

HOPE WE CAN COUNT

INTRODUCTION

BYAMY BIRD

The start of a new year can bring with it a renewed sense of hope. We hold anticipation and excitement for what lies ahead. Perhaps some dates are already circled on your calendar in delight: a graduation, vacation, or milestone birthday. Somehow, a new year brings with it a sense of new beginning, of untapped potential, of something better than before. It can be easy to feel hopeful.

But for some of us, it's not quite that simple. We've been hit hard by the trials of life and see no signs of relief coming any time soon. Considering the prospect of hope is just too risky. What if we're let down again?

Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, you're feeling some kind of emotion. That's because when God made us in His image, He made us to have emotions just like He does. Our fall into sin brings us emotions foreign to God, like fear and guilt. And our emotions can change based on a circumstance, mood, or relationship. We might feel happy, sad, afraid, angry, surprised, or loved, and many, many other feelings!

Talking about emotions can sometimes make us feel uncomfortable (another emotion). Emotions can feel unpredictable. We don't trust them or always know what to do with them. Big emotions can feel out of control. Small emotions can seem like a deficiency. But here we are, embodied creatures of our good Creator, living each moment of each day with the experience of emotions.

God cares so much about our experience as emotional creatures that the Bible shares the array of emotions Jesus experienced as He walked the earth. Next time you read the Gospels, consider what emotions Jesus is feeling. He is angered by the sellers in the temple. He feels loved as the woman washes His feet with perfume. He feels lonely when His disciples don't stay awake with Him to pray. Feeling emotions is part of what made Jesus human. And in His death and resurrection, Jesus redeems for us all of life, including our emotions.

No doubt about it, the assurance of our faith is founded in the historical reality of Jesus' saving

work that we receive through baptismal grace. But the expression of our faith is lived out through our emotions. How we feel as we live out our faith can serve as signposts informing us of the Spirit's work of pruning and growing us in His fruits. And as we consider the emotions of other people, we learn how to better serve our neighbor, offering comfort, care, and support.

Throughout this issue of *Lutheran Life*, we'll explore emotions such as joy, peace, sadness, grief, stress, anxiety, and compassion. We'll consider both how we experience these emotions and how they can point us to who God is. And as we do, no matter the emotion or article, I pray you can feel a sense of hope; that your joy and peace would be anchored in your hope in Jesus; that your suffering and sorrow would produce in you endurance, character, and hope that will not put you to shame. Because hope in Jesus is something we can count on. There's no risk involved. It's for you—both to know and to feel. ‡

As we get started, consider these questions from *Finding Hope:* From Brokenness to Restoration by Heidi Goehmann:



- What are some of the most complex emotions you have experienced in life?
- How do you most often deal with your emotions? What does it look like when you give your emotions space as informants but not leaders in your life?
- How does God, the Creator of emotions, help us be informed by our emotions but not led by them?



Q&A with Heidi Goehmann

Deaconess Heidi Goehmann is a licensed clinical social worker, theologian, and author. Her latest book, *Emotions and the Gospel: Created for Connection*, explores our experience with various emotions in light of Christ's redemption and restoration.

How does being curious about our emotions help us learn more about ourselves? About our Creator?

We often think of emotions as a defining factor of our humanity, but God is an emotional being, both in His humanity in the person and work of Jesus Christ and in His divinity. When we widen the lens and see emotions as a place we can learn more about God, it provides some truth about emotion that isn't dependent on only our experiences of them as messy, confused, hurting, loved, redeemable human beings. When we have the foundation of God to firmly stand on, we are grounded enough to then explore and discover more about ourselves with both the Law and Gospel informing us. We end up with a more honest reflection, a fuller confession of our needs and hurts and desires before God and in the relationships in our lives.

You mention in your book that God is emotional and suggest that we often don't think about God as having emotions. What characteristics, motivations, or actions of God might we miss out on if we don't consider His emotions?

It is tempting to oversimplify God, and in looking at God as emotional, we negate the ability to simplify Him. We see God's love and God's indignance, God's affection and God's wrath, God's deep desire and God's remorse. These emotions are complicated, all represented in Scripture as part of God's experiences in humanity and divinity, and while they might make us uncomfortable, they help us truly know God more, all of Him.

It's common to want to seek to control our emotions—to only show certain ones or to try to get more of another. What's behind this mindset? How can we cultivate a healthier relationship with the emotions we experience?

Where we generally seek regulation, God's face is turned toward restoration. We often try to manage ourselves, especially our emotions, and while we do need to consider self-control and address where we can bring destruction to ourselves and others, we also live in the freedom of Christ and the knowledge of God's stated value over us.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We are invited to reflect on our identity as God's dear children and live in that relationship, growing and learning without shame. Managing us, regulating, is an important aspect of the law—of boundaries, of living as a human in need of help and structure in a broken world. Yet, we will never fulfill it. Jesus fulfills the law perfectly so that we can be restored to relationship with God and focus our energy and attention on His grace meeting each of us in every moment of every day.

How do emotions connect us to one another? What helpful role can emotions play in the life of the Church?

In Emotions and the Gospel, you'll read about the concept of co-regulation, which is a phenomenal, weird, and wild gift of God to us. We were created to be connected in ways we don't completely understand. Our emotions are a piece of this connection puzzle. As humans, we are capable of much good and much destruction. With God's restorative lens of grace in our lives, we can honestly look at where our emotions lean toward adding the weight of destruction to our relationships and where they are adding good, growth, and grace.

