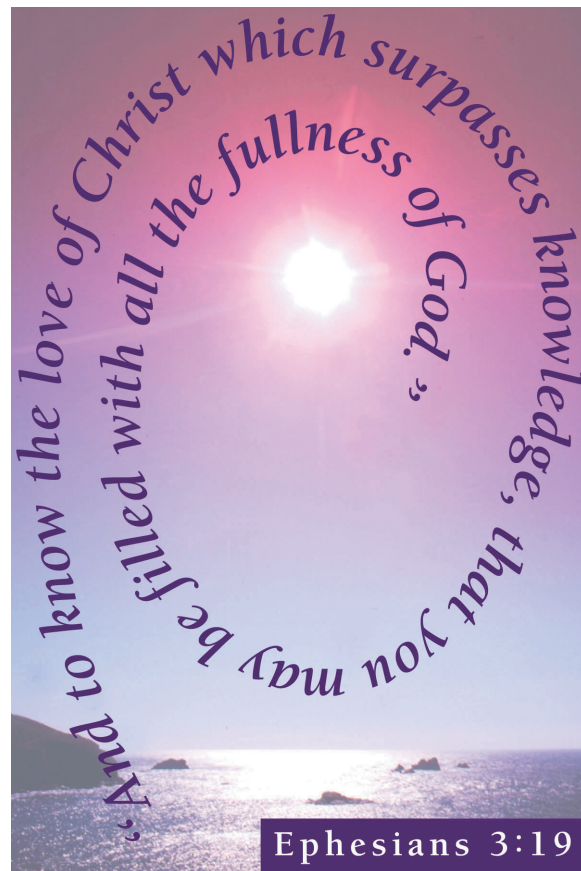


First mission response

Learn



1 Learn of Me

“Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me. That I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

They had met only a few weeks ago. Since then, there was a flurry of e-mails and phone calls and notes. They talked into the wee hours of the night, not seeming to mind the loss of sleep. Their hunger to know about each other was almost insatiable. Such is the nature of love. When two people are attracted to each other, there is a desire—even a need—to learn as much as you possibly can about the other. Love feeds on this kind of information with a ravenous hunger. The more you get to know the person, the deeper the love grows. Should it be any different in our relationship with God? God doesn't think so. Listen to what He says: “. . . let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me.”

It seems so obvious. God wants me to know Him and understand Him. Yet, if I am honest, this is not a high priority with me as much as it should be. When I turn to His Word, it is not necessarily to know *Him* better. I am in search of understanding *my life* better: What am I supposed to do in life? What am I not supposed to do? How do I quit worrying? How can I overcome a grudge? What do I do when I am lonely or depressed? You know the list. Where do you turn when you are _____? (Go ahead and fill in the blank.)

Don't get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with seeking that kind of help. That is why God put those truths in the Word in the first place. But why is it not a priority of my heart to first learn about *His heart*: What makes Him sad? What does He delight in? God has feelings. He gets jealous. He delights in our offerings. He gets angry. He yearns for fellowship with us. The more I learn about Him

in His Word, the more my heart is ablaze with His joy and His love. Ask the two men who walked some eight miles with a stranger on their way to Emmaus. Dejected and despairing, they were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. At a normal pace, that would be about a two-hour walk. Somewhere along the way, a man came up beside them. It was Jesus, but He kept Himself from being recognized by them. As He joins them, He asks what they are talking about. Listen to their response:

“They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you the only one living in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?’ ‘What things?’ he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see” (Luke 24:17-21).

Wouldn't you expect Jesus to just suddenly reveal Himself and say, “It's me, brothers. It's true”? Wouldn't there be the desire to take

these men out of their despair as quickly as possible? Jesus, however, takes another route on this eight-mile walk.

“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

An eight-mile walk with Jesus as He reviews what the Old Testament foretold about Him. That is a Sunday walk I would take at any time. This two-hour Bible lesson reminds me that my heart, too, can be ablaze with new joy and hope in His love. Remember the rest of the story:

“As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” (Luke 24:28-32).

Learning of Him is the first and most important mission response. It brings passion to all the other mission responses—Praying, Giving, Telling, Sending, Going and Celebrating. You can see these responses beginning to surface in the final words of this text:

“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ The two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when He broke bread” (Luke 24:33-35).

An eight-mile walk that began in despair led to an eight-mile return walk that was much different in pace and spirit. The journey back to their friends in Jerusalem was filled with a joy burning inside of them. What they had learned would change the pace and direction of their walk for the rest of their lives. It all began with what they learned as Jesus opened the Scriptures to them.

It is no different today. Jesus is ready to open the Scriptures to our hearts as well. Is your journey this day one filled with despair or doubt? Is your pace a little slow and dragging? Is your spirit burdened and weighed down? Jesus is willing to walk with you as He did with the two men on their way to Emmaus. Take the time to get to know and understand Him. Take one more look at Jeremiah 9:23-24 and the final words, “. . . let him who boasts, boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.”

This is what He wants us to learn. God is not one to delight in suffering or unfairness. There is much in life that causes confusion as to why God allows certain things to happen. The men on the road to Emmaus were confused. But the more we learn of Him, the more we will see and understand Him to be a God that delights in showing us kindness and in doing what is right. He can be trusted. No where better can His desire to exercise kindness, justice and righteousness be witnessed than on the Cross. The Cross alone helps me to learn all that I need to know about Him.

