

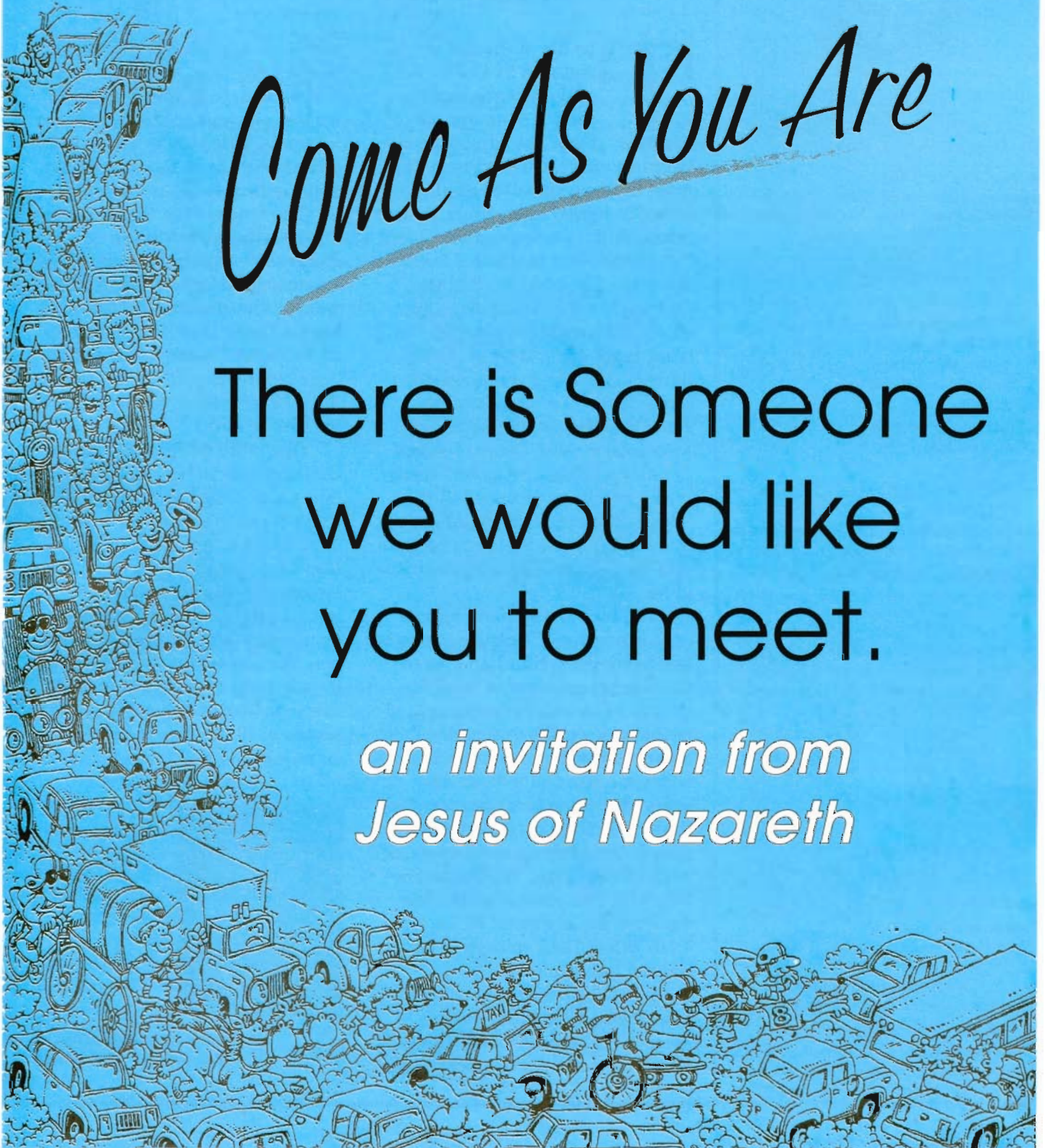
# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

March 14, 2000

*Come As You Are*

There is Someone  
we would like  
you to meet.

*an invitation from  
Jesus of Nazareth*



# THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

March 14, 2000  
Volume 38, Number 4



The magazine of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 3110 East Medicine Lake Blvd., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441. (612) 545-5631

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## AN ENCOURAGING WORD

### The Christian race

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

**T**he life of the faithful is pictured by the writer of these verses as a race. It is an apt picture. The runner needs training, effort, perseverance. He must be unencumbered, that is, travel as lightly as possible. So it is also in the Christian race.

In one town in which I lived the house I lived in fronted the highway. In the spring, from my study windows, I could watch the track team doing their running, limbering up for the coming season. Some of the members ran smoothly, almost effortlessly and with good strides. Others seemed to lumber along. One fellow, likely in the weight events, ran all the time as though he were pulling up to a stop. Comparisons can come to mind in relationship to the spiritual life.

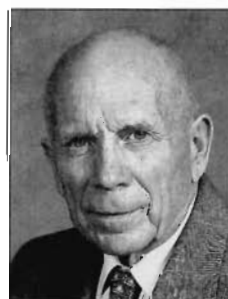
The race is begun in baptism or in conversion. Then the course is laid before him. Effort and perseverance are required, a "stick-to-it-ivism," as we sometimes say. God is able to keep His own and will do so, but Satan does not leave the believer alone and will scatter every stumbling block he can along the way. Among his trophies is a man in the Bible named Demas, of whom Paul wrote, "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone" (II Timothy 4:10). What a sad epitaph to have written below one's name.

In Reuben Youngdahl's book, *Live Today*, I read these words recently: "There are many things which on the surface appear to be

harmless, but which if indulged in weaken our lives tragically ... As we participate in worldly things, we lose our higher ideals and interests. This may cause us to be pulled away from the true center of life, which is Jesus Christ."

The true center, that's the same as the writer to the Hebrews is saying when he exhorts us to look to Jesus, Who went to the cross for us. Runners have a finish line. They press on and strain to reach it. Jesus has gone before us and He will make it possible to come safely home, if we look to Him.

One more thing. The writer challenges us to lay aside (the) "sin which clings so closely." Some think it refers to the ever present temptation to unbelief. There is also the thought that it can mean a particular sin which keeps rearing its ugly head. For you it may be a certain sin, for me a different one. The important thing is to battle whatever it is in the name of Jesus, to look to Jesus, Who is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God and prays for us.



— **Pastor Raynard Huglen**  
*Newfolden, Minnesota*



## Sound Bites



**If you want to know what God**  
**1** **has to say to you, see what Christ was and is.**

— *Charles H. Spurgeon*

Christ uncrowned himself to crown us, and put off his robes to put on our rags, and came  
**4** down from heaven to keep us out of hell. He fasted forty days that he might feast us to all eternity; he came from heaven to earth that he might send us from earth to heaven.

— *W. Dyer*

**2** When Jesus is with us, all is well and nothing seems insurmountable. But when Jesus is absent, everything is difficult. If Jesus does not speak to us inwardly, all other comfort is meaningless. But the slightest communication from him brings consolation.

— *Bernard Bangley*

He has come to share the danger as well as the drudgery of our everyday lives. He desires to weep with us and to wipe away our tears. And what seems most bizarre, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, longs to share in and to be the source of the laughter and the joy we all too rarely know.

— *Michael Card*

**5** Christianity is a rescue religion. It declares that God has taken the initiative in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins. This is the main theme of the Bible.

