

LutheranTM

L I F E



“But these are written
so that you may believe
that Jesus^{is} the Christ,
the Son^{of} God,
and that by believing
you may have life
in His name.”

JOHN 20:31

REASONS YOU NEED TO GO TO CHURCH (IT'S MAYBE NOT WHY YOU THINK)

“The local congregation is the place where Jesus dwells among us. Not the golf course. Not on social media. Not while drinking your cup of coffee in the stillness of the early morning. Jesus comes to you in the hearing of God’s Word and the receiving of the Sacraments.”

(Being Lutheran, p. 237)

You need to go to church.

I know, I know. I sound like your mom. “Shine your shoes, Jimmy! We gotta hop in the Buick and scoot to church! Let me grab my driving gloves!” (I feel like I’m mixing eras here. Let’s move on.)

You really do need to go to church. Here are three reasons that all conveniently start with the letter C.

YOU NEED CHURCH.

More specifically, you need what God gives you at church.

Christians don’t go to church to prove they’re Christians, to keep up appearances, or to earn a spot in heaven.

Christians go to church because church is where Christ meets them in the Word and Sacraments.

YOU NEED COMMUNITY.

God created humanity to live in community with one another. Being surrounded by other Christians is edifying, uplifting, and encouraging—and it keeps you accountable.

God promises to be present “where two or three are gathered in My name” (Matthew 18:20), so you can trust that He is dwelling among your congregation.

YOU NEED CHRIST.

This is the crux of why you need to go to church. You desperately need Christ and His saving work, because there is no way you could achieve salvation on your own.

Every time you go to church, you are reminded of this truth. When Law and Gospel are preached, your heart is refocused on Christ, your Savior.

Learn more about how God works through the Church at CPH.ORG/BEINGLUTHERAN.



ACTUAL WAYS FOR REAL FAMILIES TO HAVE FAMILY DEVOTIONS

Family devotions are one of those often-talked-about habits that everyone says they're *most definitely going to actually keep up with this year*—like going to the gym or eating fewer sweets.

We've all been there, and we all know how it usually ends. "Life gets in the way" might seem like an excuse, an easy way to brush off the fact that other things took priority—but we all know that life sometimes *does* get in the way.

Because when your kids are spending hours working on math you can't remember how to do and the night usually ends in tear-soaked homework at 10 p.m., family devotions take a back seat. You're just trying to make it through the day.

In your heart, you *know* that reading the Bible or a short devotion together would bring your family closer to one another and to God. You *know* it would offer comfort in the middle of a stressful week. You *know* it would teach your children valuable lessons.

And that's why it's so frustrating to feel like you *just don't have time*.

People will tell you to "just make time," but we all know it's not that easy. Between work and school alone, your family's schedule is packed full. So you have to get creative with your family devotion time.

IN THE CAR

You can listen to a daily devotion or Bible reading in the car, or have someone who's not the driver read from your favorite devotion book. Do it during your morning carpool to school or after you pick up all the kids from school and are on the way through the drive-through for dinner.

ON YOUR OWN

If everyone in your family can read on their own, encourage each person to read the family devotion on their own time—and then if you have time, you can all get together to talk about what you learned about Jesus.

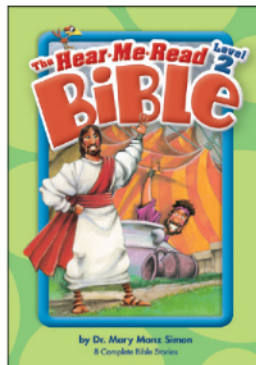
MEMORIZE A VERSE

Challenge each member of your family to memorize the same Bible verse. They can do it on their own, and then when you have a few minutes you can get together and share your thoughts on the verse.

TAKE A BREAK

If your nights are filled with long stretches of math homework and science dioramas, consider taking a five-minute break in between to squeeze in some family devotion time. You can specifically pray for the assignments your children are working on!

