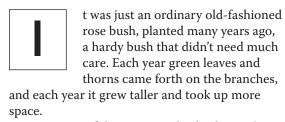


PROSPERITY



GOD CAN USE A BUSH

BY DORIS STENSLAND



For most of the summer, this bush wasn't much to brag about. It bloomed only once during the season. With their single petals, these pale pink blossoms couldn't compare with the lovely tea roses. But at blooming time, when it was covered with blossoms, it gave forth the most wonderful fragrance. A person walking down the sidewalk wanted to linger and inhale this spicy rose scent. This bush wasn't much to look at, but for a week or two it had this glorious fragrance that blessed us.

God uses bushes. A burning bush got the attention of Moses. Often we may feel like an ordinary scrub bush, quite insignificant and useless, but God looks at us and says, "You are growing in the right place and I need you." It is there in your spot on earth where God wants to use you. Do you hesitate and wonder if you are able to do what He wants? You may feel you aren't good enough. You will see that there were men listed in the Bible who had these feelings also. When you're weak, God can do great things through you.

We have been studying Gideon in our Bible class. When God wanted to use Gideon, Gideon's answer was, "You can't possibly want me!" He felt so insignificant. "I come from the lowest clan, and

I am the least in my family!" (Judges 6:15)

But God assured him, "I will be with you!" And then there was Moses. When God told Moses He needed him, Moses' response was, "You will have to get someone else. I am poor of speech."

But God promised him, "I certainly will be with you." (Exodus 3:11-12)

We see how God accomplished great things through both of these men when they surrendered to Him, followed His plans, and put their trust in Him.

Do you know what God does with scrub bushes? He fills them with His Presence and sets them aflame. He also spreads His brand of fragrance through them, making them a blessing. It is God who put the fragrance in our garden rose bush, and it is God, our Heavenly Father, who fills us with His special fragrance—love. Romans 5:5 tells us, "God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."

We can be assured that when God has an assignment for you or me, He will be with us and provide the guidance, the provisions, the courage, and the love we need. Then we can say, "Oh, Lord, we want to be blessings."

"The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not abandon the works of Your hands" (Psalm 138:8).

Stensland is a charter member of Redeemer Free Lutheran, Canton, S.D.



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soundbites

The only things we can keep are the things we freely give to God. What we try to keep for ourselves is just what we are sure to lose.

—C.S. Lewis

The grace of giving is often a tremendous stimulant to the life of faith. This is why the offering is correctly placed as part of the worship experience.

—Richard J. Foster

I never met a rich man who was happy; but I have only very occasionally met a poor man who did not want to be rich.

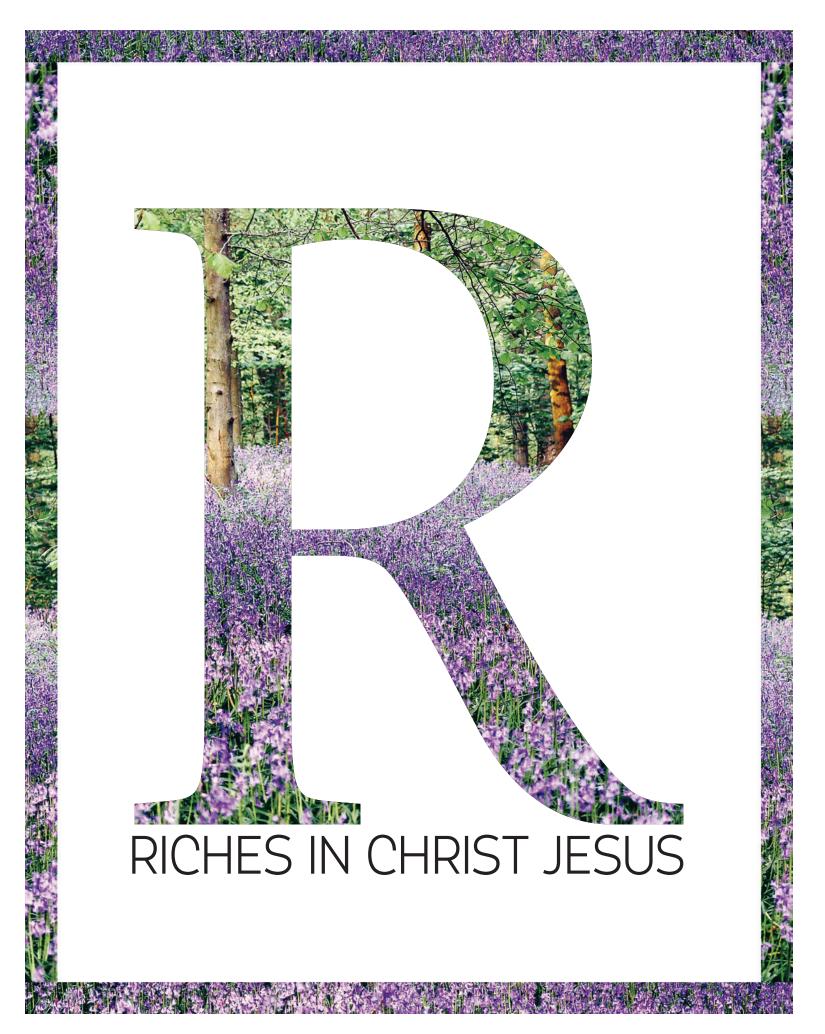
—Malcolm Muggeridge

Giving from the heart breaks the power of money, because the giver must first acknowledge the true Owner of the money and see himself or herself as merely a manager of those finances. In serving God with our money, our motives—and ultimately our actions—will be different than if our lifestyle and material desires supersede all other priorities.

—Ron Blue

There are great positives as well as refusals necessary for him who would find real prosperity. He must not only say no to the wrong, he must say yes to the right. He must not only avoid the seat of the scornful, but his delight must be in the law of the Lord.

—Clovis G. Chappell



BY WENDY WESTLAKE



e are busy people, cramming as much as we can into our full lives. I'm no different, but every now and then God gives me an experience that slows me down and resonates so deeply I know I'll remember it forever. I had one of those moments recently.

I'm married to a hyperactive pastor and we often have multiple errands to run and not enough time to do them. The first Saturday of May we were heading to Rochester, Minn., to stop at the gallery where I work, visit a patient in the hospital, get some building materials, and, of course, be back by 5:30 p.m. for youth group. I knew it was a long shot but I casually mentioned to Eric that I'd heard the bluebells were blooming in Mayowood Park and supposedly putting on quite a show. What can I say, after 28 years of marriage he can still surprise me. We went to the park.