— *John R. W. Stott*

**6** **Jesus is a fact. He is a tremendous fact. He is an eternal ever-present fact. He is the one sure fact around which everything in heaven and earth revolves.**

— *Herman W. Gockel*



# The real Jesus

## *an authentic Savior for doubters like us*

— *Pastor James L. Johnson*

I used to wonder if Jesus was just a story. The Jesus I considered as a child in the '60s and '70s, was nice and kind and Minnesotan. I saw his picture on the Sunday school wall. He had brown hair and blue eyes. A beautiful someone in a white satin robe with a blueberry stole and brand-new sandals. He loved kids and sang songs and told stories.

Nice stories.

He was a Precious Moments Savior. A Hallmark Jesus to keep on the shelf. A nice figurine, but not that significant.

Then I began to look for the real Jesus Christ.

Like Leo Tolstoy's shoe repairman Martin Avedeitch in "Where Love Is, God Is," I stared out the basement window of my heart to see if Jesus would come and what he would look like. For Tolstoy's converted cobbler, Jesus came in his old age. For me it was during high school, at a youth Bible study. There I saw a glimpse of the radical Messiah. In the students and in the Bible, I saw Jesus as a fire. He was alive. He forgives sins. He stirred my spirit.

Then and there, I began my search of the historical record — and the story I found there, has left me hopelessly in awe of the King.

He sawed wood and planed doors in a Galilee wood shop. A man who, at age 30, drew fans and opponents. They loved Him or hated Him.

Little children jump in His lap. I picture them running toward Him through the hallway, like my kids run when I come home from work, scrambling

and hugging Him through His robe, around the legs.

When He was a baby, two senior citizens hold Him in their arms and squeeze His torso and praise God and say: "Now I can die."

Here is a man who can talk an internal revenue service manager into quitting his upwardly mobile career to join His ministry with the words, "Follow me" — and Matthew comes. Here is a man who deliberately chooses to surround Himself with a band of nobodies with northern Israeli accents, uneducated, disrespected, and far too young. With one speech He causes thousands of followers to leave. He doesn't beg them to come back. From the religious, rich and famous, He engenders angry, mocking criticism. From the thieves, rejects and never-do-wells, He attracts hopeful, happy stares. He was a man people wanted to throw off a cliff. When they try, He stops them with a glance. He strides through the lynching party like through so much dry grass.

Intriguing history.

Stunning reality. He stares down intellectuals and makes lawyers sulk away. He tells crowds He came to die for them. He rises from deadness three days after being buried in a hole — never to die again. A man who beats death. A man who rises away into the clouds. A man who, unlike "Titanic" film director James Cameron, can say, "I'm king of the world." And it is no exaggeration.

Mark Twain, in a revealing moment, said that what bothered him about the Bible was not what he didn't understand — but what he did understand.

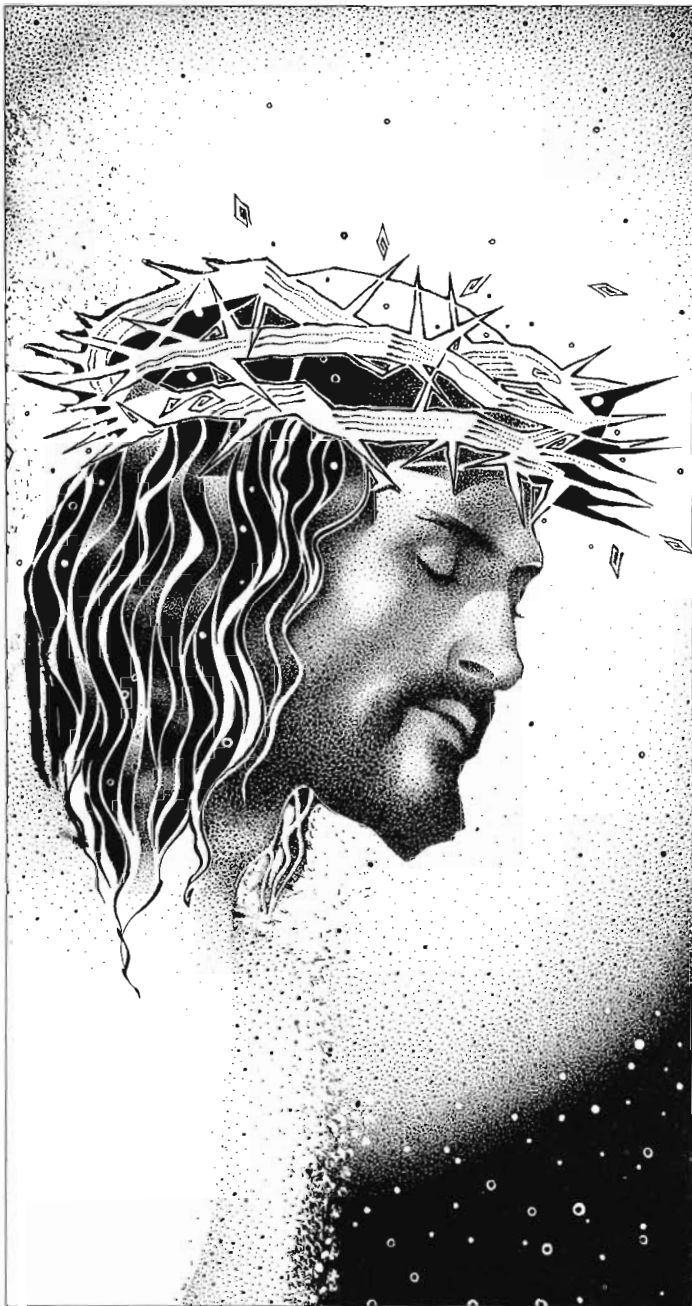
I know what he means. The primary source documents, as preserved in the Bible, stagger the imagination. At least for me. Jesus, with His heavenly Father, creates the world. Humanity falls into sin. So God sends Jesus to the rescue. He grows up in the home of a Jewish carpenter, a mother many assumed gave birth to Him out of wedlock, four brothers and at least two sisters, in the dingy, nowhere town of Nazareth. At the age of 30, His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas mock Him out of the house, then come to believe in Him only after He is gone. Pressed by the Jews, the Roman government nail Him to a cross. In an ugly execution — more brutal than any hangman's noose or firing squad of the 1800s, any electric chair of the 1900s, any lethal injection of today — Jesus is crucified. He bleeds for six hours.

The soldier who watches the final hours of his execution hangs his head and says, after Jesus grunts out his last breath, "This man was innocent." From just a few yards away, the soldier knows Jesus to be no

story. He knows Him to be real. He says, "Surely this was the Son of God."

Despite two professional security agents watching to ensure a garden tomb is secure, Jesus rises from the dead and walks away from the empty tomb — the reality, perhaps, that troubled Samuel Clemens the most. He appears to 500-some people in a 40-day span. He eats breakfast with them. He walks with them. He lives with them. And then, while they stare, He is lifted into the stratosphere, as He told them would happen. An angel appears and says, "Why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go?"

No mythological figure — but a real, live God. A King who spits on the ground and wipes the mud on a blind



person's eyelid and says, "See," and he sees. A Savior who falls asleep in the bottom of a boat. He cries. He laughs. He kicks the street vendors out of the Temple. He turns over tables.

Sure, I had questions.

Can you really just call Him a good teacher? He claimed to be God. And as one literary figure, C.S. Lewis, explained it, any great teacher who claimed to be God Himself can logically be placed in but one of three categories: He is Lord, liar, or lunatic. Could a teacher be good if He lied about his divinity? And if He is not lying, He is either Lord as He claimed — or sincerely deceived. Stark, raving mad.