How does becoming more aware of our own emotions better prepare us to live out our various vocations?

Our baggage, including emotional baggage, is often sitting quietly or not so quietly between us and those with whom we live and work. The same is true for our joys, including our emotional joy and energy. Knowing God and ourselves better helps us understand our emotions, our neighbors, and how to move forward with a Gospel-grace foot.

Why is having a place to rest so important, even when experiencing "happy" emotions?

When we limit God to being present only in the emotions we feel are pleasant—or even unpleasant—we limit our ability to see God in all things (Colossians 1:16–17). We unintentionally place our hand out in the air and keep our awareness of God's action and grace in our lives at arm's length.

In your book, you invite readers to consider a question we don't know the answer to. I'd like to hear your reflection on the same question: What do you think emotional wholeness will look like when Jesus restores all things?

This is a fun question to consider, and I hope the reader feels that way too. Any time we get to imagine what wholeness and restoration will look like, it's not the answer that necessarily matters, but the sense that God is working and leading us toward goodness and something better. In a weird way, reflecting on the long-term restoration God has planned for us with Jesus' return and the new creation, we also become more aware of God's restorative work in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives each day.

Anything else you'd like to share about processing emotions through the Gospel?

God is not judging our emotions in the same way we do. He created us to be thinkers, feelers, and doers. All of those things can be impacted by sin, but none of them are sin themselves. When sin and brokenness do impact what we think, feel, or do, we are still judged within the grace of Jesus Christ, not outside of it. This is the Gospel for our emotions. This is the Gospel for our whole selves.

Read more from Heidi at heidigoehmann.com as she advocates for mental health, emotional health, and genuine relationships—always with hope in Jesus.

EMOTIONS AND THE GOSPEL: CREATED FOR CONNECTION

Continue learning about your emotions from a biblical perspective in *Emotions and the Gospel*. You'll see how to embrace the range of your emotions as God's gifts. Find this title and others in this issue at cph.org.



LEARNING TO Lamen BY R. REED LESSING Sorrow can transform our heart into stone. We turn off emotions. We build walls. What's the solution? Laments. Laments aren't signs of weakness. Laments are signs of strength. They melt the icebergs frozen on the inside. They bring us back from the dead.

Some people, however, are uncomfortable with grief. When we open our heart they change the subject, leave the room, turn on the TV—anything to avoid awkward displays of emotion. We live in a society that wrongly concludes it's best not to discuss loss and it's better for people to privately cry. However, we must find ways to express our sadness about what once was, is no longer, and will never be again.

The Book of Psalms is God's gift to all who mourn. Psalmists often acknowledge the raw experiences of life. They cry out to the Lord, "How long?" (e.g., Psalm 6:3; 13:1–3); "Where is God?" (e.g., Psalm 42:3; 44:24; 79:10); "Why?" (e.g., Psalm 10:1; 22:1; 43:2; 74:1); "Are you asleep?" (e.g., Psalm 44:23); "Wake up!" (e.g., Psalm 35:23; 59:4); "Listen!" (e.g., Psalm 17:1; 27:7; 30:10). Psalms reject a fake and pretentious faith and affirm that suffering is real.

These laments correct euphoric and celebratory notions of faith that romantically portray the Christian life as consisting of only sweetness and light. These biblical cries of anguish help us avoid a one-sided, happiness-only mind-set that fails to deal forth-rightly with life's tragedies. We never get past sorrow, but we can overcome it by going through it. How? Complain. Appeal. Remind. Express. Seek.

- Complain to God. We need to be ourselves to succeed in any relationship. This means the curtain is pulled away, and the one hiding behind is exposed. "It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." It's me! Honest expressions of fear and anger open the way for hope and healing.
- Appeal to God's love. Appeal to His character. Trust His mercy and compassion in Jesus.
- Remind God of His promises. "God, You said that You are faithful." "God, You said that You would answer my prayers."
- Express trust in God's wisdom and the things you don't understand. Our Father in heaven knows best.
- Seek help from a professional. Your pastor, a Christian counselor, or another health care professional will be able to assist you.

Read one of the Psalms of Lament listed in this article. Then, write your own psalm of lament to God. Pour out your anger and frustration to God. Appeal to His love and remind Him of His promises.

We can be confident that a new day will dawn. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). When did God save His people from their long night in Egypt? In the morning (Exodus 14:24, 27). When does Psalm 46 say God delivers? In the morning (v. 5). When did Jesus rise again? In the morning. When does God deliver us from the long nights of life? According to Lamentations 3:23, His mercies are new every morning. What is the last name the Bible gives Jesus? The Bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16).

Feelings of raw pain are like a river flowing from our heart. This river needs a "bank," so our feelings take on depth and direction. Apart from Jeremiah's laments—and others like them—we are left with our culture's shallow prescriptions for healing. But biblical cries and protests give us words and expressions that allow our brokenness to come before God's healing throne of grace.

Go ahead. Weep. Acknowledge your pain. *Refuse to fly over your sorrow*. Also know this: joy will come because Christ's Good Friday lament turned into the Easter song of victory and resurrection.‡

OVERCOMING LIFE'S SORROWS: LEARNING FROM JEREMIAH

Continue reading this excerpt from *Overcoming Life's Sorrows*. Begin a journey alongside Jeremiah to see how he finds joy, truth, faith, and more by trusting in God. Find this title and others in this issue at cph.org.





