



identity

A PUBLICATION OF THE
CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

ISAAC SHARES A STORY OF INNER DISABILITY

THE IMPACT OF HAVING AN EPIPHANY IN THE CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

THEOLOGY

The lasting
offense of safe
spaces in schools

TESTIMONY

Understanding
brokenness
in the face of
disability

MISSION

Living with
anxiety on the
mission field

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Finding a God-
honoring path
with same-sex
attraction



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
TROY TYSDAL

the end, the king found himself right back where he started, unfulfilled and unhappy, writing, “Everything is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

It should not surprise us that lasting happiness cannot be found apart from God. No amount of wealth or material possession can take the place of knowing the joy of God’s love through Christ Jesus.

But what if we have faith and know the joy of God’s love, yet the sadness we feel does not go away?

Sometimes, as Christians, we fall into a false belief that knowing God through Christ will fix all our problems. We expect faith to bring us fortune and peace in the here and now. But that’s just not how it works.

You see, our world is sick with sin. Sin is a disease that has worked its way into every aspect of our lives. It’s not just something we do. Sin is also an active force attacking our bodies and our minds. We can feel it physically in things like cancer or even the common cold, but we also may feel it mentally in things like depression, anxiety or fear.

These attacks on our minds can be embarrassing or even crippling, but

they are rarely rooted in truth. Often, at the core of our problems, we find a lie—a false belief about ourselves or others that runs contrary to the Word of God.

When we identify the lie, we are one step closer to the truth, and as Jesus said, “The truth will set you free.”

The truth is that we are broken people, but we belong to a God who has paid the price for our failures—our brokenness. We are forgiven and loved beyond measure. That is true, whether we feel it or not.

In this issue of *identity* magazine, we explore depression, anxiety, and same-sex attraction in the lives of Christians. It is my prayer that you will come away with a better understanding of yourself, and the life lived by faith, in this broken world.

MISC.

TROY TYSDAL is Director of Communication & Prayer for the Church of the Lutheran Brethren, and serves as editor in chief of *identity* magazine.



CLB

A Disciple-Making Movement

Church of the Lutheran Brethren

identity magazine is a publication of the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB), in collaboration with Hillcrest Lutheran Academy, a subsidiary organization connected to the 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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MAKING ALL THINGS NEW
DANIEL ISAAC

“I don’t think I’ve ever been mad at God,”

Danny Isaac states. His smile beams as the glaring sunlight bounces off his face. He sits tall in his wheelchair as he continues. “The past few years I’ve thought in my head, ‘Would I give up my wheelchair to walk again?’”

At eight months old Danny’s life changed dramatically overnight. He had just learned to roll over, delighting his parents under the careful eyes of his three older brothers. No one could see the unknown virus that would attack his body that evening and leave him paralyzed from the neck down.

Danny regained control of his upper body, from his fingertips up, but from the mid-chest down he is officially paralyzed. His physical growth is stunted, but his spiritual development is unveiling faith muscles few will ever develop. “My faith with God is still the same. It’s just unique to me and my wheelchair.”

Danny folds his hands on his lap. In returning to the question of wishing he could walk, Danny’s hands raise to emphasize his point. “No, I wouldn’t. It shapes me. It shapes who I am. It’s almost like asking, ‘Would you want to be a different person?’”

Danny looks to the ground, rocking his wheelchair forward in a thinking gesture. “God has made me unique. God has made me uniquely in his image.”

Danny looks ahead confidently. “In Revelation 21:4-5, a proclamation is made that there will be no more pain, no more crying.” Danny’s eyes are closed now, his hand raised slightly in a fist as if he’s making a declaration. “No more

suffering. God will wipe every tear from your eye. He is sitting on his throne, and God proclaims, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” A smile darts across Danny’s face.

“Though I would not trade my wheelchair in this life, the brokenness in me, what really stands out, is that my disability is not on my outside. It’s on my inside. My broken sinful nature—that cannot walk on its own—God will heal it.”

Danny says he hasn’t experienced a lot of pain and suffering in his own life, yet he has seen it. He has taken mission trips, including one to the Dominican Republic, where he visited several impoverished villages. Recalling his trip, Danny said, “I have seen suffering and pain. This world is obviously broken and in pieces.”

As our time together comes to a close, Danny looks down to his hands. The sun reflects off his wheelchair as he works to illuminate an understanding of how God has directed his attitude. “He’s making us new. He’s fixing us. He’s healing us, so we can walk again.”

MISC.

DANNY ISAAC graduated from Hillcrest Lutheran Academy in 2018. He now attends South Dakota State University.



TURNED UPSIDE DOWN PASTOR JORDAN

When I was eighteen I remember sitting amidst stacks of books before a notecard-strewn desk. I was feverishly copying quotes, trying to establish a case, but I knew I was a fraud.

It was my freshman year of college and it was less than I'd imagined it to be. I had met God when I was fifteen at a conference in Minneapolis, and while I had hoped everything would change, I had found a competing love still living in my heart.

Writing this paper, for me, was about more than a grade. It was about wholeness.

