba” (NASB). Other translations record Elijah’s being afraid as him actually “seeing” the danger he was facing.

Why would Elijah respond in such a way? Why would he be fearful when he knew what God could do? Why be depressed? Perhaps it was because he was drained. He spent much time preaching to his nation the need to turn from false worship. He prayed for a consuming fire of God to come, and it did (I Kings 18:38). He was drained, tired, exhausted, and worried.

In the midst of his depression, Elijah took his eyes off God and ran far away. He ran all the way to Beersheba,



which is a great deal of space away from the scene of his victory over the prophets of Baal. There he sat under a tree and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers" (I Kings 19:4). He then went to sleep.

Are we to look down on Elijah and pity him for his condition? Are we to say he was weak in his faith and thus suffered from depression? Are we to say to him, "Suck it up and move on?"

That is not what our Lord did. God, with love, mercy, and compassion, sent the angel of Lord to Elijah twice, offering him food and water (I Kings 19:5-7). God knew Elijah was depressed. God knew Elijah needed rest and

recovery. God met Elijah where he was and ministered to him at his point of need, in the midst of his depression. God let Elijah sleep and awoke him only to feed him, preparing him for what was to come.

There is a great message here to those who suffer from depression and for those who know someone who does. Depression is not a curse. It is experienced by people of strong faith and by people of weak faith. God reaches out to meet people where they are and sets an example for us to follow. We ought to reach out to those who struggle with depression and meet their needs, like God did for the prophet Elijah.

After the prophet's rest, he arises to continue his journey. He has not yet fully understood what has happened and what was to come. He continues to run toward Horeb and enters a cave (I Kings 19:8). The Lord came to him and asked, "What are you doing here?" In response, Elijah says to the Lord that he is the only one of faith left in Israel and his life is sought after (verses 9-10). It sounds like the prophet is still depressed. He feels all alone, isolated, and worthless. He needs the comfort of God.

God decides to show Elijah, once again, His great power and presence and sends Elijah to the mountain and tells him the Lord is about to pass by. First, a great, strong wind comes and breaks up the mountain rocks, but God is not in the wind. Then comes an earthquake, but God is not in the quake (verse 11). Third, God sends a fire; but, He is not in the fire (verse 12). Following the fire, God sends a gentle wind containing His voice, which humbles Elijah and meets him once again (verse 13). Elijah had to learn that God could move in mighty ways as well as in still, small ways. God is in everything.

When God, at the cave, had once again found Elijah, He asked him again, "What are you doing here?" (verse 13). One might think Elijah would answer differently this time. But he did not. He said the same as before, I am the only one left and people are trying to kill me (verse 14). Elijah is still forlorn and needs comfort. God provides comfort to Elijah by sending him to anoint two kings and a prophet to succeed Elijah (verses 15-17). God also affirms to Elijah that He has reserved a remnant of 7,000 people who are still faithful to God (verse 18). What a comfort! A direct word from God that the work of Elijah was successful. New kings, a new prophet, and many more than one who are still faithful.

The remaining verses of chapter 19 show us that Elijah was able to go and do as the Lord had commanded. Elijah received the comfort he needed and was able to anoint Elisha and begin the process of training a new prophet. We, too, can receive God's comfort in our depression and find the comfort we need to press on.

Norlien, who attends Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis, is a member of the AFLC Youth Board. He has a master's degree in marriage and family therapy and works as a psychotherapist while he pursues licensure in Minnesota as a marriage and family therapist.

Why this Sadness

BY PASTOR JERRY NELSON

Have you ever used the phrase, “Oh that’s depressing,” or “I feel depressed today”? Perhaps you just received your grades, or the day is gray and overcast, or there’s no one around and you’re feeling lonely and so you label it as depressing. The word depression is often used for many different circumstances, including our emotional states of sadness, “the blues,” or even humiliation.

In mild depression there are no outward signs; it occurs primarily in thought patterns. This may take the form of fantasies and daydreaming. In moderate depression people may be able to talk and act in their usual manner, however, the content of their speech will be more negative and may center on death, crisis, or pessimism. This is also a difficult level to assess since our society in general — and the media in particular — tend toward a negative view of life. The individual just may be reflecting his/her surrounding environment. In severe depression, the more classic signs of depression appear, but even then, some people are good at covering up their symptoms and tend to put on a happy face when around others.

What causes depression?

While there can be biological reasons for depression, generally that is not the major cause.

Interpersonal relationships, as well as internal processes such as ambivalence, rejection, abuse, anger, negative thinking, stress, guilt or shame can also be starting points that lead to depression.

What does depression look like?

Physical effects include changes in weight, decreased body movement, feeling tired, or disturbed sleep patterns. The metabolic rate may slow down, leading to sluggishness. A rapid heart beat and/or heart palpitation is not uncommon.



mon. Emotional effects include feeling down, blue, sad, worthless, upset, hopeless, or frustrated. We also look for facial expression and body posture, and listen for tone of voice. Does the person continue to look at the floor, appear sad, cry easily, or appear dejected? A person experiencing depression has little energy to devote to such things as grooming and personal appearance and may look disheveled. There also may be a shortened attention span, or daydreaming.