Moreover, I asked, how God could put skin on? How could He come and live for 33 years and never sin? And how could it be, as it says in Isaiah 53, that He would have "no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

**He was Jesus, born plain, in a back-country town, from a blue-collar home where His brothers dismissed Him as a fluke and a fraud. And He dies for the sins of the world. He dies for me.**

**A person about whom I was dying to find. And a person who died to find you.  
No story.**

**He is real. You can meet Him. He wants to take you to the cross and all the way to heaven when you die, or when He returns. He wants you now.  
And He will take you as you are.  
It's for real.**



*The author graduated from the Free Lutheran Seminary in Minneapolis in 1992. He and his wife Linda live with their six children on the campus of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School where he has served as dean since 1996.*





# All religions really lead to the same place, don't they?

— Brent M. Olson

like to put to music. At first sight, a list like this makes us all confusionists, and we'd like to flop down among the mountain lions and start whistling Bobby McFerrin tunes. "Don't worry. Be happy. Yeah right! Mountain lions? — Bears? — Things that go munch in the night!"

If you take a little breather along your way and read all the road maps carefully, you will find that it is really not so confusing after all. Once you scrape away all the fuzzy lichens of religious-speak

I'm no world-class mountain climber myself, Midwestern farmer's grandson that I am, but I have managed to stumble my way up a few peaks. A few Rocky Mountains, a few more vertically-challenged ones across the sea. Just enough, I suppose, to learn that all well-stamped paths on the side of a mountain don't lead up. Some careen around forever until a person is so bewildered and muscle-sore that he'd just as soon live in the middle of Kansas than ever see a mountain again. No, if you asked the famous mountain climber Sir Edmund Hilary a bit about his life, I imagine he'd tell you that on all mountains worth climbing, there is usually just one best way to get to the top. You can try other ways, but doing so, you might just find yourself scaling impossibly sheer cliffs or falling headlong down bottomless caverns.

If you're searching for God, and you're tired of stumbling around, not knowing where the path you're on will lead you, let me tell you about a path that is dramatically different than all other paths. It's a gondola ride, really.

To start with, there seems to be about a billion paths people are climbing about on these days. You've got the Jewish faith, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, Marxism, Shinto, Sufists, Janists, Tao—Moonies, Humanists, Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Science, New Age, Confucianism, and on and on. It reads like a bad rap song, or something Billy Joel might

and decide on just one name for all the pretty alpine flowers, you may see that there are only three major courses on the mountain. One course claims to lead you to an impersonal energy, or force. Another claims to lead you to very high and mighty personal gods. Still another claims to come down, pick you up, and carry you to the top.

The trails of Buddhism, Hinduism, and the New Age movement run a very similar course. They wind around and around for many lifetimes until they finally reach a hazy peak. Being atop this mountain means becoming one with an indescribable impersonal energy, or force. For Buddhists, this peak is named "nirvana." Hindus hail it "Nirguna Brahman." New Age followers say it is "Universal Mind." Whatever the peak's name, the path leading to it twists and winds to the same law. This law is called karma, and it simply means that you reap what you sow. If you're more bad than good in this lifetime, you'll be reborn (reincarnated) in a body further down the chain of respectability in the next. Conversely, the better your karma, the higher you'll ascend up the mountainside.

Among the three religions, there are myriad understandings of how karma and reincarnation are related. Yet, the ultimate destination is the same. It is freedom. Freedom from suffering. Freedom from change. Freedom from ignorance. Ultimately, freedom from oneself, for "nirvana" means simply "blowing out," as in a candle. To become one with the impersonal Brahman or Universal Mind, we as individual persons must be "blown out." We too must become impersonal.



In alpine terminology, the gods of Islam and Judaism might be likened to snow-capped peaks, shrouded in clouds, looking down upon all they have created. There is a mystery to these personal gods, an utter unknown ability, a quality which, scholars of both religions say, preserves these gods' transcendence.

These gods won't show their faces, but they have pierced the cloud cover with their words and revealed their wills to the world. The path Allah in the Koran and the God in the Torah prescribes ends in the same place. On a final day of judgment, Muslims who meet Allah's weight requirement for "good deeds" and Jews whose "righteous actions" are sufficient for righteousness in God's eyes get to spend eternity in these religions' respective heavens: Muslims in a paradise of sensuous pleasures and sexual delight, Jews with God on a New Earth.

The God of Christianity is like a friendly king of a mountain who, seeing someone stumbling around down below, comes down to the rescue. Perhaps He could turn His back and shake His head in indignation at all our feeble attempts to climb the mountain alone. He could make it even harder. But instead He chooses to come down, meet us on our trail, and even offers to give us a ride to the top.

Two thousand years ago God came down to earth to rescue us by removing an insurmountable obstacle on our path to Him. God tells us in the Bible that this obstacle was sin — any of our actions or thoughts that go against God's nature and therefore break our relationship with Him. The price to remove any sin and restore our relationship with Him, God says, is death. He states it simply, like this: "The wages of sin is death ...."

But God loved us too much to let us pay the price for our own sins. In fact, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" to pay this price for us. His name, as you may have heard, was Jesus Christ, and He said that He and God were one and the same. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." "I and the Father are one," He said. So it is this simple: "God demonstrate(d) His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He



died, the Bible says very clearly, "as a ransom to set (us) free from (our) sins." Buddha died in 483 B.C. Mohammed, the Muslim prophet, died on June 8, 632 A.D. Jesus Christ died on a cross for my sin and

your sin at about 3:00 p.m. on a stormy spring day in 30 A.D. Sometime before dawn on the following Sunday morning, Jesus came alive again.

I write this to you so you know that Jesus is who He said He is and so that you can know Him too and live with Him forever. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).



## So don't all religions really lead us to the same place?

No, they don't. They lead us through and to very different places. Some lead us up a winding trail of good-karma reincarnations to a self-negating force. Others lead us up an unsteady trail of merit to a cloud-covered personal god. Only Jesus Christ meets us wherever we are on the trail and invites us for a gondola ride to be with Him forever. It simply takes faith that Jesus is who He says He is: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).



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— *Pastor David Johnson*

# The Bible:

Andrew Jackson once said, “That book, sir, (the Bible) is the rock on which our republic rests.” George Washington put it this way: “It is impossible to righteously govern the world without God and the Bible.” Charles Dickens stated, “The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.” Horace Greeley asserted, “It is impossible to mentally or socially enslave a Bible-reading people.” Finally, President Woodrow Wilson urged, “I ask every man and woman in this audience that from this day on we realize that part of the destiny of America lies in their daily perusal of this Book (the Bible).”

While the walls of many churches echo these thoughts with hymns like “God’s Word is our Great Heritage” and “The Bible Stands,” there are many other parts of our nation, sadly many seminaries included, where the Bible is described in terms of, “Fables, Fantasies, and Fairy Tales.”

But how could these great men of American history speak so boldly of a document that has been questioned so consistently? How could the Bible speak of itself as inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), eternal (Isaiah 40:8), productive (Isaiah 55:11), accurate (Matthew 5:18), living and active (Hebrews 4:12), while being filled with “alleged” errors and misstatements?

I feel there are many reasons for this well-placed confidence and bold self-proclamation. And these reasons are not simply accepted by “faith” but are, in fact, rational and historically supportable. But first of all I must give some brief historical information.

Prior to the invention of the printing press in the 15th Century, all books and publications were handwritten manuscripts. Each volume of a text, religious or otherwise, was copied word for word, by hand, until every page was tediously reproduced. Because of this, some skeptics have pointed to a variety of doubts in the Bible’s accuracy and validity. They list the following as just a few of the concerns: copying errors, texts not written by eyewitnesses, embellished stories or folklore, and the lack of archeological support. By listing the following responses, I hope to answer some of these doubts.

