



THE END OF THE ROAD AFTER A LONG DAY

“And it's been a long day now down this road I have traveled. And it's been a dark night and I've been searching so long. Through the rain and the fire I have finally found you. And it's been a long day now, but this son's coming home.” These are some lyrics from the Neal Morse Band concept album which tells the story of Pilgrim's Progress musically. It is at the very end when Christian has found that, at the end of the long day, he can come home to His Father God to be complete and safe. I was thinking about these lyrics because it feels like our country and world has had one long, never-ending, struggle of a day over the last 18 months or so. And if, like me, you are feeling like it has been a long day where should you look?



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Well, let's think about this in light of something Biblical. Let's think about the book of Revelation. As we read through it, with all the tribulations of the end times, it can be easy to bog ourselves down in the sections of hardship and plagues. We can read it and wind up worrying more. We try to decode every little thing in it as an event going on today and hope we can unlock the code before it's too late. But is this really the purpose of Revelation?

The answer to this is no. We can see that the true subject matter of Revelation is stated in the very first words of the text in 1:1, which in the rough Greek would be translated as, “revelatory-unveiling of Jesus Christ.” And in his commentary on Revelation, Dr. Louis Brighton expands on this by saying: Whatever the prophetic message of this book has to say, it is about Jesus Christ...The purpose of the message of Revelation is therefore best summed up in this word: preparation...Such preparation consists of baptismal sealing, of being washed in the blood of the Lamb and through such cleansing to stand ready for the coming of Christ. As the Christian stands prepared for the coming of the Lord he is encouraged in the hope of his faith and is inspired for the mission that Christ has given to his church on earth.

What powerful words these are because they point us to Christ, not all the conjecture and decoding many try to do. While there will be hardship and difficult times on the road, do not lose hope. While you might lose trust in the things of this world, never lose your trust in the Lord. Let him be your joy, light, and what you hope, love and trust in above all things! For we know what is at the end of the road after a long day! We do not meet a dead end. If you are ever concerned about what is going on, and how it fits into God's plan, go to the end of the road. Go to the end of Revelation and see that Jesus is victorious and as the Lamb, he reigns forever! At the end of the road after a long day, take in this scene and be at peace.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5)

Your Fellow Traveler in Christ,
Pastor Matt

LCMS STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY AUGUST 2021 ARTICLE



When it comes to stewardship, a favorite Bible verse is the account of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1–4). It's a moving account. Our Lord praises the seemingly small gift of two copper coins given by a poor widow above the abundance of gifts given by the rich, saying, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them" (Luke 21:3). And that is usually where we stop. But the text goes on. "For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:4).

"She ... put in all she had to live on." She gave everything. She held nothing back. She trusted that the Lord who made her and all creatures; who gave her everything she had; who redeemed her from her own sin, from death, and the power of the devil; who called her by the gospel and enlightened her with His gifts of Word and Sacrament; would continue to do this. He would provide her with all that she needed for this body and life because that is the character of the God she had.

But this is not why we give small gifts. Her gift, though it appeared small, was actually large. When we are tempted to give small gifts, it is precisely because we want them to be small! We don't trust the Lord to provide for us. We give small gifts because we lack faith in the One who created us, redeemed us, sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith. We give small gifts because we doubt that God will really give us what we need and desire. We give small gifts because we are not content with what God has already given.

We are not slaves, children of the slave woman, under the Old Covenant (Galatians 4). We are adopted sons of the free woman. And since we are sons, we are also heirs. And heirs receive the inheritance. For everything is already ours in Christ. And thus, moved by the willing spirit of adoption, we do the will of God in financial matters far beyond all that done by those under the Old Covenant who were forced by legal demands.

So, what have you decided to give? How do I decide what to give? Let the Scriptures be your guide.

We are to give proportionally to what we have received from God's giving to us (Luke 12:48; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, 2 Corinthians 8:12). But you have not been set free to give nothing. See that you excel in the grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8:7)!

We are not free to live selfishly outside the Gospel, without regard for God who gives us all good gifts, without generosity for our neighbor who needs us and our gifts, without supporting the community of faith in which we live, without care for our spiritual fathers and those who teach and help raise our children in the faith, and without resources for the poor and needy.