GRIEF IS NEVER EASY, especially when you try to go through it alone and without support. Through God's Word and Spirit, He reminds you that you are never meant to experience grief by yourself. Facing grief can cause you to question your faith and God's good plan for your life. In his book *Living with Grief: Bound by Sorrow, Wrapped in Comfort*, Pastor Kincaid shares his journey of pressing deeper into his relationship with God and His Word every time grief struck in his life.

Standing over the grave of a loved one is heart-breaking. We question the Lord and His love for us. "Why this, why now, why my loved one, Lord?" Such deep anguish and pain death brings. Our doubts loom large, and the Lord seems so small. When doubts and questions come, and come they will, we can remember that the Lord is always the answer, and never the problem. May our doubts and questions drive us to, and never away from, the Word of God. As we open His Word of truth we see His words of love, care, and compassion.

Why does tragedy take place? We live in a sinful, fallen world. A better question to ask is "Who can I turn to in my sorrow?" The answer is Christ—always. Hold this truth close, "I know the plans I have for you . . . plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a

hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you" (Jeremiah 29:11–12). No need to pencil in a question mark after any of the Lord's promises. "I lift up my eyes unto the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1–2). The Lord who gave His back to the whip for you never turns His back on you. He who opened His arms on the cross for you never folds them in indifference toward you.

God clearly tells us how to approach grief in Scripture. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope, for we have Christ and His love. Our lives will never be the same. The days are long, the nights longer. Hearts are heavy and sighs run deep. Knowing this, our Living Savior, in the richest compassion, bids us to cast all our burdens upon Him, for He loves us dearly and deeply. We do not grieve in hopelessness, nor do we weep alone—ever. We are weak; Christ is strong. We are not cured of grief this side of eternity. We are, however, comforted in our grief with the love of Jesus Christ, who gently wipes away our every tear. We start with the truth of His love, and we stay with that truth, for He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love," (Jeremiah 31:3). Jesus loves you all the way to the cross and the empty tomb. Christ is our comfort at all times, in all circumstances.

Two words provide enduring comfort: Jesus lives. The risen Savior is the victor over death and the grave. He laid His life down on the cross and took it back again on the third day. He lives—and our sins are forgiven. He lives—and we are never alone, for He is with us always. He lives—and death's obituary is written. He lives—and heaven is our home by grace. He lives—and our bodies will be raised from the grave. Amidst the manifold changes in our lives, we can treasure the unchanging love of Christ for us. Even in the most grievous situation, in the darkest hour, we can say, "For You are my rock and fortress; Therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me" (Psalm 31:3). We never grieve alone. The living and loving Savior is with us.

Our gracious Lord has given us His Holy Word and Sacraments, the Means of Grace, to use as tools when we feel the loneliness of grief. His Word bespeaks us loved, forgiven, and heirs of heaven. His Word is sustenance and strength for our souls. The psalmist states, "I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word" (Psalm 119:107). Comfort abounds!

Our Baptism is a well of comfort our entire life, a life-giving flood of mercy. "I am baptized." Three simple words of enduring comfort. We can rejoice that we are children of God and heirs of everlasting life. We were marked on forehead and heart with the sign of the cross to mark as one redeemed by Christ. Comfort abounds!

The Lord sets a table before us in the presence of our enemies of sin, death, and the devil—the gift of Holy Communion.

We taste and see that the Lord, He is good. We laud and magnify His glorious Name with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. This indeed is a foretaste of the feast to come. Comfort abounds!

We can say the Lord's Prayer, ever mindful that it covers our every need of body and soul. St. Paul exhorts us, "Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:17–18). Comfort abounds!

How blessed we are to stand within the doors of God's house with our fellow believers to hear of Christ and receive His gifts through Word and Sacrament. Comfort abounds for you, my grieving friend.

Comforts richly afforded as we open the treasure

chest of God's Holy Word. We hear the clear voice of our Good Shepherd saying, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand," (John 10:27–28). Jesus bids us "Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," (Matthew 11:28).

The Lord is our keeper. He hears our sighs and our cries for mercy. He knows our hearts are broken. He sees our head cupped in our hands. He is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46) our hope and confidence in all circumstances (Psalm 71). He inclines His ear to us always (Psalm 102). Peter reminds us, "Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). What tender mercy the Lord has for us! A most comforting truth! He is with us.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," (Revelation 14:13). Those who have gone before us are blessed. How so? Blessed to be with the Lord, safe and sound according to the soul. Blessed to behold Christ. Blessed to sing, "Salvation belongs to

our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb," (Revelation 7:10). The Word of the Savior, "Today you will be with Me in paradise," (Luke 23:43), comforts us knowing our loved ones are with Him—safe and sound, alive and well

Him—safe and sound, alive and well according to the soul. Their bodies will rise from the grave, as will ours, on the Last Day at the command of Christ. A blessed future indeed!

We are blessed now on our earthly pilgrimage to hear of Christ and His cross. We will be blessed at our death to be with Him and those who have gone before us in the true faith. Little wonder St. Paul states, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Philippians 1:23). The cup of comfort the Lord provides runs over. ‡

LIVING WITH GRIEF: BOUND BY SORROW, WRAPPED IN COMFORT

Grief is difficult. Perhaps the most difficult is the way it clings after a loss. Find hope and be wrapped in Christ's comfort with encouraging words from Rev. Kincaid. Find this title and others in this issue at cph.org.