## 1. Number of manuscripts

When a person wants to verify the validity of a document or text, the first thing he does is compare it to the original. However, we have no original texts of the Bible in existence today. Nor do we have any

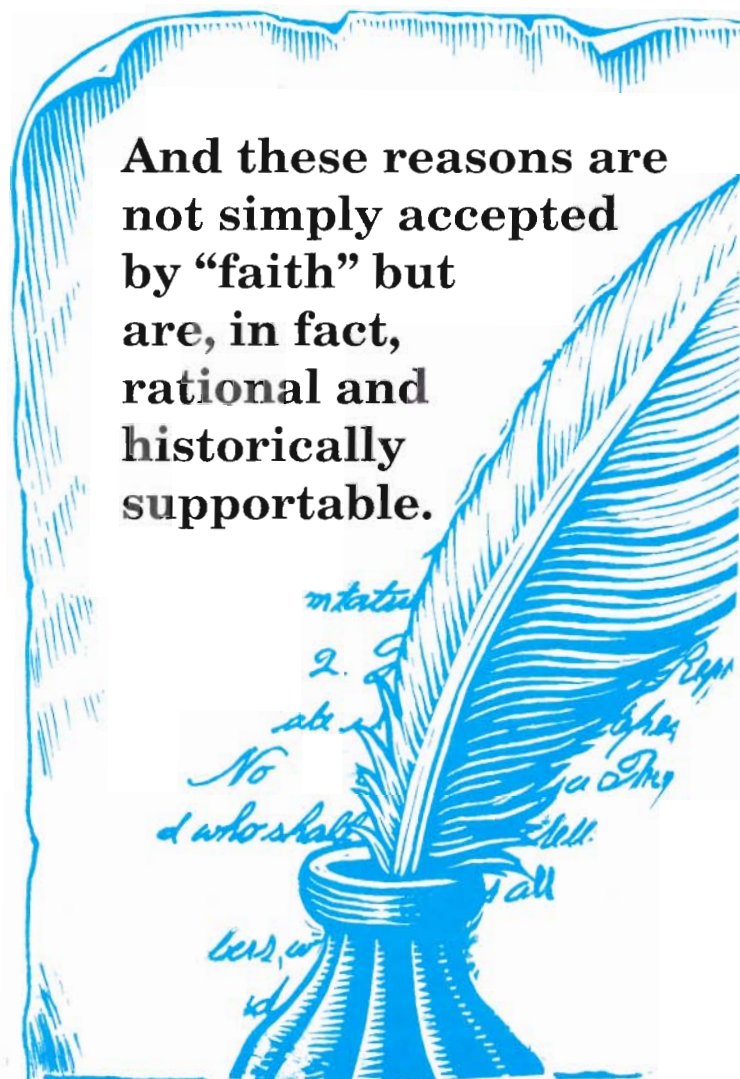
originals of other classic ancient literature. Therefore, we must instead compare it to the manuscripts or copies which are available.

In this area the Bible leads the way. There are over 24,000 copies of parts or all of the various books of the Bible. This compares to the writings of Caesar, Plato, Aristotle, or Aristophanes, none of which provide even 50 available documents. Homer’s Iliad, which offers the largest classical manuscript count, only reaches 643.

## 2. Ages of manuscripts

Another concern is the age of each manuscript. The assumption is that the older the manuscript,

**And these reasons are not simply accepted by “faith” but are, in fact, rational and historically supportable.**





# Foundation or fairy tale?

or the closer to the original date of authorship, the more accurate the document. Once again the Bible manuscripts set the standard. The oldest available biblical manuscripts of the New Testament are dated at 125 A.D. This is only 25 years after the accepted date of the New Testament's completion. This compares with over 500 years difference for the nearest competitor (Homer).

## 3. Accuracy of manuscripts

Another test for a text's validity is to count the number of errors or distortions as one compares the available manuscripts. In this area of accuracy, the Bible stands alone. Dr. Bruce Metzger, professor of New Testament language and literature at Princeton, reports a five percent distortion rate for the Iliad (764 lines out of 15,600), 10 percent distortion rate for the Mahabharata, a religious book of Hinduism (26,000 lines out of 250,000), and only one-fifth of one percent for the New Testament (40 lines out of 20,000).

## 4. Trustworthiness of "Oral Tradition"

Many people today simply pass over, or disregard, the importance of oral tradition. They assume that if anything is transmitted by mouth, it is bound to be distorted, much like the familiar "telephone" game. However, that was not the case in ancient Jewish and Greek cultures.

The people of those, and many other cultures, took great pride in the art of memorization and spent significant amounts of time working at developing this ability. They would even faithfully relay the entire Torah (books of Moses) from memory or the epics of Homer. Therefore, it would be no stretch for them to recite from memory a prophet's message or a Gospel text.

## 5. Support of other ancient writers

We also have the support and validation of other ancient historians, church leaders and authors such as: Clement of Rome (A.D. 95); Polycarp (A.D. 70-156); Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-212); Tertullian (A.D. 160-220); and Flavious Josephus just to name a few. In fact, it has been said that the early Christian writers quote Scripture so exhaustively that, "the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament transcripts" (J. Harold Greenlee).

## 6. Support of modern archeology

Finally, we also have corroborations from numerous archeological digs and discoveries. Many issues once questioned or doubted in Scripture have since been proven factual by modern archeology. The existence of Pontius Pilate, the family of Caiaphas, the Politarchs, the pool of Siloam, Jacob's well in Sychar, the Hittite people, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah have all been verified by various archeological discoveries.

Each of these arguments, or even all of them together cannot dispel all doubts or questions about the Bible's reliability. However, I hope that they confirm that following the Bible, God's Word, is not just "blind faith". It is both reasonable and rational. But only the Holy Spirit of God can transform this intellectual acknowledgment into a living faith in the revealed Savior of the Bible, Jesus Christ.



*The author graduated in 1985 from Christian Outreach School of Ministries in Hillsboro, Missouri. He lives with his wife Vicki and their five children in Amery, Wisconsin where he has served as pastor of Amery Free Lutheran since 1998.*



# The path to be rich

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

**T**he Bible contains interesting paradoxes that challenge our human way of thinking. We understand poor means possessing very little, yet Jesus said the riches of heaven belong to the poor in spirit.

What can you do to receive these riches in heaven? Nothing.

Our self-reliance robs us of God's gifts. Jesus insisted that in order to follow Him we must deny self. As long as we rely on our own resources we will never place our trust in Him. We realize how desperately we need a Savior when we acknowledge the sinfulness and poverty of our souls. That is why Jesus said, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near you."

Again Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:24). One who is utterly bound in his riches cannot expect to enter the kingdom of God.

But there is good news. God waits to freely offer His forgiveness.

Jesus promises in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given to you,

seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

In the Bible Luke records two times when Jesus encountered wealthy men. In chapter 18, the rich young ruler valued his possessions so much that he

could not give them up to follow Jesus. Luke 19 records Jesus meeting with Zaccheus, a wealthy and notorious sinner. Despite his material wealth, Zaccheus recognized his spiritual poverty and received salvation. The message of the world says, "Everyone wants to be rich." On the contrary, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." You are not rich

until you are poor — that is those who realize their spiritual poverty apart from God and trust in Him for salvation.

Do not allow your resources, wisdom, talent or abilities to prevent you from trusting the One who can bring you abundant life and make you rich beyond your imagination.



— Dale Posey  
New Hope Free Lutheran  
Snohomish, Washington



## The most comforting truth to think about — GRACE

— Sarah Olson

*The author is a 1997 graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School. She is currently a student at North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota. Her home congregation is Our Saviour's Lutheran in Thief River Falls, Minnesota.*



“**T**he faithful are inclined to judge harshly.” That was the message. That was the discussion. That was the end of class. Recently in

my literature class, we read from the Bible, Luke 15:11-32, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. I was looking forward to the class period when we were to discuss the assigned reading, even though I wasn’t expecting what I would consider a correct biblical understanding. My assumptions were right.