In short, we are not free to live unto ourselves, hoarding what God has given us only for us. For love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10). And the sum of the law is this: Love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:34–40). We love because He first loved us. We give because He has given to us.

Luther once said, "Possessions belong in your hands, not in your heart" (LW 14:240). There is a reason your 10 fingers spread apart. With your hands you catch God's gifts for what you need and let the rest fall through your fingers to your neighbors – your family, your friends, your community, your church.

Balance Sheet 05/31/2021

Assets

Assets		\$244,072.66
Current Assets	\$92,435.30	
Checking Account	\$66,066.47	
Savings Account	\$21,484.57	
Facilities Account	\$3,443.83	
PayPal	\$1,440.43	
Investments	\$151,637.36	
LCEF Steward Account	\$96,250.67	
LCEF Supplemental	\$5,503.14	
Schwab Account	\$0.10	
LCMS Endowment Fund	\$49,883.45	
Imbalance-USD		\$0.00
Total Assets		\$244,072.66

Liabilities

Liabilities		\$400.00
Outstanding Bills	\$0.00	
Outstanding Checks	\$400.00	
Total Liabilities		\$400.00

Equity

Operating Accounts		\$243,672.66
Opening Balances	\$0.00	
Operating Accounts	\$243,672.66	
General Fund	\$55,181.66	
Sinking Funds	\$62,570.62	
Local Impact Giving	\$2,124.97	
Travel	\$0.00	
Piano Organ Maint	\$789.75	
District Conv	\$624.02	
Short-Term Maint	\$5,218.57	
Landscape	\$609.42	
Long-Term Maint	\$38,746.85	
Surface Water Mgmt	\$636.82	
Property Insurance	\$4,320.92	
Parsonage Maint	\$9,499.30	
Special Funds	\$22,561.01	
Congregational Emergency Fund	\$1,818.89	
Kitchen Fund	\$3,510.60	
Memorial Fund	\$16,196.54	
Concordia Publishing	\$0.00	
Social Action Fund	\$1,034.98	
Youth Fund	\$0.00	
Emergency Fund	\$46,387.12	
Endowment Fund	\$49,883.45	
Temp Account	\$0.00	
Total Equity		\$243,672.66
Total Liabilities & Equity		\$244,072.66



You've heard the saying that knowledge is power. So, what do you know? Do you know, for instance, that astronaut Neil Armstrong used his left foot to step on the moon? Do you know that in baseball home plate is 17 inches wide? That's interesting knowledge if you're participating in a trivia game, but it's not life-saving.

What about knowing how to install a toilet or lay a tile floor? That's good do-it-yourself knowledge to improve the look and value of a home, but in the bigger picture, that isn't life-saving knowledge either. Life-saving knowledge comes from knowing how to perform CPR or even by knowing your numbers — that is, your blood cholesterol, triglyceride numbers and your blood pressure numbers. Those numbers are an indication of your health status and can alert you to a health risk that needs attention. Although even that knowledge only extends so far in this earthly life.

