

# Lutheran Counseling Network

## Faith and Everyday Life, 2025

### January

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away. (Revelation 21:4)*

Take a moment to read this verse, once through. Notice your reaction, the state of your heart, your body. Are you tense? Relaxed? Distant? Trusting?

While this verse is comforting for some, my personal and professional life has made me keenly familiar with death, suffering, pain, and trauma. Every day I find myself crying out to God for justice and mercy, for help in time of need. Must we wait until we return “home” in Heaven for God to heal and renew us? Miracles happen, but often this is not the case and suffering results. How can we find respite in this Scripture when our suffering feels so invasive and destructive now?

Scripture reminds us to return to the story of Christ, who asked this question in his final breath on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34; Psalm 22:1). Christ’s cry from the cross illustrates that God is present with us to speak to, mourn with, and even to accuse. May we be bold to *assume* God’s presence is alive and near, especially when our pain is at its worst. What if we were to close our eyes and imagine God leaning down, wiping our tears away, drawing us near and holding us *now, at this very moment*. When we do this, we experience a glimpse of Heaven on Earth, and we find true hope.

Now take a deep breath and read this verse again, slowly. Notice your spirit, your body, as you read it. If you wish, repeat this process until you feel a sense of being at home with God, even in your suffering. Feel God’s presence with you, wiping away your tears, drawing you near. Feel within you a sense of God’s hope, God’s peace, and even God’s joy.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## **February**

*The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. (John 10:2-4)*

These verses about the Good Shepherd are comforting, no matter our age. When we are young, we have a special affinity for the Good Shepherd. We are open to the love and care the Shepherd gives, and are able to give back that same deep love. We want to hear our names and follow. We find joy in being sheep of the Good Shepherd.

As we grow, our scope changes, and we look beyond the safety, love and care of this loving relationship. We develop interests that take us to different places. We may stray off the path. But when that happens, the Shepherd comes looking for us. The Shepherd values each of us, seeks after us when we are in danger, and welcomes us back into the fold.

The beautiful thing is, we are never too old to be sheep. In fact, the older we get, the more we need that comforting assurance that the Good Shepherd knows us, loves us, and will never let us go. We do not always know what lies ahead. But we know the Shepherd, who leads the way. All we need to do is trust and follow. No matter our circumstances, it's a comfort to know we can rely on the Good Shepherd.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## **March**

*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)*

When couples come into the therapy room, they are usually at odds with each other. Harsh words fly, and anger is stirred between them. They blame and point fingers at each other, their voices raised and their eyebrows knitted in anger.

I've begun to see angry behavior like this as a shield, a protection. It's too risky to show each other how much they hurt, and how much they care about each other, so they hide behind their protections and blame.

In the therapy room, we are able to slow down their arguments and discover what goes on inside, where they may harbor fears that their partner doesn't understand them, doesn't care about them, perhaps doesn't even love them.

The more the couple is able to get down beneath the anger and protection to more vulnerable emotions and share them from a softer, more vulnerable place, the more the partners begin to see each other in new ways. When one partner tentatively and vulnerably shares the fear that the other doesn't care about them, the other partner is able to respond with compassion rather than defensive anger. This begins a new pattern of vulnerability and risk that helps the partners reach for each other and rebuild their bond.

I see God at work in this process. God creates us in love, and creates us for loving relationship – with God and with each other. When our sin and brokenness get in the way, God shows us how to take down our protections and reach for each other with love and forgiveness, and a true desire to know one another. It's true for us as couples, as families, as congregations and communities. When we live this way, we make room for God's love to grow in our homes, our churches, our world.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## April

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:45-46)*

This parable is a beautiful and concise story of God's abundant love for us. It is such abundant love that there is only thing for the merchant to do, and that is give up everything to obtain the pearl. God is the merchant. We, the church and people of God, are God's beloved pearl. God shows up and in Jesus pays the ultimate price to win us.

Understanding love in this abundance is beyond my human ability. I can only grasp it by faith. I can only receive it as grace. I can only recognize it as the essence of God.

I do love the image of a pearl and what it represents. That God's beloved church, that each of us, can be molded and beautified because of some irritant or injury. Like a pearl, God's people are being formed into something new.

I see transformations happen often in my work as a therapist. It is not often a mountain that moves. Most often it is a small shift, a forgiving word, a repaired relationship, a letting-go of a past hurt, a decision to hold on with a loose grip, or a word of God's love that changes everything.

