



identity

A PUBLICATION OF THE
CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

BRANDON PANGMAN SHARES HOPE FROM YOUTH CONVENTION
INSPIRATION POINT AND TUSCARORA RELEASE WINTER CALENDAR

BEAU AND ERIN SIBUMA: A STORY OF LOVE AND SERVICE

THEOLOGY

Practicing love
and humility in a
broken world

TESTIMONY

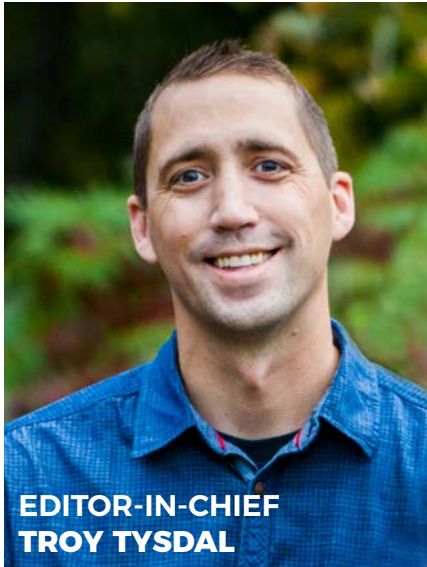
Finding identity
in Jesus

MISSION

Building a
team in Wesley
Chapel

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Seven simple
steps to prep for
persecution



**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
TROY TYSDAL**

In the Old Testament we are given the story of a prophet named Elijah. Because of the corruption around him, Elijah falsely believed he was the last follower of God in Israel. After a brave encounter with those who desired to silence him, Elijah retreated to a cave hoping to hear the Word of the Lord.

A strong wind tore through the mountains and broke the rocks to pieces, and Elijah thought, “Surely the Lord is in this mighty display of power.” But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, an earthquake. “Surely the Lord shakes the foundations of the earth,” thought Elijah. But the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, a fire—but still no sign of the Lord. Elijah returned to the cave, and there in the silence—where he least expected it—he heard a whisper.

In this life, we are surrounded by noise, and much of that noise brings an anti-Christian message about who we are, how we should think, and what we should feel. The noise can be overwhelming. In our confusion, we can be tempted to believe that we are all alone—the last followers of God in this broken

world. We listen for the Lord, but he is not in the noise.

God is not in our idols, or our selfish desires. He is not in our calls for vengeance, or in the voice of this age. But he does speak. Perhaps he speaks where we would least expect it. He speaks through the Bible—those words written thousands of years ago, and He speaks through his Church—a group of imperfect people, who are only unique because of what they believe.

The hope for *identity* magazine is that it will be a magazine faithful to the Bible—bravely applying the Word of God to relevant topics today, and telling the story of imperfect people—proclaiming the story of a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is my prayer that, throughout the articles in this publication, you will hear the voice of the Lord whispering, “I am with you.” And you will catch a glimpse of your *identity*—the person God created you to be.



CLB

A Disciple-Making Movement

Church of the Lutheran Brethren

identity magazine is a publication of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB). The CLB is a family of 116 congregations in North America, with 1,500 daughter congregations in Cameroon, Chad, Japan and Taiwan, which are organized into four national church bodies.

As a denomination, the CLB exists to serve congregations in obedience to the Great Commission—making disciples for Christ locally, nationally, and internationally.



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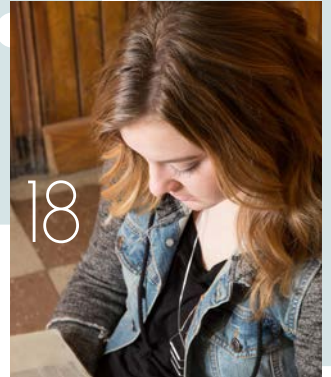
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You Take God's Breath Away

A TESTIMONY BY
TAYLOR WATKINS

When I was younger, my parents really encouraged me to be happy and do a lot in life. There are videos from my childhood where my parents would say, "What is this?" and I'd say, "I'm Taylor Watkins, and this is a great day!"

I remember, in fourth grade, when that childhood happiness was taken away. That was the first time I was called "ugly."

Throughout fourth and fifth grade, the name-calling didn't really stop. It made me think a lot less of myself. In sixth grade the vocabulary expanded, and I was called names that I didn't even understand. I just knew they hurt. For the first time, I wanted to die.

In seventh grade everything sort of calmed down. But then we all got social media. Someone made a fake Twitter account and messaged me that I should kill myself, saying I didn't belong at the school and that I didn't belong anywhere.

I believed them. I believed that if one person thought that way about me, everyone else must too.

In eighth grade I got invited to a place called Castaway. I went, and I found acceptance in Jesus. The camp speaker kept saying, "You take God's breath away." I thought, "Yes, I know Jesus loves me. I've been singing that since I was little." But she kept saying it. And then one night it hit me. The Creator of the universe looks at me and says, "**Taylor Watkins, you take my breath away.**"

When I came back from camp I had the "camp high." I was going into my freshman year, so that changed everything. I ended up getting a boyfriend, but when we broke up, he told me that I didn't deserve love. I agreed, "Yes, I don't deserve love. Especially from God."

I kept going to youth group and Young Life—things that lifted me up. One night a

speaker was talking about how big the universe is. He was explaining the things in the universe, and then said, "God didn't think it was complete until he created you."

I used to self-harm and do all kinds of things, but this time I went home and just threw away everything. I threw away the knife I used to cut myself with. I threw away harmful notes I had written. I started to understand that I have constant love from Jesus. If I mess up, I know he still loves me. If I'm having a bad day, I know he still loves me. That's something I get to experience every single day.

And so, I'm still Taylor Watkins, and not every day is a great day. But my heart is on fire for Jesus Christ, and that's how I'm living every day.