What difference would it make in your walk—in its pace and in its direction—if Jesus were to open His Word to your heart?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, walk with me this day. As you open my heart to your Word, teach me all that you desire for me to learn about you. When life seems unfair or when events confuse me as to where you are, remind me of your Cross. It is there that I have come to trust that you really are One who desires to exercise kindness, justice and righteousness. As you open your Word to me, then will my heart burn within me and I shall serve you with renewed love and joy. **Amen.**

Challenge: Read John 18-21. As you read these verses, what do you learn of Jesus? Write down your thoughts as though you were introducing Jesus to a friend. Tell what you admire about Jesus. What attracts you to Him? Who is He?

Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:97-112

From the Book of Concord: “Remember, then, that you must be concerned not only about hearing the Word, but also about learning it and retaining it. Do not think that it is up to your discretion or that it is an unimportant matter. It is the commandment of God, who will require of you an accounting of how you have heard, learned, and honored his Word.

“In the same way those conceited spirits should also be punished who, after they have heard a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel that they know it all and need no more instructors. This is precisely the sin that used to be numbered among the mortal sins and was called *acedia*—that is, laziness or weariness—a malignant, pernicious plague with which the devil bewitches and deceives many hearts so that he may take us by surprise and stealthily take the Word of God away again.

“Let me tell you this. Even though you know the Word perfectly and have already mastered everything, you are daily under the dominion of the devil, and he does not rest day or night in seeking to take you unawares and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against these three and all the other commandments. Therefore you must constantly keep God’s Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it. On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. For this Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living. Even if no other benefit or need drove us to the Word, yet everyone should be motivated by the realization that through the Word the devil is cast out and put to flight, this commandment is fulfilled, and God is more pleased than by any hypocrisy, no matter how brilliant” (The Large Catechism, The Third Commandment, p. 400.98-102).

Learn Who Matters to God

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

When I first heard about the mission and goal of Ablaze—“to share the Good News of Jesus with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017”—I laughed. My laughter was not necessarily one of joyous faith and thanks. It was more like that of Sarah and Abraham when they heard that they would have a baby: “Yeah, right.” I thought, “How crazy is this? This is just about numbers—another wild idea by people who sit in offices and have no grasp on reality.”

But the vision would not let me go. The question that kept surfacing was, “Can we do any less?” This was especially brought home to me when I read these words:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone . . . This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved . . . For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men . . .”
(1 Timothy 2:1-6).

Do you hear the reoccurring theme as to who matters to God? Everyone! Christ gave Himself as a ransom for all men—not just *some* or *most*—but *all* men.

I have heard it said that numbers are not important when it comes to matters of faith. Don’t tell that to God. A book of the Bible is

named “Numbers.” If you read the book of Acts, you will very quickly get the impression that numbers do matter to God and to the early Christian Church—twelve, to begin with, and then one hundred twenty. Soon there were three thousand added to their number. But who’s counting? God apparently was. Why? Because numbers matter to God.

Remember what Jesus said about the shepherd: One, two, three, fifty-six, fifty-seven, eighty-nine, ninety-one, ninety-nine—where is number one hundred? The shepherd went out looking for the one. Why? Because numbers mattered to the shepherd.

Remember the woman with the ten precious coins? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—where is the tenth coin? She turns the entire house upside down in search of it—and when it is found, there is partying and celebrating among her friends. Why? Because numbers mattered to the woman.

Picture it this way if you will: A family of six goes to the zoo. After a very nice day, they head home. Only when they get home do they realize that one of their four children is not with them, apparently left behind and lost. Can you imagine the wife saying to her husband, “I am so glad that we have the three children we do. After all, it is quality that counts and not numbers”? Ridiculous to even consider. Those parents would waste no time in going back to find that child. In fact, they would never

have been placed in this situation in the first place, because they would have been keeping count. Why? Because numbers matter to those parents.

Who matters to God? Everyone! God wants all to be saved! Not most. Not a majority. He wants all to be saved. So, He keeps count. Like the woman with the coins and the shepherd with the sheep, numbers matter to God. Not numbers in themselves, but *who* those numbers represent. Each number represents a soul for whom Jesus gave His life as a ransom. He paid the debt that each of us owed to God on account of our disobedience. His final words, "It is finished," literally mean "paid in full."

Numbers matter to God because each and everyone of them is someone for whom

blood was shed. Jesus tells us that the angels celebrate and party in heaven when just one person repents and comes home to God. Why? Because numbers matter to God. He is keeping count.

Prayer: Jesus, you are my ransom. You are my mediator. There is no way that I could have paid the debt that you so willingly offered on my behalf. You stand before the Father on my behalf as my mediator. Only through you can I approach the throne in prayer and have confidence that on the Day of Judgment I will be able to stand before the Father with confidence and peace. Thank you, that in the multitude of people upon this earth, I matter to you. Move my heart, Jesus, that those in my life who matter to you will matter to me as well. In your name I ask this. **Amen.**

Challenge: Think about who matters to you. Who matters to you but does not know or believe that they matter to God? For the next 48 days, would you be willing to pray for them? Pray for their family, their job, their health and, yes, pray for their relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11