You see, when I was twelve years old I looked around at the sea of faces in my health class and realized that there were more angles to the faces I liked, fewer bumps around the chest... And when my eyes finally fell upon a simple boy near the back of the classroom, I knew it was true. I thought, "Even him, I could fall in love with him."

In the coming years, it felt like fighting against my heart to deny it, to pretend that there were not longings I didn't understand and could not control... Now, as I found myself hovering over books chasing answers I'd searched for all my life, I felt undone.

As a teenager, I had picked through the Bible by searching key words like homosexual and homosexuality. But all those searches returned was the same message I had always heard: God doesn't like it.

TURNED UPSIDE DOWN
PASTOR JORDAN

The truth is there are only a handful of verses that speak directly to the issue. While I desperately wanted it to be OK, I was beginning to realize two things:

- 1) The most honest reading of the passages was that God does not approve of homosexual activity.
- 2) No matter what those verses seemed to say, I could find someone willing to offer another explanation.

I didn't know what was true, but I did know I was lonely...

I could honestly say I believed God was there. He was real. But I couldn't find him and I was ready to give up.

I prayed. There was no threat in my words. I spoke with the foregone conclusion and sorrow that I found inside me, "God, I know you're there, but I don't know where you are, or why you won't show up. I have nothing left." And I meant it.

I was completely broken there in that little cubicle desk. I was struck by the irony of my situation. I mumbled, "Tonight I'll finish my paper on homosexuality and the biblical perspective, get into my car, and drive to the city to find the gay community." I was looking for sex, for love, for whatever else there was. I didn't expect life would make sense after that. I just needed action; the stagnancy was killing me.

That was the plan... at least until Elvis entered the building.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a guy everybody called Elvis walk through the front door of the library. Truth be told, he had a haircut ten years out of style, round Harry Potter glasses, and spoke with an accent. And he was a bit socially awkward, the kind of person who didn't pick up social cues that you were no longer interested in talking to him.

Honestly, I think he really cared about other people and was good to them. But I couldn't see that because he didn't measure up—he wasn't the kind of person I wanted to be associated with. So when Elvis came in the front door I ignored him. I pretended to be working feverishly. I was giving my desk one of those "I'm really in the game" looks. It didn't work. He came over anyway.

"Hey, man, how's it going?" The words came out quickly, slipping over one another and nearly skipping the vowels.

"Good," I said, without looking up. I systematically placed a pen over the word homosexuality while covering

God wants to meet you in your pain. I'm not sure how he'll do that. But whether through your pastor, a parent, or from behind the glasses of an unlooked-for friendship, God does reach out.

other phrases with blank note cards and piles of paper clips.

"What are you working on?" he asked.

"Just a paper," I replied. He paused... "Oh, yeah? What's it on?"

Man, this guy didn't quit. I was giving him the whole "I'm disinterested, I'm tired, I'm not feeling real social" routine... but he just stood there...

"Ahh, homosexuality..." I said sheepishly.

But, unperturbed, he replied, "Cool, cool. Are you finding many resources?"

Now this was an odd question. Most people don't take a vested interest in your paper let alone offer resources.

"No, not really," I said. "There isn't much in the library."

At that point, having the standard research ability of a freshman, I had found about twenty questionable internet sources—none I would call authoritative. After a second he asked, "Do you need some?"

Now I paused... "Sure."

It turned out Elvis had recently had to do some research too. He unabashedly said, "I've got like four or five books, a couple of videos, and some pamphlets in my room. Do you want them?"

Now I don't know if you want to qualify this as a miracle, but I was literally on the verge of wrapping up my night. I had prayed honestly and had no energy left to fight. I had already decided to find the gay community that night and effectively give up on the faith I had known.

I had never had resources and felt completely defeated. I did not want to talk to Elvis. And yet, within two minutes of my being overcome by sorrow and defeat, a man named Elvis, who refused to be rebuffed, handed me the resources I had always been too afraid to seek out. You draw your own conclusions.

As I walked back across the field that night with the cool Texas air on my skin, I felt the calm of the Holy Spirit moving in and around me. I knew that God had showed up. And while I wanted this to be an ending with the type of answers, conclusions, and healing that make for a good story... I knew it wasn't. The Holy Spirit whispered that this was a beginning. He had waited until the last possible second, but he did show up. It would be a long road, and I knew it and feared it, but I had started. And starting can be the hardest part.

Now many years later, I've had time



to wrestle with those verses. What I've found is that, on the whole, the Bible leaves us with a few truths we need to acknowledge:

1) Jesus loves those who oppose him, and all people oppose him in some way or form.

2) Salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned. Thus, Christians are called to humbly consider our own oppositions toward him, ask where we may still be putting up walls against him, and submit our own will to his in faith and love.

3) God gave us a design. In his love, he tells us how to live in accordance with that design and informs us that if we live outside that design we are going to miss out on God's best for us.

I think homosexuality is one form in which we experience our wills being in rebellion against God. People often explain away each verse in the Bible

that seems to stand in opposition to homosexuality, but I think the most honest reading is that God had other plans for humanity.