Depression is often referred to as emotional pain. Sometimes that pain is perceived as being so great that the person only wants to escape. Exiting this life may seem like the only option available. Ideation refers to thinking about something, in this case suicide. Some individuals make

suicidal attempts as a cry for help, as an act of revenge, or to manipulate someone. There are also individuals who are self-destructive and drive recklessly, abuse their bodies with drugs or by other means, or challenge death in various creative ways.

What can be done about it?

God made us as biological, thinking/feeling, social and spiritual beings. When someone is experiencing depression, all four aspects need to be explored and dealt with since we are whole people. We see many examples of depression in the Bible. Psalm 38 and 42 are just two examples. Read

(Continued on page 16)

Will you *Listen?*

BY MICHELE MOBLEY



The term depression is prevalent in American society. We hear advertisements for depression medication and news stories concerning the rise of depression. When our spirits are low we exclaim, "I'm so depressed!" When a friend becomes unable to cope with daily activities we wonder, "Is she depressed?"

Depression is exhibited in varying degrees. A major depressive disorder can exhibit change in sleep and eating habits, a drop in energy, trouble concentrating, and suicidal thoughts or intentions. For the purpose of this article, the term depression is speaking to one who is experiencing "a hollow or low place; low spirits; dejection" (Webster's Dictionary, 1989).

Many of the youths in your church, your home and your community are struggling with depression. Personally, I have met youths experiencing depression at the Free Lutheran Youth Convention, the Free Lutheran Bible School and in my community. Their stories tell me the events provoking their depression. Their symptoms tell me how they are trying to cope. Their desire and courage to share tell me they are looking for a hope that will not disappoint.

The events provoking depression in our youths are often similar. For some, divorce is the event which can suddenly introduce two homes, two communities, two peer groups, two churches and two different sets of rules. One young lady shared with me that her weeks were spent in one parent's home and weekends in the others. As I listened, I tried to voice her emotions. "Confused?" "Yeah," she sighed, "It's all pretty confusing."

Other stories deal with real and/or perceived expectations. Adults and youths, alike, desire acceptance and love. A mom who grew up believing she never "fit in" may encourage her daughter to dress and do those activities which give her daughter acceptance within the "popular" peer group. A father who loves his children but is unsure of how to show his love may respond to his children with silence, leading them in pursuit of his approval. Yet, when "fitting in" brings guilt and achievement yields to exhaustion, adolescents are left feeling alone and angry.

Tragically, sexual abuse is all too often deeply threaded in the stories of our youths. Often, sexual abuse remains an unspoken story. After all, how is a young girl or boy able to speak of an act they cannot physically or emotionally begin to understand?

The stories of our youths will reveal the root of their pain. The symptoms of depression are the chosen means to medicate that pain. Symptoms are not the main plot line. Symptoms are the supporting characters. Yet, when a young lady begins cutting we try to remove the act without hearing the story behind the marred wrist. When a youth group member begins drinking or experimenting with illegal drugs, we place all our efforts toward removing the addiction while leaving an untold story whose pain will lead to other destructive behaviors, bearing new addictions. For the son or daughter who has dropped out of all activities and can only be found behind a closed bedroom door, we

try to open the door with pleas for new activities and new friends. Removing the symptoms without ministering to the pain those symptoms are "medicating" will only lead the hurting soul to find new ways to cope with the pain.

How do we begin to hear the stories behind the symptoms? How do we remove the supporting characters while bringing transforming hope to a troubled story?

First, confess before God your insufficiency to change the life of a hurting girl or boy. Remember, in Christ you are a vessel prepared to extol God's power (II Corinthians 4:7). God alone is sufficient to transform lives.

Second, ask God to help you love the soul you are about to minister to. Healing words only come through a messenger who proclaims, "I love because He first loved *me*" (I John 4:19, emphasis mine).

Next, acknowledge the symptoms. Young people admire honesty! As God places you in a young person's life, begin asking him or her about that which gives you concern. "I notice the friends you are with all dress in black. Tell me about that." The untold story may not come pouring forth! That is okay. Allow time and consistency to build trust. Keep praying. Keep asking.

As the story comes into focus begin proclaiming truth. God's truth reveals sin. The young soul sitting before you may not know Jesus. Take the opportunity for the law of God to reveal sin. As the Spirit leads share the sweetness of the gospel. Maybe this will be the day when together you will confess, "For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8b).

God's truth brings light to deception. The symptoms which have been chosen to try to medicate the pain have deceived the soul. Help the young person to confess where he or she has been deceived. Where "deeds of the flesh" have been used to medicate, the student will need to confess his or her responsibility in choosing to "indulge the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21). Freedom comes as we acknowledge the inadequacy of anything to be able to relieve pain apart from Christ.

Begin to disciple the student in the Word of God, which will bear fruit unto eternal life (Galatians 6:8). Also, the Word of God will renew the mind (Romans 12:1-2). God's truth is the liberating hope the young soul has been hungering for.

Finally, be ready to ask for help. A victim of sexual abuse will need counseling. The young person who has come to depend on drugs, cutting, or any other behavior-revealing addiction may need counseling, too.

The truth brings hope to troubled stories. Will you be a vessel of God's transforming truth? Will you begin to invest in untold stories?

Mobley has a B.S. in psychology and is currently receiving further education and training in biblical lay counseling through New Haven, a biblical counseling ministry located in Sioux Falls, S.D. (www.newhavenlighthouse.org), where she serves as a volunteer biblical lay counselor.