Neither of us had ever been there and we didn't quite know what to expect. We started down the paved trail with no one else in sight. I was hoping I hadn't got it wrong. We walked about five minutes and then we started seeing them: a few pale lavender clusters of delicate blooms. As we walked we saw more of them growing close to the tree line several meters away. I wanted a better look so I ventured off the path. I could see loads of them growing in the thin strip of woods that bordered the Zumbro River. There was a little trail down a slippery, steep embankment, but Eric and I scrambled down.

We entered another world. The leaves were barely out but the trees grew dense enough to form a canopy that filtered the light. Stark trunks and branches formed a calligraphic backdrop of walls while new vegetation covered the ground and bluebells grew everywhere. I just looked in amazement. In the distance the bank widened and the bluebells grew even thicker. All the little rolling hills along the banks of the river were covered with bluebells. The farther we went the denser the flowers grew. It was surreal—the rugged woods, the river, and acres of delicate blooms. Eric and I were alone in the middle of this heartbreakingly beautiful place. I actually started to cry. The sheer lavishness of what God had done amazed me. There were no crowds, no gardeners, and no plaques to tell us what we were looking at, just millions of bluebells putting on a very lavish, transient show. I was totally overwhelmed by God's extravagance.

Ephesians is a book that says a lot about God's extravagance, but it's not a book about gardening. It describes God's lavish intentions toward us. Paul calls it "the riches of His grace." We read about our amazing, loving Father who made us alive when we were dead. (I believe Pastor Phil Haugen, AFLC Schools faculty member, refers to this condition as "fish food.") It's hard to believe; we were disobedient children of wrath, but God

made us alive. That would be more than enough, but God's intent wasn't only to save us. No, He adopts us into His family, unites us to Himself, and reveals to us the mystery of His will. All this He planned before the foundations of the world ... incredible! How can I take it in?

It's unbelievably extravagant. Yet there's more. He

THE SHEER
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gives us real kingdom work to do and equips us to do it. Ephesians 2:4-7 are my favorite verses of Scripture, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Did you catch that? He's still not done. There's more He will lavish on us. I'm not even going to pretend I can imagine what that might be. And if I'm honest I often don't grasp the magnitude of His generous intentions for me and others right now. They're so big, they seem unbelievable.

Lord, forgive me when I fail to grasp the magnitude of your grace. Help me to live in the joy of what you have done, what you are doing, and what you will do.

Westlake is a member of Our Savior's Lutheran, Zumbrota, Minn.

BY PASTOR RICH AND KAY RAMSBACHER



enerosity is defined as "the virtue of not being tied down by concerns about one's possessions." Generosity leads to charity—the virtue of giving without expecting anything in return—and forgiveness. It can involve offering your time, assets, or talents to aid someone in need.

Defining generosity is fairly simple. Living generously might seem to be quite another thing. It boils down to the two most important commands that Jesus quoted, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40). Because of your love for God, your thankfulness for all He has done for you, and with the help of the Holy Spirit abiding in you, you respond by loving and serving your fellow man. That is living generously.

In Acts 4, we see that Peter and John are jailed because "they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (1-3). After their release, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them (23). They prayed. "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (31-35). The Holy Spirit worked in the early Church to not only share the gospel message in word, but to share generously in deed, so that none had need.

How does generosity work itself out in our lives today? God has shown Kay and me His truths through His Word and in everyday life. God has given us everything we have; it is His and it is given for us to use to His glory. Once, while fishing, one of my favorite rod and reels popped out of my hand and sank in the river. My first emotion was anger. But I remembered I had told God recently that all I had was His. As I accepted that the rod and reel were no longer mine, but His, and that if He wanted it in the river,

it was okay with me, a feeling of peace came over me. I also realized God had blessed me with many other gifts, from material gifts to the gift of family.

You cannot out-give God. Kay and I saw this truth when we purposed in our hearts to tithe. At the time, we were attending church sporadically, and only giving what we had in our wallets on any given Sunday. As we increased our giving, we realized we still had as much at month end as before.

Our daughter taught us a third truth about living generously. When Katy was 4 years old, one of the high school girls at church had a rummage sale to raise money for a mission trip. We gave Katy \$20 to spend so she could help out. When I came to pick her up she had spent a whole 50 cents. As we were about to leave she asked if she could put the rest of the money in the cash box, and I said, "Sure." Everyone there tried to get her to take something more for her money, but she wouldn't. As we were driving away, I told her she had done a nice thing. She said, as closely as I can recall, that if you plant a seed it will come up and produce a crop, some multiplying 30, some 60, some 100 times. As she was telling me this, I prepared to tell her not to expect a bunch of money. But before the words come out of my mouth she continued to tell me that it may come back as love. I knew then that generosity and prosperity had come to our house.

Dr. David Jeremiah, a Christian author, sums up generosity in the picture of an open hand. If your hand is closed in a tight fist around what you already have, you cannot and will not give; those in need will not receive. If you open that hand and give (what God has already given you), not only do the needy receive, but your hand is also open to receive more of what God wants to give to you.

Generosity will look different to each person. A life of generosity is defined by not being tied down by or concerned about one's possessions, by offering time, assets, or talents to aid someone in need. What we need to remember is this: The greatest gift God gave to us is salvation in Christ Jesus. This is the greatest gift you can share with anyone.

Don't think you can do it? Remember, also, these promises: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6), and, "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

The Ramsbachers live in Springfield, Mo., where Rich serves Immanuel Lutheran Church.





BY KEVIN OLSON



ave you ever used the phrase, "take care," at the end of a conversation? I catch myself using it often, especially when I don't really know what more to say. I suppose it is an attempt to show an on-going interest in the other person's wellbeing without getting into specifics. Imagine my surprise if someone asked me a

follow-up question, maybe something like, "That sounds nice, what kind of care are you offering?" I might think twice before closing a conversation that way the next time.

To steward is to give care. Jesus stewards all of creation. Everything has been created for Him and everything holds together because of Him (Colossians 1:17). This great Steward has given you useful work to do, and parts of His creation are set aside to be cared for by you. This work was prepared for you before you even had a chance to think it over (Ephesians 2:10). You are His steward.

The words *time*, *treasure*, and *talent* are a popular way of categorizing the gifts used to care for His creation. As we use these gifts it is important to recall how all of creation still groans for relief from the consequences of sin. These consequences result in practical limitations as we go about caring for things here in this world.

A steward's time is limited. If you ask a Sunday school class, "What did Jesus do on the cross?" I suspect you will get pretty consistent answers centering on how He took the punishment for sin that we deserved. If you dig a little deeper, though, and ask what else Jesus did on the cross, you might find some who remember that Jesus made sure someone was tasked with caring for His mother. He put John in charge of her care. In fact, Jesus spent a good part of the week leading up to His death making provision for those He loved; He knew His time with them was soon over. Being honest about how much time we have and planning accordingly is part of good stewardship.