CHURCH UPDATE
JEFF OLSEN

**JOIN A GROWING COMMUNITY
IN WESLEY CHAPEL, FLORIDA**



CONNECT WITH JEFF OLSEN AT 813-994-9363

JEFF AND HEATHER OLSEN started planting Grace Community Church in Wesley Chapel, Florida in 2005. They broke ground on a new building in 2017, and are now looking for young adults to join them in one of the most consistent growing communities in Florida.

DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE



Grace Community Church was born in the summer of 2005 when God led my wife Heather and me to establish a new congregation in Wesley Chapel, Florida. Over the past decade, this suburb of Tampa has grown rapidly, and we have seen the addition of ten public schools, three regional malls, a hospital, a state college, numerous commercial projects, and thousands of homes.

From the beginning of our ministry, many individuals and families have been impacted by the gospel. In 2012, our church leaders began to dream about constructing a church home that would help us point more people to Jesus. Although the task has been bigger than anything we could accomplish on our own, God has done amazing things! He has given us land for our future church home near three public schools and one mile from the future Interstate 75 exit. There are plans for another 37,000 new homes in our area.

As we consider the ongoing growth in this area, we see the potential for a growing church ministry of significant impact. This summer we broke ground on a 7,760 square-foot multipurpose building. We are motivated by Christ's love to complete the work as soon as possible. We are inviting volunteer work crews to help us with various parts of the construction project. We are also looking for short-term mission teams to help us with outreach plans related to our Grand Opening in the Spring of 2018. In addition, we are praying for young adults, families, and retirees to consider moving to this area to join in our work.

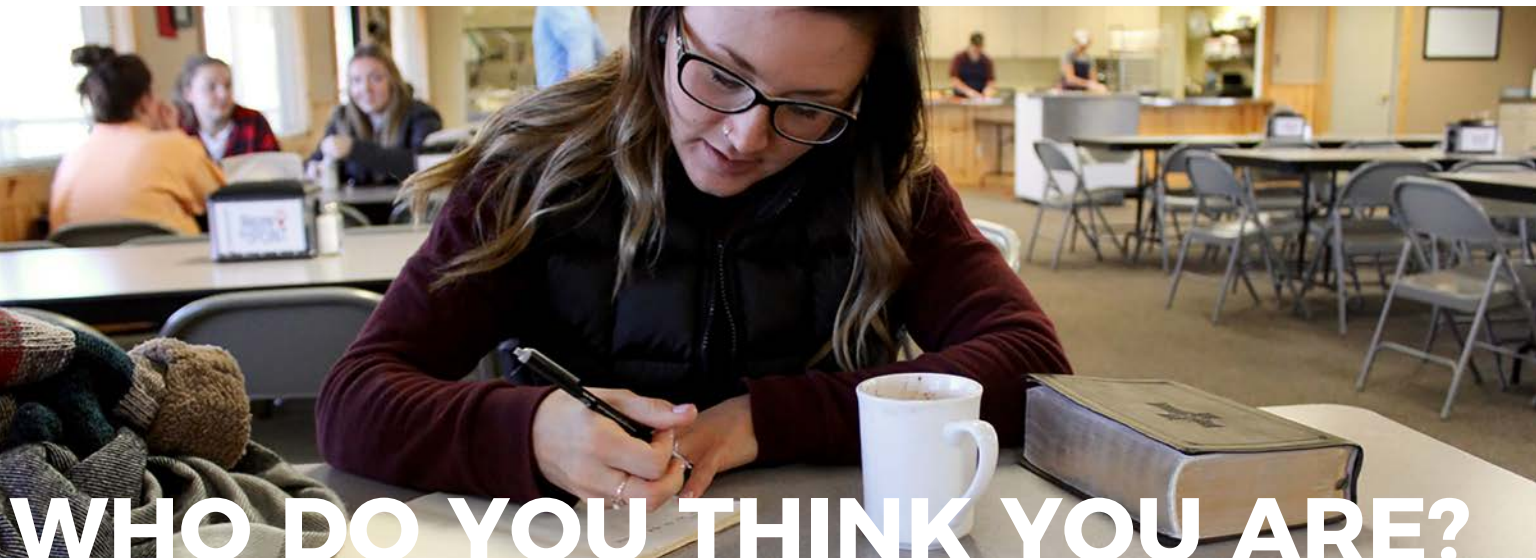
"In 2003, I was trying to teach my daughters Karissa (age 4) and Madison (age 2) to be thankful for their food and to not waste anything. One morning I noticed a LIFE cereal box on the table, so I asked them if they had eaten all of their breakfast. Karissa responded, 'Madison ate all of her cereal, but I wasted my LIFE today.'

"Now that my daughters are about to enter their college and young adult years, I continue to hope and pray that they will not waste the amazing opportunities God gives them. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus reminds us that loving God and loving our neighbors are the top priorities in life.

"As a pastor, I enjoy walking alongside young adults who want to grow in their faith, connect with a church family, and bear fruit for God's kingdom during these formative years."

— Jeff Olsen

If you think God might be leading you to join the team in Wesley Chapel, FL please contact Jeff.



WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

Just who are you? How do you identify yourself? How do you complete this sentence? “I am”

You might answer it in terms of your family and give your name. You might answer in terms of what you do and give your vocation. There are many ways by which we identify ourselves and these in part determine how we answer the identity question and define for ourselves and for others who we are. We can speak in terms of our gender, family, race, culture, religion, age, appearance, abilities, accomplishments, personality, possessions, what we do, where we live, relationships, and even who we know.

Some of the answers are from a psychological perspective while others are more sociological in nature. These are all factors that do have a part in making up our identity. However, they fall short of providing for us the ultimate basis of who we are.

How does the Bible speak to the identity question?