You can make a list of sexual rebellions: homosexual, heterosexual sex outside of marriage, polygamy, etc. There are not better or worse rebellions. They are all areas where our hearts—like Adam and Eve—still think God is holding out on us. And we want to fight him.

We forget that true intimacy, true love, isn't found in another person. The other person is only a reminder of the God in whose image we were all made. Our deepest longings are for God and we spend our lives confusing the creation for the Creator.

Today, I would say things are different. I still experience attraction to men sometimes, but it happens so rarely that I forget it's a struggle. And honestly, I'm hesitant to talk about sexual orientation change at all because I don't think it's the point. I think the point is trusting Jesus.

God wants to meet you in your pain. I'm not sure how he'll do that. But whether through your pastor, a parent, or from behind the glasses of an unlooked-for friendship,

God does reach out. Healing may not look like you think it should; healing of homosexuality may not be heterosexuality. But it will be a deepening of trust in the faithfulness and love of Jesus in new and life-changing ways.

God has worked a lot of healing in me and it has not been primarily sexual. He has taught me how to love people better, to repent better, and to submit better. And while I still find myself fighting him, I have come to believe that he really is good and I can and should trust him with all of me. When I do that, I am better able to love others and love myself as God made me. I now know that healing is less about fulfilling myself and more about knowing how I am already fulfilled in Jesus, as I am drawn closer to the true intimacy of God the Father through faith in Christ.

MISC.

JORDAN is Pastor at Rock of Ages Lutheran Brethren Church in Seattle, Washington. He and his wife Becca were married last summer.

To reach out to Jordan email him at jordan@therocklbc.org



“Epiphany is a life-changer for me. It’s where God saved me.”

HAVING AN EPIPHANY ISAIAH DEWAN

All my life I knew what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a bad guy. A drug dealer. I carried it through and through.

I started that life in eighth grade. I have been addicted to every drug there ever was, and I’ve tried everything there is to try. I sold everything, all across the USA.

But I had an awakening last year. It was like an epiphany, during a grave time.

I suffer from schizoaffective disorder. I’m bipolar. I hear voices. This disorder pushed me away from everyone.

I stopped looking at friends as my friends. I didn’t see family as my family. I really shut myself out from everything.

I finally ended up in a homeless shelter. While I was there, a random guy—during that grave time—told me the right things.

He helped me see that God is there for me. That God put me on my path and no matter what I tried to do I could never get off it, because it’s his path for me. He helped me see that God

wouldn’t have put me on that path if it wasn’t meant to be.

That conversation struck me pretty hard. I was at the lowest point of my life. I had given up. I didn’t want to fight anymore. I was tired. I was just done. That message of God being with me was all I needed to hear.

I slowly started to change. My in-laws brought me to Epiphany Lutheran Church. They attend another Lutheran Brethren church in New Jersey. They told me eight blocks away from my place in New York was a church I should attend.

I started attending church a week after Mother’s Day. I have been going ever since.

After a few weeks of regular attendance, I asked the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart. It was something based on what God was doing in the church. What I had learned and what I had heard.

Epiphany is a life-changer for me. It’s where God saved me. I don’t know where I’d be without the church. I’ve tried multiple times to end things.

I thought I could handle things by myself, but I couldn’t.

I’ve tried to end my life with pills. I’ve slashed my wrists. I’ve gashed my face. I have burn marks all over my body. All of this was self-inflicted because I didn’t know how to deal with things. I didn’t know where to direct my life.

But God gave me a chance to change.

Now, I want to live for him. I want to relate to other people who are still where I’ve been. I want to show people what God has taught me.

Jesus Christ is the answer. The Lord, our Savior.

MISC.

ISAIAH DEWAN is a member of Epiphany Lutheran Church in Manhattan, New York. His pastor, Erick Sorensen, is connecting people in the city to the gospel.

Having an Epiphany



EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH, NYC

Epiphany launched with three main prayer requests:

We prayed that we'd reach non-Christians with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We prayed that we'd embrace millennials.

We prayed that we'd equip influential people from all over the globe.

Thankfully, God has seen fit to answer each of these prayers: He has reached non-Christians with the gospel. Our church is almost entirely composed of millennials, and each week we have people attending from all over the globe.

Please continue to pray that God would grow our young church plant for the glory of his name and the good of our city!
If you would like to join the ministry of Epiphany Lutheran Church email Pastor Erick: pastorerick@epiphanylutherannyc.com



The Church Sent

The Apostle Peter wrote, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God...” (1 Peter 2:12). As a denomination, we have felt God calling us to more intentionally reach out to our neighbors in North America. This means more than opening our doors for an hour on Sunday morning. It means being the Church... outside the church. It means building relationships individually and collectively with people and communities who are not living in relationship with Jesus Christ.

This Spirit-driven desire for revival in North America has led our Regional Pastors (RPs) to focus their efforts on organizing and equipping congregations to plant churches. Our RPs have led church planting summits and have performed readiness assessments for our congregations. They have resourced pastors in developing individual strategies for church planting success.