WE NEVER

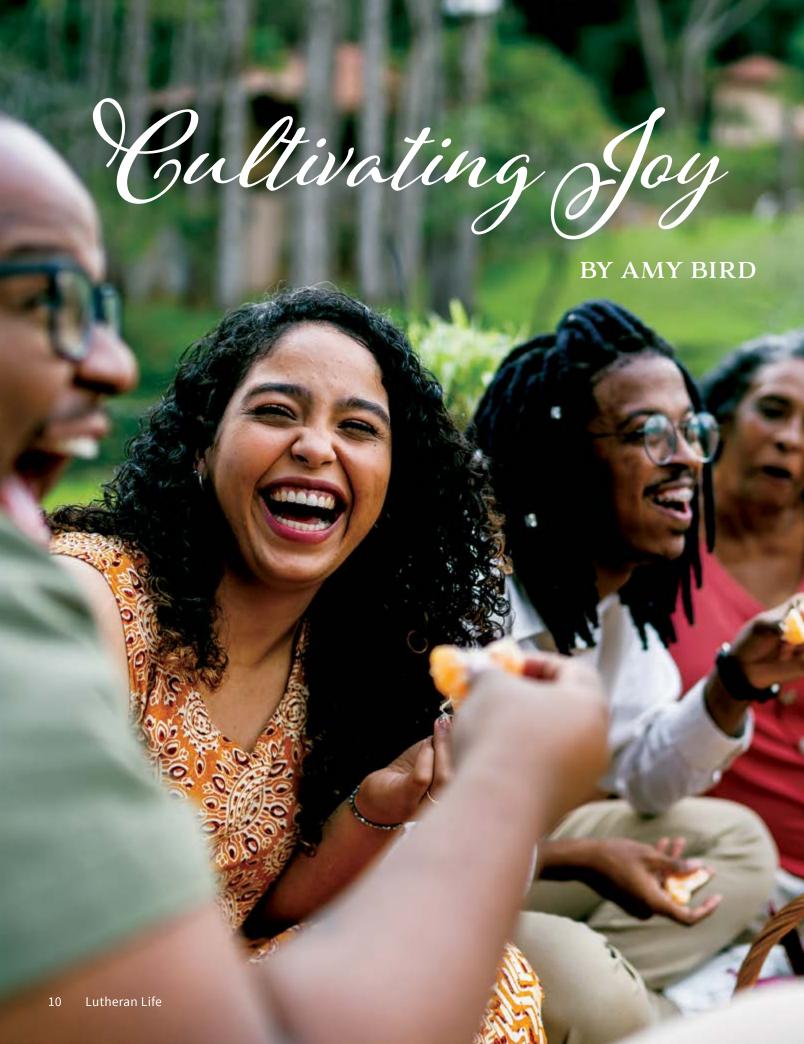
GRIEVE ALONE.

THE LIVING AND

LOVING SAVIOR

IS WITH US.





WHO IS THE MOST JOY-FILLED PERSON IN YOUR LIFE? Do their life circumstances give them reason for joy? Do they tell the best stories about their vacations? Have a loving, close-knit family? Seem totally content at their job? They might.

But more often than not, I witness people who have joy despite the bad or the good that happens to them—and both happen.

Author Deb Burma provides a helpful distinction about joy. She writes, "Happiness is a feeling that depends upon circumstances; joy is a fruit of the Spirit that's ours by faith despite our circumstances," (*Joy: A Study of Philippians*, p. 92). Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that's planted in us in our Baptism and flourishes through us as we're connected to Jesus' vine.

WHILE HAPPINESS IS A RESULT OF CIRCUMSTANCES, JOY IS A GIFT OF FAITH.

And joy does require faith. My favorite passage on joy is Philippians 4. In it, we learn from Paul that joy comes when we focus on what God provides and we entrust every anxiety to the cross.

Paul exhorts the Christians at Philippi to "Rejoice in the Lord always." He says it again, "Rejoice!" This emphasis on rejoicing, or having joy, comes alongside instruction to pray in all circumstances, to be thankful, and to cultivate a mindset that thinks on certain things. Paul pairs joy with peace and contentment that he can find in any circumstance (see Philippians 4:4–7).

If Paul was focused only on his circumstances, joy wouldn't be the outcome. He wouldn't make our list of people who seem like they should be content. He couldn't boast of his travels for the Gospel—he was often running for his life. As a single man, he didn't experience the intimacy of marriage or thrills of parenthood. And rather than receiving recognition and accolades for his evangelistic labors, he experienced persecution.

But Paul found that connection to Jesus through prayer and thanksgiving leads to a peace that's beyond our understanding and a joy that cannot be shaken.

Paul explains that joy increases by thinking about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or praiseworthy (see Philippians 4:8). It comes when we're committed to seeing more reasons to give thanks than excuses to grumble. It comes when we stop to acknowledge the Provider of each good gift rather than just expecting the provision. It comes when we pause in the midst of what's hard and trust God to be God.

YES, JOY IS A GIFT OF FAITH.

The author of Hebrews tells us that it's joy that enabled Jesus to endure the cross. "For the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is

seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus still despised the shame, He still mourned the betrayal, He still suffered the pain of dying. And yet for the *joy* set before Him, He endured. And through His death, we can experience a life of joy. What a lovely thought for us to think on.