Attending a secular college has its many challenges. I am faced with teachings that are directly opposed to Christianity, but during those class discussions I have noticed the searching hearts of many of my classmates. They are seeking for answers to all of their questions. They are searching for real peace and joy, but are rejecting the one truth that will bring them contentment. That is eternal life that we find through the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Along with the challenges, there are also many opportunities to share with those in need about the grace of God.

I have found the grace of God to be the most peaceful and comforting truth to think about. How can a God love me so much that He would offer me the free gift of forgiveness of sins? The only thing that I deserve is condemnation, but because of God’s grace and love, He offers me forgiveness of sins. In the Bible, John 1:29 says, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

It is something that is unfathomable, but something that can be rejoiced in daily. The grace of God offers me forgiveness of sins, free of charge. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

It is something that is unearned and undeserved. Because of Jesus dying on the cross in our place, we are offered a full pardon from all of our sins. In I Peter 1:18-19 it says, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold; but with the precious blood of Christ.” We

are looked upon in Christ as though we had never sinned. Romans 3:24 describes what has happened as “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The grace of God is offered to all, full and free.

We can also think of the grace of God through the eyes of a college student. For example, there are times when a student is not able to finish an assignment on time. The student pleads with the teacher for an extra day, a grace period, so they can finish their paper. They know they do not deserve the extra day and that it is unearned, but are seeking for compassion and mercy from their teacher.

God has compassion and love for us. That is why He sent His Son to this earth to die for our sins. Just as the teacher offers a grace period even though the student does not deserve it, so God offers His grace to us, sinners, free of charge. Through His grace we are forgiven.

Looking back on the discussion of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in my literature class, there was an open door to discuss the grace of God. “And he arose and came to his father, but when he was still a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him,” (Luke 15:20). The father showed grace and compassion to his son. He freely forgave his son. His son did nothing to deserve what he gave him. It was a free gift.

There are the misconceptions that Christians are “inclined to judge harshly.” That was clearly stated in my class discussion. What was also clear was the open door to tell His truth and share His grace.

*“By grace alone shall I inherit  
That blissful home beyond the skies.  
Works count for naught, the Lord incarnate  
Hath won for me the heav’nly prize.  
Salvation by His death He wrought,  
His grace alone my pardon bought.”*

— Chr. Ludwig Scheit



# Can you know for sure

— **Pastor Lloyd  
Quanbeck**

**T**here are many things in this technological age that one just cannot know for sure. I recently had a vehicle which was experiencing mechanical problems, so I took it to a reputable transmission shop in town. The mechanic's computerized analyzer led him to try one thing after another. Even after rebuilding the transmission, the problem remained. Now I wonder if any of those other expensive parts were necessary. I have come to the conclusion that we will never know for sure on this one!

It seems many people approach the possibility of having a personal relationship with God and making it to heaven with that same type of perspective. "One can never know for sure about that one, right?" Or perhaps it's, "Do the best you can and hope for the best, but you can never know for sure in this life if you will make it to eternal bliss in the next life or not."

## **We can know!**

To me the greatest news in the world is found in the pages of a book of the Bible called I John, and in chapter 5, verse 13. There it contains these words: "These things have been written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know you have eternal life." This verse tells us there's no need to wait, wonder, and hope for the best anymore! The Bible says we can know for sure about eternal life!

"And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son, has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (I John 5:11-12).

## **From the above verses we have four clear answers about eternal life:**

### **1. God has given us eternal life.**

According to the Bible there is eternal life — life after death. It comes from God. He gives it to us. It's a gift. You don't pay for gifts, just accept them. If the way to heaven was earned, it would not be called a gift. Then God would have to somehow weigh our

good deeds and bad ones to see if we had done enough to earn it. Even then we would not know if we would make it until it was too late to do anything about it.

How has God given us this gift? These verses tell us what the package of eternal life looks like. He describes it very clearly.

## **2. This eternal life is in His Son.**

In Jesus, we have eternal life. He is the package. If we want eternal life, we need Him. Why? My friend in children's ministry says it this way: "There is one thing that can never get into heaven and that is sin." God is holy and perfect, He demands that whatever enters heaven is perfect. If that were the end of the story, none of us would make it. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

But you claim some are better than others. What about that issue? Picture this: Imagine if we were all to line up on the California coast intending to swim to Hawaii. Some would make it much farther than others. My eight- and ten-year-old sons would likely make it farther than I would, and you may swim far beyond them. But I know of no one who swims well enough to make it to Hawaii. It's too far! So it is with making it to heaven. Perfection is beyond any of us, and that is what it takes.

That is why God sent Jesus. He was God in human form. He lived a life of absolute obedience to His father. He was perfect. Yet, He died a criminal's death on a Roman cross. It was part of God's plan. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" (I Peter 3:18). Jesus' death was not because He deserved punishment, but because we did. According to the Bible, something amazing happened as He hung on the cross. "The Lord laid on Him the sins of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Our guilt was transferred to the shoulders of the Perfect One. And in Him, we stand clean before God; perfect in His sight, and fit to enter heaven!

Since God has given the gift of eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ to the whole world, can we sit back and relax and not be concerned about eternal life?



# you are going to Heaven?

## 3. Not everyone has eternal life.

The above verses state that some “have the Son,” and some do not. It would be tragic to overlook or ignore this vital truth. If everyone automatically had the gift of eternal life credited to his or her account, there would be no need for the Christian Church to exist. Part of the mission of the church is to spread the Word that, “the gift of eternal life has been given, but some have not yet received it.”

The ladies at my church have fun with a secret prayer partner gift exchange. Individuals regularly place a gift for another lady on a table in our church entry. Occasionally a gift remains on the table with a name on it and is never picked up. The gift has been given, but not yet received. The gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ has been given to you. It has your name on it, but you must personally receive it. John 1:12 promises, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

## 4. You can know for sure if you have eternal life.

Since Jesus is no longer on earth in bodily form, we cannot literally shake His hand and invite Him to walk through the door of our home. Yet, we can invite Him to enter our lives. Jesus physically rose from the grave and ascended back into heaven, telling His followers that He was going to prepare a place in heaven for them. He also told them that He would send His Spirit to dwell in the hearts of all true believers in Him. It is only those who believe in Jesus, the Son of God, as their personal Savior from sin and hell, who can have assurance of eternal life. That assurance comes as they humble themselves in prayer to God, admitting their sin and rebellion against Him. “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9). When we are honest with God about our sin and need for a Savior, believe in Jesus as that Savior, and ask Him for forgiveness; He promises to come in,

cleanse our heart and take up residence there.

“He who has the Son has the life ... These things have been written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” Whether or not you feel like you are a Christian today is not the issue. The reality of your eternal destiny is based on your acceptance of the promises of God as revealed in His Word, the Bible. You may or may not remember a date when you took the step of praying a prayer, confessing your sins and asking Jesus to come into your life. What matters is not a date in the past, but your present awareness of your sinful condition and trust in God’s promise of a Savior for you in Jesus Christ.

I am so glad that I do not have to wonder about my eternal destiny. In a world where so many things are uncertain, it is wonderful to know that I have a reservation for a place in heaven. The songwriter Fanny Crosby describes my sentiments in her hymn:

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is Mine!  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchased of God.  
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.  
This is my story, this is my song.  
Praising my Savior all the day long.”