With the guidance of our RPs, church clusters have formed in our Regions to support church plants in cities and towns. In Fergus Falls, Minnesota, Bethel Lutheran Church has opened a second campus in the nearby community of Battle Lake. In our Western Region, Grace Lutheran Brethren Church of Bismarck, North Dakota has engaged a neighboring community with the hope of one day planting a Lutheran Brethren congregation there. And in our Eastern Region, our RP has been talking to several people and congregations interested in future church planting.

In addition: North American Mission has partnered with Fifth Act Church Planting, a CLB affiliate organization, to plant churches in major cities throughout North America.

It is our prayer that these seeds of hope will be part of a great revival in North America, not for the glory of the CLB, but for the glory and expansion of the Kingdom of God.

THE RIVER is a Church of the Lutheran Brethren-Canada church plant in Red Deer, Alberta. For twelve months Pastor Harold and Joyce Rust have reached the people in the city, many of whom are new to Canada. The church is impacting people from places like Congo, Namibia, Iraq, Syria, and Kyrgyzstan. If you would like to join the Lord's movement in Red Deer contact Pastor Harold: harold@reddeerriver.ca

BETHEL BATTLE LAKE is a Church of the Lutheran Brethren church plant from Bethel Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. The outreach to Battle Lake, MN has 40+ high school students gathering weekly. If you'd like to partner with Bethel Battle Lake contact Pastor Kevin Foss: kfoss@bethellbc.org

NEW HOPE CHURCH is the Lutheran Brethren's most recent church plant in Parker, Colorado. They are laying ground work for discipleship multiplication. They are formally meeting twice per month for fellowship, worship, and discipleship training. Their current initiative is to engage their community through intentional relationships with neighbors, friends, and co-workers. If you would like to join the missional movement in Parker through New Hope Church, contact Pastor Jason Rogness: j_rogness@yahoo.com

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH is a Lutheran Brethren congregation that was a church plant in Wesley Chapel, Florida. They recently finished a five-year volunteer building project on a new worship space. They launched several evangelistic programs and acts of grace in the month of August. If you would like to partner with the ministry of Grace Community contact Pastor Jeff Olsen: pastorjeffolsen@gmail.com

WINTER CAMPS

IPOINT



SENIOR HIGH WINTER WEEKEND 1

February 8-10, 2019

Speaker: Pastor Clay Mitchell

SENIOR HIGH WINTER WEEKEND 2

February 15-17, 2019

Speaker: Andrew Foss

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TUSCARORA

SENIOR HIGH WINTER WEEKEND

February 15-18, 2019

YOUNG ADULTS WEEKEND

June 14-16, 2019

Register online at www.tuscarora.org.



A man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, is speaking at a wooden podium. He is looking upwards and to the right, with his right hand raised in a gesture. The background is dark with some blue light spots.

I was a freshman in college and wanted to quit... everything.

DISARMING DEPRESSION
DR. DAVID VEUM

I had driven to the campus one morning but turned around and drove home without even going to class. I blew off my parents' concerned questions and headed for my room. They followed and found me lying with my face buried in my pillow. After more of their questions were angrily deflected, my mother recognized the dilemma and wisely said, "You know, David, the greatest temptation we face is the temptation to give up."

The truth is that I need to repent of the pride in comparing. Instead of trying to establish my own worth, I can accept the worth God has given me as his child.

Looking back on that day I now call it depression. Depression is no fun. It hurts. It saps one's productivity. It can even be scary. I'm not an expert. I am not trained as a counselor, but I know something because of my life-long awareness of this negative companion. I've also learned some coping skills. If you can use my experience to help a friend, I will be very grateful.

Triggers

Three different misperceptions usually trigger my depression. They are triggers found in:

1. Comparisons.

Comparing has many negative side effects. Thoughts of “being less than” can take over. Someone else seems more capable, more successful, or more esteemed. These thoughts give way to feelings of sadness. Envy and covetousness are often lurking beneath the surface.

2. Insecurity.

Insecurity sneaks up and catches me when I am least aware. It is rooted in a need for approval. I need others to like me, to think well of me, to say that I’m doing a good job.

If I fear criticism for not completing a project well enough, I get defensive. Defensiveness comes out in milder forms as excuses. It gets expressed more harshly as aggression. When it does, I am not a very nice person to be around. When I fear that others don’t have positive opinions of me, I feel insecure and become depressed.