What looks like death in your life today? Where is the ground so dry you're sure there's no way joy could bloom?

Joy doesn't depend on circumstances. And joy doesn't ask you to pretend the sadness and pain aren't there, to cover up or hide what is hard. Joy is from Jesus, and He is strong enough to sit with you in the hurt because He Himself endured the cross, despising the shame so that in joy, you may be connected to Him.

Maybe today all that feels possible is a seedling of joy. And maybe that's enough.

Jesus promises to be with you always and gives joy. Ask Him for joy today. ‡

THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS

Practice cultivating joy by listing three to five answers for each category Paul lists in Philippians 4:8:

- Whatever is true:
- Whatever is honorable:
- Whatever is just:
- Whatever is pure:
- Whatever is lovely:
- Whatever is commendable:
- If there is any excellence:
- If there is anything worthy of praise:

Continue this practice for the next seven days. Do you feel more or less joy than before you began?

GOING FURTHER: What would it look like to focus this exercise on a specific area of life, especially an area where you'd like more joy? Your family, a key relationship, at work, with your church?

JOY: A STUDY OF PHILIPPIANS

For eight weeks, study the joy of Paul's Letter to the Philippians in this Bible study. Each session is flexible, making it perfect for groups and individuals. Find this title and others in this issue at cph.org.







Keep God in view. When we're stressed, it's easy to lose sight of our faith. When that happens, we feel overwhelmed and forget that God has everything under control. "When we forget about God and attempt life on our own, our spiritual dehydration eventually shows." We can become angry and neglect the command to love our neighbor. Rather than try to deal with our stress apart from God and His Word, we can seek the Lord and find strength to sustain us in difficult times. Life is stressful—for most of us, there's no way around that fact. But we can prevent ourselves from being overcome by excessive stress by looking to God, remembering His Word, and counting on His grace to carry us through.

If I had to pick one verse that shows Christ's perfect example of dealing with stress, it would be Jesus' words in the garden. "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus acknowledged His stress and His desire to be relieved of it. But ultimately, He trusted that all things were in the hands of the Father, and He submitted Himself to the Father's perfect plan.

How do we find joy in the midst of stress? The words of 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 are instructive: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Note, it doesn't say to give thanks for all circumstances because not all things are good. Instead, it says to give thanks in all circumstances. So, amid any situation, we can be thankful, joyful people. Our joy is not based on the shifting sands of our daily lives but on the unchanging, rock-solid foundation of Christ. Even when life is stressful, He is our joy.

In a sense, all of Scripture is God beckoning us to always trust Him. "Many situations are handed to us without our asking. They are inherent stresses. We trust in God's plan to demonstrate His strength in our weakness." Scripture gives witness to God's faithfulness to His people. We can always count on Him. Many specific verses reinforce God's faithfulness and invite us to trust

Him. Perhaps none speaks to us more powerfully than the Savior's own words: "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). You can respond similarly when under stress. You can enlist others to help carry your burden. You can seek God in prayer. You can entrust yourself to God's perfect will. In all of it, you can trust God, who sent His only Son to suffer in your place so that by faith you would be God's protected child. ‡

LESSONS FROM THE GARDEN

From Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, we observe three constructive measures that apply to all types of stressful situations:

- 1. Jesus didn't try to carry the stress alone. He invited His closest friends—Peter, James, and John—to accompany Him.
- 2. Jesus prayed. Prayer calms our souls. It connects us to God, who promises, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect is weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- 3. Jesus entrusted Himself to His heavenly Father's will. He asked for the cup of suffering to be removed. His request shows just how much angst He felt! While honestly admitting His feelings, Jesus submitted Himself to the Father's plan, praying, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE: RESPONDING FAITHFULLY TO STRESS

Read more about how we can respond in our faith to stress with Christopher Kennedy's book Grace under Pressure: Responding Faithfully to Stress.

Find this title and others in this issue at cph.org.



MOVED WITH Compassion

BY AMY BIRD

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO A DISOBEDIENT CHILD? An insubordinate employee? An out-of-control driver? Compassion is probably not the first emotion rushing through your veins.

And yet when God meets with Moses after the Israelites have rebelled against God—not trusting Him and choosing to worship a golden calf instead—God tells Moses He is a God of compassion.

Check out Exodus 34:5-6:

The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed,

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"

While the ESV translates it "merciful," the Hebrew word used here is *rakhum*, meaning "compassion". It's related to *rekhem*, the Hebrew word for womb. Compassion is an intense emotion felt deep in a person's gut.

Isaiah 49:15 plays on these two words to describe how God's compassion for His people exceeds that of a new mother: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."

What mother can forget her newborn child and not do everything in her power to meet their needs? How much more does God have motherly compassion for His children, continually pursuing the rebellious Israelites and being willing to even step into humanity in order to meet our greatest need: right relationship with Him.

Yes, in the incarnation, compassion takes on flesh and bones, fully embodied and expressed as Jesus sees the needs of the people around Him and is moved to action. He heals the sick, feeds the hungry, and sets the captives free. In compassion, He mourns the death of his friend Lazarus and grieves for the waywardness of Jerusalem.

Compassion is often defined as both an awareness of others' distress along with a drive to ease it. In the ultimate act of compassion, Jesus takes in His body the distress of the whole world. He feels it deep in His gut, crying out to God and sweating anguished drops of blood. But because God has compassion for the world, Jesus comes to die. His death heals all that sorrows. The empty tomb makes a way for all that is lost. Jesus doesn't just desire to alleviate our distress, He does alleviate our stress.