When, you're Helpless

BY JENNIFER HOLT

Unfortunately, I remember it pretty clearly: sitting with my back against a wall, crying uncontrollably. My eyes were fixed on our three small, sweet children, playing happily, but my mind was overwhelmed with uncertainty. I was unable and/or unwilling to interact with my kids, and I couldn't picture a time when I ever would be able. Helplessness immobilized me.

This is, thankfully, a somewhat distant memory. It has been more than five years since my husband, Jason, and I asked my doctor if I was possibly suffering from depression. He suggested medication, which I started immediately, and counseling, which I have only recently begun. Looking back, I can see symptoms from my teen years on, but it has been the boot camp that is parenthood that really pushed me to seek help. I am still a work-in-progress (in this area and many others), which I hate to admit. I still have episodes of overwhelming helplessness and sadness, but they are very few and far between. And, by God's grace, there has always been hope.

My family and our church family were my first sources of support, and they were faithful and encouraging, praise be to God! Those whom I told in confidence kept it in confidence, and often shared words of hope and healing. I was never blamed for these struggles, but instead was encouraged with compassion and empathy. I was surprised how many of my brothers and sisters in Christ had been through a similar thing themselves, with family members, or with friends. That ability to relate really gave me a sense that I was still "normal" (whatever that is!), and that I still very much belonged. If I haven't thanked any of you dear people, please accept my heartfelt appreciation.

Compassionate believers who listen without judgment

are a tremendous gift to those struggling with mental health issues. I know that I have a relatively minor case of depression, but I think this would be true for most, if not all. I have found people who gracefully listened with compassion without letting me wallow. It doesn't seem easy, but I'm grateful for all who try.

God's Word is a powerful tool in any situation, and that is just as true when dealing with depression. I found particular comfort in the Psalms, where God in His infinite wisdom led King David to pen words of hopelessness that always ended in words of trust, submission, and hope in an awesome, compassionate God. Psalms 62, 63, and 121 were, and still are, some of my favorites. The Lord continually points back, throughout His Word, to how He has provided and protected His people. What a wonderful reminder that is to those who are questioning how they will make it through a day!

Everyone's experience with mental health issues is unique, just as each type has its own symptoms and hallmarks. If you want to be an encouragement, just ask how, as you would with any other medical diagnosis. I believe depression shouldn't be a "closet" subject, unless that is clearly how that individual wants it. I appreciated most when friends were matter-of-fact with me instead of making assumptions, dancing around the subject, or pretending it didn't exist. What questions can you ask? Here are some ideas, but don't stop with these — they are only starters!

How are you ... really?

Is there anything I can do to help or encourage you?

What is it like? Help me understand.

How can I pray for you?

(Continued on page 22)





A little bit of Time



BY PASTOR KERWIN SLETTTO

Depression can take many forms and be caused by any number of factors, no less for the elderly. Have you noticed that your mother is always tired? Is your grandfather increasingly grumpy and irritable?

Mood changes and signs of depression can be caused by medicines older people take for arthritis, high blood pressure or heart disease. Compound that with a chemical imbalance or changed circumstances and the likelihood of depression is multiplied.

Many times, after the death of a family member, elderly people may state that they “feel so alone,” even though they are surrounded by their children or other family members. The reason they feel so alone is because their close friends and family who experienced the growing-up years with them are no longer alive. There is no one to remember their early years with them. They are very much alone.

Sometimes stress can cause depression. The elderly worry about how an illness will affect their lives. They may feel tired and worn down and not feel like they can deal with something that makes them sad. It's important to have someone to talk to when they go through these feelings. They need our support.

How can we, the family of God, help the elderly as they pass through these discouraging times? I think you'll find that it doesn't take a lot to make a person feel special. It only takes a little bit of your time.

Patience and understanding are key. If you are visiting someone who is discouraged or depressed, don't stop for only five minutes, but take the time to visit with them. Take your coat off and stay for a while. Get the person to talk about their memories, even if it seems like they are repeating themselves.

Have you thought about getting your relative or friend to go on outings with you? Take them to go on an activ-

ity that they once enjoyed. Offer to pick the person up for church or a morning Bible study. Many times the elderly don't like to go out at night for fear of stumbling or falling. Possibly, their eyesight is failing and they can't see as well at night. Also, they need to go to bed earlier because the nursing home schedule starts early in the morning. So invite the elderly to your home for a meal during the day. By keeping contact with the elderly, it can help ease the loneliness and increase their self-worth.

Another important way to help the elderly is by taking time to pray for them — and be sure to let them know that you are praying. Ask God to show you ways to extend your hand of love and friendship. Recognize that the elderly have spent their lives helping and taking care of others, and they might feel awkward being the one served. Remind them of all the times that they were blessed by being able to serve others. Tell them that you are being blessed by being able to serve them.

Correspondence is another way you can encourage an elderly friend. Make a phone call or send an encouraging card or note to them. Remember them on their birthday or at Christmas by sending them a card or visit them. It will say so much about the fact that you care. It will lift their spirits.

So often, as people grow older and possibly enter a nursing home, they feel like they have lost their value and worth. The reality is that they have much to offer, but we, as the family of God, need to draw them out. We don't have to go to a foreign land to minister in Jesus' name. We only have to look to the elderly. We don't have to spend a lot of money; it only takes some of our time. We have a great opportunity to serve.