3. Disapproval.

Disapproval comes in many forms: being passed over; not making the team; rejection; being ignored. It possesses a greater power over me than do the first two triggers. Comparisons and insecurity arise in my own thinking, but disapproval comes from the outside. Someone has done something “to me.” I interpret the action to mean that I am devalued. The experience, coupled with my misinterpretation, makes

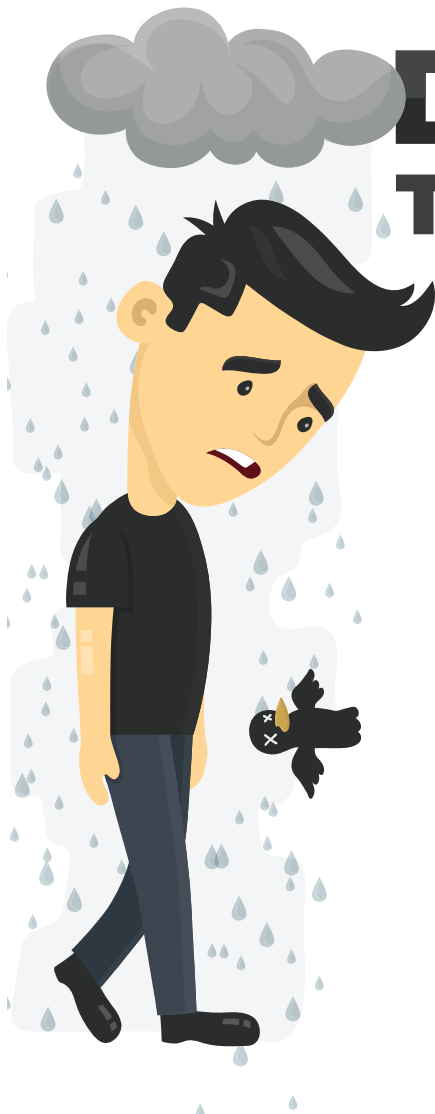
disapproval especially powerful and results in my deepest feelings of depression.

Truth

In the sixth decade of my life God graciously began to set me free from the power of these depressive feelings. I have been learning to recognize the incorrect thinking which leads to the feelings and to live in the power of truth.

Two resources have been especially helpful. A Christian counselor taught me the basics of cognitive therapy—that our thoughts determine our feelings and not the reverse. If I am feeling bad, then most likely I have been thinking something that is not true.

Through another resource I have learned that much of my negative thinking has a sinful side. Notice, I did not say that depressive



DEPRESSION TRIGGERS



COMPARISON

The act or process of comparing: such as the representing of one thing or person as similar to or like another. Also an examination of two or more items to establish similarities and dissimilarities.



INSECURITY

Not confident or sure: **UNCERTAIN**. Not adequately guarded or sustained: **UNSAFE**. Not firmly fastened or fixed: **SHAKY**.



DISAPPROVAL

Having unfavorable judgment passed on. To refuse approval to: **REJECT**.

feelings are sinful, but for me the thinking that leads to them is.

Consider the self-centeredness inherent in comparing. Comparing myself with others results in me believing that I am less than others. But that belief would not even be possible if I didn't have a desire to be better than others or at least be held in high regard by others.

Insecurity can look like humility, but for me it is a fig-leaf attempt to cover my innate sense of shame. At the core of my being I want to be significant. I experience the insecurity as anxiety and depression, but the thinking that precedes it focuses on my desire for self-importance.

And my response to disapproval? Instead of resting in God's value of me, I easily allow someone's disapproval to determine my value as a person. I readily give in to the message that disapproval brings.

The truth is that I need to repent of the pride in comparing. Instead of trying to establish my own worth, I can accept the worth God has given me as his child. My heavenly Father has created me, and his Son has redeemed me.

The truth is that I need to repent of my insecurity instead of always trying to justify myself through the approval of others. When I feel insecure, I can stop and reflect on the only source of approval that matters: God approves of me in Christ Jesus.

The truth is that I need to repent of letting the actions of others determine my value. Even if someone openly rejects me, my heavenly Father ultimately determines my value. I can rest in the immeasurable value God has given to me in giving his Son. He was rejected for me.

Living in the Truth

I don't mean to suggest that these lessons are easy to learn. They are

not easy to learn, nor are they easy to apply. Often, I need to journal about my feelings to discover the error in my thinking. It seems I need to first acknowledge my feelings of sadness or insecurity. Then the Holy Spirit reveals the misbelief that led to the feeling. Vigilance in hearing God speak truth through his Word has also been an absolute necessity for me.

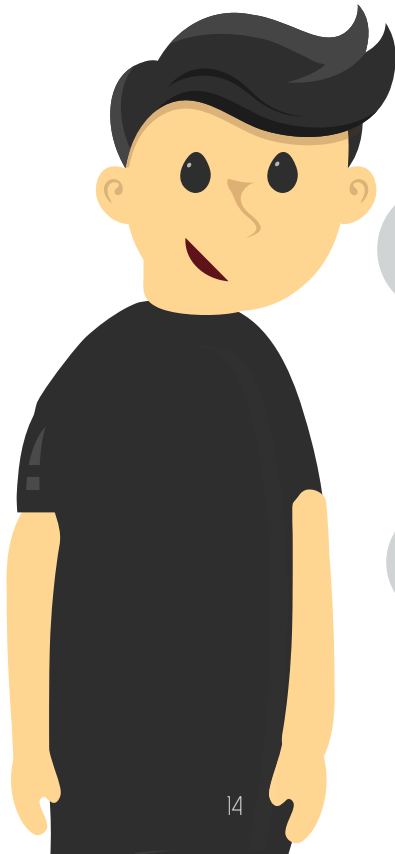
These lessons are not easy to learn or apply, but they are not complex. God's Word is the Truth I need. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth who convicts me of the pride and self-focus at the core of that thinking. He speaks words of forgiveness. He helps me to replace misbeliefs with the truth.