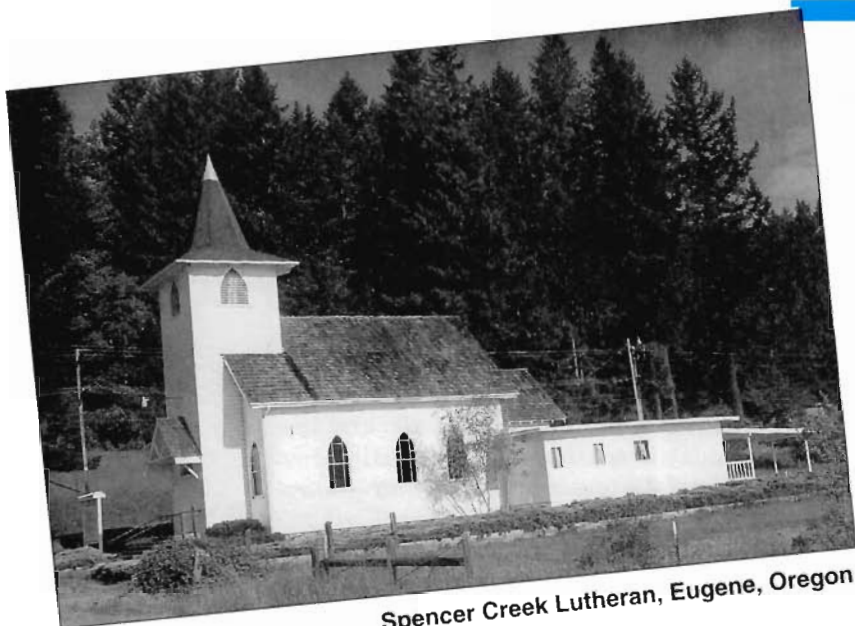
**I have fought the  
good fight, I have  
finished the race, I have  
kept the faith. Now there  
is in store for me the  
crown of righteousness,  
which the Lord, the  
righteous Judge will award  
to me on that day — and  
not only to me, but also to  
all who have longed for his  
appearing.**

— II Timothy 4:7-8



*The author is a 1990 graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Seminary in Minneapolis. He lives with his wife Jean and five sons in Minot, North Dakota where he has served Bethel Lutheran since 1996.*

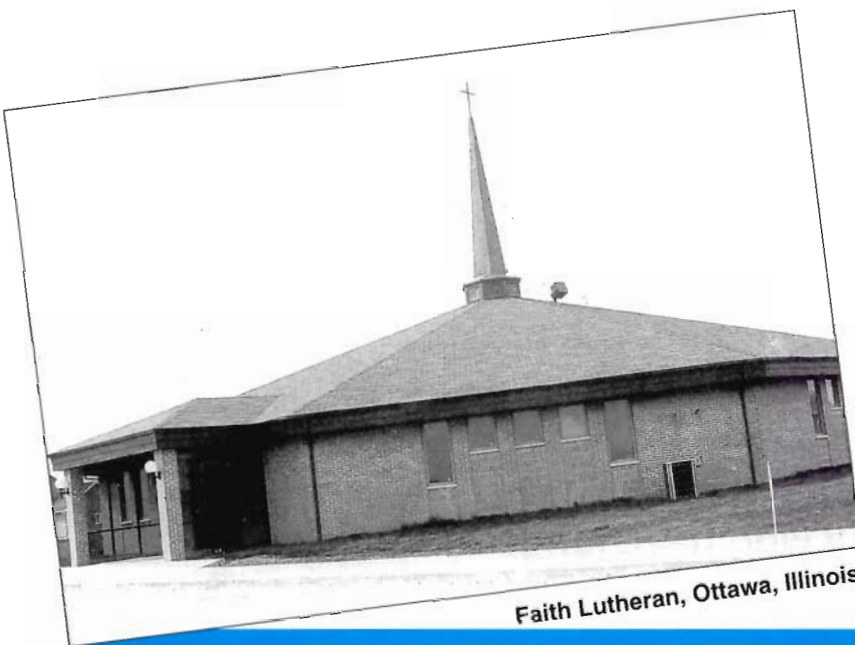




Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Oregon

“Let us not give up  
meeting together,  
as some are in the  
habit of doing.”

— Hebrews 10:25



Faith Lutheran, Ottawa, Illinois

# Why I need

**I**s it really important to go to church every Sunday? Can't I stay home and worship the Lord there and relax Sunday mornings instead of waking up to go to church? Does it really matter that much?

I grew up in a home where going to church wasn't even a choice. If we kids were even marginally healthy we were expected to be sitting in church, well dressed, quiet and alert, in time for the service. This expectation continued as long as I lived at home. Even in high school, when my classmates stopped coming to church, my parents made sure I was there every week.

My parents had formed in me the habit of going to church every Sunday. It wasn't until I moved into the dorms for my freshman year of college that I first faced the option of not going

to church. I also had to face the question of why I bothered to go to church at all. Since then I have discovered several reasons why it is important to go to church.

I go to church to have my soul restored. Psalm 23:3 speaks of the Lord restoring our souls, and He does it every time we hear from the Bible, the Word of God. There is a special blessing for me in sitting down and hearing the Bible read to me and explained. Gathering with others to receive teaching from God together refreshes my soul in a way I do not find by reading on my own, although I need that daily time as well when He speaks to me.

During the worship service, the word about what I should do and what God has done is presented in a clear and concise way. In confessing sin, I acknowledge to God that I not only sin, but that “we are by nature sinful and unclean.” I sin against God continually in what I do, say and think. I must “flee for refuge to (God's) infinite mercy.” As I spend time contemplating what I am and what I have done, my soul is laid bare before God. I am unable to do anything but plead for mercy on the basis of God's grace alone.

God's mercy is granted to me. I am able to confess my faith with a resounding “I believe!” The promises of God give me confidence to approach God's throne and lay hold of the sal-



# my congregation

— Amy Dalager

vation He has given me. I can freely confess my faith confidently, believing that God will keep His promises and reward me with eternal life.

It is good to confess my sin and my faith alone during personal devotions. But it is also important to confess them in the church service, surrounded by fellow believers. To stand in church and say those words and hear them echoed by a hundred people encourages me. I am not alone in my belief! When I am discouraged it is helpful to remember that there are people who believe as I believe, and I do not feel so alone.

Another reason I go to church is to find support in facing the false teaching of the world. In my daily life I'm surrounded by attitudes that

are in direct conflict with what the Bible teaches. Many around me live in ways that draw them away from God and they seek me to join them. The media and our culture often ignores or even mocks the basic truths of the Bible. In my own spirit I find myself turning to my desires rather than to God and His teachings.

My church is a refuge to me, a place I can go where I know that I will be drawn nearer to God instead of having to battle temptation on every side. There I know I will hear the Word accurately read and faithfully and humbly taught.

Ultimately, I go to church to be drawn closer to God. As a Christian, I strive to know His will more fully. This is better achieved the more time I spend with others studying God's Word, worshipping Him, and hearing His Word explained.

Why does it matter if I go to church or not? I certainly could be a Christian without going. But not to accept the good things God wants to give me there would be to reject one of the chief elements of God's plan for giving me strength for life.



*The author is a 1997 graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Bible School. She worked in Chad, Africa as a tutor for Wycliff Bible Translators, Bill and Rachel Chesley. Currently she is a student at South Dakota State University. She and her husband Nathan are members of Grace Lutheran in Bruce, South Dakota.*



First Lutheran, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



Bethel Lutheran, Frontier, Saskatchewan



Faith Lutheran, Weslaco, Texas

Some times a person needs to just take a step back and watch the Holy Spirit do His thing. By His miraculous powers a cold heart can be turned into a burning ball of fire for the Lord. That became clear to me on a cold winter night a few years ago.