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Luther's Tribulation

BY DAVID NEFF

The world seemed shocked this fall when it learned that Mother Teresa experienced several decades of spiritual dryness and a profound sense of being disconnected from God.

Doubleday published *Come Be My Light*, a collection of private letters to her spiritual advisers. In those letters, Mother Teresa compared her anguish to hell. She described her spiritual state, using words like “dryness,” “darkness,” and “torture.” Such language brings to mind the “dark night of the soul” described by John of the Cross in the 16th century.

Christianity Today readers should also recall similar periods of feeling spiritually abandoned in the lives of great Protestants: Oswald Chambers and William Cowper, for example, and especially Martin Luther. It was not in Luther's monastic years, when he was struggling for acceptance with God, that he felt the absence of God most deeply. Like Mother Teresa, it was after his special experience of God's grace and after he wrote his watershed 95 theses that his periods of *Anfechtung*, his word for doubt, turmoil, and despair, came upon him. To discover grace is not to escape spiritual tribulation.

Here is a sample of how Luther wrote about his feelings of abandonment: “God often, as it were, hides himself, and will not hear; yea, will not suffer himself to be found.”

Luther described times when trying to preach or speak of Christ, “the word freezes upon my lips.” He said, “Had another had the tribulations which I have suffered, he would long since have died.”

Luther's call to be a professor forced him to find a new approach to the Scriptures and, in turn, Christian experience. According to historical theologian Robert Rosin of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, the tools of Renaissance humanism liberated Luther from medieval philosophical categories and helped him move toward a more straightfor-

ward reading of the text. Luther discovered that Christians do not approach God through a logical *ergo* (as the scholastics had done), but through a *nevertheless*. Luther learned from Scripture that Christians must look beyond their own experiences, feelings, and thoughts in order to contend for the faith.

The solution is to allow tribulation to drive you to prayer and Scripture and above all, to God's promises. Luther said:

“When one is possessed with doubt, that though he call upon the Lord he cannot be heard, and that God has turned his heart from him, and is angry, ... he must ... arm himself with God's Word, promising to hear him. As to the when and how God will hear him, this is stark naught; place, time, and person are accidental things; the substance and essence is the promise.”

Promise is a fundamental category in Luther's theology of salvation. In his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he wrote:

“For God does not deal, nor has he ever dealt, with man otherwise than through a Word of promise. We in turn cannot deal with God otherwise than through faith in the Word of his promise. He does not desire works, nor has he need of them; ... But God has need of this: that we consider him faithful in his promises [Hebrews 10:23], and patiently persist in this belief ... [P]romise and faith must necessarily go together. For without the promise there is nothing to be believed; while without faith the promise is useless, since it is established and fulfilled through faith.”

For Luther, *Anfechtung* was to be expected in the life of faith, but this subjective experience could never triumph over the objective reality of God's promises in His Word.

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Seek fellowship

(Sadness, continued from page 7)

some of the following depictions.

"I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning" (Psalm 38:6, NIV), or "My days are filled with grief" (NLT).

"I am exhausted and completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart" (Psalm 38:8, NIV). Note: The heart is the very center of who a person is; their attitudes, character, and thoughts.

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (Psalm 42:5a, NIV) "Why am I discouraged? Why so sad?" (NLT).

God created us for relationships. Whether you are the one experiencing depression, or you know someone who is, relational interaction is key. Depression may be a result of our own actions, the actions of others, or our response to their actions. Ultimately, the responsibility for our depression rests on our shoulders, or to be more biblically accurate, in our heart.

If you know someone who is depressed, be available to listen to and pray without lecturing. II Corinthians 1:4 states, "He (God) comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." What the person needs the most at this time is encouragement and hope. Sometimes just being there provides the comfort and assurance he or she may need.

If you are the person experiencing depression, you can begin to help yourself by following the advice of Dr. David Seamands:

First, avoid being alone.

Isolation is a natural tendency as it doesn't require as much physical and mental energy as interacting with others. I would add get regular exercise and get on a healthy diet since it recharges your body biochemically. Many times this is easier if you exercise with someone else (think accountability partner).

Second, seek the help of others.

This is related to avoiding being alone and is a part of the relational interaction. Remember that God made us as social people.

Third, sing.

The Bible tells us about King Saul and how his moods could only be alleviated by David's singing (I Samuel 16:14-23). Researchers are finding that uplifting music positively impacts the emotional part of the brain. David practiced praising God when he was depressed. Go back to Psalm 42 and read how David connects hope and praise.

Fourth, remember that Scripture is God's help to us.

There are many verses which are helpful, but start with the Psalms. Read the following: 6, 13, 18, 23, 25, 27, 31, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 46, 51, 55, 62, 63, 69, 71, 73, 77, 84, 86, 90, 91, 94, 95, 103, 104, 107, 110, 116, 118, 121, 123, 124, 130, 138, 141, 142, 143, 146, 147.

As you read each one, write down in a notebook what that particular Psalm means to you.

On the biological side, your doctor may prescribe antidepressants. Do not be afraid of these medications. They are meant to increase the availability of neurochemicals in your brain to

help you stabilize your mood. Your physician or pharmacist would be more than happy to fully explain the action of these medications.