The Truth Sets Me Free

My mother spoke the truth that bleak morning when I felt like quitting everything. You may be able to help your depressed friend by asking them, "What is true?" The truth is that you have infinite value to God and he loves you more than you could ever know.

MISC.

DR. DAVID VEUM is the President of Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. If you'd like more information on the seminary email Dr. Veum directly at dveum@clba.org.



HABITS



REDEEMPTIVE THINKING

Negative thinking has a sinful side. Redemptive thinking rests in God's value placed on you.



COGNITIVE THERAPY

Our thoughts determine our feelings. If we feel bad it is likely from believing things that aren't true.

WELCOME

ROM 1:17

JULY 20-24, 2019

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Registration:

Early Bird (March 24th) \$400
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YC19.org



Matt Schweitzer

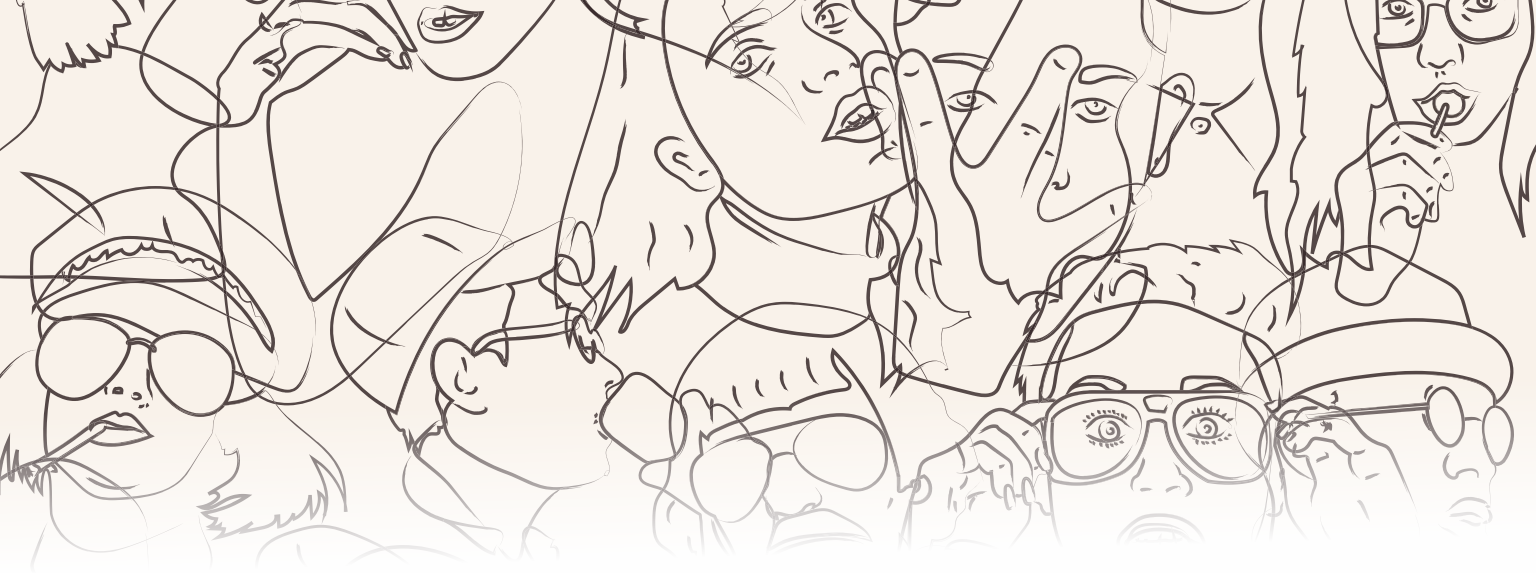
Worship Speakers



Dave Veum



Troy Tysdal



WHERE SAFE SPACES GROW

“We never really talked about it,” the young girl stated as we sat down. “Our school basically said you can’t because you might offend someone.”

I grabbed my burger a little tighter and shifted in my chair. We had watched a movie about abortion before going out for burgers to recap the film. I asked if they’d ever studied abortion in school. I was shocked that they were shunted from talking about it because abortion is offensive for some.

So I started researching why important conversations are shut down in our culture. I’m dismayed by what I found.

The glow of my iPad in my late night study was blinding. Abortion wasn’t the issue. I wanted to understand safe spaces.

I read stories of speakers whose lives were threatened because they voiced a contrary opinion. Videos showed riots on college campuses over assumptions about a speaker’s feelings on gender identity.

Schools responded by creating safe spaces. Some colleges offered coloring stations and counselors, so students could retreat and share how they were offended. I could only imagine the cultural shift for many professors who changed syllabi to soften the dialogue on difficult issues.