A steward's treasures have limits. God provides wisdom with regard to how and where we spend the money He provides. Even armed with this wisdom, we can never eliminate risk. There will be times when the money we give will be used in ways we didn't intend or foresee. There will be times when the money we give doesn't seem to be having the effect we think it should have. Give with prudence and ask God to mitigate the risk.

The reach of a steward's talents is limited. A few years ago I was part of a group that had the privilege of spending a brief time with a leader from the Minnesota National Guard. While we were together he mentioned that some of the soldiers under his care were deployed to dangerous parts of the world. You could tell by the tone of

his voice and the way he carried himself that he would drop everything in an instant and go help them. However, his orders were to stay in Minnesota. He had taken care to train the soldiers properly, but now had to entrust their safety to others. Maybe there is a circumstance in your

THESE LIMITS
REMIND US
THAT WE ARE
NOT GOD.

life where you desperately want to provide care but are unable. Just as our lives have seasons and those seasons run their course, so too the work of which God has made us a part will run its earthly course. Sometimes this work ends sooner than we had hoped. This might be one reason why Paul was so thankful to God for "putting into the heart of Titus the same earnest care" that he had for the Corinthians (II Corinthians 8:10). Paul realized the limits of his own care but knew that God could continue to care for them through Titus.

These limits remind us that we are not God. They also remind us that the effectiveness of Christian stewardship ultimately rests with Him. The subjects and forms of the stewardship He entrusts to us are as many and varied as creation itself. Ask yourself, how many different species of flowers has He created? Even a simple observation like that will give you a glimpse into the immense creativity of God. He has interesting ways for you to participate in the care of His creation. Your ability to steward on His behalf is not limited by your own judgment concerning your usefulness to Him. Take care from Him and you will give care to His creation.

Olson, who serves on the AFLC's Budget Analysis Committee, is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D.

BY PASTOR NATE JORE



aul warns Timothy about false teachers who "think that godliness is a means to financial gain" in I Timothy 6:3-5. The prosperity gospel appeals to a love of money for those in the pulpit as well as for those listening.

The basic doctrine of the prosperity gospel is that God wants people to be blessed with wealth and

health. Satan, on the other hand, is the author of curses and hardship, which include poverty and sickness. In an animistic culture, the belief is held that if you want to overcome a curse, you must find help from someone (a witch doctor) who is more powerful than the curse. When

THE TRUE
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that mentality seeps into the Church, people look for and put their hope in a powerful pastor whom they believe can overcome curses in their lives. As is the case with the witch doctor, the pastor requires a fee for his services. This kind of practice fits in perfectly with the animistic worldview.

For the ones in the pulpit, prosperity gospel preaching is a potentially lucrative business. After

all, who would be convinced by a message of prosperity if the one bringing the message is perceived to be poor? Some time ago, the most luxurious and expensive vehicle one could own in Uganda was a Hummer. There were only four Hummers in the country at that time, and one of them was owned by a prominent pastor. Gaudy displays of wealth are all part of the persona for a prosperity preacher because it is tangible evidence of the blessing of God on his life. The lure for those behind the pulpit is obvious: wealth, respect, and power.

Where does such wealth come from in countries like Uganda? When we first came to the city of Jinja, there was a large crusade being held which was entitled "Jinja for Jesus." Thousands of people attended the conference. With promises of tenfold blessing from God for those who gave, people lined up to contribute their offerings. Larger donors were given special offering baskets to place their money into with special blessings prayed over them. Another source of income that supplies such wealth is donors from western churches. Pleas for funding to support orphans, schools, and income-generating projects often

bring a stream of cash to the hands of the leaders.

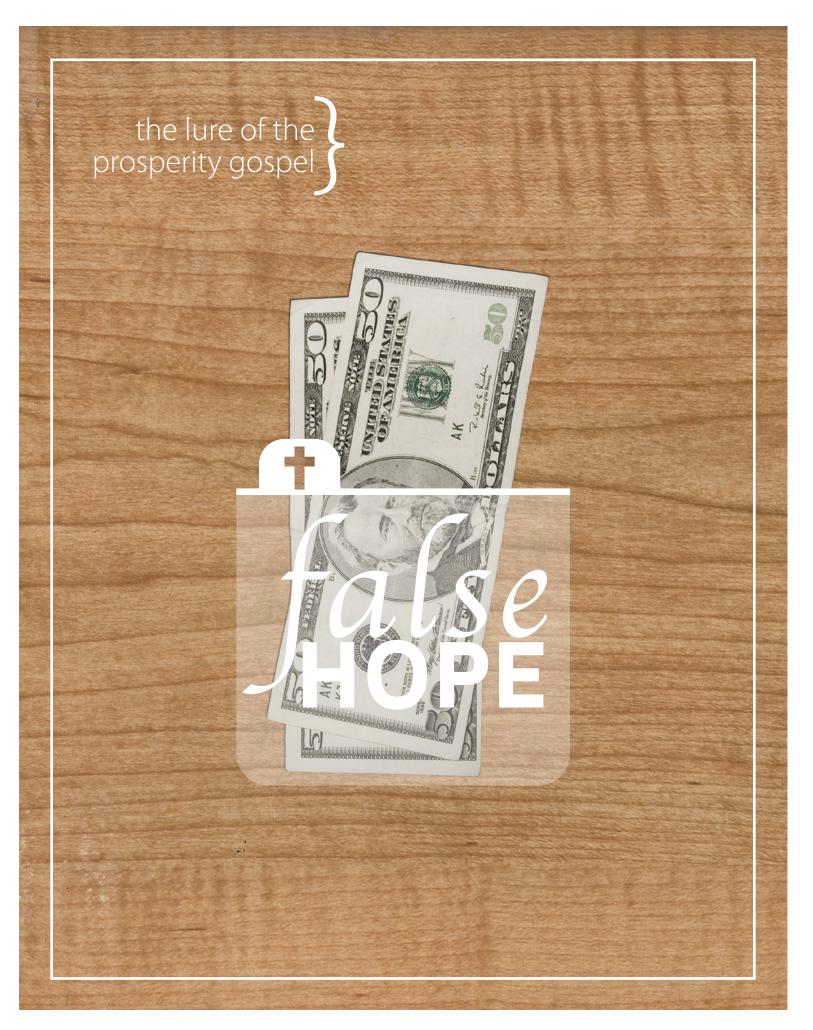
The lure of the prosperity gospel for those promoting it is obvious, but what is the lure for the common person? To answer this question, we must first try to understand his/her mind-set. One with a poverty mind-set does not see a way out of the cycle of poverty in which he is caught. What is needed to thrive and even survive is lacking, and he does not see a way of changing that. Helplessness and desperation sets in, often along with the ability to think or to make decisions rationally or wisely. Self-promotion is not an option in this situation, but if someone of means will promote him, that could be his ticket out of the poverty cycle. Prosperity preachers can fill that role as the person of means with the seeming power to pluck one from poverty and into God's favor.