God shows us how to love abundantly. May we be transformed by this love, and learn to love without limit.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## **May**

### *Psalm 139: 1-18*

This psalm has special meaning in our family. It is a favorite of our son's birth mother. I can see why. It talks about how God created each of us deliberately, and knows and loves each of us intimately. I can imagine that in the days leading up to her son's birth, it must have reassured her that he was no accident. It was God who knit him together in her womb. God created him on purpose, and had a plan for his life. This must have been so comforting as she prepared her heart for her adoption plan. She knew she wouldn't be there each day to see her birth son's life unfold. She had to trust that God had a purpose in mind for him, and would be watching over him, loving and guiding him, even when she couldn't.

The psalm has special meaning for me too, as an adoptive mother. It assures me that I am part of the plan for my son's life. Knowing God has created me to be just who I am has provided healing from the sadness of not being able to conceive. It assures me that my path is a good one. Knowing God loves me just as I am fills me with love I want to share. It fuels who I am as a mom. It helps me seek to know my son, to love him just as he is, to offer guidance and support. It also reminds me that ultimately, he is God's child, and that God will guide him when he's out on his own, beyond my influence.

This is true for each of us. God created each of us with love, just as we are. God has plans and a purpose for us. We are never beyond God's reach, or beyond God's loving care. We are never alone. Thanks be to God!

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## June

*Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'* (Luke 15:4-6)

Let's back up a chapter. Jesus has been talking to the scribes and Pharisees, who criticized Jesus for receiving and eating with sinners. How interesting that sinners were drawn to Jesus, and were comfortable in his presence.

In the above parable, there is no criticism of the one who became lost, no chiding of a sheep whose own foolish choice may have caused the disconnect from its shepherd. The focus and clear emphasis is on the determination of the shepherd to find even one that becomes lost.

Jesus said elsewhere, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." What a Father, who is so devoted to his creation that he cares that not even one be lost.

Consider that whatever lost-ness you may have experienced, whether in the past or right now, the heart of the Father is pursuit *and finding*. It is not a calloused, flippant attitude. Nor is it shaming. Once found, the shepherd is ecstatic and calls his friends and neighbors to share his joy. Connection is restored. As image-bearers of our Father, this longing for deep connection and restoration is in us also.

What a Great Shepherd who cares for the many *and* the one!

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## **July**

*Luke 12:22-34*

Our lives give us plenty to worry about.

Sometimes we worry about whether we have enough, or whether there will be enough to get us through to the next paycheck. Other times we worry about whether we are good enough, whether we measure up, whether we are valued by others. We worry about our children -- about their future, about their wellbeing -- no matter their age. We worry about our country, our church, where we are headed.

In this Scripture, Jesus gives us the antidote to our worry. He assures us that we are of great value to God. If God values us, we can be assured that we measure up. If God values us, we needn't worry whether other people do. And because God values us, God will provide us with everything we need. We don't need to worry about whether we will have enough.

Jesus encourages us not to worry, reminding us that we can't add a single hour to our life by doing so. Every minute we spend worrying about the future or dwelling on the past is a minute we miss living our lives in the here and now.

Jesus encourages us to give our worries to God, and instead invest our time and energy in striving for God's kingdom. When we do this, we can put our worries aside, because we know God is in charge and we aren't. This is the greatest comfort of all.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## August

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 3:38-39)*

These verses from Romans are among my favorites in all of Scripture. The assurances in these words are comforting beyond words. However, I am human, as are the clients I sit with each day, and I must confess that although I love and rely upon the unshakable promise of these verses, I sometimes lose sight of the truth of them when life gets “too big.”

I have a Russian nesting doll on my desk in my office. This doll is a set of seven figures of decreasing sizes, each able to be stacked into the next so that all fit together inside of the largest doll. The tiniest doll in the set is less than an inch tall. Cute, but very small. Vulnerable. A reminder of how one may feel when life gets “too big.”

The outer layers of my nesting doll keep the small, vulnerable one safe. But what happens if something happens to those outer layers? What if a doctor ran a test which revealed something new and frightening? A layer cracks. What if one’s marriage has crumbled? More cracks. What if I have been betrayed by a trusted loved one? What if a child has died? Layers shatter, sometimes never to be repaired.

Although these verses from Romans do not protect us from the periodic cracking and shattering of the layers that hold us in this life, they remind me of the foundational certainty that grounds our faith. God, the very largest layer of our life’s nesting doll, is *always* intact, and *always* rock solid. God, and God alone, is capable of holding us, in all of our smallness and with all of our cracked and shattered layers. We may even discover that God is also that layer of our nesting doll that is closest to us, besides being the layer that is big enough to contain all that our lives hold. No matter how many cracks there are, and how vulnerable and small we feel at times, there is *nothing* that will be able separate us from the care of our Lord and Savior.

