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Resurrection LUTHERAN CHURCH



April 2020

CANCELLED?

With schools, offices, sporting events, and so much more either closed or cancelled it can be tough to navigate life normally. Add to this the fact that churches are also having to adapt how they are doing services, given the ever-changing governmental requirements, and you have what are “trying” circumstances all around. As I have been thinking about all of these things, and looking at the likelihood that our Easter Services will not look the same this year, I want to remind everyone that there is a difference between something being different and being cancelled.



A perfect illustration of this comes to us from the comedy TV show “The Office.” In one of the Christmas episodes, the inept boss Michael is dumped during the company Christmas party. He is so distraught about this that he makes this proclamation: “I’d like everybody’s attention. Christmas is canceled.” To which one of the employees (Stanley) replies, “You can’t cancel a holiday.” They then continue their arguing back and forth with this exchange.

“Michael: Keep it up Stanley and you will lose New Year’s.
Stanley: What does that mean?
Michael: Jim, take New Year’s away from Stanley.”

Amid this humor, we see a certain truth. Stanley is absolutely correct. Christmas cannot be cancelled no matter what is going on with Michael. It is much the same with today’s temporary constraints. We see so much chaos going on around the world and even in our homes. However, even though it might not look like our “normal” celebration, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and everything that signifies for us will not be cancelled. I mean, if Satan thought that death and the cross would cancel out Christ, and we see how wrong he was, then we can be rest assured that even with the cancellations of worldly events going on, our Lord will still be risen indeed!

Paul reminds us of this in Romans 8:38-39: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The present COVID-19 pandemic and the disorder, confusion, and anxieties it is causing will not separate us from the love that is in Christ Jesus!

A good thing I want to assure all of you of is that when the protective orders are lifted, on whatever Sunday follows, we will celebrate Easter in full at both services, with all the fellowship, joy, and love that surrounds it! For you see, we don’t have just one Easter Sunday, but a whole season of Easter that runs to Pentecost in May! Even more amazing, every Sunday is a mini-Easter where we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus! So, while we might not have it on the “official” day, we will still have Easter in fellowship with one another.

As Peter in his first book 1:25 reminds us quoting Isaiah, “Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. As the Scriptures say, ‘People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.” With the Word remaining forever, live this and everyday as Resurrection People proclaiming the Good News that is preached to you! Amen!

In Jesus’ Powerful, Never Cancelled, Name,
Pastor Matt

THREE HEBREW HANDHOLDS IN A SPINNING CRISIS by Chad Bird



Long ago, the people of Israel began to sing words of encouragement to each other in times of distress. In their songs, the psalms, are three Hebrew words that provide stability for us. They are more than just words—each one encapsulates the way of God with his people. They serve as helpful handholds in times of stress and upheaval. The words are these: רָפָה (be still), קַוָּה (wait), and שָׁמַר (watch).

Like many of you, my family feels like we're on a very un-fun carnival ride right now—the kind that makes you lose your lunch. My wife and several members of our family have been laid off work. We fear for the health of our elderly parents. Our children's lives have also been thrown into confusion by school closures and more job losses.

Our little worlds are spinning right now. And we're all grasping for a handhold.

What I find myself returning to, again and again, are small things. There is wisdom here. No manhandling the world. No wrestling with the cosmos. The bigger and more looming the crisis, the more we need something sure and stable and small. Something ancient and profound. Something that anchors us to what cannot change.

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רָפָה Be Still

Things are falling apart in [Psalm 46](#). Nations are raging. Kingdoms tottering. The earth gives way. The mountains fall into the heart of the sea. If there were ever a time to explode with action and tackle this spinning world, it would be now. Hurry up and do something!

God, however, has other plans. He says, “*Rapha*, and know that I am God.” The verb, *rapha*, means to let something grow slack or hang down (like your hands). Thus, in this verse, it's translated “Be still” (ESV), “cease striving” (NASB), or “desist” (JPS).

Colloquially, we might say, “Relax.”