On the thinking/feeling/spiritual side, what you tell yourself has an impact on who you are. Do you tell yourself what the world says, or do you believe God? If your parents, or someone else, rejected, neglected, or abused you, that set you on a particular path in developing your core beliefs. This is how you see yourself, others, the world, the future and even God, and may not be very accurate. Ask for help from someone you trust, such as your pastor or a Christian counselor, to help you differentiate the truth about yourself from the lies that are leading to depression.

Nelson, MA and MS, serves on staff at Christ is Lord Lutheran, LaCrosse, Wis.



Be STILL

“Be still, and know
that I am God.”

~ Psalm 46:10

BY PASTOR TOMASZ CHMIEL

I really like hymns and other meaningful songs. Many times these songs speak to my weary soul. Awhile ago I was listening to a Christian radio station on the internet and I heard the song, “Be still and know that He is God” by Steven Curtis Chapman. I sat on our couch for a long time as I pondered these words. They came at the right time as my wife, Miriam, and I were going through so much.

Our lives have changed a lot since we accepted the call to become AFLC missionaries on loan to EEMN (East European Missions Network), and we were feeling overwhelmed. Since my seminary graduation in May 2006, we have been busy traveling, sharing our vision for the work in the Ukraine, packing, moving, going through a lot of paperwork, finding an apartment in the Ukraine, repairing our new place, studying Ukrainian, getting to know a lot of new people, and learning to understand this new culture.

Many times we were discouraged because things did not go our way. We had a lot of unanswered questions. And then suddenly God used that song to speak to my heart. It caught me by surprise and tears started streaming down my face as I realized the depth of these words. I felt like God put His loving arm around me at that very moment. I felt that He was there for me just when I needed Him the most. I felt like He was telling me, “I am here for you. I see your struggles, I see your pain. I am your loving Father and I know what you are going through. Trust Me! Be still and know that I am faithful. Consider all that I have done.



Tomasz and Miriam Chmiel stand outside their new home in the Ukraine, where they are beginning to work as missionaries with East European Mission Network.

Stand in awe, be amazed and know that I never change.”

How I needed to hear those words! There has been a lot going on lately, but when we look back, we see that God was with us in every hard moment we went through and every difficult situation we did not know how to solve. But even though we have experienced God’s faithfulness so many times, for some reason it is still hard to trust God when new struggles come up.

But God does not change. He is always the same. In the same way He was there for us in the past, He will also be there in the future. I need to remind myself of that truth. I need to learn to be still and listen to His voice. I realize that this new year will again bring a lot of new and unknown problems. And again I will not know what to do. But I do not need to have all the answers. I need to learn to let God be God. I need to let Him work in and through me. He is my Father who loves me and cares for me. He will take my hand and lead me through everything. Even in this new year.

Chmiel is an AFLC missionary on loan to EEMN.

Look to the LIGHT

BY DAWN JOHNSON

Depression. It's not an easy subject to deal with. It affects people of all walks of life; it doesn't discriminate. If you have experienced it, then you know that it is something you never want to return to.

If you haven't, then the best way to explain it may be to say that it is like walking around in a haze — as if life is going on around you but you feel like you aren't participating in it but are just going through the motions.

Along with this are many feelings you may experience. Perhaps you feel like you are in a deep, dark pit that you can't get out of. There may be things that were important to you that you have lost interest in, as well as feelings of worthlessness, fatigue, sadness, and the list goes on.

Depression can be a fearful thing. You may not recognize when you are falling into it. It may come on gradually, but you will know when you are there. You find very little if any joy or laughter, there are many tears and it seems like there is nothing that makes your spirit sing. It is a very lonesome place even though you may be in the company of other people.

Some can deal with it through time spent with the Lord in His Word, in prayer and fellowship with Him or through the help of family and friends; some must seek medical help, but it does need to be dealt with.

Sometimes we may not understand the struggles that we face. But when we go through these times of trial in our lives we must realize that the Lord is allowing us to experience them to strengthen us and draw us closer to Him. Through all of our trials, be it depression, financial issues or relationship struggles — whatever life has for us — we can always turn to God and His Word for guidance, comfort and direction. Through His Word He gives us little



nuggets to hold onto and directions to follow. God tells us that His plan for us is for welfare not calamity, to give us a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). In I Peter 5:7 God tells us to cast all our cares on Him, because He cares for us. Psalm 56:3 tells us to put our trust in the Lord when we are afraid.

The pit may be dark and lonesome, but look up to the light that shines for you and seek the Lord with all your heart. He is there; He always is! Go to His Word, call upon Him in prayer. It is there that you will rediscover the joy, the laughter and all that you feel you have lost. "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and song and He has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2).

Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Seek the joy of the Lord and take hold of Him when you experience trials, whatever they may be. Remember the promise God has given us in Isaiah 40:31, "Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary." It is the Lord we need to seek whenever trials come our way.

Johnson, Wilson, Wis., is the executive secretary for the National WMF.

Strive for life

BY CONNIE MONSON

It is Oct. 31 and I am standing in the parking lot at Calvary Free Lutheran Church in Mesa, Ariz. Light Up the Night, a community event of lights, fun, food and good news, is in progress. This is the second year our congregation has hosted this Halloween-alternative outreach project, and much prayer and preparation has been focused on it.