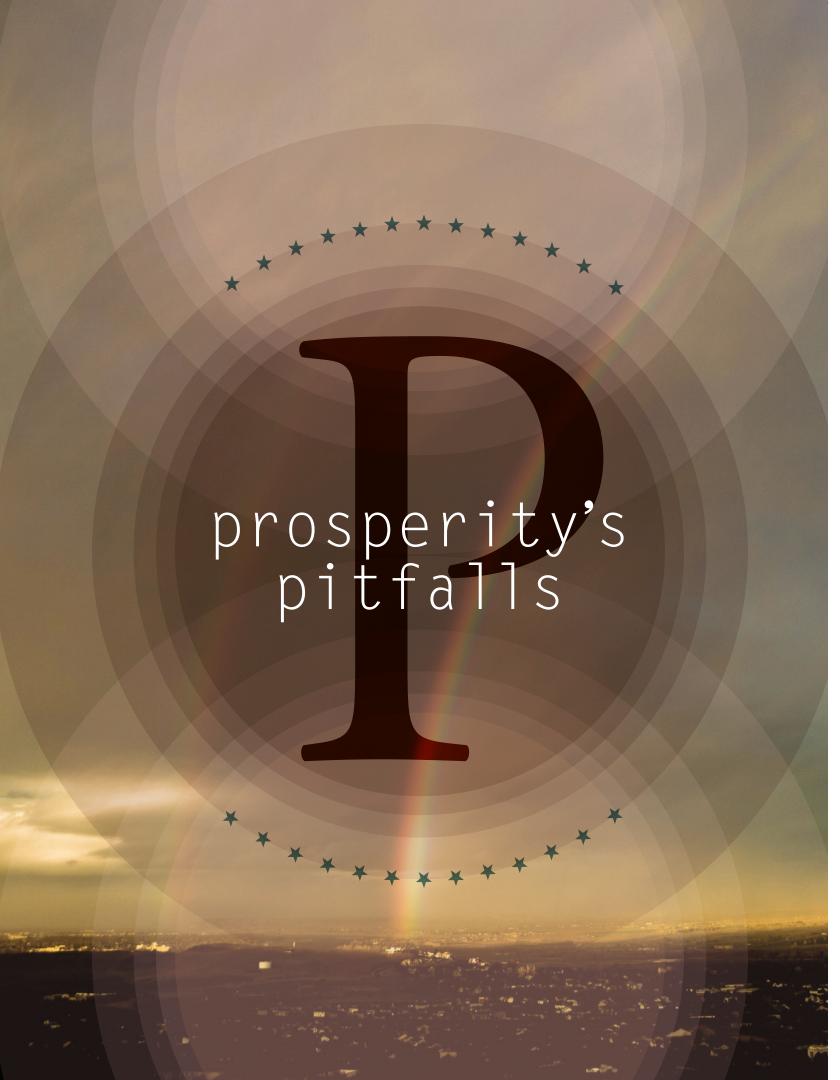
Prosperity preaching does not talk about sin and repentance, rather, it talks about God's blessing and about overcoming challenges—you get all the blessings of God without being called to account for your sin. This obviously appeals to the average person. The thought behind this preaching is that "I am basically good and, therefore, I deserve God's blessing." Prosperity preaching can be very appealing to the flesh as it promises all of the blessings that money can give. One pastor encouraged his congregation to go outside into the church parking lot and to stand in an empty parking space and claim a vehicle to park there in the name of Jesus. Prayer and fasting are often used as tools to twist God's arm into giving me what I want. Such prayers in essence pray, "My will be done," while ignoring that God may have another plan.

Unfortunately, many missionaries fall into the trap of prosperity teaching. Many try to attract people to the gospel by talking about the blessings that come in the life of a believer or about God's plans to prosper those who put their faith in Christ. While it is true that there is great blessing for those who are in Christ, if the emphasis is not on repentance from sin and surrendering to Christ, it is no different than a prosperity message. The true call to salvation is not one of blessing and riches, but a call to lay down your life, to take up your cross, and follow Christ.

The true gospel could not be more opposite from the prosperity gospel. The reality is that we are not inherently good, and we do not deserve God's blessing, but rather His wrath. We are dead in our sins and destined for hell. But God, because of His great love for us, bore our sin and paid our debt that we might be set free. And the truth remains that there is indeed much blessing for those who are truly in Christ.

Jore is an AFLC missionary serving in Jinja, Uganda, with his wife, Rhoda, and five children: Elijah, Judah, Hannah, Jeremiah, and Julia.





BY NATHAN DALAGER



ne of the first true tastes of prosperity for many of us as we were growing up was rolling those two little white dice and landing on the Free Parking square when there was a big fat pile of Monopoly money lying in the middle of the board. Oh, the satisfaction of sweeping

that glorious hoard over to your side of the board and smugly sorting all those bills onto your own piles. That was prosperity: having events work out for your benefit and ending up with more than enough.

Few things in the world are as appealing to us as prosperity. The simple chance to achieve prosperity is enough to drive millions to buy lottery tickets and is quite strong enough to keep the whole capitalist system spinning merrily along.

Even within the Church, the message that God's blessings are just waiting to pour down upon you and that His riches will jump right into your bank account is very appealing. That message has been around for a long time, and those who preach that God wants His people to prosper never seem to have trouble finding an audience.

They also have no problem finding examples from the Scriptures to back up that message: the fabulously wealthy patriarchs, streets of gold, King Solomon, and a whole stack of promises from God that He will make His people prosper. There is no lack of material for those who teach a prosperity gospel. Yet at the same time there are the examples of the rich young ruler or the rich man and Lazarus, many warnings such as "you can't serve two masters," and the example of Solomon again that teach of the dangers of riches. There are examples in the Bible of God making some rich, examples of God utterly bankrupting and destroying people, and examples of God treating prosperity and poverty as though both were utterly irrelevant. God's Word seems to be surprisingly unhelpful in answering this important question: How we can get ahead and be rich in this life?

The Bible's lack of an answer should point out to us that we are asking the wrong question.

We have forgotten Who is the main character of the Bible. It is not us. It is God. His desire for us is that He would be the Lord of our lives and that we would trust in Him and walk in His will. As fallen sinners our desires are in opposition to His. The Bible teaches that for a believer, prosperity (us getting our way and having what we want) is a dangerous condition.

I Timothy 6:10 teaches the familiar lesson that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. Verse nine warns that "those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which

plunge men into ruin and destruction." Riches, prosperity, and the drive to acquire those carry a grave risk of falling into pride and open sin. The prodigal son was not able to achieve truly rock-star levels of debauchery until he got his hands on his father's money (Luke 15:11-32). This open enticement to choose the wrong path is one obvious risk of prosperity.

