



# Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Dear Brother,

The 1995 synod convention is now history. Parts of it will live on only in the Proceedings. They will be studied only by a historian or two in the future. However, some parts of this convention deserve to have a life of their own.

One of the enduring features this year ought to be the Bible Studies. One has already been presented in BoRaM. Following the convention, a Bible Study was prepared which shows how we are carrying out our mission to Share the Promise, from five different perspectives. All seven are included with this mailing.

I believe I can safely say the delegates were edified by and enjoyed these Bible Studies. Now we are offering you and your congregation the same opportunity. We send you the enclosed studies with the encouragement to use them in any way you select. If you would like to easily revise them for your own use, they are available to your computer through WELSNET.

As we study the Word of God, everything comes into focus. We see ourselves as we really are, sinners deserving of condemnation. We see ourselves as God views us, forgiven children of God destined for heaven. And we also see how God would now use us to Share the Promise with others. Let's study and rejoice together as we do exactly that!

Serving Christ with you,

Karl R. Gurgel

KRG/ev

# WELS SYNOD CONVENTION

July 24-28, 1995 - Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, MI

## Essays/Bible Studies

Pre-Convention Bible Study

United Around The Promise  
David J. Valleskey

Monday July 24, 1995 - #1

Share The Promise  
by Dr. John Lawrenz

Essay 4:00 - 4:15 PM

Bible Study by Floor Committees 4:15 - 5:00 PM

Tuesday, July 25, 1995 - #2

Share the Promise With Our Families  
by Rev. Richard Gurgel

Essay 9:00 - 9:15 AM

Bible Study by Floor committees 9:15 - 10:00 AM

Tuesday, July 25, 1995 - #3

Share The Promise With Friends and Neighbors  
by Rev. Wayne Schulz

Essay 4:00 - 4:15 PM

Bible Study by Floor Committees 4:15 - 5:00 PM

Wednesday, July 26, 1995 - #4

Share The Promise With Our Offerings  
by Rev. Ronald Muetzel

Essay 9:00 - 9:15 AM

Bible Study by Floor Committees 9:15 - 10:00 AM

Thursday, July 27, 1995 - #5

Share The Promise Into the 3rd Millennium  
by Rev. Harold Essmann

Essay 9:00 - 9:15 AM

Bible Study by Floor Committees 9:15 - 10:00 AM

Post Convention Bible Study

Sharing The Promise From Convention to Convention  
by Gary Baumler

# **UNITED AROUND THE PROMISE: A FIRST CENTURY CHURCH CONVENTION**

## **A Bible Study on Acts 15:1-35**

### **The Historical Setting**

The time was some twenty years after Pentecost. The Word of the Lord had begun its worldwide spread as Jesus had promised (Acts 1:8). On Pentecost Day, 3000 were brought to believe the message of salvation and were baptized (2:41). Within a short time that number had grown to 5000 (4:4). No longer keeping count after this point, Luke simply reports that "the Word of God spread" and that, as a result, "the number of disciples in Jerusalem spread rapidly" (6:7).

It wasn't just in Jerusalem, however, that the Word spread. Believers carried it wherever they went--throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1,4) and, farther to the north and west, to Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia--possibly all the way to Rome by this time.

It had begun as a small handful of 120 Jewish followers of Christ huddled together under lock and key in Jerusalem. God had caused it to mushroom into a church of thousands, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, stretching from Jerusalem to Rome.

### **15:1           The Controversy**

Antioch was about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, a congregation consisting largely of Gentiles (Acts 11:20), while the Jerusalem congregation was made up of Jews mostly. Antioch was the church that had sent Paul and Barnabas out to the Gentile world on what we today call Paul's First Missionary Journey.

According to the men who travelled from Judea to Antioch, what did the Christians in Antioch have to do to be truly united with the church in Jerusalem?

Note: The critical issue did not revolve around whether the Gentiles could share in the blessings of the Kingdom. That point was not contested. The issue was: Did the Gentiles have to put themselves under the various Jewish ceremonial laws to receive these blessings? To put it another way: What united Jew and Gentile, a common obedience to a common law or a common faith in God's promise?

### **15:2-4       The Way the Church Determined to Deal with the Controversy**

How was it determined that Paul and Barnabas in particular as well as some other unnamed believers from Antioch would travel to Jerusalem?

Whom, then, did they represent?