Learn something new about Jesus each day by heading to CPH.ORG/HEARMERead and CPH.ORG/PORTALSforKIDS.



STOP CHASING JESUS

“The Christian faith is you and me being pursued by the God of the universe.”

(Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?, p. 206)

Are your spiritual feet tired from running? Have you been trying . . . and reading . . . and praying . . . all in the hopes that you would encounter Jesus?

Our human tendency is to *do*. We want to earn grace. We want to work for our salvation. We want to find Jesus. At least then, if we could do something to be worthy of God’s gifts, we’d be able to feel sure of them.

So we do *all the things*. We do everything in our power to ensure that we’re being a “good Christian”—we volunteer for all the committees, we attend all the Bible studies, we take our kids to all the VBS events.

And these are good things. But it’s important to make a clear distinction:

THESE THINGS DO NOT DETERMINE OUR SALVATION.

We can so easily get caught up in chasing Jesus through programs and events that we forget our salvation is already secure and Jesus has already come to us.

We can’t find God by searching more. We can’t acquire salvation by doing more, trying harder, or tithing more.

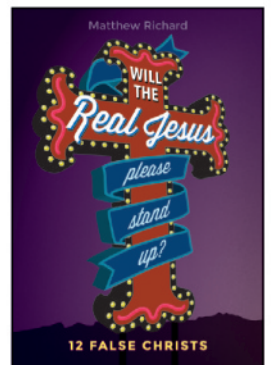
So what do we do now? Nothing?

Well, that’s all we *have* to do to receive life and salvation. But that’s not all we *should* do.

We can continue to do all the things listed above, but now we can come at them from a place of joy, not obligation.

Jesus has secured our salvation for us—no assembly required. We can rest easy in that knowledge, and then we can get up and worship Him and serve our neighbor.

There’s only one real Jesus—and He’s better than anything we could create. Read all about Him at [**CPH.ORG/REALJESUS.**](http://CPH.ORG/REALJESUS)



FEELING LIKE A SAINT WHEN YOU KNOW YOU'RE A SINNER

When I was young, my parents always told me I was a sinner. They told me that I sinned every day—from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to sleep.

My small, proud heart didn't believe them.

I looked at my life at age 8, 10, and 16 and thought *"I go to church. I go to Sunday School. I get good grades. I don't break most of the Ten Commandments, so I must be good."*

This haughty attitude greatly affected my faith life—when you don't believe you're truly a sinner, you don't believe that you *truly* need Jesus.

Thanks be to God, He graciously brought me down low, making me acutely aware of my sin. I recognized my desperate need for a Savior! Amen! Life's good, right?

But then I encountered a new problem. Despair.

I *knew* I was saved. I *knew* God forgave my sins. But when I saw myself sinning every day—gossiping, unfairly judging, being discontent, not loving people well, being lazy—it was hard to believe that God would forgive these "little" sins that surely kept adding up.

I had never felt less like a Christian. Weren't Christians supposed to be perfect?

The more I learned about God, the more I learned about my own sin. So while I was growing closer to God, I was simultaneously feeling driven farther away from Him because I began to fully recognize just how deep the chasm my sin created was.

Turns out, that's exactly how the Christian life is supposed to go.

"The crisis of conscience, however, is indication that God has kept the Christian in the battle. To be in the struggle against sin itself means that the Christian does not desire to go along with sin. In response, the Christian runs again to Jesus Christ. This is what Christians do."

(Faith That Sees through the Culture, p. 115)

This might seem contradictory. I think that's because, over the years, we have painted Christians to be goody two-shoes, people who live perfect lives and go to church every Sunday.

When, in reality, Christians are in church every Sunday because they desperately need God's forgiveness and grace. We are simultaneously sinner and saint, and recognizing that tension, that conflict, is the reality of the Christian life.

So rejoice in your struggles, dear friend, because you are being drawn closer to your Savior each and every day.

Learn to live in the tension of saint and sinner at

CPH.ORG/FAITHTHATSEES.