Thanks be to God.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network



## September

*Luke 13:10-17*

We humans like it when things are settled. When we know what to expect. This gives us comfort. We like it when we can count on God to be the same yesterday, today, and always. When we know what to expect. It settles us.

But so often Jesus breaks the rules, upsets our world view, defies our expectations. When this happens, we don't know what to do. We may object. We may even reject his love, his healing, his forgiveness.

That's how it was for the leader of the synagogue in this story. Jesus healed a woman who had been bent over in pain for 18 years. Everyone should have been happy, right? But this gift of healing came in a way that was unexpected, unorthodox. The leader of the synagogue didn't know what to make of it. He objected. He cited the rule book. He told people to come back and get their healing on the appointed day.

Jesus is clear. He directly challenges the leader of the synagogue, and the human-made restrictions we want to put on God. Have some common sense, he seems to say. You water your animals on the Sabbath. "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for 18 long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" Wow. Preach it, Jesus.

Just when we think we have God figured out, Jesus breaks in and shakes us up. It can be unsettling. But the thing we can count on is that God is about love, and he sends Jesus to shake us out of our rules and our expectations, in order to discover, over and over again, what that love is really all about.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## **October**

*Psalm 34:18*

I recently visited Rancho La Hermosa orphanage near Primotapia, Mexico. In this orphanage there were more than 20 children, who previously had been living on the streets. The mission of the orphanage is to rescue children from the streets and provide them with school, clothing, food and a future. I saw God's light in these children. I saw them playing and enjoying their summer vacation with clothing, good food, love and care. Ordinary people are donating their time and money to build school rooms and more dorms to continue restoring these children.

Seeing the work the orphanage is doing changes my perspective on how to give back. I realize one week is not enough to really help others. I have been thinking of ways to continue the call to help others. There are many in our communities that need help. My plan is to be able to do that.

This is what God calls the church to do. God calls us to help widows and orphans. To show each child that they are valuable and worthy of love and care. That God has loved them from the beginning of time. God knew about each of them before mom or dad or anyone else. He calls his creation perfect. He never makes mistakes and has a purpose for each of these children.

How has God blessed you and called you to help others? I invite you to ask God to reveal how you can help in your community, your church, or to the ends of the earth.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## **November**

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (Jeremiah 28:11)*

In this verse, Jeremiah reassures the people of Israel, who are in captivity in Babylon, that God has a plan for them. But if we read the verse out of context, we can miss the real point of it. Earlier in this chapter, the false prophet Hananiah gives the Israelites the fake promise that God will free them from captivity in Babylon after just two years.

Jeremiah assures the Israelites that God has good things in mind for them, but in a different way than they expect. It's not all about going home, about being delivered from adversity, says God. Instead, God directs the Israelites to "seek the peace and the prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (29:7)

God eventually delivers the Israelites from captivity. But not for another generation. God's plan is for this generation to stay put and help prosper the nation that holds them captive. Instead of removing them from their suffering, God promises to be with them in their adversity, and to help them transform it, for the good of all.

It's this way for us as well. We may wish God would free us from suffering. Instead, God promises to be with us in our suffering, giving us a future with hope, and providing us the tools we need to create change, not just for ourselves, but for our children, our neighborhoods, our communities, our world.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network

## December

*I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

I have never been a terrific gardener. I get inspired for a weekend here and there, but then I get busy, or something else grabs my attention, and my garden suffers. The flowers droop. The leaves get parched. The bushes get overgrown and unruly, their branches choking each other out.

And so it is for us, says Jesus, when we don't root ourselves in him. We get off track. We lose energy. Our best efforts come to nothing.

The way for us to bear fruit, says Jesus, is to abide in him. The Message translation puts it this way: "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you." Jesus lives in us, and he invites us to live in him. To root ourselves in his ways of love and forgiveness. To drink deeply of his love, so that everything we do flows from that love. Like branches that grow and get their nourishment from a vine.

When we live in Jesus, we flourish. But we can't do it alone. We need a community of believers to remind us where we belong and where to get our true nourishment, to give each other strength and encouragement when we struggle. When we root ourselves together in the Vine, we bear fruit together. We are like a vibrant garden of flowers. We are like lush green leaves on a shrub. We are like the strong branches on a tree, all working together, all bearing good fruit.

Thanks be to God for being such a faithful gardener, and for giving us such a loving, life-giving Vine to root in. It's good to live and grow among his branches.

Written by a staff  
member of Lutheran Counseling  
Network