Yes, compassion by its very definition cannot be passive. Compassion always leads to action.

So what happens when we experience "compassion fatigue"? Rather than being moved to action, we are instead immobilized by apathy and indifference. Compassion fatigue can happen when we take on the emotional burden of someone else's agony and feel overwhelmed by the immense need or deep brokenness. It's a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty of how we could do anything to make a real difference. And it's common among people who dedicate their life to caring for others—the kind of life God calls us to live.

When we experience compassion fatigue, we forget who is in control and what He is capable of. We feel the weight of suffering in our gut and are weighed down. We become heavy and sedentary. Looking WHEN GOD SEES SUFFERING IN THE WORLD, HE IS NOT FATIGUED. HE LISTENS TO EVERY GROAN AND FEELS EVERY TEARDROP. HE IS MOVED TO ACTIONTHROUGH HIS SPIRIT AND THROUGH US.

through our own eyes and assessing our own strength, things seem beyond repair. Suffering and injustice no longer move us to help. Instead, the next news story reinforces the narrative we already know so well: Bad things happen and as soon as we try to help with one travesty, another one occurs.

And yet Scripture tells us over and over that God is compassionate. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. So, we put on the shoulders of God the things we cannot carry. We turn compassion into lament (see pg. 6) and cry out to God, "How long?" We hold God to His character and to His promises.

Because when God sees suffering in the world, He is not fatigued. He listens to every groan and feels every teardrop. He is moved to action—through His Spirit and through us.

Interestingly, the word *compassion* often appears alongside another attribute of God: graciousness. Did you catch it in Exodus 34:6? It appears again in Psalm 103:8: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love." Check out any number of references: 2 Chronicles 30:9; Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalm 86:16; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2.

The combination of compassion and grace buoys us as followers of Jesus just as it did the Israelites. In compassion, God understands both our yearning and fatigue. In grace, He forgives our disobedience, distrust, and apathy. And as we live in light of God's gracious compassion for us, we're refreshed to have compassion for others. For the child, the employee, the driver, and anyone else God places around you to show what kind of God we follow: The Lord, the Lord, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Father, do not delay in showing compassion. Display Your gut-felt love to us and all people, relieving all distress. ‡





Q&A with Lindsay Hausch

Lindsay Hausch is wife to Nathan, an LCMS pastor in Northern California, and mother of three little kids who are growing like weeds! In her cracks of alone time, she wrestles to write meaningful words about life's struggles and God's goodness. Her debut book with CPH is *Take Heart: God's Comfort for Anxious Thoughts*.

What inspired you to write *Take Heart*? What message do you hope your reader hears?

I noticed that the moments I struggle with anxious thoughts the most are also when I pray and look to God more for peace. It prompted the question, "what if?" Instead of trying to deny or stuff down my anxious thoughts, what if they became the place I draw closer to God and others? I believe our anxious thoughts can become our invitation to recognize our weakness and grab hold of God's grace for us, moment by moment, in our real-time struggle. I wanted to share this encouragement with others that find themselves in the same place.

What do we do with the "mental tug-of-war" (as you describe in your book) between our anxious thoughts and God's promises?

We can let go of the rope! As we identify how anxious thoughts are a rabbit hole of lies, we squeeze our eyes shut, let go, and fall into His grace. In response to every lie that tugs at our consciousness, we point to Jesus, whose truth anchors us to a greater reality instead of resisting or fighting back with human reasoning.

But as anxious thoughts come a-knockin', get ready to go into battle, because they are devilish little things that will try hard to get us swept up in their lies and to forget God's truth. We can find strength and strategy as we store God's Word in our hearts, equipping us to resist the devil with God's truth, just as Jesus did in the wilderness. Also, we surround ourselves with other believers who can pray for us and remind us of God's promises and who we are in Jesus.

What daily rhythms can help soothe our anxious thoughts?

I have accepted that I am the kind of package that needs to be stamped "handle with care." There are physical and spiritual things in my life that need tending to be the healthiest version of myself. I have to pay attention to things like getting enough sleep, avoiding too much caffeine and alcohol, and getting enough exercise. These things greatly influence my state of mind. I also need to tend to my soul daily. I feel better when I spend time every day in God's Word and prayer and reach out to others regularly for meaningful connection and encouragement.

What have you learned about God through your experiences with anxiety?

God isn't fragile or easily offended by my humanness. He can handle all of me, and His forgiveness and grace are real for me, even when I don't feel it.

What would you say to the anxious Christian frustrated that they haven't been able to "overcome" or "get past" weeks, months, or years of nagging anxiety?

You are not your anxiety.

Your anxiety is an intruder and not your identity in Christ.

But even as you grab hold of every bit of G o d's truth and knowthat you know it, you may lack the strength today to face the monsters in your mind. I want you to know that I get it. From my experience, I understand that you can't just grit your teeth, think "feel good" thoughts, and overcome your anxiety. Instead, it's a gentle process, led by the Holy Spirit and ideally done with the help of other believers. Remember, God celebrates our baby steps, and His voice is never harsh or condemning.

Also, I have benefited from Christian therapy and medication over the years, which are tools God provides to help us. If your anxiety is interfering with everyday life, I recommend you talk to a medical professional to see how they can help you.