WHAT GOD CALLS MEN AND WOMEN TO DO

MEN

Pray

Acknowledge what you cannot do. Entrust your calling to be a man to your heavenly Father.

Love

Love selflessly. Model the love Christ has for His creation—a sacrificial love.

Give

Exist for the good of those you have been entrusted to serve. Prioritize love, sacrifice, and relationships.

Fight

Be steadfast in your mission. Have grit in the face of distractions. Know what you're fighting for.

(Adapted from *Man Up!*)

WOMEN

Rejoice

Rejoice in your triumphs, in your friends' successes, in the forgiveness you have from Jesus.

Submit

Don't shy away from this word. It's a beautiful description of God and how He set up His creation.

Love

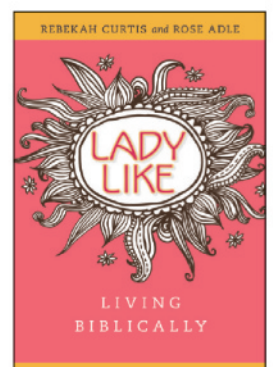
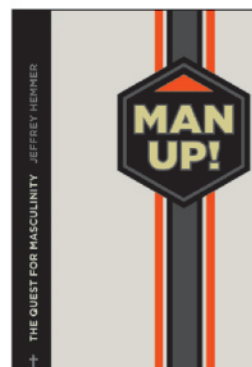
Love your friends. Your parents. Your husband and children if you have them. Do it all selflessly.

Serve

Whatever your vocation, God has called you to serve in specific areas and to serve specific people. He's using you.

(Adapted from *LadyLike*)

Find your identity as a man or woman of God at
CPH.ORG/MANUP and
CPH.ORG/LADYLIKE.



QUESTION: CAN I QUESTION GOD?

“God welcomes your questions and outcries. Even when you don’t receive immediate or complete answers, you will receive His immediate and complete care. . . . Bring everything to God—even your most brutal questions.”

(Hope When Your Heart Breaks, p. 124)

*Maybe you’re questioning why you’re sick.
Why your friend passed away suddenly.
Why you lost your job.*

Or maybe you’re just questioning God in general.

There is a delicate balance between acknowledging God’s sovereign will and recognizing that we are able to come to Him with our questions and doubts.

We have a loving, kind God who welcomes our toughest questions. We can come to Him in our anger. In our sadness. In our heartbreak. In our confusion. In our doubt.

At the end of the day, we’re still approaching our heavenly Father. It might be with screams, cries, tears, outbursts, or rants—but we’re still coming to our God.

Because God is God and we are not, we won’t always know why things happen. That’s hard to accept. There’s no blanket statement that anyone can offer that makes us feel any better about not knowing why God does what He does.

So come to God with your questions. With your doubts. With your worries.

He is big enough to handle them all. He is God, and He loves you.

Find hope, comfort, and peace in the midst of your questions at CPH.ORG/HEARTBREAK.



YOU CAN BE ABSOLUTELY, CERTAINLY, 100% CONFIDENT IN YOUR SALVATION

*"This is the faith that Christianity echoes now—trust in the good news of the past miracle that has established a future perfection."
(Echo, p. 168)*

Your salvation is totally secure. Locked down.

But not because of you.

Even on your best day, you couldn't earn your salvation.

That might not be the most comforting sentence you've ever read. After all, we humans love accomplishing things. Feeling like you earned that 4.0 GPA, that promotion at work, that award for community service—it makes you feel accomplished. Worthy, somehow.

So when you hear of this mysterious thing called *grace*, you shudder a little bit.

You're incapable of doing anything to earn it. Ever. At all.

You're helpless to achieve your own salvation. But you desperately need it.

Here's the Good News (because by now you need to hear this sweet truth):

You still have salvation. And it's at no cost to you.

You've got all the blessings of life eternal, forgiveness, and peace. You've got a guaranteed seal placed on your heart that has marked you as one redeemed.

And you did absolutely nothing to earn it.

You're sinful. In your heart of hearts, you hate God because your sin runs so deep you could never find its source.