What do you think is the significance of the word "welcomed" in verse 4?

### *For Reflection and Discussion*

1. What can we learn from these verses about a wise course of action to take when doctrinal controversy arises in a church body? What would have been the result if the church at Antioch had simply said, "We know we're right. Who cares about them? We'll go on our own way"?
2. Agree or disagree? As with the first church convention in Jerusalem, so today the primary purpose of a church convention is to preserve unity in doctrine.
3. What does the fact that delegates are *chosen* to attend the convention--by the Synod or by their congregation--indicate?
4. At times delegates to a convention may be sharply divided on certain issues, sometimes of a doctrinal, but more often of a non-doctrinal nature. What will we want to remember about those who are on the other side of an issue?

### **15:5      The Issue Restated**

Why was it so critical to resolve this issue?

### **15:6-11    The Report of Peter**

vv. 6-9      To what incident is Peter here referring (you might want to quickly review Acts 10)?

vv. 10-11    What additional insight does Peter add in these verses? What is the "yoke" to which he refers in verse 10?

Why is it impossible for anyone, Jew or Gentile, to bear that yoke?

What is the one way, according to Peter, that both Jew and Gentile will be saved?

### *For Reflection and Discussion*

1. The incident Peter refers to in these verses occurred some ten years before the time of the Jerusalem Council. What does the fact that it was still an issue indicate? What are some doctrinal issues in our church body that took many years to fully resolve? How did they get resolved?
2. Who had worked this marvelous unity between Jew and Gentile (see verse 8)? We are members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran *Synod*. The word "synod" refers to people who are "walking together." What is the most important way in which we walk together? How has this walking together been made possible?

### **15:12            The Report of Barnabas and Paul**

What did Barnabas and Paul add to what Peter had said?

What purpose had the "miraculous signs and wonders" served (see Mark 16:19,20)?

*For Reflection and Discussion*

Note how both Peter and then Barnabas and Paul in their convention reports give all credit to the Lord for uniting Jew and Gentile into one church (v. 7, "God made a choice"; v. 8, "God...accepted them"; v. 9, "He made no distinction between us and them"; v. 12, "the miraculous signs and wonders God had done"). We will want to do the same, in the spirit of Paul who wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

**15:13-21 The Recommendation of James**

vv. 15-18      What important element does James (half-brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem) add to the reports of Peter and of Barnabas and Paul?

vv. 19-21      James' Recommendation

v. 19            How could the Jews have made it difficult for the Gentiles who were "turning to God"?

v. 20            Note the four things from which the Gentiles were urged to abstain:

- (1)              food polluted by idols, i.e., meat that had been offered to idols and then was sold for food (see 1 Corinthians 8)
- (2)              sexual immorality
- (3)              meat of strangled animals, i.e., that had the blood still in them (see Genesis 9:4)
- (4)              blood, i.e., from eating blood (see Leviticus 17:10-12)

James urges #1, 3, and 4, not because they are prohibited to New Testament Christians, but out of concern for the tender consciences of the Jewish Christians, who had been brought up under the law of Moses (see verse 24). He undoubtedly includes #2, abstaining from sexual immorality, because that was a besetting sin of the Gentile world.

*For Reflection and Discussion*

We will see from what follows that the whole church accepted the Scripture-based recommendations of James. He was not a dictator. He offered a resolution. The church accepted it.

Church conventions today also make decisions through resolutions offered by various floor committees for debate and vote by the convention. Would it be correct to say that the Word of God must decide all resolutions that come before a church convention? Give a reason for your answer.

If the Word of God does not decide all issues, what does? How can it be determined what is to be decided by the Word and what is not to be decided by the Word?

If it was not scripturally mandated that the Gentiles abstain from food polluted by idols, from meat of strangled animals, and from blood, then why should they do it? Can you think of situations in

which a congregation or church body should not exercise its freedom to embark on a certain course of action out of concern for some of its members? Are there times when action should be taken regardless of lingering concern?

**15:22-29            The Council's Letter to the Gentile Believers**

- v. 22            Why was it good for the church in Jerusalem to send "some of their own men" to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas?
- v. 23            What is significant about the greeting in this letter?
- vv. 25,26        How did this part of the letter help to strengthen the fellowship between the church in Jerusalem and the church in Antioch?
- v. 28            How can a resolution of a church council be introduced with the words, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit..." when it was the church that drew up the resolution?