“Yes,” God is saying, “I know that your lives are in a tailspin. All around you, turmoil threatens. But I am your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. I am with you. I am your fortress. This current crisis is not my first rodeo. I've been handling these for my people from the beginning of time. So, relax. *Rapha*. And know this: I am God—and not just God, but *your* God.”



קָוָה Wait

There are two kinds of waiting: interminable waiting and terminable waiting. Interminable waiting has no clear terminus—no clear end or goal. It's like a couple who want to conceive children, but so far have not. They're waiting for that to happen. Maybe it will, or maybe it won't. Their waiting is uncertain. Terminable waiting, on

the other hand, is waiting in hope for the terminus, the end or goal, to arrive. This is like the same couple, who have conceived a child, waiting for that child to be born. They know it will happen.



In [Psalm 27](#), God's people express a terminable waiting, "Qavah for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; qavah for the LORD!" To qavah is to wait in hope. Now this is no easy task, given the circumstances. David says evildoers are like cannibals, trying to "eat up my flesh," (v. 2). Armies encamp against Israel. False witnesses accuse him. Even his parents have forsaken him. But, David says, "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!" (v. 13). Therefore, he qavahs, he waits to reach that goal.

As do we. No, we cannot pinpoint a date when, finally, we will go back to work or resume lives of normality. Indeed, we suspect that our future lives might not be quite the same—or even close to the same—as they were before. But we do not qavah on normality; we qavah on the Lord. We await his rescue, his grace, his action on our behalf. For our Lord, the Messiah, is the stronghold of our lives.

Life may be changing rapidly around us, but he remains the same Lord of mercy, yesterday, today, and forever. We qavah for him.

שָׁמַר Watch

While we *rapha* (relax) and *qavah* (wait), what is the Lord doing? He is engaging in the work of being our *Shomer*—our Guardian, Watcher, Gatekeeper. A *Shomer* is doing the verb *shamar*, which means to keep, guard, observe, protect, watch over. In ancient cities, the *Shomer* was the guardian of a city, stationed upon its walls or at its gates, to ensure no enemy got near. While others slept, he stayed awake.

In [Psalm 121](#), *shamar* is all over the place, occurring six times in this eight-verse poem. I've added the Hebrew to let you see where it occurs: "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? 2 My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. 3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who SHAMARS you will not slumber. 4 Behold, he who SHAMARS Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is your SHOMER; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD will SHAMAR you from all evil; he will SHAMAR your life. 8 The LORD will SHAMAR your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."

Our good and gracious God is no heavy-eyed, yawning novice of a *Shomer*. He who made heaven and earth (v. 2) has been doing this from creation's dawn. He will not sleep or slumber. When we pray, "Deliver us from evil," our *Shomer* replies, "I will *shamar* you from all evil" (v. 7). By day, by night, 24/7, the Lord who has given his very life for ours, will keep our lives in safety (v. 7).

These three Hebrew words summarize our life now and in the future. Let the world spin as wildly as it might, these handholds will not be shaken or removed. For now, we relax. We wait. And we trust in our Savior, Jesus the Messiah, who is our Guardian, Friend, and King.

LCMS STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY APRIL 2020 ARTICLE



On the topic of stewardship, one of the most common questions a person might ask is *not* whether a Christian should give to their church. Everyone knows this. Of course, Christians should give to their church.

The most common question: “How much should I give?” But what they really mean is this: “Should Christians give a tithe of their income to their local congregation?” So, let’s look at why you should or should not tithe.

Following are some reasons often offered for why Christians *shouldn’t* give a tithe to their church.

Some say you shouldn’t tithe because it isn’t expressly commanded in the New Testament. Lacking that command, there is no “Thus saith the Lord” and no “should” for giving a tithe to your congregation.

Others say that Christians give to their congregation in ways much broader than money. They give of their time and their talents, and these, together with treasures (money), add up to more than a tithe.

Still others say they give of their treasures to other things besides their congregation, and they want to support those things alongside their church.

And there are those who think Christians shouldn’t tithe because of fear. If they tithe, they are afraid their gift will be misused, and they are afraid they won’t have enough to get the things they use, want, or need.

Following are some reasons for why Christians *should* give a tithe to their church.