Statistically as a nation, we're more anxious than ever before. How can we best walk with—and serve—our anxious neighbor?

We can let our neighbors see that we struggle, too. Allowing others to see our imperfection is a gift that invites God's grace to shine between us. When we're real, our neighbor will say, "Oh, so this life is really hard for you too? I thought I was the only one." In the raw and honest places, our neighbors can see that life is tough for us too, but our hope in God is genuine and life-giving. God's strength in our weakness is not just the theology of the cross but a framework for our relationships. ‡

TAKE HEART: GOD'S COMFORT FOR ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

Do you struggle with anxiety or anxious thoughts? See how God provides comfort and guidance for overcoming anxious thoughts in His Word with author Lindsay Hausch.

Find this title and others in this issue at cph.org.



Lindsay Hausch, *Take Heart: God's Comfort for Anxious Thoughts* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2021).



hen we think about being truly content, it's easy to think that it is all up to us. As believers, we know that true contentment is momentary until our Savior comes again. Part of the life of faith that we as Christians lead is to trust that no matter how distressing things become, He will be faithful to the Word He has given us and revealed to us. Our Baptism too shows that we can trust that He will rise from the dead and the Holy Spirit will help us to endure and find peace—even when what we see may be the opposite.

How do we reach real contentment? Trying to find contentment on our own sets us up for disappointment. Contentment is in fact a gift that God gives us through His grace. We are all guilty of going it alone, especially when we forget that we only reach content-

ment because God brings us there. When learning to accept this, we should also endeavor to understand how contentment is defined in God's Word, rather than using the world's definition.

Ecclesiastes is a great reference for learning about contentment because this book deals with someone who is struggling with a life that lacks a sense of meaning. We all sometimes feel our lives are without

purpose. When we think about finding contentment, we notice that the speaker suggests we can find it by living in the present.

For us who have the promises of the Gospel, living in the present is different. As humans, we struggle with two big things: regret for the past (things we did, things we said, etc.) and anxiety about the future. We tend to look to the future with fear and the past with regret—but we can't change either. Yet, God calls us in His Word to live in the present and be at peace with what the present day gives us. It helps us to realize the past is gone and forgiven—our past sins are washed away. It also gives us hope for a certain future. Even in death, we know we won't be apart from our Lord. So, finding wellbeing in the present is really trusting that God follows through in His promises.

Psalm 90 also defines contentment for us as believers. It is the song and prayer of Moses and

speaks of numbering our days. This chapter also teaches us how we can live in the Gospel and make the most of each day that we are given. Moses emphasizes that it is God who satisfies us. This psalm shows how when we go out into the world in our vocations, we grasp contentment when God gives meaning and purpose to what we do. The reality that we are God's children becomes clear. Psalms like this one don't leave us wallowing in the lament but end with showing God's mercy. The verses aren't afraid to meet us where we are at in our lives and then bring us to new hope.

When reading about contentment in the Bible, it can be a challenge to unpack the sometimes-complex language in books such as Ecclesiastes and Psalms. We can find peace knowing that these books are not nec-

Psalm 130:5–6 says,

"I wait for the LORD,

my soul waits, and

in His word I hope;

my soul waits for

the Lord."

essarily written by contented people—yet we always see a turn when the speaker revels in God's good mercy. These books help us to understand waiting on the Lord. We wait on Him to deliver on His promises. The waiting can seem very long. But His Word brings us satisfaction in waiting.

Psalm 130:5-6 says, "I wait

for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord." It can be hard to live in the moment, so it is important to help one another and encourage one another in doing so. We should rely on one another as fellow believers to remind one another of this calling. If you're facing the idea of contentment, I always encourage everyone to do some practical things to

live in the present. Create a practical habit. Enjoy

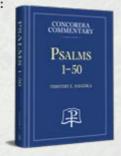
the simple gifts that God gives us. God gives us the

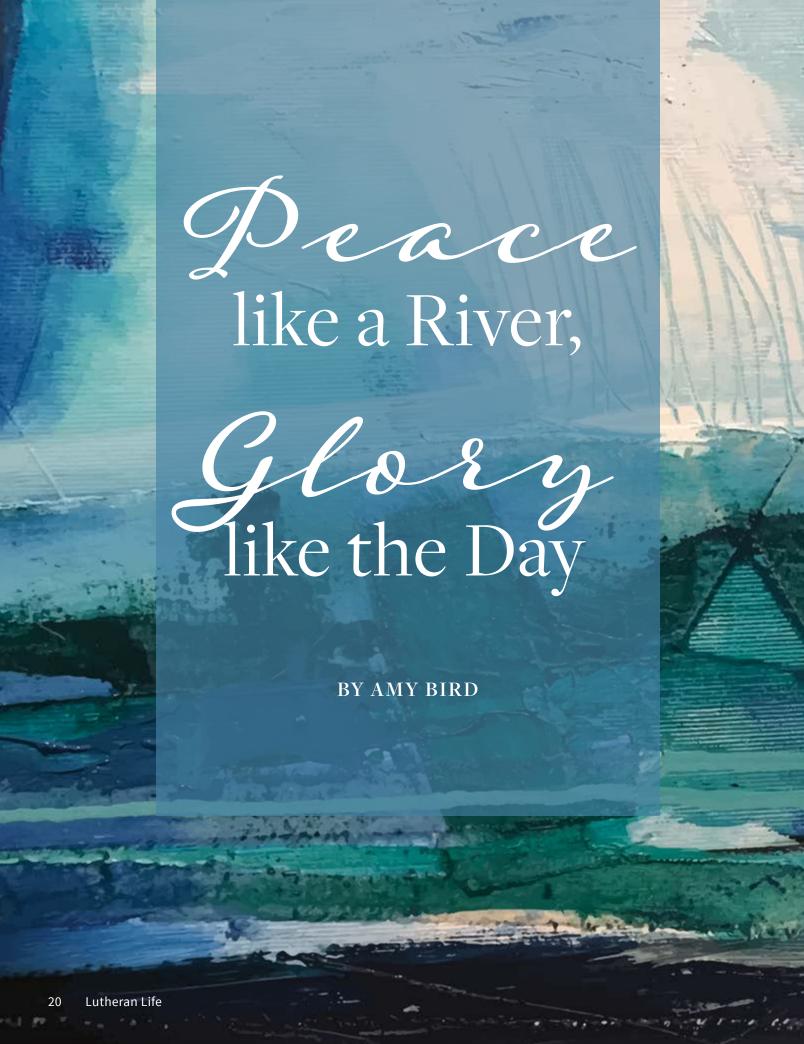
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Things will calm down once this happens... I'll have peace after that...