*For Reflection and Discussion*

1. Note the respect the Jewish and Gentile believers displayed toward one another. At times discussion of issues at a church convention can become quite heated. What will we want to remember about each other at times we are debating volatile issues?
2. Note also the concern to clearly communicate the results of the church convention in Jerusalem, both by letter and by personal visit. Why was this important? How might we do this today?
3. The participants in the Jerusalem Council were convinced that the Holy Spirit had led them to a proper resolution of the issue that threatened to divide the early church. Can church conventions, which begin with prayer that God would guide all the discussions and decisions, err in their decisions? How does one determine whether or not to be bound by a decision of a church convention?

**15:30-35    Visitation of the Church at Antioch**

What did the visitors from Jerusalem do in addition to reading the letter from the Jerusalem Council?

Of what value was that?

How did the church at Antioch express its fellowship with the church in Jerusalem?

*For Reflection and Discussion*

Our Synod's doctrinal statement on fellowship defines church fellowship as an activity: "Every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another."

Go back over this chapter (verses 1-35) and point out such joint expressions, manifestations, and demonstrations of the common faith the early Christians shared.

How do we today in a church convention jointly express, manifest, and demonstrate the faith we have in common with one another--a faith that is united around the promise of free salvation by God's grace in Christ Jesus?

What is the value of doing this?

### **A Final Thought**

The Lord brought his early church to a closer walk together through this first century church convention. May he use our church conventions today to lead us to walk more closely together in love around his Word of promise, the gospel, that unites us with Jesus and with each other. Then together, *united around the promise*, we can go back to our congregations and communities to *share the promise* with all who will hear.

David J. Valleskey

# **WE SHARE THE PROMISE FROM GOD**

*Monday Bible Study*  
1995 WELS Convention

## **Introduction on the Convention Floor**

What promise life holds for those who know the one, true God! For such the world is not frightful, but **FULFILLING**. For such the human experience is a time to discover **FAMILY** rather than frustration. For such there is an eternal **FUTURE** because sin, death, and Satan have been defeated.

Our loving God gave us the Holy Scriptures so that we might know and believe the promises he has made and kept for us. In the opening chapter of the Bible's first book we are told of the awe-inspiring promise intended by God for us in a perfect Creation. First, God called into being the building blocks of our existence--time, matter, and energy. Then God filled the sea, the sky, and the land with creatures having the breath of life. Finally, he crowned all that he had made with a masterpiece of flesh and blood. Adam was alive like the animals, made of time and energy like the stars, but unique. To human beings the Lord God gave his divine image. Adam and Eve were the only handiwork of God created to know their Maker and to share his love, his joy, his will, and his rest.

The Bible tells us in the second chapter of Genesis how real the promise of that perfect world was. The Lord God came to Adam with work to do, a woman to have, and worship to give. Adam was put in charge of the universe and of all life. Adam went to work, examining, probing, evaluating, naming, tending, and enjoying. Adam was alone only so long as God could arouse in him a perfect longing for someone like himself around whom he might build a home, a family, and a working, worshipping society. Adam greeted God's gifts of Eve and marriage with poetry. God also came to Adam and Eve with his Word. At the center of their garden home they were to worship by leaving one tree's fruit unused. Willing obedience held out for them an eternal, unbroken, perfect communion between Creator and his highest creation.

Look around you and see evidence everywhere of the lost promise of that first perfect world. Work is now toil. The sin-infested world frightens. Fulfillment eludes the sinner. The family of man is frustrated. Homes break. Marriage is dishonored. Societal values crumble. Men, women, and children cry out in pain. And where is worship? For far too many it is far, too far, removed from the Word of the one, true God.

In order to restore fulfillment, family, and an everlasting future, our God has given us the rest of Scripture. In the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments we have the patient, powerful, progressive unfolding of God's promise in Christ. The bud of a flower contains all the beauty of that flower. Only in time do the petals peel away to reveal the fullness of the flower's full beauty. Even so God's first gospel promise began with a single sentence spoken to the first two winners. God spoke of a poisoned heel and a crushed head. The heel would be that of a child born of a woman. The crushed head was that of Satan. This one-verse picture pointed to Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter in utter simplicity. The Lord himself would become a second Adam so that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Promises made and promises kept are the key to Bible history from Adam to Christ and from Christ's time to our own.