From the Book of Concord: "But since the Confutation condemns us for assigning these two parts to repentance, we must show that Scripture makes them the chief parts in repentance or the conversion of the ungodly. For Christ says in Matthew 11[:28], 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' There are two parts here: being weary and carrying heavy burdens refer to contrition, anxieties, and the terrors of sin and death; to come to Christ is to believe that on account of Christ sins are forgiven. When we believe, our hearts are made alive by the Holy Spirit through the Word of Christ. Therefore, these are the two chief parts: contrition and faith. In the first chapter of Mark [v. 15] Christ says, 'Repent and believe the gospel.' Where in the first part he denounces sin, in the second part he consoles us and shows us the forgiveness of sins. For 'to believe in the gospel' is not that general faith, which the demons also possess, but it is properly speaking to believe the forgiveness of sins given on account of Christ. For this is revealed in the gospel. Here you also see that these two parts are joined: contrition, when sins are condemned, and faith, when it is said, 'believe the gospel.' We will not argue if someone says that Christ also included the fruits of repentance or the entire new life. It is enough for us that he names these two chief parts: contrition and faith" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII: Repentance, pp. 193-194.44-45).

3 Learn What He Desires

“On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick, But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” (Matthew 9:13)

When you know someone well, you know their styles, their likes and their dislikes. It is important for you and them to get to know those kinds of things. As relationships deepen, it is important to not only know the personal preferences of a person, but to also know what their deepest heartfelt desires are in life.

Knowing what a loved one desires is part of a growing and vibrant relationship. Furthermore, you not only know what they desire, but what is important to them becomes important to you. The desires of their heart become a part of what you desire in life. This is evident among best friends, in marriages, and in healthy working teams.

It is also evident in one’s relationship with God as it matures and grows over time. It is not uncommon to find some in the faith whose main concern is to escape the fires of hell and make sure they will be in heaven someday. Their faith initially is fairly self-centered—like that of a toddler. Their concern is more on how God can help them with a variety of problems within their life. This does not mean they are not Christians. Their faith, however, needs to mature. Paul spoke about this when he said,

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:1-3).

This kind of growth is so apparent in the disciples who initially followed Jesus. At first their faith was very self-centered and immature. How often did Jesus find them talking about who was the greatest in their midst? Even on the day of Ascension, they were still focused on their needs and their desires. Remember them asking Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Yet, along the way, as they are filled with the Spirit and mature in the faith, their focus and their desire are transformed. Christ’s mission becomes their mission. Christ’s passion becomes their passion. Christ’s desire becomes their desire. They became so identified with Christ that Paul was led to say,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

What is it that Jesus desires? If you could put it into a sentence, what would you say is His heartfelt desire for you? For those in your life and in this world? Listen to what He says:

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew (9:12-13)).

Jesus was not one to be overly impressed with outward show. People in His day were no different than people in our day—or for that

matter, than you and me. We often become so impressed by what is outside a person—the clothes they wear, the cars they drive, the salary they make. These were the kind of people who were upset with Jesus because He was hanging out with sinners and tax collectors, a less than impressive crowd. They could not stand it when He had the nerve to invite Matthew, one of the least respected in their community, into His circle of friends.

The heart of Jesus, however, desires something different than most people. Jesus looks for what is in a person's heart: *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice."* Mercy is a matter of the heart. Sacrifice is focused on the actions that show on the surface. Jesus, of course, is very interested in our outer actions. But first He looks into the heart as to what motivates the actions that surface.

David understood this so well when in his own guilt he came before God and declared,

"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51: 16-17).

Many years ago, Fred Rogers of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" sang a song, "It's You I Like." In this song, he would sing:

"It's you I like; it's not the things you wear;
it's not the way you do your hair,
But it's you I like, the way you are right now,
the way down deep inside you,
not the things that hide you,
—not your toys, they're just beside you."

If Jesus were singing that song to you, what are the things that he would point out that identify you and give you a sense of value and yet are only beside you? They are not the real you. He would say to you, "It's you I like."

We may look inside ourselves and think, "If you only knew . . . If you only knew what I have done and what I have thought . . ." Jesus does know and His response is, "It's you I like."

Listen to what He says: *"I have not come to call the righteous but the sinners."* He is not impressed by those who pretend to have their act together and are impressed by their own righteousness—those who see no urgent need for Him. He is, however, touched by those whose hearts are broken and contrite. He is moved by those who know they have failed Him. His promise is there for you: *"All that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).*

The love of Jesus is like no other you could ever know. This does not mean that He winks at our sin. Consider the woman caught in adultery. After He places His own name and life on the line for her, Jesus turns to her and says, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? . . . Then neither do I condemn you . . . Go now and leave your life of sin"* (John 8:10-11). He loves us just the way we are, but He loves us so much that He does not want to leave us that way.

This promise is not just for you and me. There are so many others that Jesus desires to call to Him. It may be the last person you would ever think about as a possibility because, on the surface, they just do not seem to be open or receptive. Jesus looks at them in a different way. He looks at them the same way He looked at Matthew or the woman caught in adultery—straight into the heart. You know some of these people in your life. These are ones to whom we are called. These are the people who make up the 100 million to whom we can communicate the love of Christ so that their hearts might be ablaze with His love and presence.

Who is there in your life that might surprise you if you were to look at them in the same way that God looks at them? Would you be willing to pray for them over the remainder of these 50 days? Pray for their well-being. Pray for their family. Pray for the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with them. Responding to the call of Jesus to be His witness begins with learning about Him personally and about what He desires. It also involves learning about the people who matter to Him.