# Watching God at work

## How God used a police officer and changed a drug dealer's life

— Glenn Mork

I was doing my job as a police officer. This particular case started with me sitting in a surveillance vehicle night after night documenting every move Kevin made. I noted every vehicle that would come and go. I made countless entries on the log, checking local, state and federal records to see who he was making contact with, when and where. He had a few close associates and would deal with no one else. He was a part-time bus driver by day and a full-time drug dealer by night. Information was given that he was heavy into the drugs he was selling. He was not only a seller but a heavy user also. He had to make a sizable profit to pay for the coke he and his girlfriend were snorting. He also needed a lot in order to pay for the two Corvettes, three motorcycles, house, boat and many other toys he had attained.

I had been a police officer for about 10 years and had been newly assigned to the narcotics section. As with many other drug dealers,

someone had dropped a dime on him for whatever reason they had. Some call to get rid of competition. Some call because they care. Some call because the dealer just ticked them off and they want revenge. It doesn't really matter to us how we get the information, we simply open another file on another dealer.

Kevin was not just another drug dealer though. Neither he nor I realized that at first.

The cat and mouse game began. Kevin did not know I was watching him, but his drug use was making him paranoid. A walk to his mailbox was tense as he looked in all directions to see if anyone was watching. Trips in the car were quick and fast, darting here and there, always looking for a tail. Kevin did not trust anyone except a few close friends.

After several weeks we received the break we needed. We had successfully penetrated his world and cocaine buys were made and larger ones arranged. The undercover officer was afraid to go back in. Kevin's house was not the typical suburban house in Richfield. When the undercover officer was allowed to enter, the doors were locked with heavy duty deadbolts. It would take time to enter but worse yet, if something went wrong the undercover officer would be trapped inside. She was wired with a listening device but you never want to count on everything working just right.

We decided to error on the side of caution. The case had taken us as far as we needed to go. A search warrant was served and Kevin was arrested without incident. The house was, as I said before, not your typical suburban house. The couch in the living room had been pushed off to the side to make room for the three motorcycles. The dining room table was somewhere beneath and behind motorcycle parts and pinball machines. There were lines of cocaine all over the house. Packaging from cocaine shipments was all that occupied the spare bedroom. Empty kilo containers flooded the floor with scales nearby to divide up the next shipment.

The house contained all the stuff you would expect to see in a drug house except for one thing. Even in the midst of a SWAT team entry, everyone rushing through to secure the house before anyone had time to react, I noticed one thing out of place. On the living room floor, at the opposite end of the motorcycles was a Bible. It was open. I didn't pay attention to what chapter it was open to but that open Bible stuck in my mind for hours after.

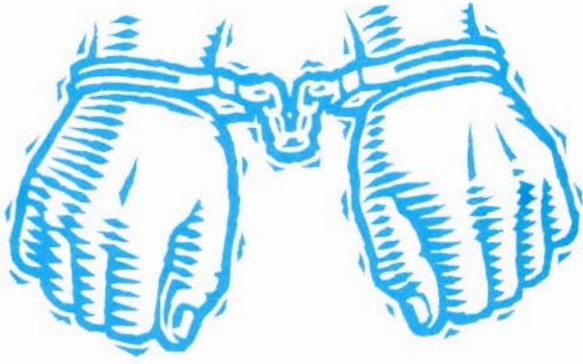
When an investigation of this type reaches the arrest stage, we kick into high gear. Often times for the next day or two, little or no sleep comes our way. After the pace slowed, I was still puzzled by the open Bible. I knew it was there for a reason.

Before taking Kevin to DEA for booking, I paused and said, "Kevin, I have to ask you something. What was that Bible doing open on the living room floor?"





**“It was an odd relationship in which I had to tread lightly. I was the arresting officer but Kevin sought my advice ...”**



He quietly told me that he was trying to get out of the drug world and thought just maybe the Bible had some answers for him. He had grown up going to church but had walked away from that a long time ago. He went on to tell me that someone had tried to kill him a few days before. He left the house to get the mail and someone hit him in the back of the head with an object that left the imprint like that of a two by four.

I encouraged Kevin to keep looking in that Book. I assured him that he was headed in the right direction. From that point on, Kevin placed his trust in me to guide him through the legal system. It was an odd relationship in which I had to tread lightly. I was the arresting officer but Kevin sought my advice when negotiating a plea with the attorneys at the Federal Building. I discouraged him from placing his trust in me.

**I stood by and watched God do His work! He transformed this man from one of the scariest drug dealers I had ever met to a broken, remorseful child of God. Never before had I witnessed such an event. Never before had I let my guard down and befriended a man such as this. God saw the big picture. I had only seen a drug dealer. Kevin saw a way of life that he didn't like but could not get out of on his own. God saw a child; a hopeless, lost child. He prompted me to ask one simple question. I did and the Lord did the transforming.**

Kevin and I spoke often. We shared our prayers and concerns. Kevin shifted his trust from man to God. He accepted Christ into his life before going off to prison. I had the opportunity to visit him in prison. He had Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. The plea

agreement had a set amount of time that he would spend in prison no matter what his belief. I knew Kevin had nothing to gain from man by saying he was a Christian. We both knew he had everything to gain by knowing he was in a right relationship with Jesus.

God was not done with Kevin. The miracles kept on coming. Kevin was immediately off drugs and never craved the habit. He no longer desired any type of drug. He was immediately set free from the drug that had held him captive for years.

After prison Kevin went back to college and finished with a Masters Degree from St Thomas. He spoke with high school students about the evils of the drug world. He became a very successful consultant. God has given him the talent of showing companies how to be more efficient and effective in their operations. He has traveled throughout the United States working with many different companies. He maintains his love for the Lord. He is thankful God used a police officer to change his life. He knows he would be dead if God had not intervened.

Never before had I allowed myself to become close and personal with a man that I was responsible for sending to prison. I gave Kevin my home address. I gave him my home phone number. At the request of Kevin's parole officer, I wrote a letter of support for Kevin to be released from parole early. His parole officer said he had never met a former drug dealer quite like Kevin. He felt the restrictions of parole were detrimental to Kevin. This was a first for him also. He had never requested early release from parole for anyone.

A few years ago, I received a call from Kevin. He had settled down in Memphis, Tennessee. He was getting married. They were busy making the wedding plans and they wanted me to be a part of those plans. Kevin asked me to stand up for him at his wedding. My wife and I drove from Bloomington, Minnesota to Memphis, Tennessee. The long drive seemed fitting for the occasion. Our lives had traveled a great distance since that day when I thought I was just working another drug dealer. To this day I shake my head in amazement when I think of what God has done in this man's life.

I am thankful God allowed me to see Him in action. God showed me that He can do it all on His own but He chose to use me this time. He didn't ask much. He didn't need a scholar. He didn't need a pastor. He didn't need a teacher. He didn't need me, but He wanted me to be a part of His miracle. It was awesome. All he had me do was ask one simple question. He took care of the rest.

It is great when you get a chance to get a full view of God's awesome work!



*The author is a 25-year veteran of the Richfield Police Department. He lives with his wife Sherry and three children in Bloomington, Minnesota, where they are members of Emmaus Lutheran. He has also been a part-time student at the Free Lutheran Seminary in Minneapolis.*

# Thank you for saving me

— Kara Crimmin

Dear God,

There are so many times that I wonder why You still love me, even after all the terrible things that I have done; why when You look at the world, You feel love and I feel hate. You feel sadness and I feel anger. I have gone against You and Your Word in almost every way possible. I've sinned, asked for forgiveness and then gone and done the same exact sin an hour later. I've made you promises that I've broken within five minutes.

I've been unworthy and at times, unteachable. I've been selfish and unwilling to listen to You. There have been times that I've cried at your feet and times that I've blamed You for my actions. You've helped me in situations that seemed impossible to get out of. You've helped me make some of the hardest decisions of my life. You have been my strength when I am weak. You've carried me when I could no longer walk. You have been my voice and given me the words when I didn't know what to say.