Even though the New Testament doesn’t specifically command Christians to give a tithe, the Old Testament people were commanded to tithe and did. On top of this, St. Paul often describes the giving Christians are to do in similar terms as a tithe: a regular and generous proportion of the first fruits of their income (1 Cor. 6:1–2; 2 Cor. 8:7–23; 2 Cor. 9:2–7).

But here's another way to think about it. What was the point of the tithe in the Old Testament? Where did it go? The reason for the Old Testament tithe was to support the full ministry of the Levites. They were not given any land because they had no time to farm; their full-time job was the ministry.

What does it say in the New Testament? "The Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should make their living from the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14). This is the verse that Luther put in the *Small Catechism's* Table of Duties to cover what Christians owe to the support of the ministry.

It seems clear from both the Old and the New Testaments that the tithe is the goal of Christians in their giving. But what if we're not there yet? How should we handle this? What are we to do?

Let's answer this by asking a different question about something entirely different. What would you say to your adult children who only attended church quarterly or once a month? There, is after all, no passage in the New Testament that requires Christians to go to church weekly. Hebrews 10:25 is the closest we have, and it states simply for Christians to not neglect gathering together. Even though there is no passage that commands Christians to gather weekly, that is the implicit expectation throughout the Old and New Testaments. It is the goal.

So, what would you say to that son or daughter? I'd expect that conversation would be something like this: "I'm glad you're still going to church. It is a wonderful blessing to hear God's promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and to receive His gifts in the Word and the Sacraments. But you can do better, and it will only be a blessing to you. There is a better way, and I'd really like you to try to attain it."

This same conversation is how we should approach the topic of the tithe. It's not specifically commanded in the New Testament, but it sure seems like the implicit expectation of both the Old and New Testaments. So, the church is ecstatic that you're giving when you're giving in all these ways – time, talents, and treasures.

EASTER SERVICE PLANS

Because of the ongoing government restrictions and recommendations we will be having our Holy Week and Easter Services livestreaming only. Here is the schedule for the services:

A Combined Maundy/Good Friday Service will stream, starting at 7:30 PM, with music led by our friend Ron Mallory.

We will stream two services on Easter Sunday at 8 and 10:30 am. We look forward to you celebrating the Resurrection of Our Lord with us on our facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/rlcdesmoineswa/>

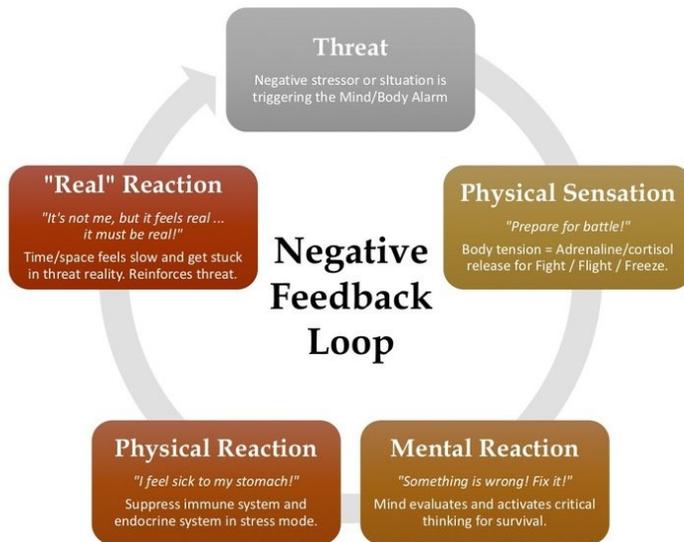


Finally, like I mentioned in my article when the all the restrictions are lifted we will celebrate with a Reunion Easter service on whatever date that is! Thanks for your prayers and continued support of RLC, I love you all.