The Bible tells us that “God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). The human person is given the identity of having been made in the image of God. The psalmist also speaks to this from the perspective of God’s creation work: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you” (Psalm 139:13-18).

We are to understand ourselves as personally made and fashioned by God.

The Bible teaches us that our true identity is also found in relation to Jesus Christ. Our identity is not ultimately determined by the “world’s point of view” (2 Corinthians 5:16). For the believer in Christ there is another reality that determines our identity. Through faith in Christ, we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ we have been qualified “to share in the inheritance of his holy people. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:12-14). In Christ we have an identity that has brought us to fullness—that is complete, not lacking anything. There is no need to look to another source for our identity. In Christ we have the identity of being *righteous*. This is not a righteousness that we have produced by our performance, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is given as a gift “from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9). In Christ we have *his* righteousness.

THEOLOGY WITH
EUGENE BOE

We can complete that “I am...” statement with the word “righteous,” for that is who and what we are in Christ.

When the Apostle Peter writes to believers living in a hostile environment, he identifies them as God’s elect, while at the same time recognizing that in terms of their social identity they are scattered exiles. But what ultimately defines them is that they are God’s elect “who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:2).

To know oneself to be chosen by God establishes an identity that is foundational. As persons, we have the need to belong. We were created to belong. It is of first-order to belong to the one who created us. Peter expands on this by defining them as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

The identity that Peter establishes for the first readers of his letter is also the identity for all believers in Christ. As a believer in Christ you are chosen, a royal priest, God’s special possession. The significance of such an identity is life-strengthening. Having come into this identity through the gift of a new birth, we have a hope that is alive. It is so alive that it breathes the resurrection life of the risen Christ. Coming with this identity is an inheritance that transcends the decaying possessions of this world. Such an inheritance is reserved for you! In this identity there is protection for the believer who is guarded by the very power of God “until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). Such an identity causes the believer to burst forth with rejoicing even while going through grief and all kinds of trials (1 Peter 1:6). John, writing to believers in his letter, says to them, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). To be defined as a child of God is to have the identity that we were created for.

When our “I am...” sentence is completed with the Lord’s words by which he defines who we are in Christ, we possess and are confessing an identity that is anchored in God’s truth. It is an identity that gives meaning, significance and purpose.

**CALLED TO EQUIP
THE CALLED**



EUGENE BOE is Academic Dean and Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Lutheran Brethren Seminary. He travels extensively in teaching and sharing the distinct perspective of grace found in Lutheran Brethren theology. He is married to Gudrun, and they have four adult children.

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NAVIGATING HOMOSEXUALITY

HELPFUL TIPS IN HONORING CHRIST AND BUILDING COMMUNITY

BY: ERICK SORENSEN

The Bible clearly teaches that same-sex activity and gender confusion are results of the Fall into sin. It also teaches that our God loves his world (John 3:16).

God loves us fallen deviants so much that he sent his Son to save us by living the perfect life in our place (Matthew 5:17), dying the death our sins have incurred (Matthew 20:28), and rising to new life for our justification (Romans 4:25). He promises that all who receive what he has done for them by faith will be saved from their deserved condemnation (Romans 10:9), thereby becoming “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17) who will enjoy a kingdom without end.

Since God loves us this much, we are called to display the same kind of love to our neighbors: A love that doesn't wait for them to come to us, but a love that seeks them out wherever they are at in life. This love calls us to share the same gospel message with them that was shared with us—the message that brought us salvation.

But how in the world do we do that? Where do we even start? Especially when it comes to our neighbors who struggle with or affirm a different gender identity than their biological identity, or struggle with or engage in sexual activity contrary to God's design.

Let me establish a few facts right out of the gate:

First, God's intent in Creation was to create two sexes, male and female (Genesis 1:27, 5:2). Nowhere in Scripture does one's gender differ from their biological sex.¹

Second, the Bible teaches that the only permissible sexual activity is between one male and one female in the context of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:2; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

Third, the Bible teaches that mankind has fallen into sin,

creating spiritual death. This has resulted in moral, mental, and physical corruption (Romans 8:19-23), affecting every area of our sexual and gender identity. Thus, throughout human history, those who claim to be followers of God and those who do not, have had sex before marriage with different partners, committed same-sex acts, engaged in pedophilia, polyamory, bigamy, etc. They have resisted or changed their biological sex and have engaged in all kinds of disobedience against the Lord of heaven and earth.²

We are idol worshippers who push back against the true design of God's Creation (Romans 1:18-32). If not checked, we are capable of incredible sexual distortion and delusion.

Most likely you already know most of this, having heard it very clearly from your youth leaders and pastors. But there's a fourth point.

Even as the Bible clearly teaches that same-sex activity and gender confusion are results of the Fall, it also teaches that our God loves his world (John 3:16). Since that is the case, let me suggest a few ways forward.

Start conversations: Ask tons of questions, do lots of listening, and genuinely engage with what the other person is saying. As a church planter in New York City, I've spent a great number of days interacting with strangers in local cafés and other public meeting spots. I meet people from every kind of background, with every sort of lifestyle, including many who are same-sex-attracted or are transgendered.

A little while back I struck up a conversation with a transgendered person in a café. He wasn't quite sure what to make of a pastor that wanted to chat, but as I asked more and more questions about what life was like as a trans person, genuinely seeking to hear his story,

he opened up to me and shared some really thought-provoking and challenging things.

After 45 minutes, he hadn't converted to Christianity, but he did see that I cared for him. That's a huge step because, the truth is, many members of the LGBTQ community really don't believe that we care to hear their side of things at all. Start there.