Not really knowing what to do, I sat

down with pen and paper to chart the issues. In desperation I flipped open my Bible next to the notepad and started scribbling my jumbled thoughts. Starting in Genesis, I outlined the first chapters.

I wrote the word *God* at the top of the paper. God created the world with order and purpose. Under that I wrote *man*. God created man in his image. Then I wrote the word *work*. God gave man work to do before the fall. Then I wrote *woman*. God gave man a suitable helper and the two supported each other. Then, *community*. In Eve, God gave Adam a person with whom to enjoy *common unity*. God gave Adam and Eve community, reflecting the nature of God. Lastly I wrote the word *purpose*. The world as God designed it was meant to give humankind purpose, identity, and safety. Everything finds its origin in the design and character of God.

I flipped the paper upside down. Now it feels like the world is more upside down than right side up.

In the dead of night I looked out my window. It was cold outside my house. The light from my window only lit parts of my backyard. I thought how dangerous it is to live in a world without God. If God isn’t illuminating the world, we’re left grasping for direction in the dark.

Safe spaces started to make sense as I stared out my window that evening.

When the world is turned upside down we fashion order and purpose around our pursuit of identity and safety. We build communities, look at marriage, understand work, and explain humanity in an individual and sometimes arbitrary hunt for identity and purpose with a covering of safety.

Since that evening there has been a pile of books on my desk helping me decipher how we arrived in a safe space culture. A common thread emerged from my research. People need to be guilt-free to progress. God has a moral standard. People don’t meet this standard and therefore feel guilty.

God needed to die. Thought-shapers like Friedrich Nietzsche believed that getting rid of God would allow society to create a better standard. Without God there is no standard for right and wrong. Nietzsche argued that a godless world would grant a sort of second innocence. He pitched that—without the standard set by God and without a foe like Satan standing in opposition—we could regain the perfection of Eden. Doing away with condemnation and making morality relative would catapult culture towards progress.

However, simply removing God didn’t do away with guilty feelings. There is a strange persistence in guilt. Sigmund Freud advanced Nietzsche’s ideas, saying that guilt is the most important problem in developing civilizations. If

UNDERSTANDING SAFE SPACES

WAYNE STENDER

a civilization can do away with guilt they can progress unfettered.

Freud offered a godless therapy to de-moralize and deconstruct guilt. Whatever moral norms surrounded culture, Freud wanted to challenge them for the sake of liberating people. Essentially, Freud said guilt is a construct placed on a person by someone else. No one is truly guilty. Therapy can reveal that bad thoughts and wrong actions result from an underworked superego, a hyperactive conscience. Events from a person's youth or things outside a person's control drive them to live outside a moral norm. Guilt follows, and that is unjust. Freud worked to deconstruct guilt so a person was left with a subjective and emotional explanation for their feeling of condemnation, removing their culpability.

But despite Freud's efforts, guilt stood persistent. People still feel guilty.

There's an ironic aspect of truth. Truth stands, even when it isn't popular. Truth is consistent with reality. It is coherent and understandable. It is complete, addressing all who look on it. The unwanted reality for all of us is that we are guilty. This is true.

There is an unspeakable persistence in guilt. I watch videos of my kids and feel like I haven't spent enough time with them. I feel guilty that the money from my wallet doesn't stretch far enough to allow me more time with them. I watch news reports of starving children around the world and think that I should support one more orphaned kid. The lady next door needs me to mow her lawn, but I find myself researching fantasy football. And then there are my devotional habits. If only I could spend just a little more time I would be better. Guilt is persistent, and the world's answers for it are hollow.

One of the books I read blamed our feelings of guilt on technology. This

generation of students is the first to have the iPhone as teenagers. Information overload is an hourly reality. With this flood we don't know what is important and therefore think everything is worth fighting over. The loudest voices are often perceived as the right voices.

Another book introduced people like Herbert Marcuse who called for restricting the rights of some people so the rights of others could be better displayed. He wanted to treat guilt by creating a level playing field for everyone. His writings called for an absolute equality, where tolerance required some discrimination. He felt that indiscriminate tolerance breeds repression—if we're tolerant of everyone the weak don't get heard. Marcuse called for restricting free speech and other rights of those who have influence so that those who don't can be heard. Those who are heard now must have their rights of speech restricted so the quiet and disenfranchised can participate. His ideas made me drop my book.

From Marcuse hundreds of ideas emerged looking to deal with repression and guilt. Kimberlé Crenshaw developed a concept called intersectionalism. A person's standing in race, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical ability, and even fertility earns a place of privilege or oppression. I am defined as a white, heterosexual, cisgendered male, which means that I am privileged and I cast oppression on all ranks of those who do not fit my social makeup.

I hate oppression. It makes me feel guilty. So I need to un-become the things that I was born into. I need a safe space to disrobe in.