Pastor Matt

WHEN ANXIETY TAKES HOLD OF MY THOUGHTS

by Joe Padilla of mentalhealthgracealliance.org/



What if I told you negative thoughts can be healthy? Negative thoughts can actually act as a natural self-preservation filter to avoid danger. For example, when my kids ask me to do a backflip on the trampoline, it's healthy for me to have negative thoughts and tell my kids, "No way!" It's not an issue of not believing in myself or trusting God enough, it's a valuable negative assessment to avoid harm and loss. However, when I encounter overwhelming stress with ongoing disappointments, pressures, or expectations, my negative thinking can end up depleting my self-esteem and confidence. It's a self-preservation filter on overdrive, and this is when it becomes unhealthy.

The Apostle Paul knew that we all have negative thoughts and circumstances that can distort our true reality and identity, so he encouraged the churches to practice moving from negative thinking to thrive thinking (truth thinking). He wrote things like, "...think on these things [healthy attributes of life] ..." and "set your mind on the things above [where our true identity is sourced and secured] ..." (Philippians 4:8; Colossians 1:9 and 3:1-2). But the question is, how do we practically do that? While I may not have "the" answer, I'll highlight some overall understanding and some tips using a "healthy thinking tool" found in our Thrive Workbook, a whole-health guide for building resilient hearts and minds.

Here are some important insights to give context to the experience of racing, negative thoughts:

We're battling the sensation that it might be true.

When we have a negative thought (stressor), it triggers the threat center of the brain (amygdala) and communicates to the body to focus on fight or flight! The immune system is suppressed and the endocrine system releases the stress hormones to prepare the body for danger. Our prefrontal cortex goes into high critical and quick thinking, and our nervous system is on edge anticipating danger, loss, and hurt. This ongoing sensation is creating a feedback loop sensation distorting our perspective of time and space, inside and out.

We're anxious because we know it's not true.

Our brain and body algorithm – or “operating system” – is in high gear, creating the experience that “it” is or “it” might be true. Because it feels true, it creates an ongoing negative feedback loop that is mentally, physically, and even spiritually exhausting. Thus, we react because deep down we know it's not true, it just feels true! We end up battling against ourselves and it's exhausting. Negative thoughts get worse when we fight or pray against them. When we mentally or spiritually fight against negative thoughts by arguing against them, praying or rebuking them, it can actually intensify those thoughts. If our prayer focus is to "fight, conquer, or breakthrough," it implies we're already in loss, defeated, and/or vulnerable. This fear-focused reaction ignites our fight or flight system and traps us in a negative feedback loop.

So, what can we do instead as we encounter negative thoughts? Here are four helpful tips to move from negative thinking to thrive thinking:

#1 - Be Aware of the Potholes

Have you ever driven down an unpaved road? You slow everything down to be aware and avoid damaging your tires or alignment. In the same way, we have to slow down to become aware so we don't lose traction or our internal alignment as a result of our negative thoughts. In our Thrive

workbook, we list out a variety of negative thinking “traps” (or potholes), which are categorized by Dr. David Burns popular book, "Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy." This includes all-or-none thinking, emotional reasoning, should statements, personalization, blaming and more!

What are the traps or “potholes” that seem to be your typical reaction? For example, when I'm stressed my default is the "all-or-none thinking." This is when I see life in black or white ultimatums: "Ugh, it's just not going to work out ... it's all going to fall apart ... I'll never be good enough for _____." Because I've been down this road before and I know where the potholes are now, I find it easier to drive along with greater comfort and without losing my traction and alignment on what I know to be true.

#2 - Evaluate the Impact

Sometimes our negative thinking plays out more as feelings than specific thoughts (remember the body sensation aspect). So, when something negative happens, it can trigger the negative feedback loop that points back to our negative thoughts. So, we recognize, review, and realize:

- a. Recognize what happened that triggered the internal reaction or feeling.
- b. Review the emotions and physical reaction (e.g., anger, sadness, fear, sweating, racing heart, avoidance).
- c. Realize which mental traps (potholes) are causing us to lose traction and alignment and feel stuck (e.g., all-or-nothing thinking).

For example, I can recognize what made me upset (e.g., someone's rude and critical comments). Then, I review how I feel sad, angry, and irritable with my nerves a little on edge. Then, I can realize my "all-or-nothing thinking" is causing me to feel stuck: "I can never do anything right, why try."