Eve cradled Seth in hope. She believed her son was God's substitute for the murdered Abel. By the birth of this substitute God had not failed in his promise. Eve would in the fullness of time become the mother of the living through the birth of Jesus, the son of Mary.

Noah walked out of the ark into a devastated world. Yet he believed God's promise that seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night would not cease until such time as the Jesus-tent, descended from his son Shem would be pitched among men.

Abraham left the good life in Ur to follow a promise. He and childless Sarah would have a son. Abraham would yield that Son in trusting faith to God when asked. Why? Abraham believed God had the power to raise the dead if necessary so that all families on earth might be blessed.

God promised Moses mighty wonders upon Pharaoh and Egypt. God was as good as his Word. The blood of Passover lambs turned away the angel of death. The absence of that blood forced Egypt in grief to set Israel free. Moses believed the Lord when told of a future leader, one like Moses, who would reveal all truth and to whom all blood-bought believers would listen.

King David wished to build God a temple made with hands. Instead the Lord promised David a temple of God's making whom evil hands would tear down, but God would in three days raise again.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the humiliation and captivity of Judah. With equal clarity the prophet promised that God would dwell with his people in the person of a virgin's Child would be Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. He would be despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, stricken smitten, and afflicted, yet one to see the light of life and justify many.

The holy apostles gazed into heaven as Jesus passed from sight. Jesus promised to be with them always. He was. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. He did. Jesus promised that the gates of Hell would not prevail against believers like you and me. They haven't.

In promises made and promises kept I fill up my life working while it is day before the night comes when no man can work. In promises made and promises kept, I am an adopted son or daughter of God empowered by the love of God in Christ to forgive my fellow man. In promises made and promises kept I have a future that stretches from my second birth in baptism past the day of judgment to a blessed eternity. What promise life holds for those who know the one, true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent!

[Suggestion to the Floor Committee leader: Divide your committee into six groups. Assign one Bible study "part" with its thought question to each group. Spend 15 minutes in group work. Then report back with each group getting five minutes. Appoint one person as timekeeper.]

## Floor Committee Bible Study

**promise, n, 1:** *a declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of a specified act.* **2:** *ground for expectation usually of success, improvement, or excellence; the appearance, character, or quality that gives or seems to give such ground of expectation.* [Webster's Third New International]

The dictionary's definition of "promise" cuts two ways. So does the concept of "promise" in the Bible. God created the human race with great promise (definition #2). This promise was lost through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. We continue to fall short of what God created us to be. The good news is that God made promises (definition #1) to restore what had been lost. He started with Adam and Eve. His promises are there for us as well. Jesus fulfills God's promises in order to restore our promise. Thus Jesus Christ embodies both definitions of promise.

This Bible study explores the promise that is ours by virtue of our creation, our redemption and our sanctification. We are believers who have been invited to **SHARE THE PROMISE FROM GOD.**

**PART ONE: Created with Promise.** "Create" means to call something entirely new into being. God did this three times during Creation week.

A. Genesis 1:1 - ...*God CREATED* \_\_\_\_\_.

In what ways did God then proceed to organize what was created. Check Genesis 1:3, 1:6, 1:9, 1:11, and 1:14?

B. Genesis 1:21 - ...*God CREATED ... every \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ thing....*

NOTE: The Hebrew expression for the word in the first blank involves the concepts of "living" and "breathing."

Into what varieties did God organize such creatures? Check 1:21 and 1:24.

C. Genesis 1:27 - ...*So God CREATED* \_\_\_\_\_.

What two-part organization of this creation followed? Check the end of Genesis 1:27 and 2:21-22.

**THOUGHT QUESTION:** What insights about the value of people does creation offer that evolution can't explain or appreciate?

**PART TWO: God's Blessing Adds to Promise.** Creation made people special. God guided human potential. He set in motion things that add "promise" to the life of every person. In Genesis 2 we are told how God challenged humanity to live up to its promise.