I have failed You countless times, some I can barely remember or maybe I just don't want to remember. I have ignored Your words and gone in the opposite direction of where You told me to go. I have thought many times that I could make it on my own, that I didn't need You. It seems almost funny now that I actually thought I could go through life without You. But I did. I always thought that being good would be easier than being bad. But now I know that being good is impossible without You.

There have been times that I've tried to leave You, but You wouldn't let me. It's like You kept saying, "No, you can't leave, you need Me." So finally, after years of ignoring and rejecting You, I gave in. I let You into my heart and I gave You everything. Every part of me. I accepted You as my Lord and Savior.

There are still times that I'm not sure if I can make it or not. You have taken me through the toughest journeys. You have helped me face the hardest trials, even when I felt like I wanted to give up. You have carried me through dangerous waters and saved me from the devil and from myself. You saved me from sin, when You sent your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross. You've given me life and a love so pure, righteous and unconditional. You have never given up on me, even when I was ready to give up on myself. You have been everything that anyone could ever ask for and more: faithful, merciful, forgiving — a Teacher, Brother, Father, Friend, Lord and a Savior.

Thank you God. Thank you for loving me, even though I don't deserve it. Thank you for forgiving me, even when you shouldn't have. Thank you for finding me when I was lost. Thank you for saving me and for dying for me on the cross of Calvary. I love You.

Amen.



*The author attends the Association Free Lutheran Bible School in Minneapolis. Written about a year ago, this first appeared in "The Lamplighter," the St. Olaf Lutheran newsletter, Montgomery, Illinois, February, 2000. Used with permission.*



# Why do we believe?

**“W**hy do we believe all this? How do we know it's not just some fables people have made up over the years?” That was the question one young person in our congregation asked recently. Another student said, “I've been wondering the same thing. I've just been a little too shy to ask the question.”

I enjoy hearing questions like that. It often means the one asking the question is thinking and wanting to have a faith that is more than just going along with the routine. Questions like that can lead to a faith that is real, that knows what it believes and why it believes it.

Too many don't ask the questions. They may for a time keep on going to church. They may keep doing various religious rituals, but their heart isn't in it. They do what they do out of habit, or maybe out of fear of what people would think if they stopped. They wonder if there really is a basis for believing, but they don't bother asking. The result is often a faith that is just a show, and not something that will stand up in the midst of testing and challenges.

Jesus, in the Bible, in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter seven and verses seven and eight, said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Jesus wants us to ask questions. He wants us seeking after answers. He doesn't want us to just keep religious traditions without knowing why. He doesn't want us to be obeying on the outside but full of doubt on the inside. In the book of the Bible that talks about the early church it says that one of the groups that listened to the teacher, Paul “were of more noble character ... they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” The Bible can stand up to testing. Solid answers can be found.

In answering the student's question about how can we believe this is true, I replied in a way similar to my response to a college professor who questioned me about my faith. He said, “Many people claim to be the Messiah. Would you believe me if I said I was the Messiah?” I said, “If you died and then rose again

from the dead in three days, I'd probably start to listen to you pretty seriously.”

Ultimately it all comes down to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Paul said in the book of I Corinthians, “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”

Good teachers with great messages on how to live moral lives are all around us. People come and go who can do impressive and unexplainable things. Dynamic and motivational leaders can often be found. But nobody else ever claimed to die on the cross to pay the penalty for all the rotten things I have done. Nobody else ever claimed to rise again from the dead, never to die again.

If He really is who He claimed to be; if He really did what it is claimed He has done; then I better listen to Him. Someone who can rise from the dead, has power unlike anyone else. His words have authority. He is to be obeyed, and He can be trusted.

I believe the Bible and look to it as the guide and authority over my life, because Jesus rose from the dead. And I believe Jesus rose from the dead because the evidence supporting it is overwhelming. No other event in history has such solid proof that it happened. A number of people who knew for a fact that He was dead, saw Him alive. Over five hundred people were willing and unwavering witnesses. Many of those people gave up their lives rather than

change their stories. What was changed was the lives of the people who said they saw Him. Cowards became courageous. Doubters became brave defenders of the faith. People who set out to kill Christians became ones who were willing to die for being Christians.

People who claim to have been changed by the resurrected Jesus are still around today. During a period when I was wondering if all this Christianity stuff was true, I thought about people I knew who said it was true. Something was different about them. Something had happened to them. They had a peace, a purpose, a confident hope and a love for others that was desirable and undeniable. There has to be something to this. It couldn't be a fable.

Come to God with a sincere heart and a desire to find the truth. Ask questions and He'll provide answers. Check it out and see if it's really true, and get ready to be amazed by how good God is. He loves seekers, and He loves you.

— Pastor Craig Johnson

**“Ultimately it all comes down to Jesus' resurrection from the dead.”**

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## BUILDING THE BASE

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# Who do you say that I am?

**I**n the first four books of the New Testament called the Gospels we read of a conversation Jesus had with His disciples. Jesus begins by posing a question. "Who do the people say that I am?" The disciples responded by saying, "some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others say Jeremiah, or perhaps another one of the prophets."

Jesus proceeded to direct His questioning at a more personal level, by inquiring, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then affirmed Peter's answer as correct thereby leaving the answers attributed to the people in the former question as necessarily false.

The question as to the identity of Jesus continues even to this very day. Invariably around Easter each year Jesus, (at least an artist's rendering of Him) is featured on the covers of the leading news magazines. They take up the question concerning the identity of Jesus, maintaining that they are delivering the very latest and most expert opinions of just who this Jesus was. In typical fashion, they find the most radical scholars on the subject to suggest and support their claims on having found the real historic Jesus of Nazareth. The most popular of these groups is the ever-quoted "Jesus Seminar" which consists of radical, liberal scholars who assume the inauthenticity of the Gospels, the ignorance

and simple-mindedness of the disciples, the supreme psychological impairment of Jesus, along with any and every other antagonistic approach one can entertain in analyzing the life of Christ.

Due to these factors, the articles inevitably portray Jesus as sort of a mixed-up sage with a messianic complex. A deception they often utilize is to attempt to separate for us all, the Jesus of history, with Jesus the Christ. They assert the Jesus of history was nothing more than an ordinary man with a rather uncanny ability to attract followers, and thereby became an annoyance to the government, who then executed Him as they would do with rebels of His kind. Jesus the Christ is seen as nothing more than a figment of the imagination of the writers of the Gospels, whomever they may be, thereby creating this mythical figure, which we see in the New Testament.

Reason would say to us that if indeed this is the "truth," Christianity is not only a lie, but also an utterly immoral and destructive teaching. What is ironic, and beyond my understanding, is that these radical scholars still think Christianity has some credibility. If the facts of Christianity, the life of Jesus, including the Resurrection, have no basis in history, I concur with the Apostle Paul who said, "That if Jesus was not raised, our faith is worthless, and we are of all men most to be pitied."

In future columns, we will take a closer look at who Jesus really

thought Himself to be. I first need to be very clear about what I see to be the critical parameters of this discussion. Let us be very sure about one thing. If Jesus is not who He claimed to be, then Christianity is necessarily false. I simply detest the rather condescending opinion of those who purport that Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels is not historic, yet continue to claim that Christianity can provide meaning and hope. There may be some pragmatic value, meaning it may help in establishing a moral code to live by, but if it is fundamentally flawed, I for one do not want to commit my life to something that is false.

I conclude with the words of C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*: "We are faced then with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse. Now it seems obvious to me that He was neither a lunatic or a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form."



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