But God looks at you—a sheep that constantly strays—and says, "I love you anyway."

And because He is God, He cannot lie. So when He says, "You are forgiven. You have eternal life. You are My child," you can believe it.

This truth is incomprehensible to our brains that seem to be hardwired for accomplishments and checked-off lists.

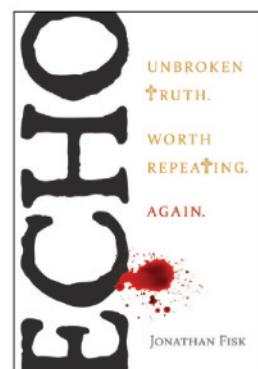
This truth, in all its unfathomable glory, is the Gospel.

And it's for you.

It's yours. Free of cost.

And because it doesn't rely on you, you can be absolutely, certainly, 100% confident in your salvation.

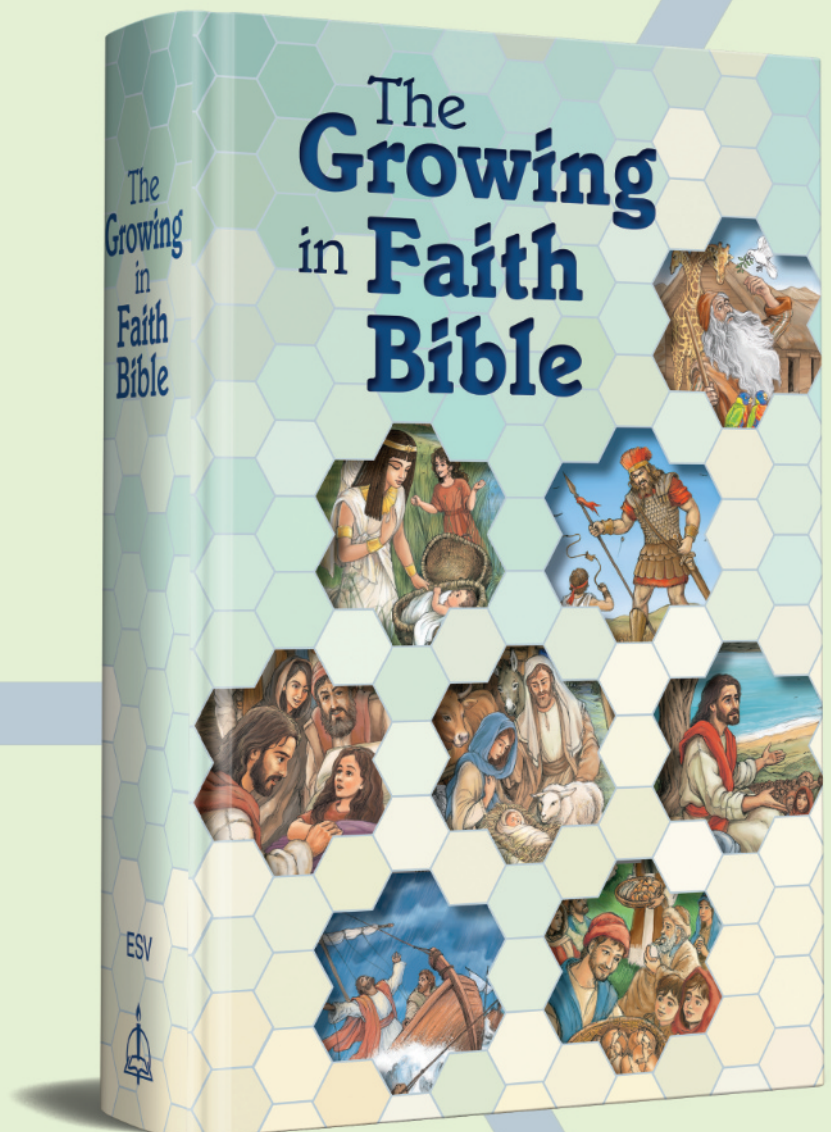
This truth is simple yet complex. Dive into the intricacies of the beauty of the Gospel at **CPH.ORG/ECHO**.