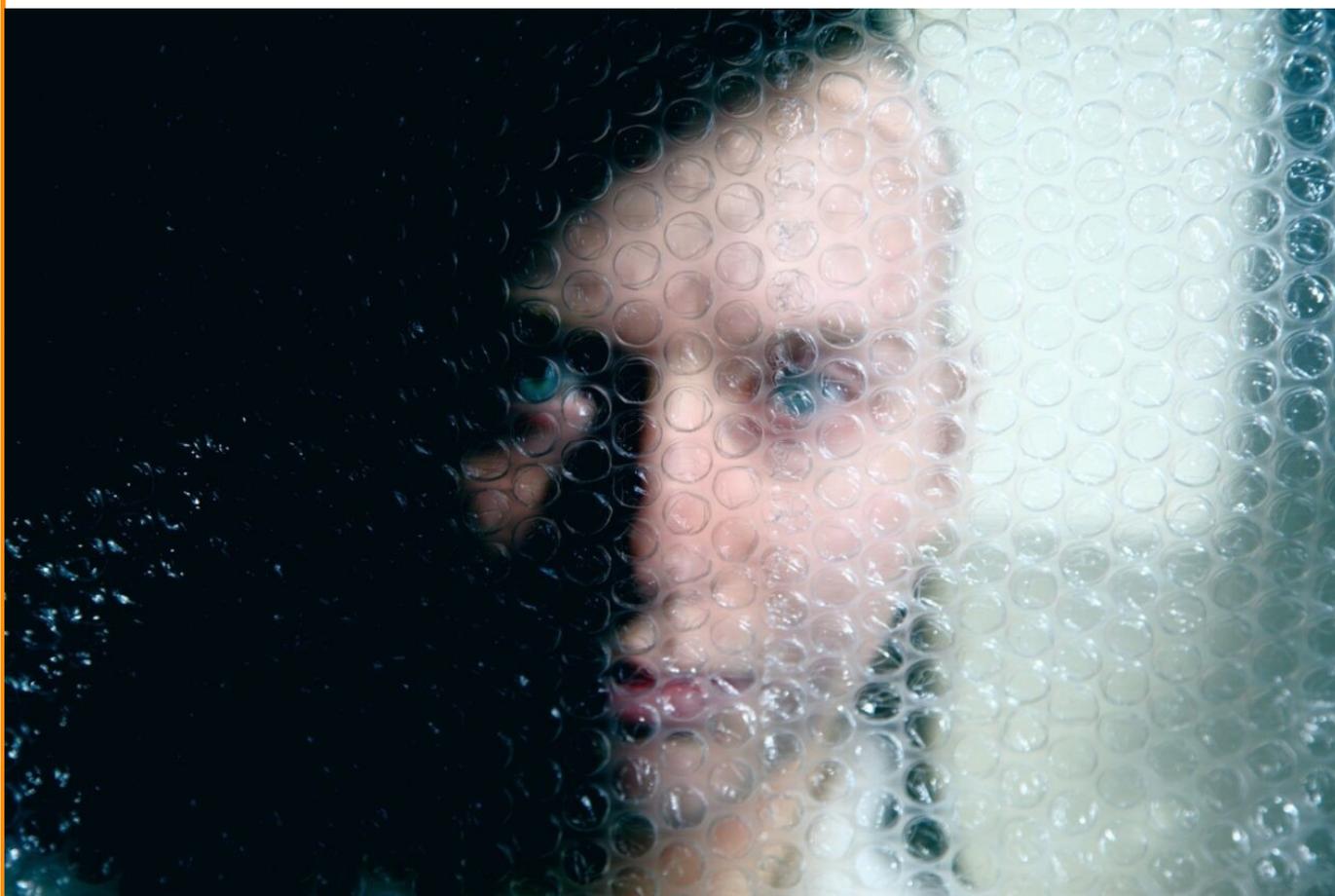
Then there are some things we wish we didn't know. For example, we wish we didn't know the words to annoying commercial jingles that replay constantly in our head. Perhaps something else we wish we didn't know: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." (Psalm 51:3) We are well aware of our sinful natures and what we have said, thought or done that are in stark opposition to what God commands.

Thankfully, through our faith that was given to us by the power of the Holy Spirit at baptism, we also know ". . . that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." (1 John 5:11) Now that's life-saving knowledge! We rejoice that Christ came to earth to be the sacrifice for our sins – to die for us – and through His resurrection, we have the promise and hope of an everlasting life.

I think we need to revise an earlier statement: it's not just about what you know, but who you know. Because of our faith, we know Christ crucified! We believe that through Christ's death on the cross, God has forgiven every one of our sins, and He will continue to do so until that day we are with Him in Heaven.

Trivia knowledge may come and go, and we may not be able to rattle off our blood cholesterol numbers, but what's locked in our hearts and minds is what we proclaimed confidently just a few short months ago, "I know that my Redeemer lives. What comfort that sweet sentence gives!"

HIDING OUR SHAME by Erick Sorensen of 1517.org/articles/hiding-our-shame



No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13).

If you were to scroll down my Instagram or Twitter feed you might get the impression that I’ve got things “together.” My timeline is filled with me teaching the Bible, pictures of me and my kids hanging out somewhere fun, and some really smiley selfies with my wife. I’m pretty gifted at presenting to the world the person I want them to see.

But the truth is, if I didn’t have the infinite opportunities for pictorial curation that social media provides, you might see images of me in a far less flattering light. For example, from time to time, you could come across portraits of me paralyzed by anxiety over my ministry. You might see a nice frame of me losing it on my kids for being too loud (in other words, just for being kids). You could even see a few classic shots of my wife and I arguing probably because I’m being a grump.