Prayer: Lord, you desire mercy and not sacrifice. Help me to learn what this means. So often I focus on the external things about those around me. I am attracted by those who seem to have their act together but ignore those who are less than impressive. Yet, you look into their

hearts, as you have done with me. You do not turn away from those whose hearts are broken and contrite. Help me to not turn away from them either. May they see you in me, through my words and my actions. In your name I ask this. **Amen.**

Challenge: If Jesus were to say to you, “It’s you I like, the way you are right now, the way down deep inside you, not the things that hide you—not your _____, they’re just beside you,” what would He put in the blank? What are the things about you that make you feel important but are just beside you? If you were to say these words to the people who matter to you—the people you are praying for—what are the things that are beside them? The things that hide them?

Scripture Reading: Psalm 51

From the Book of Concord: “This Christ calls all sinners to himself and promises them refreshment. He is utterly serious in his desire that all people should come to him and seek help for themselves. He offers himself to them in the Word. He desires them to hear the Word and not to plug their ears or despise his Word. To this end he promises the power and activity of the Holy Spirit, divine assistance in remaining faithful and attaining eternal salvation” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article XI: Election, p. 517.8).

4 Learn His Word to Revere Him

“Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.’” (Deuteronomy 4:10)

Fred had been in the church longer than anyone could remember. Every Sunday he was there. In fact, every Sunday before worship, he could be found sitting in Sunday School class—third from the left in the second row of chairs. There was little question of his dedication. He had the pins to prove it. Each year the Sunday School department gave out pins for perfect attendance. Fred had seven of them—seven years in a row of perfect attendance.

One day, a visitor came and joined in the study. Afterwards, Fred greeted him, and welcomed him to the church. As the conversation progressed, the visitor noticed the seven pins that Fred wore on his coat. He asked Fred what they were for. Fred proudly shared that they were given to acknowledge his seven years of perfect attendance in class. “I have never missed a class, except the one time they cancelled it due to the blizzard of five years ago.” The visitor responded, “My, with all that knowledge, you must really be equipped to do something quite significant. What, may I ask, will you do with all that learning?” Fred thought for a while. No one had ever asked him that question before. Fred had never asked himself that question. After a few moments of quiet reflection, Fred beamed proudly and said, “Why, I am going to get another one. I am going to get an eighth pin. No one, I believe, has ever done that around here.”

Sadly, this story is repeated over and over again in many circles. Maybe not with Sunday School pins, but how many people study God’s Word Sunday after Sunday and year after year

but have no purpose in mind as to what they will do with all that they learn?

This is not to put down learning and study. Let there be no doubt, God wants us to learn His Word. His Word declares,

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-16).

God wants us to learn His Word, but not as an end to itself. In learning His Word, we gain wisdom in two key areas. First, in the matter of salvation, we get to know Jesus. The Scriptures show us what He has done for us and how we are saved. Secondly, all of our learning is meant to give us wisdom in the area of day-to-day living, as we are “equipped for every good work.”

There is a huge difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge, which the world knows much about and values so highly, is fostered by curiosity. Twenty-four hour news coverage—and behind-the-scenes coverage like we have never seen before—feeds our curiosity, increasing our appetite for more of the same. We live in a society that values information and knowledge (i.e., the more you know and

have at your finger tips, the more influential and powerful you are in life). Wisdom, however, is fostered by reverence. God says,

“Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children’”
(Deuteronomy 4:10).

God has revealed His Word to us that we might revere Him and stand in awe of Him. This reverence will then draw us in to learn more about Him. Don’t confuse reverence with fear. Reverence, or awe, is a sense of wonder and humility that is created when one is in the presence of greatness and mystery. Fear repels us, causing us to shrink back in terror. Reverence will draw us near in humbleness as we are empowered to live changed lives. Time after time, this is evident in those who are exposed to the teaching of God.

Remember the woman at the well with Jesus (John 4)? Knowing little of who He is or what He offers, nonetheless her life is changed. Throughout her conversation with Jesus, even though Jesus exposes her sinful life, she is drawn in closer to Him. That is what reverence does. When she leaves Jesus to go back to town and the folks there, she is a changed woman. She knows it. The townspeople sense it. By what they see and hear from her, they feel compelled to go and check this out for themselves. The response of her neighbors is exactly what God had in mind all along when we learn His Word. It is not about getting one more Sunday School pin. It is about mission. It is about drawing others into the fellowship of God. This is the good work that follows once God has made us wise unto salvation. Listen to how God described His original intent for our learning:

“See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will

show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?’”
(Deuteronomy 4:5-7).

The world knows what it is like to see people living in fear. We have plenty of that around us these days. The world is not so familiar with those who live in awe and reverence. There is nothing quite so compelling as witnessing someone whose life is lived out not in mundane routines and uncertainty of the future, but with a sense of awe and reverence for a God whose love and authority lays claim on their day-to-day living.

When God delivered His people out of Egypt, He gathered them together at Sinai, giving them His Word with a mission in mind. They were to learn it and live it—not to gain His love (they already had that, undeserved and freely given). God had shown them His grace and mercy in His saving act through Moses. His intent was that their witness would compel nations to be drawn to Him.

When the people of God stood before Him at Sinai, the Word He gave them revealed two things: His Law and His Gospel. In His Law, He clearly said what He demanded of them. The commandments were not suggestions but His revealed will. In His Gospel, He revealed what He had already done for them in delivering them from slavery. His Word—both Law and Gospel—caused them to stand in awe before Him. These are the two great teachings of Scripture—Law and Gospel. The Word caused them to stand in reverence before Him. That is the result of learning His Word—it fills you with reverence.