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Preview a free sample at cph.org/growinginfaith.

THE GOSPEL ONLINE

“As we study and learn about this modern digital culture, we find ways to share the Gospel with others. This calls for us to approach life with a missionary mind-set.” (Digitized, p. 102)

Social media has changed the mission field.

Way back when, if you wanted to meet someone who didn't know Jesus, you'd probably have to fly on a plane to a faraway country.

Now, all you have to do is head to your Facebook or Twitter feed.

People all over the world still don't know Jesus as their Savior—that might be your real-life neighbor, but it also might be your casual high school acquaintance who followed you on Instagram fifteen years after you graduated. (Why, though, Brad?)

Lots of people may think, “Well, I posted a picture of me and my husband at church. And a picture of my Bible next to my latte. That's, like, totally witnessing, right?”

And, sure, in some ways, that is a witness—you are being open about your faith! But it's important to be more intentional than that.

But now social media allows us to be more connected with people than ever before, meaning that we can know more about people's lives whom we are only marginally connected to.

How often do you use those emotional connections (however distant they may be) to grow your relationship with someone? I mean offering to pray for and with someone who posted that they just received an uncertain cancer diagnosis. And I certainly don't mean just commenting “Prayers!” on their post.

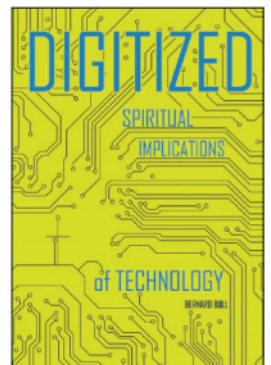
I mean reaching out to that person—call, text, video chat, email, postcard, or in person—and investing in them. Caring about them deeply. Loving them as Christ loves you.

It's hard to do that in a Facebook comment.

But the real way that social media can be used to spread the Gospel is using it to connect more deeply with people.

Don't limit yourself to just “sharing your faith” on social media. That's certainly important and valid and valuable. But even better is using it to build real relationships with real people, helping draw them closer to Christ.

Technology is changing us.
Learn how it's changing our
spiritual lives at
CPH.ORG/DIGITIZED.



WHEN IT FEELS LIKE GOD ISN'T HEARING YOUR PRAYERS

“The one who prays is never forgotten.”

(Our Way Home, p. 35)

You have a request. Maybe it's big, maybe it's small.

God, I want a spouse. A baby. Healing. A new job. Reconciliation. Rest.

You cry to God—the only thing you know to do in a situation like this. Day in and day out, you feel like you're flinging your supplications up to God only to have them fall back down on your bowed head.

Unanswered. Unheard. At least, that's how it seems.

Nothing has changed. Or maybe things have gotten worse. Against your better judgment, you find yourself questioning God. You faithfully pray “Thy will be done,” but it's getting harder and harder to see exactly what that will is.

Your mind spirals into thoughts that you can't help but consider:

- **Why isn't God answering my prayers?**
- **Am I not praying correctly?**
- **Am I not praying enough?**
- **Is God even hearing my prayers?**

And sometimes, when you voice these concerns to faithful friends, they might offer you platitudes that don't really comfort or build you up:

God's timing isn't our timing. It's all part of God's plan. God's got this. Just because you don't get the answer you want doesn't mean God isn't listening.

These quips certainly are true, but when God feels silent and you feel abandoned, they just seem like a condescending pat on the head when all you really want is a hug.

You might be tempted to stop praying—maybe you already stopped a long time ago. *Why continue a one-sided relationship?* Like the psalmist, you've been asking God, “Why do You hide Your face from me?” (Psalm 88:14). Why talk to someone who seems distant and absent?

There is no easy solution or five-step plan to praying. There's no secret recipe to understanding the will of God with three parts prayer and two parts Bible reading.

All we can do is pray, read His Word, and receive His Sacraments.