I suppose I could blame this digital cover up all on social media and our culture’s pressure to produce “good” content. But that wouldn’t really be fair or accurate. The truth is, long before I got on Facebook or Twitter, I was an expert at covering up my “less impressive” parts. I’m willing to wager you’re not all that different from me. Having lived in this place long enough, you’ve learned that to be uncovered is to be vulnerable, and to be vulnerable is to be possibly weak and to be weak is to open yourself up to all sorts of potential hurt, shame, and pain. If we are to be safe, at least some of who we are needs to be hidden. In one sense, “to cover up” is what it means to be human in a fallen world (Gen 3:7).

But...There is a cost to all this covering up. The sad fact is, the more we try and hide, the less capable we are of receiving and extending love. C.S. Lewis was right when he wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable." (1)

In other words, Lewis is saying, "To refuse vulnerability is to become hardened not merely to other people, but also to God." But of course, this is all too understandable. We hear that God is a consuming fire, that he is holy, that no sin is acceptable in his sight, and we can't help but run for cover. Like our first parents cowering in Eden, we delude ourselves into believing that with enough fig leaves we can hide our problems from the seemingly terrifying presence of God. Those leaves have made their way into our ears, deafening us to the God redemptively calling out in the garden of our destruction, "Where are you?"

Perhaps you can't hear his saving voice over the barriers you're hiding under today, but maybe, just maybe, you can read his saving voice calling out to you in his word: If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:7-10).

Take those words in, weary sinner, step out of the darkness and walk into the light. Far from God threatening to crush you for what you've tried to keep hidden, God invites you to confess the skeletons in your closet so that he might bury them in the grave for good. In fact, both fellowship with "one another" and with God come with a continual acknowledgment of one's shortcomings, failures, and sins. In other words, before the face of God you are free to be.... vulnerable. Brene Brown, the foremost expert on the power of vulnerability writes, "Vulnerability is the birthplace of everything we're hungry for." (2)

What are we creatures made in God's image really hungering for? Acceptance, grace, love, and embrace. Deep down we all want to know that if we "get real" that our true selves will not be greeted with a smug laugh or a judgmental glare. The good news the Scriptures give us is that all the embrace, love, acceptance, and grace we desperately long for is freely given in Jesus Christ. As we bring our shortcomings, failures, and sins to our Lord in confession, God has no choice but to respond with soul transforming words of pardon: "You are forgiven."

Because Jesus Christ has absorbed the wrath our sins have incurred (1 John 2:2-2), we no longer have to hide our shame. Those sins, yes even THAT SIN is now "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). To be a Christian is simply exchanging that which hides us: We exchange the insufficient rags we've used to cover up, for the all sufficient robe of Christ's righteousness given in our baptism (Gal 3:27). Therefore, we are invited by the author of Hebrews to go "boldly to the throne of grace to find grace in our time of need" (Heb 4:16). Since, there's never a moment that isn't a "time of need," this means that now, yes right now, is the perfect time to get real, to get vulnerable with your God. He can't wait to tell you, you are forgiven.

(1) C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

(2) Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Erick Sorensen is a pastor currently serving as church planter of Epiphany Church in New York City as well as part-time associate pastor at Hillside Lutheran Brethren Church in New Jersey. He is married to Missy and they have three boys, Jude, John, and Lincoln. He has co-authored two books: *The Sinner/Saint Devotional* and *Scandalous Stories: A sort of commentary on the parables* and a co-host of the weekly podcast *30 Minutes in the New Testament*.

AUGUST 2021



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Brian Lindeke	8-1	Paul Lindeke	8-1
Tom Ficklin	8-12	Micah Denning	8-13
Joshua Green	8-15	Ann Lindeke	8-19
Betty Cissell	8-23	Alley Bos	8-30



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NOTE TO QUILTERS

Now that most of the pandemic restrictions are lifted, we are ready to restart the quilting group. Our first meeting will be Wednesday, September 1, from 9:30 to 11:30, in room 200. We may complete some quilts but the first order of business is to sort and store the boxes of fabric that have been donated. If you have never quilted, it's really simple - just tying knots. If you cannot stand long at the tables, there are other jobs that can be done while sitting. Any questions, call Barbara Tonkinson, 206-870-4102.