Today, we stand at another mountain—not Sinai, but Calvary. We need not approach this one in trembling. Nor should we be too casual, lacking deep reverence. For here again God reveals Himself in both Law and Gospel. It moves one to fall before Him in both fear and

love. Emil Brunner, a Swiss theologian, wrote in a sermon:

“Only at the cross of Christ does man see fully what it is that separates him from God; yet it is here alone that he perceives that he is no longer separated from God. Nowhere else does the inviolable holiness of God, the impossibility of overlooking the guilt of man, stand out more plainly; but nowhere else does the limitless mercy of God, which utterly transcends all human standards, stand out more clearly and plainly.”

One of the mission responses to God’s Word is learning—not as an end in itself, but rather that we might learn to revere Him. When our hearts are ablaze with reverence and awe before Him, then those around us will marvel at what kind of God we serve who is so near to us and who fills us with wisdom and understanding. Remember what God said in Jeremiah,

“Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast

of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things” (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Prayer: Dear Father, your Word reveals you as Holy and Just. That alone would fill me with such fear and trembling. How could I even dare come into your presence, let alone speak to you as I do right now? But your Word also reveals you to me as Gracious and Merciful. You delight in showing me love and kindness. You invite me to approach you as my Father. Holy and Just. Gracious and Merciful. I stand before you in awe and reverence. Who is a God like you? So pure that you cannot tolerate evil before you. So kind that you turn no one away who comes to you in the name of your Son. It is there, in Jesus, that I behold your wisdom and power and righteousness. In Him your holiness and justice and grace and mercy are satisfied and fulfilled. I stand in awe of you and praise, you dear Father. **Amen.**

Challenge: Write down on an index card the words of Revelation 4:11: *“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”* In the coming days, read and meditate over these words, using them as a form of worship and praise.

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 4

From the Book of Concord: “Let me tell you this. Even though you know the Word perfectly and have already mastered everything, you are daily under the dominion of the devil, and he does not rest day or night in seeking to take you unawares and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against these three and all the other commandments. Therefore you must constantly keep God’s Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it. On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. For this Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living. Even if no other benefit or need drove us to the Word, yet everyone should be motivated by the realization that through the Word the devil is cast out and put to flight, this commandment is fulfilled, and God is more pleased than by any hypocrisy, no matter how brilliant” (The Large Catechism, The Third Commandment, p. 400.100-102).

5 Learn the Joyful Sound

“Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord.” (Psalm 89:15)

The word “acclaim” in Psalm 89:15 seems to imply an action on our part. Look up the word in the dictionary and you will find that one of the meanings for acclaim is “to shout approval.” There is, indeed, joy to be found in those who learn to shout their approval and praise unto God. But a closer look at the text reveals *God’s action*. The English Standard Version is helpful in shedding light on this: *“Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face.”* The festal (festival) shout mentioned refers to an event in one of the most precious of festivals to Jewish people—the Year of Jubilee. The history of this great festival is found in Leviticus 25. It begins with God’s command that Israel allow the land to rest every seventh year. No crops or cultivation. The seventh year was to be a Sabbath year as the land rested. No planting, picking of fruit, or harvesting of any kind. Israel was asked to trust God that He would provide for their needs during this time:

“You may ask, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?’ I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in” (Leviticus 25:20-22).

What an incredible promise—God is promising them a triple harvest. Next, God commanded that the people observe seven consecutive cycles of Sabbaths for the land—49 years of trusting that God would

provide for their needs and then some. After these seven seven-year periods, the fiftieth year was to be a Year of Jubilee. When that year arrived, there would be a sounding of trumpets. (The word Jubilee means “the clamoring of trumpets.”)

“Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan” (Leviticus 25:9).

The joyful sound of the trumpet could be heard throughout the land—in every village and every city. Much like the ringing of church bells in our day, the trumpets would joyfully sound. What made their sound so joyful is that this marked the canceling of all debts and restored all goods to the original owner. It freed every servant. If a farmer had fallen into hard times, the Year of Jubilee returned his land and possibly even his family to him. The Year of Jubilee enabled a person to say, “Nothing in my past can be held against me. I am free. That which I lost has been given back to me.”

Those who learned the meaning of the sound of the trumpets were so joyful as it filled them with confidence and hope even in the midst of depressing and difficult times. Those who knew the joyful sound became fearless as they walked through life. They may be afflicted, but their hearts are at rest in knowing the joyful sound.

The echoes of this joyous sound reverberate

throughout the pages of the New Testament. The message Christ proclaims is that *this is* our year of the Jubilee. It is so fitting that in His first sermon to His own hometown, Jesus would stand up and say,

“The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

In Christ, I know that my past does not have to be held against me. That which I lost in Adam’s fall, I have now regained in being able to call God my Father. The inheritance is mine once again. Blessed are those who know and have learned the joyful sound.

It is not a sound that I must wait to hear once every seven years or every fifty. The joyful sound is heard when I drink of His blood and eat of His body and hear the words, “The body of Christ, given and shed for you.” Can you hear the joyful sound in that? It is our Lord proclaiming release to you and me in our poverty and blindness. The joyful sound is heard in the liturgy of the church when the

pastor pronounces in the stead and by the command of Jesus the forgiveness for our rebellion and disobedience. The joyful sound is heard in the splashing of water with the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Time after time the joyful sound is heard as God shouts His approval of us on account of what Jesus has done on our behalf. Read and ponder the words of Romans 8:1: “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” The past is forgotten. The trumpets are blasting. Blessed are those who have learned the joyful sound.