Include them: As you engage members of the LGBTQ community, really seek to be a friend to them. I'm telling you, THIS. IS. HUGE! One of the attendees of our church plant is a same-sex-attracted male who has sought to live a life of celibacy out of worship to God. He earnestly believes if the church is going to ask same-sex-attracted people, and those with gender dysphoria, to NOT give in to their desires for intimacy, then the church MUST be the place where they are able to find the intimacy of real friendship. He is right. Invite them over to your place for a meal or to go out to a movie or a small group at your church or whatever it is you might do with any of the rest of your friends, but include them.

Share your convictions winsomely and with empathy: If my first two suggestions above made you fear that perhaps I was suggesting you downplay or diminish your convictions about the Bible's teaching, this point should put those fears to rest. Christian, you have no choice: You must believe what the Bible clearly teaches. And anyone who is same-sex-attracted or suffers from gender dysphoria must be made aware that acting on those desires is contrary to God's design. The Law must do its work of revealing sin and the condemnation it deserves.

However, that doesn't mean you have to be a jerk about it. Be super-sensitive and caring. As Francis Schaeffer once said, “Biblical orthodoxy without

compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world.” You must express your convictions, not with gritted teeth and fists clenched, but with tears in your eyes and a warm smile. Frankly, it may take some time to get to this point in your relationship with this person, but at some point they’ve got to hear your heart, which as a Christian, beats with the truth. Yes, it’s possible they’ll be upset or reject you, but deep down they’ll know you shared your convictions because you actually care for them.

Give them Jesus: This is the point, my friends. A while back I had a really interesting conversation with a same-sex-attracted man. My wife and I were staying at a hotel in San Diego, celebrating our anniversary, and she had gone up to the room before me. As I stood outside ready to go in, I saw a young guy run past me. And then again, and then again. He looked frantic, so the next time when he was walking by a bit slower, I asked him what he was doing. He was trying to get copies of the LGBTQ magazine he worked for out before deadline.

We did the small talk thing for a bit, but then I asked him, “What is the biggest issue facing the gay community?”

He said, “Oh, without a doubt, marriage.” (At the time, same-sex marriage was not yet legal). “And who’s your biggest threat in that regard?”

“Oh, probably Christians and Mormons,” he said with a sneer.

I hadn’t told him I was a pastor, so we were able to just talk like two human beings about his background and upbringing. He was raised in a very strict Christian home. His mom was the church secretary, his dad an elder. He’d been deeply involved in church, even attended Bible College for awhile. But now he’s living as a gay man working for an LGBTQ magazine in San Diego.

“So how did you get here?” I asked. He pointed to two things: His dad, though physically present, was emotionally absent. He didn’t spend any time with him, and never shared affection with him

at all. As a result, his relationship with his dad was still scarred and awkward.

The second thing he said was really interesting: “I just feel like, if there is a God, he must have turned his back on me because of my attractions.”

At that point, I had to tell him I was a pastor. Then I said, “God didn’t turn his back on you, but he did turn his back on his own Son for you. And he did that so that he could be the Father you never had. He did that so that your sin would be paid for, so that you could be forgiven. And I promise you, he is the Father you always hoped for.”

As I was saying this, he started to cry. He looked at me and said, “Growing up in church, I never heard it put like that before.”

Never, never, never assume that your friends know the gospel. SO OFTEN I have met people who grew up in church, but have that same story: They never heard the gospel put like that before!

My sincere prayer is that this short piece will at least give you a framework to begin the wonderful, exhilarating, challenging and godly work of loving your LGBTQ neighbors. May God bless you in your journey.



ERICK SORENSEN is pastor of Epiphany Lutheran Church in New York City, NY. He is a graduate of Lutheran Brethren Seminary. He and his wife Missy have three children.

Epiphany is a church plant located in the area of Stuyvesant Town and Alphabet City (NYC). If you are interested in being a part of this church plant, please contact Erick.

DIRECTIONS

1. In the Bible we learn that some are born with inherent physical disorders that affect how they see their gender or sexuality. For example, there is a rare case of the intersexual person, one born without clearly discernible male or female features. Scripture acknowledges the intersexual person with the term “eunuch” in Matthew 19:12. Like other physical disorders throughout Church and biblical history, this problem is understood as resulting from mankind’s Fall into sin, and can make it difficult to determine exactly what gender they are meant to be and what people they’re “supposed” to be attracted to.
2. In our current Western culture the mindset that leads to the justification of sexual sins can be summed up with the words, “Be true to yourself.” If by that phrase we mean, “Don’t be inauthentic or fake,” then I’m all for it. But most of the time in our culture it means that whatever one “feels” is true about them is, in fact, “true.” One problem with this is that we are not merely “one self” throughout our lives. We change constantly. Also, if “being true to ourselves” is merely determined by our feelings, than what is wrong with someone “self-identifying” as another race or, for that matter, another species? “Being true to ourselves” can often mean self-gratification or selfishness.

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≡ HUMILITY ≡

First



“**L**ove everybody!” That must be good, because it sounds like a Bible verse. Everybody is God’s creation, so we should extend that respect and love to all people. But what if someone tells me that I’m not “loving” them unless I support their sexual promiscuity, same-sex relationship, or gender reassignment? Jesus said, “Don’t judge.” But did he mean *everything’s* ok? Do you ever wonder, “What’s actually right?”

How do we face these complicated questions? Wouldn’t it be nice if there was one overriding principle that governed all of these questions?

Some people try to make it simple, so they hold up one great Christian principle: love. In terms of Christian principles, love is right up near the top. Because of God’s great love for us, he gave his one and only Son. That’s the difference between life and death, hope and despair, right there! Read 1 Corinthians 13 sometime and you’ll see love is right at the top. Love can answer any question—“Just do the loving thing...” But if you’ve been around long enough, you’ve probably realized that you don’t always know what love is. Can it be loving to tell someone that they’re wrong? Is it loving to let someone abuse me instead of reporting them? Is it loving to deny an alcoholic a drink when they really want it?