#3 - Renew with a New Route

Getting unstuck does not mean we have to respond with “positive” thinking. Instead, it challenges the thought or weakness and responds with self-compassion and a comfort perspective.

- a. Renew with a challenge: "Is this how my closest friends, my family, and significant other or spouse really sees me? Would I ever say this about someone else? No, never! There's no evidence it's true!"
- b. Renew with self-compassion: "I may not say or do everything right, I know I'm not perfect and I can grow from mistakes, AND that's okay! AND it doesn't cancel me out as a person! AND my friends, family, and significant other/spouse and God NEVER cancel me out!"
- c. Renew with God's comfort: "What does God truly believe about me in this situation?"
- d. If that's hard, think of a child who comes to you in tears saying they feel worthless. What would you say to comfort them? What you would say to encourage them? What you end up saying to a child would be the very thing God would be saying to you! For example, "I know it's hard! I see your strength and your faith in this. I see so much in you and I believe in you! I love you, and I will always be here for you because you are worth everything to me. I know you can be successful. Let's do this together!"

#4 - Reflect on a New Thought

Lastly, evaluate how this is now making us rethink our thoughts, emotions, and physical responses (e.g., I'm okay, peaceful, calm, breathing easier)? Then, reinforce this comfort by turning it into a gratitude prayer. "Jesus, thank you for always believing in me, staying with me, and continuing to strengthen me with your grace for every part of my journey. Thank you for loving me so much."

This is a grace-filled perspective and a process for self-compassion, comfort, and gratitude, which activates parts of the brain and body that lead to stress relief, calm and positive emotions (serotonin and dopamine). At the same time, it's not a quick-fix cure. We all are unique and some will want more guidance with a professional therapist, and I highly encourage you to take advantage of that. Thrive thinking isn't perfect thinking, it's practicing resilient thinking. It doesn't mean we will never have a negative thought again, rather we have the skills to better manage them and not get stuck in a negative feedback loop.

WON'T YOU BE MY (UNIQUE) NEIGHBOR? By Steve Gruenwald from Concordia Plan's Better Health Spring 2020

As children we were taught that everyone is different, and that God created each person uniquely. As proof, we learned about fingerprints, eye retinas, DNA and other distinct characteristics that differentiate us from each other. Here's a simpler way to see those differences now that you're older: look at your neighbor's house or yard. Perhaps you have found yourself saying, "Who paints their front door purple ... or red ... or green?" (or whatever color is different from the one you chose). Maybe you've exclaimed, "I'd never buy a yard ornament and shutters like that!"

Perhaps these examples speak more about taste and preference, but they do point to the fact that we are different. We think differently about color, shape, size, value, need, and style. While you may have chosen to play it safe with your styles, some of your neighbors may have wanted to express their personality and their tastes through different home decorating decisions.

Several years ago, after moving into our new home we needed to replace our broken-down mailbox and post. With walks around the neighborhood I found myself looking at mailboxes and being intrigued by some very different types. While the local hardware stores carried traditional-looking mailboxes, an online search revealed an industry that catered to finding just the right mailbox that reflected individual tastes.

Look, if you sometimes get exasperated that your family, your friends, your church, or even your country can't come together to agree on how to deal with certain issues, realize that they probably couldn't even agree upon the type of mailbox to purchase! We are all different.

Interestingly enough, research shows it's normal to wish that others are unique. The catch is, as long as that uniqueness makes them more like you! Turns out, we become tense in situations where we try to put everyone in a similar "type" box - defined as the way we'd like them to be, not the way they are. Realistically, co-workers won't think or react the same as you do. Students won't all learn the same way you do. Congregation members are going to have a variety of ideas on how things are done - some won't even agree on a carpet color for the narthex.

The advice of mental health experts is to lean into personality differences. We can drive ourselves crazy trying to fight those variances or by trying to change people. Instead we can try to accept the fact that there will always be differences in style and personality. Your neighborhood (along with your school, church, office) is a hodge-podge of characters, but consider it a blessing that they - and you - are uniquely created by a Master Craftsman.