There are many ways in which we can respond to Jesus in mission. We can pray, we can serve, we can tell, but there is no more important response than first learning and hearing the joyful sound within our own being.

Prayer: Jesus, it is because of you that I hear and know the joyful sound. I have heard the joyful sound of the Father’s shout of approval for me. It is all because of you. Now it is my turn. I want to shout my approval and praise of you. You alone deserve that, and it is my joy to offer you it with all of my heart and soul and might. To you alone belong glory, honor, wealth, power, riches and blessing. Now and forevermore. **Amen.**

Challenge: On the next Lord’s Day, when you are in worship, listen for the joyful sounds in the hymns you sing, the liturgy, the Word and the prayers. Listen again for the same joyful sounds the next time you witness a Baptism or receive the Lord’s Supper.

Scripture Reading: Leviticus 23-25

From the Book of Concord: “In the first place, we have a clear text in the very words of Christ, ‘DO THIS in remembrance of me.’ These are words that instruct and command us, urging all those who want to be Christians to partake of the sacrament. Therefore, whoever wants to be a disciple of Christ—it is those to whom he is speaking here—must faithfully hold to this sacrament, not from compulsion, forced by humans, but to obey and please the Lord Christ. However, you may say, ‘But the words are added, ‘as often as you do it’; so he compels no one, but leaves it to our free choice.’ Answer: That is true, but it does not say that we should never partake of it. Indeed, precisely his words, ‘as often as you do it,’ imply that we should do it frequently. And they are added because he wishes the sacrament to be free, not bound to a special time like the Passover, which the Jews were obligated to eat only once a year, precisely on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first full moon, without variation of a single day. He means to say: ‘I am instituting a Passover or Supper for you, which you shall enjoy not just on this one evening of the year, but frequently, whenever and wherever you will, according to everyone’s opportunity and need, being bound to no special place or time’ (although the pope afterward perverted it and turned it back into a Jewish feast)” (The Large Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar, p. 471.45-48).

6 Learn a New Song

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.” (Revelation 14:3)

Have you ever noticed how much God likes “new”? Page through the scriptures and new things jump off the page. He likes *new* wine (Numbers 18:12); *new* hearts (Ezekial 36:26); a *new* spirit (Ezekial 11:19); a *new* name (Isaiah 62:6); a *new* creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); a *new* command (2 John 1:5); a *new* covenant (Jeremiah 31:31); *new* wineskins (Matthew 9:17); the *New* Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12); and a *new* heaven and a *new* earth (Revelation 21:1).

It should not surprise us, then, that around the throne, as people and multitudes gather, they sing a *new* song (Revelation 14:3). Would anything else be fitting for a moment like that: People streaming in from all parts of the world and from all moments in time—people whom we have not seen for years who have had such an impact on our lives—all gathering together in praise to Father, Son and Holy Spirit! What could be more fitting than for this multitude to join in singing a new song of praise?

Do you find it hard to picture? Me too. But consider this: What is your favorite hymn or song to sing in praise of God? Even if you cannot sing, what is the song you just love to hear sung by a large group of people? Can you picture singing that song—people, lots of people around you, singing with all of their heart and soul? When I am singing a song that expresses the love and faith I have deep inside, I love to sing it out for all to hear, because I am speaking about the love and joy of my heart. Ask those around me. They will testify to my singing certain songs joyfully loud (not always on key, but joyfully loud). Now, try to imagine what it will be like to gather around the throne

and sing praises to Him with loved ones from all ages standing before Him face to face.

Look over there—there are Abraham and Sarah singing, and near them is Isaiah. Come on over here with me and let me introduce you to my dad who loved to sing when he was here on earth. What they and we all share in common is that everyone is singing a new song.

What is this new song being sung by those who have gone before us? It is part of an expanding and unending chorus that echoes throughout the pages of Revelation. It begins with the singing of “Holy, Holy, Holy” (4:8) as the Lamb of God is crowned in glory. It reaches its peak with the Hallelujah Chorus in the marriage celebration of the bride and the Lamb in 19:1-10 and continues to be sung in glory and joy even as you read these words.

The words of the new song are given in Revelation 5:9-14. There are three stanzas. The first proclaims that the Lamb is worthy to receive the scroll because with His blood He has “*purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*” (vv. 9-10). The second stanza (v. 12) expresses the praise and honor and glory that the Lamb alone is worthy to receive: “*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.*” The third stanza gives glory both to God and the Lamb together: “*To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!*” (v. 13).

This “new song” is mentioned only twice in Revelation—once in 5:8-9, and once in 14:3. There

is, however, an interesting difference between the two verses. Take a look at them and see if you can detect the difference:

“And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy, to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation’” (Revelation 5:9-14).

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth” (Revelation 14:3).

In the first reference, the new song is sung before the throne by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. In the glory of heaven where we know fully and no longer in part, everyone knows the words and the tune. In worship, there is nothing quite like the joy of hearing people sing when everyone knows the words and the tune and sings from the depths of their souls. That is the scene before the throne.