Just because love is important, doesn’t mean it’s everything. When we’re faced with really difficult moral and ethical questions, let me offer another Christian principle to couple with love: humility. Humility might be the least remembered Christian principle because it never brags about itself, but don’t underestimate its importance. Humility is at the foundation of all the great Christian truths!

Start with Creation. The very fact that we are God’s creation means that we are subject to the “laws” he has placed on us. I can’t fly, no matter what I’d like to think; I can’t answer every question, no matter what I’d like to think; and I can’t always do what’s right, no matter what I’d like to think. I need to be shown my limits by my Creator. Sometimes I need to be told what’s best for me, even if I disagree with it right now.



DANIEL BERGE is Professor of New Testament Studies at Lutheran Brethren Seminary. Daniel, and his wife Meghan, recently moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota with their seven children, soon to be eight.

Consider too, *redemption*. Redemption is all about humility. God himself put on the greatest display of humility by becoming something strange, weak (sometimes smelly)—a human like you and me. And then think of the goal he had for that human life! Why would the Creator-of-all-things decide to become an outcast, and then choose to be beaten and executed as a criminal? How much humility did that take? Yet he chose to do that because I'm not the humble, trusting creation I should be. How humiliating! But also, honoring.

Finally, consider our Christian hope! Jesus humbled himself in order to honor us—ultimately bringing glory to himself! He calls us to humbly repent and believe, and promises that the dead will be raised to new life! He promises that our bodies—that will all be humbled by death—will also be honored with life in the new creation. When Jesus comes again and restores all things, he will make all things right! That's the promise of his resurrection!

So what does all that “theological” humility have to do with the complicated questions we face every day? Let me suggest two things: First, it teaches us to stay humble and recognize that we don't always know what's right. Should you give money to an alcoholic beggar on the side of the road if they might just buy alcohol with it? Maybe this time they won't; or maybe the easy money is the reason they still do. Sometimes we just don't know. Until the final restoration, we live in a fallen world where we actually have to make compromises. We must still try our best to do what's right, but we have to recognize that our best intentions might turn out to be wrong. This should also drive us back to the Scriptures, God's Word, so that we don't trust too much in what we think or what other people say. We're just creatures, so we should trust what the Creator says about us. Chapter one of Romans clearly considers homosexuality a sin on the same level as murder, greed, gossip, deceitfulness, boastfulness, disobedience to parents, and heartlessness. Perhaps we need a humble correction from God's Word in a few of these matters...

Second, this teaches us to stay humble, because it doesn't all depend on us! Whatever I do, I trust in God that he will make all things right. I will do my best to serve my neighbor, even if he's on the side of the road begging for money—but I don't think it's my job to “save” him, nor do I think I really know how! I don't stand apart from everyone else and think I'm a superhero who can save them all—I'm part of this fallen world myself. And I'm in need of a Savior just like everyone and everything else! But in this humility we still go out in this world with a light that shines in the darkness. Our hope is the message of God's salvation. Our promise: one day “he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces” (Isaiah 25:8). I may not know exactly what's right today, but I have the message that Someone Else will make all things right in the future.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

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CENTRAL REGION
FEB. 9-11 & FEB. 16-18, 2018**

- ✔ In order to give more high schoolers the opportunity to experience iPoint in the winter, we've added a second retreat. Join us for some XC skiing, a run down the snow-tubing hill, or a game of broom ball. inspiration Point's very own John Osmundson will be our speaker as we dig deep into God's Word.



TO REGISTER OR FIND MORE INFO CHECK OUT WWW.IPOINT.ORG

WARM BEACH BIBLE CAMP

**WARM BEACH BIBLE CAMP
PACIFIC NORTH REGION
JUNE 26-JULY 1, 2018**

- ✔ At Warm Beach we devote all we are to teaching teenagers the importance of God and Christian community. We seek to help them grow in their relationship with God to prepare them for life in this world and a life everlasting with Jesus Christ.

REGISTER: WWW.BIBLECAMPROCKS.COM



HILLCREST LUTHERAN ACADEMY



WINTER CAMPUS DAYS DEC. 14-16, 2017

✔ Check out a top-ranked Christian boarding school. It's a place for you to build your faith and prepare for college. Winter campus days will have you go through classes, stay overnight in the dorms, and connect with kids from around the world.



HIT CAMPUS DAYS APR. 14-16, 2018

✔ The HIT is a basketball tournament held at Hillcrest for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. Visit during HIT to see classes, meet new friends, and stay overnight in the dorms to see what Hillcrest is all about.

TO REGISTER OR FIND MORE INFO CHECK OUT WWW.FFHILLCREST.ORG/VISIT

TUSCARORA INN



WINTER WEEKEND EASTERN REGION JAN. 12-14 & FEB. 16-19, 2018

✔ Join friends at Tuscarora for a Christ-centered winter weekend retreat.



JUNIOR WEEK EASTERN REGION JULY 8-14, 2018

✔ Young adults are invited to apply to counsel for Tuscarora's Junior Week, where grade school students attend camp for the week.



TEEN WEEK EASTERN REGION JULY 22-28, 2018

✔ High school students are invited to attend a high-octane week of praise and worship, Bible study, and fun with friends at Teen Week. Young adults are invited to apply to counsel.



FIND MORE INFO AT WWW.TUSCARORA.ORG

Responding to request

INTERNATIONAL MISSION

DAN VENBERG

I was sitting on a rickety wooden bench, enjoying some sweet tea and grilled goat meat, a common meal for a traveler looking for restaurant fare in rural Chad, Africa.