An illusionist is giving a gospel presentation in a large, open tent where adults and children have gathered. I am in position to observe much of the audience and see the talking, the repeated coming and going, the restlessness and attention to candy and costume. Add to this some technical difficulty with sound equipment and it is far from the quiet, attentive audience and problem-free situations that we usually desire and strive for in ministry.

I find myself praying, almost apologizing, "O, God, this is not very conducive to Your working here. This is the most important part of the evening, and so few seem to be listening."

The illusionist completes his presentation with an invitation to all. The crowd disperses. Clean-up begins. The event is over. Wait, the response cards! They are reviewed and indicate several people answered that this was their first response to God's call and others desired to recommit their lives to God.

"O, God, forgive me for underestimating You! You

are not limited to our quiet and attentive audiences and smooth running programs. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

Thank you, God; please don't give up on me. Keep prodding me."

And He does. It is several weeks later and I'm in our backyard. Our winter grass is up, and along the edges in the rock area grass seedlings are growing. As I begin pulling them up I'm reminded of the Parable of the Sower. The seeds among the rocky places are supposed to scorch and wither, but these are green, growing and some are even resistant to being pulled up. The seed has gone down below the rocks and has found the needed soil. In this case the ground appeared to be rocky, but it was surface only. The seed is strong and striving for the life God has designed.

"O, God, your Word is Life; it goes beyond the rocky soil I see. Just like at Light Up the Night, You are not limited. Your Word is living and alive. Isaiah 55:11 says, '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.' Help me let go of my ideas and expectations and allow You to show me Your ways."

Monson and her husband, Pastor Al Monson, serve Calvary Free Lutheran, Mesa, Ariz.

Parish Ed reprints Olson baptism book

Three years ago, a grandson of Dr. Iver B. Olson contacted Ambassador Publications to obtain a copy of a book he heard his grandfather had written called *Baptism and Spiritual Life*. He was disappointed to learn that the book was out of print. About a year ago, several members of the Olson family expressed interest in seeing the book republished and offered to fund the reprinting. Thanks to the generosity of the Olson family, this project was completed in September.

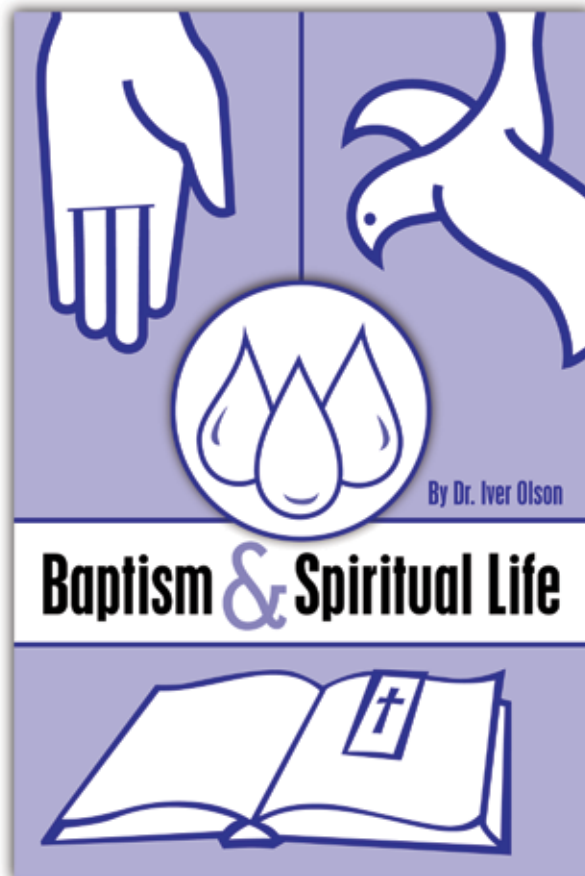
Baptism and Spiritual Life has been out of print for several years and had previously been used as a textbook at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (AFLBS) and Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary (AFLTS). The material in the book was originally presented as a lecture series by Dr. Olson in February 1951 during a Christian Workers' Conference at the Hauge Memorial Home in Minneapolis. At that time, several leaders in the Hauge Innermission Federation urged that the lectures be published, and the material was put into writing and published by The Messenger Press in 1951. The book was later republished by the AFLC in 1984. The current 2007 edition is

the fourth printing of the book.

This new edition includes a preface written by Dr. Francis Monseth, AFLTS dean, and a biographical sketch of Dr. Olson, who served as dean of AFLTS from 1966-71. Dr. Olson also wrote and published numerous articles, pamphlets, and books; translated *Spirit and Power* by Ludvig Hope into English; and was the editor of the AFLC devotional book, *Waters in the Wilderness*. He passed away in 1987.

In the preface to the 2007 edition, Dr. Monseth writes, "The reader will find in this small book a thoroughly biblical study of what for many is a little understood teaching of God's Word, the Sacrament of Baptism. The value of this material lies chiefly in its careful and clear unfolding of the many Scripture passages that treat the subject of baptism. The

author consistently substantiates his points with helpful discussion of the pertinent Bible references."