In the second reference, the new song is sung by the 144,000. Who is singing the new song? This represents the church on earth—those believers, you and me among them, who are awaiting the great day of the Lord’s return. What I find curious and incredibly humbling about this verse in Revelation 14:3 is the word “learn.” In heaven, before the throne, there is no learning. Everyone knows the words. No choir practice is necessary before the throne. But here on earth, not everyone knows the song. There are so many who do not know what the Lamb has done for them. So many have never even heard. Some who have heard may not yet fully understand. They have heard the Word, and yet they walk along their way downcast and depressed, much like the men on their way to Emmaus after the Resurrection.

We gather Sunday after Sunday in worship for “choir practice.” Crowds of people—believers mingled with unbelievers, and those who have so many questions and doubts—worshiping and learning a new song. This is what humbles me: Here we are in worship, learning the song that they sing before the throne in perfection and glory. Some of us may sing it off key and others may be flat, but we sing. Sometimes it is more than my singing that is flat. Sometimes it is my faith and love for Him that fall flat. Yet we sing the song that is sung in glory around the throne. We sing the new song that praises Him for what He has done and for what is yet to be revealed.

In worship we learn of His love and His saving grace over and over each Sabbath Day. In spite of our willful disobedience, we hear the words, “On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when He had given thanks He gave it to them and said ‘Take and eat, this is my body which is given for you,’ and in response we sing the new song as the words, “Holy, Holy, Holy” roll off our lips.

The liturgy within our church is structured to bring praise to Him *and* to teach us. There are such powerful and profound lessons to be learned within the liturgy and the hymns we sing. It may seem repetitive at times, but that is good. We are learning the new song, and repetition helps us to learn. Ask any choir director. You practice and you practice it over and over and over again until you know it and it becomes part of you.

God first placed the new song into my heart when I was baptized as an infant. As I grew up, my mom and dad sang the new song to me, teaching me the words as they opened His Word to me. Through devotions and our evening prayers, they taught me the new song. All of this was reinforced as they took me to Sunday School and Worship, which were a must in our home. These were a part of the “choir practice” where we were learning to sing the new song with brothers and sisters already before His throne. What I remember most is when my mom and dad would sit on the piano bench,

singing as a duet so many of the great hymns. I can still hear them singing together, “I Love To Tell The Story.”

I love singing the new song, but I am still learning it. As I grow in His Word, I am learning new stanzas in which to express the adoration and love I have for what He has done. I am still learning the width and depth and breadth to words that I have sung most of my life. Louis A. Brighton, in his wonderful commentary of Revelation, says it so well:

“There is a profound message. . . here on earth, the church learns the hymns sung by our glorified brothers and sisters in Christ. The church on earth joins the church in heaven to form *one* holy church, united in faith expressed through hymns sung in unison. In worship the church on earth raises her voice to participate in the heavenly worship. This truth is articulated in the Preface: ‘With angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying...’” (p. 369).

When I hear those words spoken, I cannot help but think of my dad and those who stand before Jesus. What they sing in joyous and endless praise, we here on earth are learning. The thought of that humbles me and fills me with great joy at the same time. It also compels me to invite more people to join the “choir”—to come and worship with me. As I share His love with those who are lost and they join me in worship, each voice adds to the growing swell of praise unto Him. It is not enough for me to learn the new song. I want to invite those whom I know to join me in the chorus now and unto eternity.

All of this is summed up so well in the song that I remember my mom and dad singing on that piano bench, “I Love To Tell The Story”:

I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory,
of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story,
because I know ‘tis true;
It satisfies my longings
as nothing else can do.
I love to tell the story,
‘twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story;
‘tis pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it,
more wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story,
for some have never heard
The message of salvation
from God’s own holy Word.
I love to tell the story,
‘twill by my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story,
for those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting
to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song.
‘Twill be the old, old story
that I have loved so long.”
I love to tell the story,
‘twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story
of Jesus and His love.

(Words: A. Katherine Hankey, 1866, Music: William G. Fischer, 1869)

Prayer: You alone, O Christ, are worthy to receive glory and honor and power and wealth and all wisdom. I bow before you, O Christ, in humble and heartfelt thanks for your life that you offered up on my behalf. You endured the agony of the cross, the shame of man’s mockery and the forsakenness of your Father, so that I might be cleansed. Yours and yours alone are the Kingdom and the Power and Glory now and forevermore. **Amen.**

Challenge: The next time you are in worship, sing each of the hymns and participate in each part of the service imagining that you are standing with the company of heaven before the Throne.

Scripture Reading: Revelation 4-5

From the Book of Concord: “I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought into it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God’s Word, which is the beginning point for entering it. Before we had come into this community, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. The Holy Spirit will remain with the holy community or Christian people until the Last Day. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases holiness, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in its fruits, which the Spirit produces” (The Large Catechism, The Third Article of The Creed, pp. 437-438.51-53).

7 Learn the Secret

“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:11-13)

A few years ago, a movie came out entitled, “Pleasantville.” Nothing changed in Pleasantville. Everything remained the same. Everyone was happy. Same routines, same daily schedules, and the same cycle of events day by day. Slowly, through a chain of events, things began to change. The change was very unsettling to most as they did not know how to respond to it.

We do not live in Pleasantville. Life changes rapidly. More often than not, too rapidly. Years ago, the world around us embraced stability as something to be valued. That too has changed. Today, the world values change. Remaining the same as we were yesterday is considered a weakness. Doing things the same way we used to is a sure way to failure in the technology and life style of today’s world.