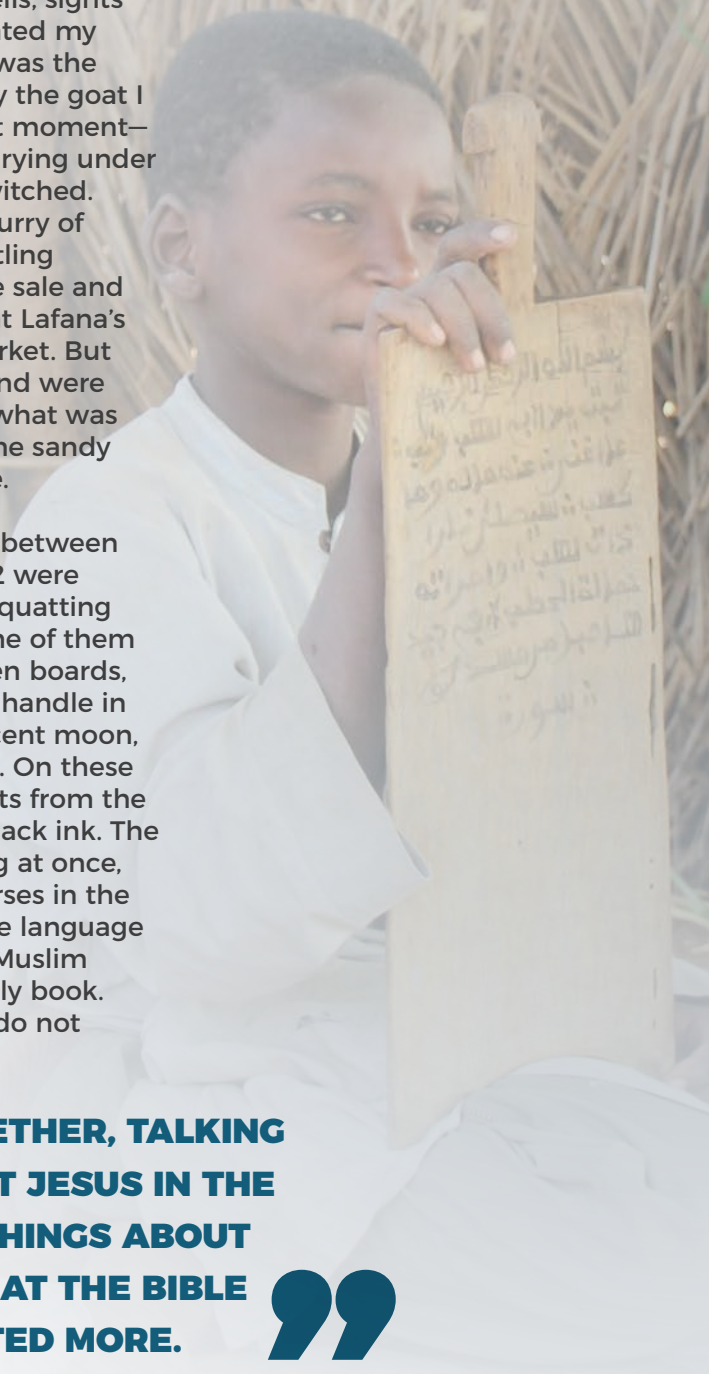
This was not my first visit to Lafana, a rural Chadian farming community. I had met a young man here a few weeks prior, and he was curious what I—a white American who spoke his language—was doing in the middle of proverbial nowhere in the bush of Chad. I had told him that God had given me a love for his people, the Fulbe, and that I was called to learn their language and their culture so that I could share with them what I know about Jesus. He was curious and wanted to hear more. Like the majority of the population, he was Muslim. And as a Muslim, he had been taught about a great prophet named Isa (Jesus), but what he had been taught was a very incomplete and deceptive concept of what Jesus is really all about.

We spent several hours together, talking about Jesus, reading about Jesus, comparing the teachings about Jesus in the Qur'an (Islam's holy book) to what the Bible

teaches. And he still wanted to hear more. So we made an appointment for another visit.

Now, as I grabbed some lunch at a roadside butcher stand, a cacophony of smells, sights and sounds permeated my senses. Behind me was the hide of a goat—likely the goat I was savoring at that moment—stretched out and drying under the sun. My nose twitched. Around me was a flurry of activity, people bustling about, bartering the sale and purchase of wares at Lafana's weekly open air market. But my eyes and my mind were mostly focused on what was happening across the sandy street in front of me.

Twenty young boys between the ages of 8 and 12 were huddled together, squatting on a large mat. Some of them clutched flat wooden boards, ornamented with a handle in the shape of a crescent moon, the symbol of Islam. On these boards were excerpts from the Qur'an, written in black ink. The boys were all talking at once, reciting Qur'anic verses in the Arabic language, the language in which any good Muslim must recite their holy book. Most of these boys do not



“ WE HAD SEVERAL HOURS TOGETHER, TALKING ABOUT JESUS, READING ABOUT JESUS IN THE BIBLE, COMPARING THE TEACHINGS ABOUT JESUS IN THE QUR’AN TO WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES... AND HE WANTED MORE. ”

Requests from Africa

REACHING THE UNREACHED



DAN VENBERG is Mission Mobilizer and Recruiter for Lutheran Brethren International Mission. He and his wife Rachel served in Chad, Africa for over ten years—preaching and teaching the gospel to the unreached.

know the content or meaning of these recitations, but the expectation is to learn to recite, regardless of comprehension. Walking among these boys were two men, the “marabou.” These teachers each held a whip in their hands, and would threaten to whip any who failed to recite the lessons properly. It saddened me deeply to see these boys cowering in front of their teachers, raising their voices in recitation of something they did not understand. But they do it because of a false notion that this is what Allah demands of them in order to merit his mercy... maybe.