And yes, that seems to be just another platitude that is a Band-Aid over a deeper wound. But when you feel like you're searching for God, you have to go where He has promised He can be found—in His Word and Sacraments.

Too often, when we assert that we can't find God, it's because we aren't looking in the right places. God is certainly with us always, but we can be sure of the places where He promises to meet us.

Maybe you have been going to church, reading God's Word, and receiving His Sacraments—and God *still* feels distant. What then?

Thanks be to God, faith is not about feeling. Faith is trusting that God hears our prayers—and while it is certainly hard to trust that in the midst of darkness, faith is grounded in trust that God's Word is truth.

“O LORD, You hear the desire of the afflicted; You will strengthen their heart.”
(Psalm 10:17)

The promises of God are true, even when we feel like we aren't experiencing them.

So when you feel like God isn't hearing your prayers, keep praying. When you aren't feeling spiritually filled during worship, keep attending. When you “aren't getting anything out of” your devotion, keep reading.

It's difficult. It can be frustrating. And it certainly can feel futile. But our God is present, faithful, and compassionate. He hears your cries, and He loves you still.

**“You have kept count of my tossings;
put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in
Your book?”**
(Psalm 56:8)

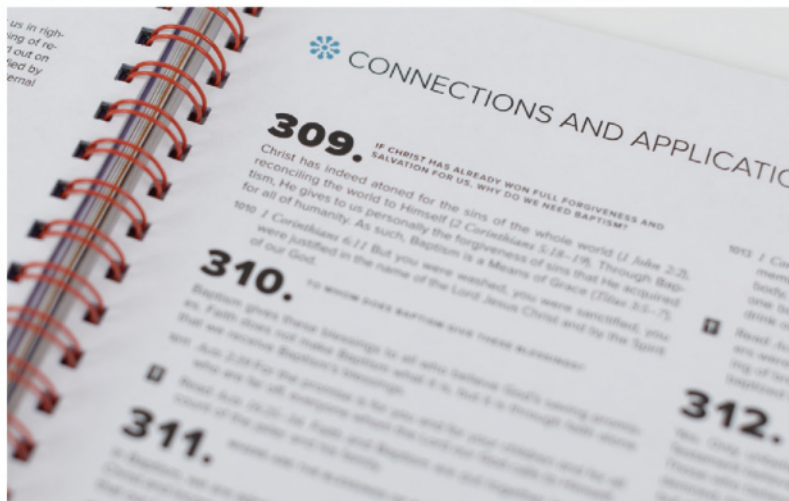
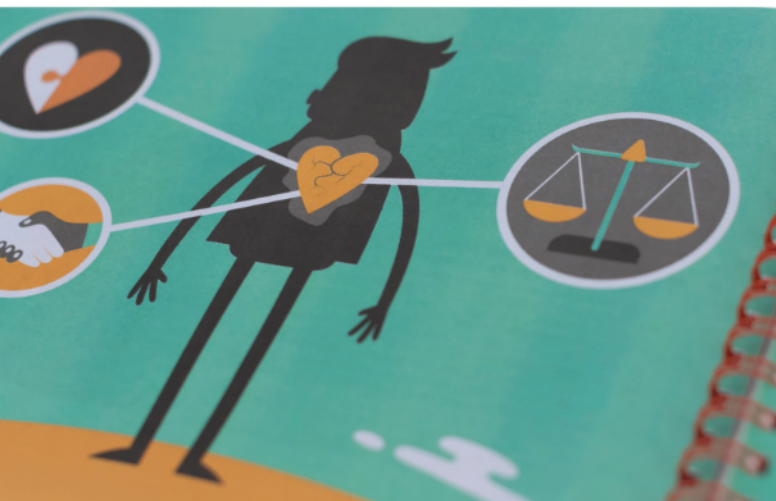
When you don't have the words to pray, use the ones Jesus gave you. Animate your praying with the Lord's Prayer at **CPH.ORG/OURWAYHOME**.





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