The more I researched this, the more I realized that there is a significant amount of guilt inside and outside the Church. Turning from God, as Nietzsche urged, and deconstructing sin, as Freud encouraged, does not remove guilty feelings. I guess

Romans 3:23 is true whether a person believes it or not: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

The way a godless world deals with condemnation is to find a scapegoat. Through intersectionalism a person can assign a stronger class the blame for repression. If a person is part of a more privileged class, they may try to cleanse themselves by stealing someone else's suffering. There is a faux humbling, casting guilt on a different class of people to sanctify themselves. This is the reality of safe spaces.

The great theological injustice of safe spaces is their inability to deal with our guilt. They offer a place of sanctification without offering any atonement. There is a need for a true scapegoat. Casting blame or oppression from one class to another does not remedy the problem of the pain we feel. When Adam did that in the garden, it didn't absolve his failure. Adam needed someone to truly shoulder his failures because they were crushing him.

God provided that for Adam, and he provides it for us. Let's not be a culture that simply casts our guilty feelings on a different people group, time period, or economic class. Let's look for true redemption in Christ, talking about real brokenness, how it truly makes us feel. And let's find our identity in the One who knows what it is to suffer and be raised victorious... Jesus Christ.

MISC.

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FACING ANXIETY
SONJA N.

Anxiety, discouragement and distraction—the enemy has been hard at work. When I or my family gets sick, anxiety and fears escalate. “What if” and “worst case” scenarios run through my head and, because the medical care is limited in Chad, the anxiety multiplies.

It started subtly with me: a headache, stomachache, diarrhea all night, just when we started an intense Chadian Arabic class. I was able to get through class Thursday and Friday, but then my two-year-old got a fever, wasn't eating well, became very crabby... Is it teething?... Or malaria?

Monday night my husband Dave's lymph nodes started to swell. He had a fever. The rapid malaria test was negative. Tuesday the entire left side of his face was swollen. I consulted friends via internet: Allergic reaction to his anti-malarial medication? Benadryl given. Salivary gland infected? Antibiotics started. An abscess? Warm packs applied. If nothing works, could it be mumps? (Which it was!)

The anxiety increases and God reminds me that even if we don't figure out what's wrong, he knows and is in control. I ultimately cry out to him to give me wisdom to know what advice to follow and what action to take.

But I was shaken, rattled, and questioning why God allows suffering in this world. I felt discouraged because I was physically sick, and mentally anxious regarding illness in my family.

It was hard to put forth effort to learn a language. I couldn't just make these things go away, I couldn't just tell myself to stop being anxious. How could I cope?

I have found over the years, that when I am anxious, it helps to dwell on who God is, what he's done, what he's doing and what he promises to do. God led me to read Isaiah.

Throughout this book he tells us: "I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand; I will help you; I will make rivers flow; I will turn the desert into pools of water; I will put trees in the desert; I have redeemed you and summoned you by name, you are mine; I will be with you; I am making a way in the wilderness and I provide water in the wilderness to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself; I will pour water on the thirsty land; I will pour out my spirit on

your offspring; I have made you; I will not forget you; I have swept away your offenses; I formed you in the womb; I am the Lord, the maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens; I will restore; I will go before you and level the mountains; I will break down the gates; I will give you hidden treasures; I will strengthen you; I speak the truth and declare what is right; I am he who will sustain you; I will carry you; I will rescue you; what I have planned, I will do; I am bringing my righteousness near; I will grant salvation; I teach you what is best for you; I direct you in the way you should go; I will answer you; I will keep you and make you to be a covenant; I comfort my people and have compassion on my afflicted ones; I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; I give you a well-instructed tongue; I waken you morning by morning; I have put my words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of my hand; I set the heavens in place and laid the foundations of the earth; my word will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it; I will bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy; I have seen their ways but I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort; I have anointed you to proclaim good news to the poor; I have sent you to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release prisoners from darkness; I will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations; I will create new heavens and a new earth that will endure before me and so will your name and descendants endure."

I love how throughout the book of Isaiah God tells us over and over who he is, not in a condemning way, but with compassion and patience. He speaks about how we craft our own idols, yet he challenges us to compare them to him, The First and The Last, the one who parted the sea and made dry land, the one who stretches out the heavens, who formed us in the womb, who has foretold things to come. He asks us if our idols have done these things, and can they do these things?

As I was reading God's Word and focusing on who he is, what he's done,

is doing and promises to do, he showed me where I was putting my trust: myself.

Being a witness to suffering and sickness first hand as a nurse and now living in Chad, Africa, I struggle with trusting God to take care of me and my family. If it happens to others, it can happen to me, right?

So I try to figure out what troubles may come and think maybe I can prevent it or, at the very least, be prepared for it.

The fear and anxiety comes because I am putting my trust in me—a weak, imperfect me. Thanks be to God! In spite of our rebellion, idolatry, and lack of trust in him, he longs to be gracious.

"The Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion... How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.' Then you will desecrate your idols... you will throw them away" (Isaiah 30:18-22).

MISC.

SONJA N. is a graduate of Hillcrest Lutheran Academy and is now serving the Church of the Lutheran Brethren with her husband David as missionaries in Chad, Africa.

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