For a Muslim, there is no assurance of Allah’s favor... only a shallow hope that they might be shown mercy on judgment day—IF they are obedient enough to the law of Islam.

My thoughts returned to the young man with whom I had just met. The gospel of Jesus had been clearly presented to him, in his own language, in the quietness of his own home. And he found joy and hope in the message. He was eager to learn more! What a contrast! I was reminded of the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts chapter 8, who was met on the isolated Gaza road by Philip, the evangelist.

Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man answered, “How can I, unless someone explains it to me?” Like the Ethiopian, many people in the world are God-fearers. They believe in a god, and they seek truth. But they have been deceived into believing a lie.

According to the Joshua Project, over a third of the world’s population is considered “unreached” with the gospel. This means that they do not have a Christian witness in the context of their culture and language. They do not have a church. They do not have a Bible they can read. They do not have a Christian friend through whom they can hear the gospel. They will likely die without hearing it.

Romans 10:14-15 asks us the question, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” In this same chapter, verse 17 states, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

As I downed the last of my meal and prepared to leave, one of the boys paused from his recitation, peered over his board and looked at me... and smiled. I smiled back as I got on my bike to return home. Pedaling away from Lafana, I was overwhelmed with a sense of joy but also sadness. Joy in the privilege of sharing the gospel with a man who otherwise may never have heard it. Sadness for the many others, like that boy, with whom I may never have the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus.

Who will go to him?

Connect with

 Email Dan Venberg
identity@clba.org
 Join the Conversation
www.CLBA.org/requests-from-africa



WHO'S NEXT?

DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE

LBIM (Lutheran Brethren International Mission) is all about reaching the unreached. We are passionate about being the Church where there is no church; speaking the gospel where the gospel is not proclaimed; being a light in the darkest corners of the world.

We are looking for those who would step out in faith and be ambassadors for Jesus in these places. We are looking for those who would answer a call to go and make disciples of all nations.

Contact: LBIM@CLBA.org



BRANDON PANGMAN is Director of YC19, and Pastor at Emmaus Road Church, Dewitt, IA.

NATIONAL YOUTH CONVENTION
BRANDON PANGMAN

Follow Brandon on Twitter:
@brandonpangman
... or find him on Facebook

There is a familiar story where this lady who was caught in adultery was brought before Jesus. Her accusers dragged her into a room full of people who were looking to prove something while using her as a prop. Naked she stood there. Probably with her legs crossed, hugging herself to cover up as much of her shame as possible. This definitely wasn't her finest moment and everyone was looking at her, everyone was talking about her, everyone was there because of her failures.

How about us? Some of us are caught in our sin, some of us are covering up as much as we can so that no one can see our sins, our struggles, our deepest hidden moments. We don't want people to know the pains that keep us chained. We've been abused, sexually active, had abortions, used drugs, stolen... and we've become burdened by these sins and their effects. The burden stretches to our core because we don't just commit these sins, we *identify* with them.

This burden is more than we are able to bear. This is why, at YC17, we focused on these words from the Apostle Paul,

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Jesus Christ came into this world to pay for our wrongs. He became a prisoner and carried our sins to the cross. He paid for every single wrong you and I have ever or will ever commit. Our shame, guilt and false *identities* are defeated in Christ's resurrection. Believing in Christ Jesus' death and resurrection, we are released from the chains of this world and declared free people by God himself.

That is the best news ever! But now how do we go and sin no more? How do we stand firm and not go back to being a slave to sin? The verse we just read warns us against turning back to that old way of life.

When I was in elementary school, my track coach taught us that, when we are running, we should never look back to see who is behind us. Our focus must be on what is in front of us. There is a spiritual element to this. We need to run from those things that used to enslave us. There is a reason

we were slaves. It's because we loved those sins. When we turn back just to get a little glimpse, we remember how much our insides still long for those ways. When the angels of the Lord pulled Lot and his family out of Sodom he told them to run and not to look back. Lot's wife looked back and it cost her her life. When Christ pulls us out of our sin, we should look to him and not to our old ways.

So how do we run and not look back? How do we stand firm? Well, we don't actually run... we rest. We daily rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. We rest in the fact that our freedom wasn't accomplished by us. The verse above says that Christ has set us free. That's our new *identity*! Our *identity* isn't in our past behaviors and lack of accomplishments. We are no longer adulterers and thieves—no, our *identity* is in the work of Jesus Christ and the freedom that we have in him.

Need a prayer to say today? Pray this short prayer with me: Lord, turn my face toward you. Forgive me when my flesh turns back. Remind me, Lord, that you continue to bring me freedom.



REGISTER FOR WARM BEACH
BIBLE CAMP AT
WWW.BIBLECAMPROCKS.COM

LIVING A LIFE OF SERVICE

Beau and Erin Sibuma live for camp. Their relationship started as a camp crush, and camp was the natural soil they grew in. They looked forward to seeing each other at Warm Beach Bible Camp every summer—after the fall, winter, and spring in their respective home towns in Washington State.

Flash forward twenty years and the two are continuing to foster their love for each other in a place that grew their love for Jesus. Beau and Erin oversee the teen camp in the Pacific Northwest during the Pacific Region of the Lutheran Brethren’s Bible Camp week at Warm Beach.

Their story of being involved in camp ministry isn’t smooth. After graduating high school and pursuing college, the two were married and started to look for outlets of ministry together. In committing to the place that fostered their relationship, they were disappointed with the care and attention that was given to some of the youth. It felt as if the leadership had forgotten what it looked like to have fun.

Beau and Erin started on a long road of involvement with camp. They committed to joining the camp board, arrived early at camp to do tasks few wanted to do, and started volunteering countless hours to run games,



CONNECT WITH BEAU ON FACEBOOK: WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SIBUMA

do the night shift, and pray over the students of the camp. Their commitment earned favor in the eyes of leadership, who saw conviction in the two as they labored to enhance camp as a place for faith formation.