Baptism and Spiritual Life

\$7.50 plus shipping and handling
(Correlating Bible study guide and teacher manual also available for \$4.00 each)
Available from Ambassador Publications
Phone (763) 545-5631
Email parished@aflc.org

Ambassador schedule

If you have any noteworthy news items about your congregation to submit, please do so within one month of the event's happening. Please submit items of upcoming events at least two months prior to the issue's date. To contact the editors, call (763) 545-5631 or email ruthg@aflc.org or craigj@teleport.com.

Issue Date	Deadline	Issue theme
February	December 17	AFLC Schools
March	January 28	Lent/Easter
April	February 25	Missions
May	March 25	False teachings
June	April 28	Evangelism
July	May 27	Christian Education
August	June 23	Conference Review
September	July 28	Youth/FLY
October	August 25	Gender issues
November	September 22	Reform./Thanksgiving
December	October 27	Advent/Christmas

Ground-breaking held for Sioux Falls church



Members of Living Word Free Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, S.D., broke ground for their new facility on Nov. 18. Living Word, served by Pastor Wade Mobley, currently meets at an elementary school in south-west Sioux Falls. Their new facility, planned for about 19,000 square feet, is in the same neighborhood. Construction has started, and the congregation will occupy the new facility this fall.

Amery congregation dedicates new sanctuary



Members of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis., dedicated a new sanctuary on Oct. 28 in a special service with Pastor Robert Lee, former AFLC president, officiating the dedication. Work on the addition began on June 3 with a ground-breaking ceremony. Construction began soon after and was completed this fall. Lee, speaking at the Reformation Sunday service, encouraged members with the words of Ephesians 6 and I Peter 2:5 to not think of the building as a monument, but as an instrument for Christ's work on earth.

▶ November memorials

AFLBS

Edvin Iverson
Agnes Haakenson
Ingeborg Berge (2)
Becky Slack Peterson

AFLTS

Agnes Haakenson (2)
Ralph Anderson (2)
Gene Mattson

General Fund

Pastor Bruce Peterson

Home Missions

Nanna Netterlund
Ingeborg Berge
Mavis Adrian

Miriam Infant Home

Agnes Haakenson

Parish Education

Iva Lindahl

Vision

Agnes Haakenson (2)
Cody Anderson

WMF

Ingeborg Berge
Arnold Ellingsen
Albert Stegman
Jerome McCarlson
Hazel Mathre
Marian Peterson
Eleanor Nelson
Sedelle Phillips
Wayne Johnson
Lynn Kjorstad
Craig Hartsoch

World Missions

Gloria Giszler

Plan on attending ARC retreats

The Association Retreat Center, Osceola, Wis., will host several AFLC retreats this winter under the theme: "God's Plan of Salvation (Ephesians 2:4-5).

SIDExSIDE and Sno Daze, a weekend retreat for those in grades seven through twelve and four through seven, respectively, will be held Feb. 1-3. The cost is \$90 per student. Please register by Jan. 25 to avoid a \$10 late fee. A non-refundable deposit of \$25 is due when you register.

The Couples Retreat will be Feb. 15-16, with Pastor Lyndon and Linda Korhonen leading. The cost is \$125 per couple, with an option of staying Saturday night and breakfast on Sunday for an addition \$30.

For more information on the retreats listed above and other retreats, call (800) 294-2877 or visit the ARC's website at www.arc-aflc.org.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Pastor Rich Carr has accepted a call to serve Christ Community Church in Hagerstown, Md. He will begin his ministry there in early January. Carr previously served at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis.

Pastor Brian Davidson was installed as interim pastor at United Lutheran, Laurel, Neb., on Nov. 11, 2007. Pastor Elden Nelson, AFLC president, officiated at the service.

(Helpless, continued from page 10)

And don't give up! Someone who has been receptive to your loving inquiries may begin "hermitting," as I call it, and not seek out interaction. But your concern is still just as important, and they will likely respond again eventually.

I've used the phrase "without judgment" a few times, because I know of Christians who feel like outcasts after admitting depression or a suicide attempt. It is always important to be compassionate as Christians, and no more so than in the realm of mental health. I think this judgment sometimes comes from misunderstanding or misinformation. There is no "quick fix" or really, any complete fix at all, to mental health problems. Please don't expect it. And please try to gain knowledge of depression, both general (clinical) and specific (personal), since everyone's experience is unique. In any situation, we need to remember that it is not for us to judge — that is ultimately the Lord's job alone. Our responsibility is to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8). May we all be humble lovers of mercy!

Finally, please don't be embarrassed, no matter which side of this issue you are on, sufferer or supporter. Honesty and being real are so important as Christians, so we don't have false impressions of ourselves, and for the sake of anyone who is going through any given trial. I'm not saying we should glorify or exalt in our struggles, but we don't have to present ourselves as perfect (or anything close to it). Life is hard. Everyone has struggles. Depression is only one of them. Being honest about your own struggles (without being graphic or dwelling on them) allows approachability. You never know what the person who just asked you, "How are you?" is dealing with. It's my dream that the answer "fine" would be the exception rather than the rule! We can be honest without complaining or whining, and give glory to God through our struggles. And just as Paul speaks of his "thorn in the flesh," our struggles may never fully disappear. But by God's grace, they are each something we can handle. And, by God's grace, He has given us the compassionate body of Christ to walk with us through our trials. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

Holt is a member of Living Hope, St. Michael, Minn.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1 - Nov. 30, 2007