- A. What did God challenge people to do in respect to the material universe?  
Genesis 1:29 \_\_\_\_\_  
Who shares this privilege? Check 1:30.  
Genesis 2:15 \_\_\_\_\_
- B. What did God challenge people to do in respect to the world of living creatures?  
Genesis 1:28b \_\_\_\_\_  
Genesis 2:19-20 \_\_\_\_\_
- C. What did God challenge people to do in respect to their own kind, made in God's image?  
Genesis 1:28a with 2:24 \_\_\_\_\_
- D. What did God challenge people to do in respect to God himself?  
Genesis 2:16-17 \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Think of three "W" words that might help us remember areas of human endeavor that were full of promise for Adam and are still full of promise for us?  
W \_\_\_\_\_ (think over Genesis 1:29 and 2:15 and read Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)  
W \_\_\_\_\_ (think over 1:28b and 2:19-20 and read Proverbs 12:5a and 18:22)  
W \_\_\_\_\_ (think over 2:16-17 and 1:28a with 2:24, and read Romans 12:1-3)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: How does Psalm 128 capture what is revealed in chapter 2 of Genesis? What thoughts does Psalm 128 add?

**PART THREE: Robbed of Promise.** What would the world be like without sin? How would mankind have lived up to its promise? How might people have been a blessing to everything in every way? We can only guess. Sin robbed people of their promise!

- A. How did mankind's sin affect living creatures and the world in which they live?  
Genesis 3:7 \_\_\_\_\_  
3:17-19 (echoed in 5:29) \_\_\_\_\_  
7:21-23 \_\_\_\_\_  
Romans 8:21 \_\_\_\_\_
- B. What happened to the relationships within the human race?  
Genesis 3:12 \_\_\_\_\_  
3:16 \_\_\_\_\_  
4:8 and 4:23 \_\_\_\_\_  
6:2 and 6:11 \_\_\_\_\_  
Romans 1:28-32 \_\_\_\_\_
- C. What happened to the relationship of the sinner toward God?  
Genesis 3:8 \_\_\_\_\_  
3:10 \_\_\_\_\_  
5:3 (compare with 5:1) \_\_\_\_\_  
6:5-6 (compare Romans 8:1) \_\_\_\_\_  
Romans 3:10-18 \_\_\_\_\_

THOUGHT QUESTIONS: What fears rank highest in people? How do these fears relate to lost "promise" of broken relationships?

**PART FOUR: God's Earliest Promises.** Mankind's total loss of promise after sin left only one avenue of escape and rescue. God himself! God made promises from time to time. He expected them to be believed and passed on to others. Before God's Word was written down, God spoke his promises to Adam and Eve, to Noah and his family, and to Abraham and his offspring.

A. Adam and Eve. Read Genesis 3:15. What parts of the second article of the Apostle's Creed are referred to by these phrases:

her offspring? \_\_\_\_\_

crush head? \_\_\_\_\_

strike heel? \_\_\_\_\_

How was Adam's faith evident in what he said in Genesis 3:20? \_\_\_\_\_

How was Eve's faith evident in what she said in Genesis 4:1? \_\_\_\_\_

B. Noah. Read Genesis 8:21-22, and 9:11. What promises were made to the "first" and "second" of God's original creations?

Read Genesis 9:6. Compare Romans 13:1. How does God promise to protect the time in which each person might come to know salvation?

Read Genesis 9:25-27, spoken by Noah as a preview of history. Consider what the Lord revealed regarding the significance of the Old Testament's Tabernacle and Temple in Deuteronomy 12:5. Compare Jesus understanding of the powerful imagery of Tabernacle and Temple in John 2:19. Then ask yourself, which one word describing a concrete object does Noah use in Genesis 9:25-27 that connects Noah's faith with that of all believers?

C. Abraham. Read Genesis 22:15-18. Compare the word in verse 18 with a footnote with Genesis 22:8,13-14 and Galatians 3:16. What blessing was the hope of Abraham's faith? \_\_\_\_\_

THOUGHT QUESTION: In each case God's early promises followed a universal falling away. Yet God renewed his promises. How might we use this comfort for ourselves and others?

**PART FIVE: God's Promises to Israel.** To Israel the Lord delivered his written Word. Israel received many laws. These laws made Israel a special people. Like humanity at large, Israel could not live up to its promise as a special people and was forced to rely solely on God's promises. Many of Israel's laws contained promises. Hebrews 10:1 refers to such a promise imbedded in the Law of Moses a "shadow of the good things...coming."