The allure of prosperity poses another danger to the Church that is less obvious but no less fatal to our faith. I Timothy 6:17-18 says, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." Prosperity poses a grave danger to believers and congregations because we are so quick to take our eyes off of God and trust in the uncertainty of riches.

Living in a prosperous nation in a time of plenty allows us to add certain things to our lives. We take steps to surround ourselves with things that make us comfortable and secure. So what happens when a time of trial or testing comes? Are we are more likely to check our insurance policy or seek His will? Are we more likely to check the checkbook balance or to pray? Even congregations can have a tendency to look to their investments as they plan rather than to God. I know of several congregations that have regretted a gift given to the church because of the divisions and disputes that arose because of it. We are so quick to let money and goods take our eyes off of Jesus and the gospel.

The early Church gives us a good example of how to deal with prosperity. The New Testament church handled their property and riches in a remarkable manner. The apostles, following the example of Jesus and the guidance of the Spirit, led the church to be deliberately generous. They were holding the things of this world with a very light grip, remembering that this world was not their home. They knew that all the treasure and prosperity they might acquire here is nothing when compared to that one lost sheep. Our desire as Christians should not be to get ahead, but to cling to the salvation that Jesus bought for us on the cross.

If you hear someone sharing about how God wants you to have His blessings, are you hearing about the Cross and the message of forgiveness and salvation, or are they just talking about things that "moth and rust destroy" (Matthew 6:19)? God does not want you to just have riches and prosperity. God wants you to have the very best— Himself.

Dalager, a public school teacher, is a member of Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn.

BY PASTOR DAVID AND CHERYL SKORDAHL



ne day we all will leave this earthly abode and move on into eternity. In today's culture, as we age, it is common to consider what we will leave behind for our children and grandchildren. Frequently the focus is a legacy of money or real estate. But we have witnessed all too often families who have been fractured

and divided when the will of the departed is disclosed. So may we consider a far more important legacy than money, houses, or land?

We desire our legacy to be our children, our grandchildren, and a host of others who have been

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influenced as our lives reveal the presence of Jesus. Our fireside chats with our grandchildren have been tremendously uplifting for us and for them as we discuss various Scripture passages, sharing how these words impact our daily lives. The conversations with our grown children are blessed. Their spiritual insights and biblical knowledge astound us.

Such insights were displayed when our son encouraged his 18-year-old nephew (our grandson), explaining complex spiritual truths in logical sequence.

He shared how Zerubbabel's historical task was to rebuild the temple, Ezra's task was to beautify the physical temple by restoring the valuable gold and silver articles required for temple worship, and Nehemiah's task was to rebuild the wall of the temple. Ezra is described as a man who read the Word, studied the Word, walked out the Word, and taught the Word (Ezra 7:10). Our son's admonition to his nephew was to emulate Ezra, and in doing so beautify the temple of the body.

This is how a spiritual legacy is carried on from generation to generation. It's a comfort as well as a reward to see that our children and grandchildren have been sharing their faith and have been reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Christ.

Scripture mandates us to be in the ministry of reconciliation. II Corinthians 5:17-19 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has

passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation ..."

Since our official retirement, we have served in interim ministries to seven different churches in twelve years. Repeatedly we are aware of the need for people to be reconciled to one another. Many times we discover a certain hardness revealed in the way people relate to one another. Sometimes they use hurtful, angry words and other times no words at all, revealing broken relationships. This hardness of the heart not only degrades a relationship, it also disrupts the link with God, inhibiting the flow of the Holy Spirit in the congregation. It seems the Lord has called us to simply listen and indicate that we understand their hurt by giving an unreactive ear. We then help them look at the problem from God's perspective. Often times individuals are convicted and forgive one another wholeheartedly, which makes such a delightful difference in their relationship with Jesus.

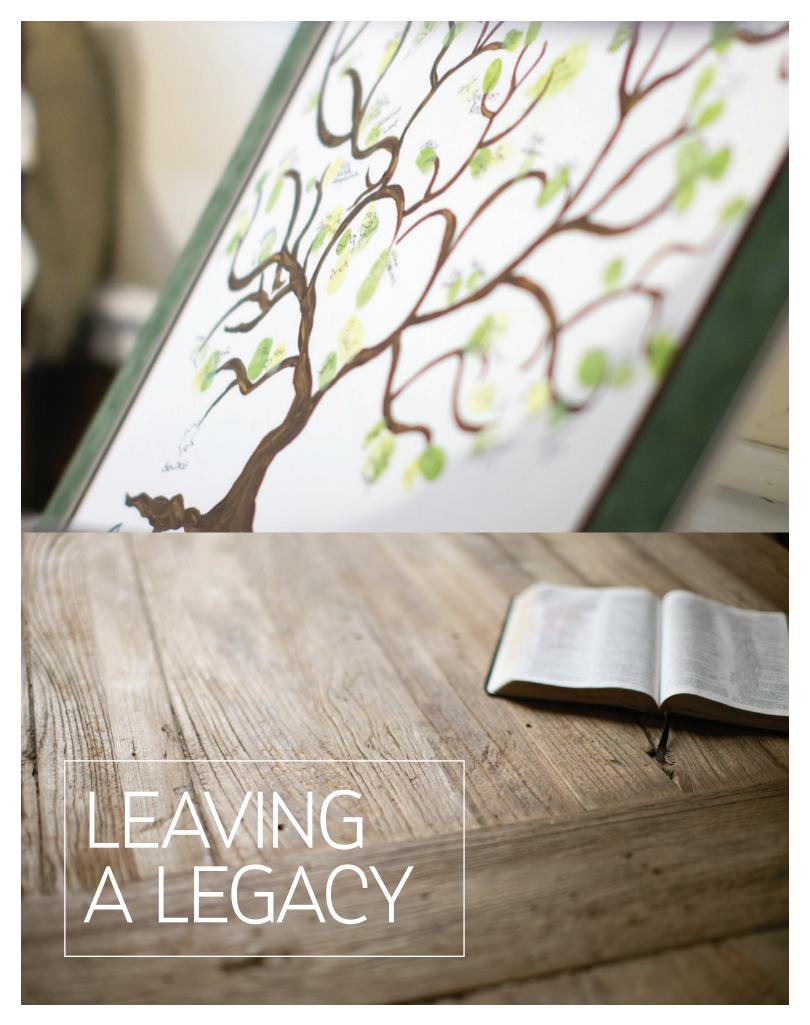
It's always a thrill to see the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of people, bringing reconciliation and restoration—a legacy. Will the Lord lead us to another interim position? It's possible if that is what God would have us do.

This past year we moved to Rogers, Minn., and reaffirmed our membership at Living Hope Church in St. Michael. Recently this AFLC congregation voted to purchase five acres of land, which includes a small church building. We want our legacy to include working side by side with the people in this congregation as together we remodel the building—scrubbing and painting, landscaping and mowing, praying and trusting.