The problem I find in all of this is adjusting to change. Just about the time that I finally catch up to the changes around me, things change again. I was just beginning to catch on to VCR’s—at least how to change the clock on them—and then out came DVD’s. I was just beginning to catch on to DVD’s, and out came the MP3’s. There is no end. Change in technology is one thing. Change in my personal life is another. Life can be such a yo-yo at times. Calm one moment and chaotic the next. Exciting one day and exasperating the very next. How does one adjust to the sudden changes around us and within? We don’t live in Pleasantville.

However, this very characteristic of our world is what God can use to open the doors of mission before us. Our mission is to enter into the lives of people torn by change and offer them a changeless Christ. His Word assures us, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).*

This was the secret that Paul discovered through the many changes in his life. He knew what it was like to experience the highs and the lows of life. He knew what it was like to have food on the table and what it was like to wonder where tomorrow’s supper would come from. He knew what it was like to be respected by many and what it was like to be reviled by others. Paul did not live in Pleasantville either, but he did live in contentment. His secret: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).*

This is not mere positive thinking where we say with the little red engine in a children’s story, “I think I can, I think I can.” This is a confidence that is rooted in Christ, not me, who enables me to accomplish what He calls me to do. The changes of life can be overwhelming, flooding over us and filling us with despair and fear. The disciples knew all too well the unsettling nature of change. Anticipating the death of Jesus, their lives were soon to be turned upside down. Listen to what He says to them and to us, *“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1).* These words, “let not your hearts be troubled” are a command of Christ. When the spirit is

troubled and we find ourselves worrying, there is something we can do: *“Believe in God; believe also in Me.”* The way to stop worrying in the midst of change begins when we stop focusing on ourselves. That is what worry is all about. When I worry, I focus on me. When my heart is directed to focus on Him, I worship. In the midst of changes, Jesus invites and even commands us to focus on Him, the one who never changes. A Lutheran prayer book from 1862 has this prayer:

“Let not the world ensnare our hearts by its attractions nor overburden us by its cares. Enable us to abandon all hope of lasting consolation from created things, and to esteem nothing honorable, nothing pleasing, nothing great and worthy the affections of our souls, but thee, the Lord, and that which directly tends to the improvement of our state in thee. Lord, thou art the chief among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely. It is only by abiding in thy truth that we can taste the consolations of grace or the hopes of glory. Wherever we look for support out of thee, we find nothing but weakness and distress. If thou dost not strengthen, illumine, deliver and preserve us, the friendship of mankind can give no consolation, the strength of the might bring no support, the counsels of the wise and the labors of the learned impart no instruction, the treasures of the earth purchase no deliverance, and the most secret places afford no protection. Thou, Lord, thou alone art the supreme, the essential and final good, the perfection of life, and light, and love. Oh grant us thyself; may we ever abide in thy doctrine; then shall we have both the Father and the Son, and then shall we be able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us” (Family Prayer, pp. 146-147.)

As we learn His Word, we not only learn to revere Him, but we learn the secret to a contented life—Jesus. In Him we too can

say, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

One year after that prayer was written, Abraham Lincoln would offer his own testimony as to how he or a nation could find strength in the midst of change. Ponder his words of March 1863:

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord. We know that by His divine law, nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world. May we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end our national reformation as a whole people? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have daily imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us” (Lincoln Proclamation Appointing National Fast Day, March 30, 1863, Washington, DC).

It is as if those words could have been written today about the world we live in. Self-

sufficiency is a cancer of the soul. It creeps in, robbing us of the very thing that the world hungers for—contentment.

Take a close look at the commercials on television or in print and ask what they are selling. Beyond the cars and clothes and comforts of life, they promise something they cannot deliver—contentment. We chase after this most of our lives, believing that if we buy this or invest here, that in the end we will be satisfied and secure.

One thing and one thing only can offer an abiding contentment—Jesus Christ. A few years ago, a dear friend of mine was diagnosed with lung cancer. The future looked bleak. He was very anxious. As I sat with him in the hospital, I told him, “I have no idea whether you will make it through this or not. I cannot promise you that you will beat the cancer. What I can promise you is what God promises:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance,

character and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:1-5).”

I assured my friend that while I did not know the outcome of his battle with cancer, I knew by God’s promise that God could use the suffering to bring about perseverance and character and, ultimately, hope. All the while, God would pour into his heart truckloads of love by the Holy Spirit. I then asked him, “Is this enough?” God be praised, I saw in his eyes at that moment and through the rest of his battle with cancer contentment and peace that was unshakeable. There are certain things that cancer cannot do, and one of those is to rob us of the strength of Christ.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” This is the secret to contentment. This is our message to a world no longer living in Pleasantville.

Prayer: Father, may I in the hours that lie ahead, keep close to mind and heart that I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me. On His strength alone, not mine, may I rely and at the end of the day, may the glory be yours alone. **Amen.**

Challenge: Identify one area in your life where you frequently worry. Ask God to help you to rely on His strength, not yours. Focus your prayer and thoughts on what He is able to do.

Scripture Reading: Romans 5

From the Book of Concord: “Now although untested people despise this teaching completely, it is nevertheless the case that it is very comforting and beneficial for timid and terrified consciences. For the conscience cannot find rest and peace through works but by faith alone, when it concludes on its own with certainty that it has a gracious God for Christ’s sake, as Paul says (Rom. 5:1): ‘Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God’ (The Augsburg Confession – German Text, Article XX: Faith, p. 54.15-16).

In Your Own Words: Write below or in the margins the key thought or lesson you have learned in this chapter on Learn and/or a thought you would like to explore further.