A. Read Hebrews 10:1-13. What meaningful, often repeated, ceremony did Moses set for Israel? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was appointed carried out these Old Testament ceremonies? \_\_\_\_\_

What reality stood behind the Old Testament ceremonies and the ones who carried them out? \_\_\_\_\_

- B. Read 2 Samuel 7:1-16. What office did the Lord give David? \_\_\_\_\_  
What was David's heartfelt intention? \_\_\_\_\_  
What promise was God's better idea? \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Read Deuteronomy 18:18. With what further office did the Lord bless Israel? \_\_\_\_\_  
Read Deuteronomy 13:1-3. What warning did Israel receive? \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Overall, what was the sad record of those mere mortals whom God raised up for Israel as shadows of the good things coming?  
Read Psalm 78:56-64 with Isaiah 11:1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Read Daniel 9:8-14. \_\_\_\_\_  
Read Jeremiah 2:26-27. \_\_\_\_\_

**THOUGHT QUESTIONS:** Who today in the church corresponds to the three kinds of Old Testament leaders? Using the history of Israel as our guide, what pluses and minuses should we expect to find in today's church and its leaders?

**PART SIX: God's Promises to Us.** The New Testament teaches us that Jesus has, does, and will fulfill God's promises. We hold to God's promises, therefore, what we are grows day by day, anticipating that time when we shall experience the full promise which God intended us to have.

- A. Read Acts 2:38-39, a portion of Peter's sermon on Pentecost together with Matthew 26:28 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17.  
By what means do God's promises come? \_\_\_\_\_  
By whose power does God's promise in us grow? \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Read Romans 6:4 and 1 Corinthians 11:26.  
In what experience of Jesus do promise-holders share? \_\_\_\_\_  
What is the result of this shared experience? \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Read Titus 3:3-7 and Philippians 3:12-14.  
On whom must the promise or its realization never depend? \_\_\_\_\_  
What should we not expect to achieve in this life? \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 and 50-58.  
What experience of Jesus guarantees every promise? \_\_\_\_\_  
What tragic event in human history that destroyed the promise we had at creation is thereby reversed? \_\_\_\_\_  
When will our promise and God's promises be completely fulfilled? \_\_\_\_\_  
Meanwhile, what ought we to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
What promise is attached to our labor here in Saginaw as a convention? \_\_\_\_\_

**THOUGHT QUESTION:** How and where must the church create faith, instill hope, and develop the selfless power among people so that they might find (a) FULFILLMENT in their work, (b) the blessings of FAMILY in their relationships with each other, and (c) a FUTURE faced unafraid?

# ***WE SHARE THE PROMISE FROM GOD***

To be read at the CLOSE of the MONDAY Bible Study

What is a child but starry stuff --  
An aggregate of whirring molecules, enough  
For God to leave the fingerprint of His creative Word  
On every part -- some deft, some plain, some seemingly absurd.

What is a child but life breathed by heav'ns words  
Into the clay of swimming things, great whales, birds,  
Animals, both wild and tame, as well as things that creep? --  
A breath God gave them all to animate the lifeless deep.

What is a child but bearer of God's truest self? --  
The pot the Potter proudly placed upon the topmost shelf  
Of all created things. Why? To know the hand and mind and will  
Of Him who shaped all vessels of His love and loves them still.

What is a child, now that Paradise is lost, but DOOR?  
Closed! Locked! Capable of nothing more  
Than being there, a hiding place for dark things behind,  
A gate to nowhere, inert, godless, blind!

Knock! Knock, Knock!  
Who are the ones that heaven sends to love each door?  
Not angels, surely.  
Look, these who knock are but doors themselves for  
Whom the Key was found, inserted, turned, and kept.  
They knock incessantly,  
these opened doors for whom the Key once wept.

Yes, the Key to life and breath and knowing everything divine  
Is God incarnate, a Child himself, of Mary,  
the Last and Best of David's line,  
A priest who sacrificed Himself, a prophet speaking truth instead  
Of lies; the Child whom Eve believed would crush the liar's head.

Yes, all who knock, knock with unearthly power  
To open eyes, restore God's place,  
quicken, turn night to day, and shower  
Life with blessings.  
Their power is faith, not in self or hope-filled deeds,  
But faith in Jesus,  
the One who paid the unpaid price of sin and filled all needs.

And how comes faith's pow'r  
but by those means through which a child enters life  
A second time? There death is drowned in Jesus' Word. There strife  
Is ended in the glory of a gravesite door forever rolled away.  
Herein lies the hope, the joy,  
the preciousness of each and everlasting day.