During a recent interim at Tordenskjold Lutheran, Dalton, Minn., a young teenager walked down the aisle. She had on a sweatshirt with the words, "Today is the only day you have, so make this day fun." This is so true. Being in the center of His will is always the best place to be. All our days are numbered, and what we do with them is the legacy we will leave. Not many earthly possessions will be left to our family but we hope they will have been blessed by our passion to be faithful to Jesus and to joyfully have fun serving Him.

May it be said of us one day, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing" (II Timothy 4:7-8).

The Skordahls live in Rogers, Minn., and are members of Living Hope, St. Michael, Minn.





"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other." (Luke 16:13)



od desires to be loved sincerely by all of His children; He does not want a lip service only, but one that comes from the very depths of the heart. The only way a person can have a real and lasting peace is to surrender to this loving God and permit Him to become his personal Savior.

Many Christians seem to be living defeated lives. There is no undergirding peace in the heart and no real joy in the soul. The reason may be that they are trying to serve two masters. They are holding on to God with one hand, and clinging to the world and its pleasures with the other. Actually, it is the world they love and serve, but for spiritual security they want to hang on to God, too. Young people want to be popular with other young people, but they are afraid to confess Christ publicly. So they are miserable. If this is your trouble, have you ever thought that these people of whom you are afraid may be longing to hear a word from you about Christ?

There are other people, young and older, who have decided to live wholeheartedly for God. They have both peace and joy in their hearts; more often than not they also have the respect of those who know them. They have lost nothing, but gained everything, since they decided to renounce dual allegiance. Will you?

Rev. Ernest Langness, now deceased, served congregations in Washington, Saskatchewan, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Michigan.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. "Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls," wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.

LBT moves offices to Concordia, Mo.

Lutheran Bible Translators has announced that it is moving its global headquarters from Aurora, Ill., to Concordia, Mo. The offices will be located on the campus of St. Paul's Lutheran High School in Concordia. The partnership with Concordia High School will allow LBT to focus on international ministry while the school manages the facilities.

"We anticipate low operational costs through shared facilities and great support from a surrounding community passionate about reaching the ends of the earth with God's Word in the languages in which they can hear it," said Dr. Mike Rodewald, LBT's executive director.

Josh and Ruthie Wagner are AFLC missionaries on loan to LBT. The Wagners are currently living in Richfield, Minn., while they wait to return to work in Sierra Leone.

The offices will transition to Concordia on September 1. For more information, visit lbt.org/move.

Alumni and Friends Day

Mark your calendars for the annual Alumni and Friends Day on Aug. 1, hosted by the Association Free Lutheran Bible School. The day will feature a Golf Scramble, Disc Golf tournament, and a barbecue and silent auction at the AFLBS campus, which will include games and inflatables for kids.

A class titled, "Back to Bible School Classes," will be held in the morning, taught by Pastor Bob Lee and Pastor Phil Haugen.

Were you in the AFLBS class of 2005, 1995, 1985, or 1975? If you are interested in organizing a class reunion, please contact the AFLBS office at 763-544-9501 or aflbs@aflc.org.

ARC hosts family camp

AFLC Family Camp will be held Aug. 2-8 at the Association Retreat Center, which is located near Osceola, Wis.

Special speakers include Pastor Nate Jore, AFLC missionary to Uganda, and Pastor Brian Ricke, Living Hope Church, St. Michael, Minn. For more information on the camp, contact the ARC at (715) 294-2877 or visit the web site at arc-aflc.org.



FRUITS FOR ETERNITY

BY BECKY ABEL

ugusto and Deise Fiuri and their four children, Brazilians from the Free Lutheran work in Curitiba, are presently sharing the gospel in Switzerland. This work is the fruit

of an evangelistic campaign nearly 50 years ago in the interior of Paraná, when Augusto's parents

In 1965 John Abel moved to Campo Mourão to begin the Free Lutheran work in Brazil. He began a radio program in order to reach beyond the bounds of the city. One of the listeners extended an invitation to Pastor Abel to do an evangelism outreach in a small interior town. Augusto's mother, Lourdes, was in charge of opening the local school for the meetings. Being a typical Brazilian Catholic, she had no interest or intention of getting involved with "believers." However, the preaching of the Word that first night led her and her husband, Evaldo, to the Savior, who has changed their lives and the lives of so many through them in these past five decades.

Ridiculed and criticized for her decision to become a Christian, Lourdes remained strong

in the Lord and eventually many other family members were converted. Lourdes and Evaldo raised three children and with much sacrifice sent them to Bible camp in the summers and eventually to Bible school in Campo Mourão.

After Augusto finished Bible school he moved to Curitiba, where Paul and I had started a Free Lutheran church. Through the years Augusto was a faithful member and used his gifts in teaching and preaching in the local church. For a period of time he served as a lay pastor in the Campo Largo church while we were in the U.S. on furlough. Five years ago he sensed God leading him to Switzerland, where he now lives with his family. Through a series of events he is now pastoring a Brazilian congregation in Geneva and seeking to instruct them in the Word using Free Lutheran catechism materials from Brazil.

In May Paul and I, accompanied by AFLC World Missions Director Pastor Del and Karen Palmer, had the privilege of visiting this family and encouraging their small congregation. It is a blessing to see how God's plan unfolds. Pray for vision and direction in reaching out with the gospel to European nations, which are in great

need of hearing the Word of God and coming to know Jesus.

Evaldo and Lourdes eventually moved to Curitiba and have been a part of the Bateias congregation for years. Their testimony and prayers have influenced many lives. Each morning they wake in the early hours to intercede for their family and make their requests known to God. Although they miss having their family close to them, they rejoice in the fact that their son's family is taking the message of salvation to people in Switzerland. They could have never imagined that their relationship with the Lord would one day lead to the beginning of a mission field in another country. One by one the seeds are planted, and God continues to grow His church around the world until Jesus returns.

Abel serves as an AFLC missionary in Brazil, along with her husband, Pastor Paul Abel.



Jesus heals a blind man in John 9

BY ESTHER HYLDEN

he streets of Jerusalem were teaming with people who had made the trip to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Booths. Jesus was teaching in the

temple on the Sabbath. The crowd turned against Him, picking up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid and went out of the temple. As He passed by, He saw a blind man. Having compassion, Jesus stopped, and after mixing dirt with His spit, He placed it on the blind man's eyes.

"Go to Siloam and wash," He said. The blind man made his way to the Pool of Siloam, washed, and received his sight.

Suddenly the man's world turned upside down. He was able to see for the first time in his life. However, fear gripped his

heart as he was brought to the Pharisees for questioning. Imposing in their ornate robes, their questioning shook the formerly blind

"One thing I do know, I was blind and now I see," he answered.