With their foot in the door running menial tasks, the two were eventually granted directorship over the youth portion. They have enhanced the games and activities at Warm Beach, bringing in gladiator-style games that help campers build relationships with their counselors. Their relational approach is seen by many as a parental presence in camp leadership, and they are tirelessly working to have the camp experience be relevant for teens to build their trust in Jesus.

Beau and Erin are now looking for the next generation of leaders. Do you have a love for camp ministry? Contact Beau and Erin to apply to join their leadership team this coming summer.

PREPARING FOR PERSECUTION



Jesus said we should expect many troubles in following him. For most, we call those troubles persecution. The Lutheran Brethren is historically concerned with equipping young people for tough times by strengthening their faith. Hillcrest Academy was established for this purpose. Here are seven simple steps we use at Hillcrest to equip students for coming persecution.

2 EMBRACE MARTYRDOM AS A LIFESTYLE

The word *martyr* comes from the same root word as *testify*. A good example of someone testifying in a martyr fashion is found in the story of Stephen in Acts 7. If we hone habits of prayer, speaking with a flavor of God should flow naturally. So whether we're in church, in public places, or at our dinner table, these practices of testifying to Jesus will become habit. Ask your pastor or youth pastor to start a testimony time in church.

3 UNLOCK CHRISTIAN LEGACIES

I recently discovered the story of Eric Liddell. He was an Olympic champion who traded his sprinting spikes for a Bible and became a missionary in China. He eventually landed in a concentration camp, where he found more peace and joy sharing Jesus than he had when he was free. We build courage in Christ when we hear of others who endured hardships. Check out the book *7 Men and 7 Women* by Eric Metaxas or the *Voice of the Martyrs* (www.persecution.com) to unlock these legacies.



1 HONE HABITS OF PRAYER

One of Jesus' character-revealing habits was prayer. It wasn't a mealtime nicety. Jesus' actions on earth were driven by prayer. To build a solid foundation that will withstand gale-force winds of persecution, prayer is an essential habit.

A great resource that will help build your devotional routine is *The 29:59 Plan* by Daniel Henderson.



4 MOURN WITH PERSPECTIVE

My brother's first son died in the womb. My wife and I made a special candle as a physical reminder of a life we never saw. Every year, as we light the candle, it is a reminder of the sorrow and injustice of an infant dying before being held. This grants us a perspective that life is short and beautiful, and God holds all of it inside his hand, granting strength, peace, and love to the broken. Mourning gives perspective for joy.



5 PRACTICE WAITING WITHOUT WORRY

I once led a minute-long intentional moment of silence in chapel at Hillcrest. It was painful. After 45 seconds the exercise was over. Waiting without worry is counter-cultural. We are conditioned to be active and busy, and waiting is seen as lazy and unintelligent. However, Jesus waited in silence before Pontius Pilate, and in doing so taught that waiting reveals confidence in God executing his plan. This is important as you prepare to face turmoil.



EQUIPPING FOR LIVES OF ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE



WAYNE STENDER is Director of Enrollment at Hillcrest Academy. He and his wife met while serving at Hillcrest, and were married in the school's chapel. Fifteen years later they are continuing to mentor students, equipping them for lives of eternal significance found in Jesus Christ.

6 WORSHIP IN SERVICE



Lyn grabbed a bottle of lotion and made a bee-line to the lady in the back. We were in the blistering Dominican heat on Hillcrest's senior class mission. Others were building a roof, prepping their sermon, and sharing Jesus with kids on the street. Lyn was rubbing lotion on the arms of someone cast out by society. Too often we highlight the work being done rather than consider the One whom we are reflecting in our work. Practicing simple acts of worship—and calling them worship—prepares us for times when worship doesn't sound or look glorifying.

DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE

Students at Hillcrest receive focused mentorship—a place for them to solidify their faith. Classrooms host students from around the world who are growing in confidence in Jesus. Students live in a dormitory during the school months, being mentored by Hillcrest's trained staff. The Bible is studied alongside normal high school subjects, while students participate in athletics, the arts, music, and a host of other programs that earn Hillcrest a mark as one of the top Christian boarding schools in the country.



Visit: www.GOHILLCREST.com

7 BUILD A WORLDVIEW

Many view education as training to build opportunities. Schools give students a leg-up and pull the poor out of poverty. However, a biblical view of education focuses on Jesus Christ. Every subject and discipline you study in school shouts to the need for God in the world, and the purpose of education is to show that Jesus is the only means of salvation for the poor, feeble-minded, and strong alike. Education builds a view of the world, and if our view of the world is centered on studying Christ and his plan, we build a scaffold to support us in tough times.





Church of the Lutheran Brethren



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identity
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HILLCREST
ACADEMY

Present:



IDENTITYWEEKEND

Thursday - Sunday
June 7-10, 2018

REGISTER TODAY

www.ffhillcrest.org/identityweekend

The National Youth Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren is teaming up with Hillcrest Academy to offer an in-depth training weekend. High school and college-age students will study theology and comparative religions to help students build a biblically-based view of *identity*. Attendees will study the overarching themes in Scripture, while also understanding what makes the Lutheran Brethren different from other faith systems and Christian denominations. Hillcrest will offer this training series related to logic; how one can know the Christian perspective is the most consistent with reality; and why other faith systems like evolution, Islam, and new age thinking don't make sense. Attendees will stay in Hillcrest's dormitory and participate in the evening sessions of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren's Biennial Convention. The mornings will consist of teaching and training, with afternoon projects that solidify teaching. Evening activities will include worship, community-building time, and competitions that will connect Christian students with each other in building an *identity* based on Jesus Christ.