Have you ever found yourself thinking this way? We want peace and calm but there's always something standing in our way. Perhaps our schedules are too full, or an upcoming event has us anxious, or the state of current affairs is just too much. Is there time for peace? Is pursuing peace even appropriate when there's so much around us? How could peace even be possible in the midst of unending pain?

The author of the well-known hymn "When Peace, like a River" (LSB 763) knew something about unexpected peace despite unending sorrow. Horatio Gates Spafford came to America in search of a better life. He worked hard to make a living but ended up losing most of his financial investments during the 1871 Great Chicago Fire. Two years later, his four young daughters were killed when his family was traveling without him to England and their ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel. As Horatio traveled to meet his grieving wife in England, he penned this hymn:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way; When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.

How could Horatio write these words? And how can so many Christians sing them over and over again hundreds of years later? How can it be well with our soul when sorrows like sea billows roll?

Peace.

God's peace is another fruit of the Spirit, another gift of God received in our Baptism, another emotion that comes from outside of ourselves and our circumstances. It is a peace that surpasses understanding. It is a peace that doesn't make sense in the midst of tragedy. It is a peace that comes from being held by Jesus.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,

Let this blest assurance control,

That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate And hath shed His own blood for my soul. We can proclaim it is well with our soul despite it not being well in the world because Jesus has shed His own blood for our souls—and promises to restore the world. Regardless of what Satan throws at us or whatever experience of brokenness we face, we can rest with assurance because of Christ's redeeming work on the cross.

Perhaps Horatio knew what author Heidi Goehmann says in *Finding Hope*: "In all the brokenness, sometimes we lose sight of the truth: The pain will end. Jesus is real. He is here with us now, and He is coming soon" (p.154).

Amen, Heidi! Peace is possible when we zoom out our perspective to see a bigger picture. While the pain is real, it does end. And Jesus is real—and He's coming soon.

In his Gospel, John declares, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). And darkness will not overcome light. The pain may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning. And Jesus is our Morning Sun. He is near the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). He is our light. And we look forward to the day that is coming when there will be no more broken-heartedness or crying, no more pain or death. There is just light, that is the glory of God, and by it all the nations will walk (Revelation 21:24).

We can have peace for today because there's hope for tomorrow. And our hope will not put us to shame.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus, and grant us peace that surpasses our understanding, peace that will guard our hearts and minds in You. ‡

FINDING HOPE: FROM BROKENNESS TO RESTORATION

Brokenness is heavy, but it's time to call brokenness by name. Find tools to identify it in your life and see God's hope amid the mess.

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About This Issue's Authors

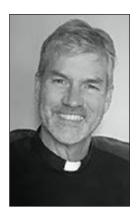


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Kristian Kincaid has served as a parish pastor for over thirty years, shepherding the flock for the last twenty-seven years at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Dubuque, Iowa. He also serves St. Matthew in Sherrill, Iowa. He is blessed to be a husband and father, and to lovingly point families and flock to Christ, the Lamb once slain but who forever lives



Christopher M. Kennedy is an author, blogger, podcaster, and pastor. He serves a large congregation in San Antonio, Texas. He earned a bachelor's degree in communication, a master's degree in theology, and a doctorate in ministry. He and his wife are parents of four.



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is also the author of the Bible study *God's Abiding Word: Psalms* (Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

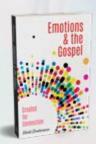
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Overcoming Life's Sorrows: Learning from Jeremiah

Settle into the prophet Jeremiah's narrative of hope and joy despite numerous tragedies with R. Reed Lessing. See how God's Word offers hope, truth, faith, and more.



Take Heart: God's Comfort for Anxious Thoughts

Author Lindsay Hausch is no stranger to real-life struggles with anxiety. Join her in finding the strength to overcome anxious thoughts through God's grace.



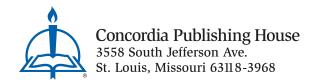
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DISCOVER THE WIDE SPECTRUM OF EMOTIONS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU AND HOW CHRIST HELPS YOU HANDLE THEM IN THIS FALLEN WORLD.



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