"You were born in utter sin," the Pharisees declared, and they cast the man healed of blindness out of the synagogue.

When Jesus heard that the man was cast out, He didn't say, "Oh, that's too bad," and go back to what He was doing. He didn't say, "We will have to try to help him some day."

No! Having found the man Jesus said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

After Jesus explained who He was the healed man said, "Lord, I believe." And he

worshiped Him.

This is the example that Jesus left us; this is the mission of the WMF. Do we wait until the lost find us? No, we go and find them. We, the WMF of the AFLC, dedicate ourselves to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:13). Let us live our lives in such a way that others see Jesus through us and desire to know this Jesus. Come join us.

Hylden, the first vice president of the WMF, is a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D.



WHOSE SUCCESS IS IT?

BY PASTOR LUKE EMERSON



ow, how time flies by and how God is continually providing, protecting, and filling us with

His power. Looking back just a few years, my wife, Kelly, and I remember our special time of training and preparing for the ministry. Training was not just started when we arrived at seminary, it had been ongoing our entire life.

What does it mean to be prosperous? The words or thoughts that most of us think of when we hear *prosperity* are success, profitability, affluence, wealth, luxury, the good life, milk and honey, (good) fortune, ease, plenty, comfort, security, well-being ... and this list can go on and on.

Growing up as a pastor's kid (Curtis and Jane Emerson) I believed that we were the most

well-off and prosperous family in town. It was not even a thought that we were in need of anything. We were rich in Jesus and He blessed my family in so many different ways. Life continued and I was able to attend and even graduate from our Bible school. God provided yet again with a best friend and partner. Kelly and I were married and our adventure started.

I had a new focus that led us all over the country, but my focus was on prosperity for myself and my family. Money, success, wealth, luxury, comfort, and ease—this was my new focus and passion. We were good at making money but even better at spending it.

Kelly and I were blessed with two awesome children. We had everything that we ever needed, but we always wanted more. We were always looking for what would make us happy and content. We had the cars, homes, and clothes, but nothing would satisfy. We were just existing.

God got our attention through a series of bad and selfish decisions. We had taken our eyes off of Jesus and the cross and we had turned to our own strength to make it better. We had to be broken and at the end of ourselves. We had to be on our knees. And that is where Jesus began. He needed to get our full attention to prepare us to bring

glory to His name and to shine His light, share His love, and shape His people.

Philippians 4:18-20 says, "But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

God got our attention; He has worked a miracle in our lives. He is now using us in a loving and beautiful community in the heartland of the United States.

We can trust that God will always meet our needs. We must remember the difference between our needs and wants. Trusting in Jesus Christ will change our attitudes and appetites from wanting everything to accepting His protection, provision, and power to live for Jesus. Praise be to God.

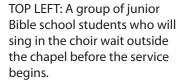
Emerson serves Newark Lutheran Church, Newark, Ill.

AFLC Schools graduate 10 seminarians, 40 Bible school students









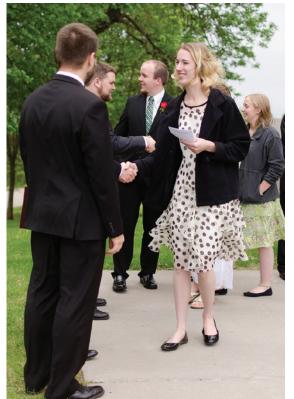
TOP RIGHT: Members of the Concert Choir sing "Day By Day," directed by Andrew Hanson.

ABOVE: Members of the Proclaim Choir sing "Lamb of God, What Wondrous Love," directed by Andrew Hanson.

FAR RIGHT: AFLBS junior Jenaya Crestik congratulates the seminary graduates following the service.

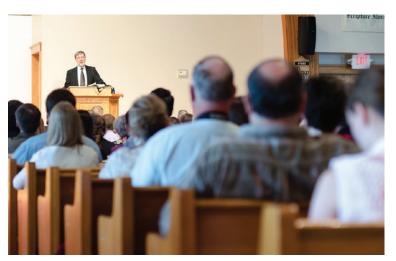
NEAR RIGHT: AFLTS graduate Nathan Olson reads Scripture.













TOP: Ten men graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary, including (from left) Jarrod Hylden, Daniel Hurner, David Lusk, Brent Raan, Ryan Tonneson, George Winston, Rob Edwards, Nathan Olson, and Daniel Antal. Not pictured is Brad Novacek.

TOP LEFT: Pastor Wade Mobley, dean of the seminary and president of the AFLC Schools, asked the seminary graduates to affirm their faith prior to receiving their diplomas.

LEFT: Pastor Robert Lee, AFLC Schools faculty, brought the commencement address.

ABOVE: AFLBS graduates Caleb Peterson, Valley City, N.D., and Emma Twedt, Fargo, N.D., welcomed family, friends and staff to the graduation service.

PEOPLE & PLACES

The AFLBS Alumni Association has hired **Emily Olson** (class of 2012) as the Alumni Relations Coordinator. In this part-time position, Olson will work remotely to serve as a point of contact for alumni relations, communications, and events in order to support the work of the Association. Olson lives with her husband and son in St. Louis, Mo.

Pastor Luke Berntson, Park River, N.D., has accepted a call to serve Maranatha Free Lutheran Church, Ulen, Minn. Formerly the director of program ministry at Park River Bible Camp, he is a 2007 graduate of the Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Fergus Falls, Minn.

Correction: Our apologies to **Nate Nash** for the error in last month's issue. Nash is currently serving as interim pastor at Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Northwood, N.D., and will continue as the youth and family pastor.

Pastor Roy Johnson has completed an interim ministry at Durant, Okla., returning with his wife LaVonne to their lake home near Bigfork, Minn. He is available for pulpit supply.

MAY MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Adam Bauer Ruth Claus Margaret Mundfrom Bertina Thorvig Judy Strand (3) Larry Olson (2) Harriet Erickson Adeline McCarlson

AFLTS

Darrell Novacek (2)
Don Tollefson
Margaret Mundfrom
Adam Bauer
Alan Davidson
Adeline McCarlson
Judy Strand
Harriet Erickson

General Fund Adeline McCarlson Alan Davidson

Evangelism

James Klesalek Adeline McCarlson Adam Bauer

Parish EducationDr. Mary Lindquist

WMF

Adeline McCarlson Agnes Dale Allyn Thompson Larry Olson

World Missions

L. James Sundby Gertrude Nelson Richard Schauland

... in honor of

World MissionsRev. George Knapp



AFLBS teams head out for summer ministry

A group of 40 current and former AFLBS students will be working at AFLC churches and camps throughout the U.S. this summer. The students form ten teams, many of which will be helping congregations with vacation Bible school programs. One team of three alumni will be working in Alaska. Pastor Paul Nash (right), director of Home Missions, helped lead the week-long training.



AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-May 31, 2015

FUND	REC ['] D IN MAY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$23,659	\$145,849	\$144,044
Evangelism	12,725	62,383	69,520
Youth Ministries	7,155	49,389	57,684
Parish Education	6,691	53,562	51,111
Seminary	20,420	109,631	103,400
Bible School	68,348	208,182	197,233
Home Missions	28,849	183,432	181,372
World Missions	28,950	149,957	204,831
Personal Support	39,822	202,445	182,206
TOTALS	\$236,618	\$1,164,831	\$1,191,402

Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.

ON PRAYING FOR PROSPERITY

he topic of prosperity in this issue has been a challenging one to address with the proper balance. You will read about the dangers of the so-called "prosperity gospel," as well as the many ways in which our gracious and generous Father in Heaven blesses His children in temporal and material ways, resulting in opportunities for us to be gracious and generous. We would agree, however, that an emphasis on spiritual blessings should be first and foremost. So, is it possible to find a proper balance?



Pastor Robert Lee

It was interesting to discover that there is a word for prospering in the New Testament, and it is only used in three verses. The meaning of the word includes a sense of success, as some translations indicate, and

some sources define it as being guided on a good way.

The first reference, Romans 1:10, connects it to the Apostle Paul's journey to Rome, which he prayed would be successful or prosperous. The second, I Corinthians 16:2, refers to the offering from the congregations in Galatia for the needy saints in Judea, and Paul instructs the believers to contribute as they have been prospered.

The third reference, III John 2, includes a form of the word twice, and strikes the balance that is needed when this topic is addressed: "Beloved friend, I pray that you are getting along well in every way and are enjoying health, just as your soul is prospering" (Berkeley Version). The NAS translation speaks of prospering in all respects, including soul prosperity. Please note that the two forms of prosperity are listed: a. spiritual prosperity ["just as your soul is prospering"]; b. material prosperity ["getting along well in every way and enjoying health"].

What does it mean to have a prosperous soul? The following verses, III John 3-4, mention two things about Gaius, to whom

John is writing, that will answer this question—the truth is in him, and he is walking in the truth. This is spiritual prosperity. When "the" is used before "truth," it usually indicates the content of our faith, the biblical teachings that we believe. In one sense, to have the truth in us speaks of our heart and mind convictions as well as our commitment to them. But it is not only "what" we believe that is important, but "the One in whom we believe," for

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), and by His Spirit He lives within us ... "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

The call to walk in the truth should not be a strange one to us. Gaius is spiritually prosperous because the truth is in him and because he is walking in it. To walk in the truth means to live what we believe—to be a doer of the Word, not only a hearer (James 1:22). It is not legalistic to

proclaim the imperatives of Holy Scripture and that Christianity is a gospel-inspiredand-empowered life to be lived.

John was joyfully assured of Gaius' spiritual prosperity (verses 3-4), and he prays that his temporal circumstances would be equally prosperous. Health is specifically mentioned, and one wonders if John was aware of a problem, but the prayer includes every area of life, "in everything," as one translation puts it. Thus, we are encouraged to pray for material as well as spiritual prosperity. "Let our garners be full, furnishing every kind of produce, and our flocks bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; let our cattle bear without mishap and without loss ..." (Psalm 144:13-14).

Motivation is important, of course. If we only seek personal gain, then our prayers are selfish ones and should not expect

answers. But we may pray for health to the One who knows our hearts, in order to live the truth, and for material prosperity to have the means to help others.

It is a challenge indeed to keep the balance in our prayers that we see in John's little letter, for our motives are mixed and stained with sin. Spiritual prosperity is eternal, and so we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

It is not legalistic to proclaim the imperatives of Holy Scripture and that Christianity is a gospelinspired-and-empowered life to be lived.

GRATEFUL TO OUR WRITERS

Each issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador* is blessed by the ministry of many gifted writers who willingly serve the Lord and our AFLC family. Some have prepared one article, while others write a series, and we are especially grateful to Liz Tonneson for her "Encouraging Words" during the past months. Liz and her husband, Ryan, have moved to Mesa, Ariz., where he serves a new Home Missions church plant.

Our new writer is Doris Stensland, a charter member of Redeemer congregation, Canton, S.D., and a published author who was honored with the 2012 Governor's Award for History from the South Dakota State Historical Society.

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

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association retreat center

GOD'S LIMITLESS LOVE

BY DAN SHILSON



teen was regularly embarrassed by his mother's continual praise of him in front of

her friends. She would say, "I'm so proud of him," "He's such a hard-working son," and, "He's an excellent example for his little brother." Even harder for the boy were the acclamations from his mom's friends. When meeting his familiar face about town, they would comment on "how handsome" or "what a nice young man" he was, or the ever-embarrassing, "He has such polite manners."

The teenager knew that he could pretend to be the person others perceived him to be, but when he heard these ovations being lavished on him, it was difficult to accept them. "They don't really know me," he would think to himself. "If they saw the person that I am inside, they wouldn't say these things." He

let his sinfulness overshadow the positive, outward expression of God's impact on his life.

Sometimes we do this very thing when we try to understand God's magnificent and unconditional love for us. There is a balance between humbly recognizing our sin yet acknowledging Christ's presence in our lives. Galatians 2:20 reveals that Christ lives within us because He loved us and was willing to give Himself up for us.

God is always with us. He desires to commune with us, He wants us to prosper, and He will most certainly save us a place at His eternal table if we embrace the gift of His love. God has always been boldly determined to reach out to all people so that they can experience the indescribable freedom and joy that can be found only in His presence.

But Satan, "the trickster" according to John 8:44, would

like nothing more than to convince us that we couldn't possibly be pure, blameless, and loved in the way that God loves us. He sends his malignant spirits to strangle the seeds of the gospel and of hope before they take root, just as Jesus talks about in Matthew 13. Satan is tireless about attacking the assurances that we have been given through Christ's words and actions. He truly wants us separated from God.

So where do we go when the devil whittles away at our confidence in our relationship with our Heavenly Father? Jesus set for us example during His experience in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) through fasting and prayer and purposeful communion with His Father. Following Jesus example of prayer strengthens us to thwart off the enemy's attacks.

Jesus' other weapon of choice is the Sword of Truth,

the Word. We are told to put His words in our hearts. Jesus responded to every temptation from the devil with a rebuke from the word of God. Committing verses to memory will be a useful tool as we respond to Satan's challenges to our faith and relationship with God. God already has victory over the devil. His infinite protection is upon us when we claim His name.

Even the Son of God needed to be strengthened after waging spiritual warfare with Satan. In like manner, we can be sure that God will strengthen us. His love, so deep that He died for us, also cares for us in life. When we are weak, He is strong.

Shilson is the director of events and marking at the Association Retreat Center.