FUND	TOTAL (Subsidy)	REC'D IN NOV.	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% TOTAL
General Fund	\$361,225	\$32,387	\$351,671	97
Youth Ministries	73,114	4,336	61,221	84
Evangelism	108,236	8,304	102,999	95
Parish Education	107,052	13,913	96,130	90
Seminary	216,097	20,874	194,799	90
Bible School	343,545	26,120	322,886	94
Home Missions	316,413	32,092	286,121	90
World Missions	287,808	38,407	242,412	84
Personal Support	407,198	33,014	443,851	109
TOTALS	\$2,220,688	\$209,447	\$2,102,091	95
TOTALS 2006	\$1,994,798	\$166,547	\$1,841,120	92

Goal 92%

These are the Annual Conference-approved budgets but do not reflect all the financial needs of the departments. Contact the individual departments for further information.

comfort *the downcast*

For many years my mother had to take medication for a heart condition. Nobody told her it was a sign she was spiritually weak. Some do claim that medication should never be taken and a person with sufficient faith will be healed without it. While those views exist, most evangelicals accept that sometimes medication for the heart and other parts of the body is necessary.

It gets more complicated when the problem is with the brain instead of the heart. A lot more people believe in faith healing when it comes to that part of the body. Some question whether medication for conditions such as depression should ever be taken.



Pastor Craig Johnson

Sometimes the problem is spiritual. A person who focuses on themselves and their problems instead of the Lord is going to have trouble. Unconfessed sin can create numerous difficulties. A person who is not

in a right relationship with God is going to lack the joy of the Lord.

At times, however, the problem is physical. A chemical imbalance may exist. The right medication can restore the proper balance. It can be as much of a physical condition as when it involves another part of the body.

God created us as physical, spiritual, emotional and mental beings. Those different aspects of our being don't come neatly compartmentalized. Often it all blends together. People who have experienced the death of a loved one sometimes suffer serious physical problems soon afterward. Emotional stress can lead to physical trouble. The reverse can also happen: poor physical health can lead to emotional struggles.

The fact that we are complex beings makes diagnosing the cause of mental health problems difficult. The problem could be spiritual. It could be physical. It could be some type of combination. A person could be looking to pills to make them feel better, when what they need to do is deal with their spiritual condition. On the other hand the person may have a close relationship with the Lord, they just need medication similar to the needs of a heart patient.

I gave my mom rides to the doctor's office. I did not attempt to do the doctor's job. I wouldn't try to diagnosis her condition or tell her what pills she should or should not take. We would try to discern whether the doctor knew what he or she was doing and was qualified to do their job well. My job was to provide support and help where I could.

When it comes to mental health conditions, a lot of people think they can do the doctor's job. They act as if they are certain of the cause of their neighbor's problem. They claim to know who needs to take medication and who doesn't.

We're called to be a friend who
supports them and encourages them
and points them to Jesus.

Most of us are not equipped to be doctor for family or friends who are suffering from depression or similar conditions. They need a good physical to determine if there is a problem in that area. It would be good if they see a well-qualified professional who will hopefully give a thoughtful and prayerful diagnosis. What we can do is give them a ride. Provide a listening ear. Pray for them. Share Scripture with them in an encouraging and non-judgmental manner. We don't have to determine the cause and solution of their problems, and often we cause trouble when we try. We're called to be a friend who supports them and encourages them and points them to Jesus.

In the Old Testament we read of Job who had some terrible trials that led to emotional duress. Some friends came who thought they had all the answers. When God spoke He was more upset with the judgmental friends than Job (Job 42:7).

The apostle Paul told of being "harassed at every turn — conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (II Corinthians 7:5, 6, NIV). If Paul had conflicts and fears it should not shock us when Christians today have them. And if God comforts the downcast, then we must do the same.

association retreat center

BY PAT FLANDERS

love • feed • pray

The theme verses for the AFLC camps at the ARC in 2008 come from Ephesians 2:4-5. Each year we have the privilege of praying for wisdom in choosing the theme, which has only one requirement: it must be honoring of God (scripturally based). “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

God’s plan of salvation, according to Paul’s letter to Timothy, is for all. He writes in I Timothy 2:1-6, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.”

At the ARC we are blessed to partner with many different cultures and denominations in spreading the gospel. We are also privileged to have an AFLC leadership that stands firmly on the Word of God. While I don’t always understand or agree with the style of worship used by some of the groups who book our camp, I’ve come to understand this section of I Timothy much better. So many people are seeking Christ. I certainly will have little influence on their culture or their worship style, but I can

request, pray, intercede and give thanks for them. This is something we all can do, regardless of culture or denominational background.

As I apply this, something seems to be missing. Do I just need to pray? If God’s Word is for all, will my prayer that they hear the Word ensure that it happens?

God’s Great Commission (Matthew 28:20) gives testimony to what He wants us to do with our salvation. We have the saving knowledge of grace; go share it with those who don’t know! Jesus himself shares in Luke 10:27, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

I Corinthians 13 gives us God’s perspective on love. Love is an action verb here. It is about relationships! This is best exemplified when Jesus asks Peter, “‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep’” (John 21:17).

If God loves us and desires all to be saved, and if He tells us to do the feeding, then what are we feeding them? Feed them the Word!

Love them, feed them the Word and pray. Then they will also know God’s grace and God’s plan of salvation!

Flanders is director of the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wis.