# WE SHARE THE PROMISE

## WITH OUR FAMILIES

Except for the fact that God does not gamble, you could almost call it God's "calculated risk." You can find that "calculated risk" in a very familiar passage of Scripture: **"Our Father in heaven"** (Matthew 6:9). With those words Jesus has not only instructed believers how to pray, he has also reminded them that he has staked a part of his reputation in each home on the parents he gives to children. As the children of our homes learn to pray, **"Our Father in heaven,"** what thoughts are crossing their minds? How do they picture their heavenly Father? Certainly their picture of their heavenly Father is shaped by those of us the little ones call father and mother. As our children watch us, their earthly fathers and mothers, God is using us - sinful human beings! - to form within our children a concept of what their heavenly Father must be like. Doesn't God seem to be taking a "risk" in entrusting that responsibility to us?

But the pattern goes even beyond that. As they hear God's Word from us, or fail to hear it, God is shaping their knowledge of him through us. As they watch us apply its saving truths and promises to our every day lives, or fail to do so, we are telling them day after day what God and his grace mean to us. God's "calculated risk" is that he uses us as his representatives to shape in the minds of the next generation who he is and what he means to us. As royal priests of God who are called to share the promise, it is in our homes that our most regular, and perhaps most important sharing of the promise takes place. Our Christian churches and schools can only be as strong as our Christian homes. What happens or fails to happen within the walls of our homes will impact future generations for as long as God lets this world exist. In our homes, either God's name will be hallowed and souls pointed towards heaven, or God's name will be dishonored and souls will be confused and misdirected.

Will we retreat from this responsibility and hide under excuses? Will we plead that our busy 20th century lifestyle has barely left us enough time around the house to feed our bodies let alone to feed our souls? Will we plead that we are not equipped and prepared for such a monumental task - suggesting that God may have been a little foolish to "risk" so much on what happens within our homes? Or trusting in God's forgiveness for our sins, will we remember that God never gives us any responsibility without also supplying the grace and strength to accomplish it? Will we remember that God really is taking no risk at all since through his Word he is more than able to make our homes strongholds of his gospel?

As we continue to consider how we **Share the Promise**, and today consider that **We Share the Promise with our Families**, let's look at this awesome responsibility that God has entrusted to us in our homes. Let's be honest in humble repentance about where we have failed, but let's also be encouraged by the wonders of God's grace to equip and strengthen us for that task.

### I. The Awesome Responsibility

For those of us wishing to check the box marked "pass" when it comes to this spiritual responsibility in our homes, we're sorry to announce that that is impossible. We have no choice when it comes to exerting a spiritual influence on our children. God has given us a task to accomplish. By the perfect life and innocent death of his Son, God has won salvation for every soul of every generation that will ever walk the face of the earth. That is the fulfilled promise he has called us all to share. As parents, God has called us to play a

critically important spiritual role as we pass that promise on to our children. We cannot forget Paul's words to the Ephesian Christians: **"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"** (Ephesians 6:4). The moment God places children in our home, this responsibility is given to us. The question is never whether we are going to be a spiritual influence on our children or not. The only question is this: Will that influence be positive or negative?

What is more, this spiritual influence we are called to exert on our families goes beyond one generation. To use a negative example of that, consider God's words in Exodus 20:5: **"I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me."** The sinful stubbornness of one generation often will play itself out in one generation after the next. Stated positively, the promise of the gospel diligently and faithfully shared with one generation will also bless one generation after the next. The fruits of our spiritual leadership in the home will be felt down to our great-grandchildren and even beyond. Think of it! Because God chooses to use sinful human beings like us to share his promise within the home, God has placed the souls of generations to come into our sphere of influence!

How sad, then, that one of the glaring weaknesses of the 20th century church is that we have far too often forgotten that the most important link in the chain of home-church-school is the home. Of course this is no recent deception of Satan, unique to our generation, but it certainly is troubling us greatly in our day. As hard as we work in our churches and schools to share the promise with our children, have we too easily forgotten that God has given them no one more important to share with them that gospel than mom and dad? We can delegate our responsibilities in many areas of life, but we cannot delegate our spiritual responsibilities in our homes. Pastors and teachers can be valuable aids and assistants when it comes to sharing the promise with our families, but they cannot replace the divinely given influence God has designed for the parents in the home. To neglect our role of sharing the promise in our homes is to cast aside a key element of God's plan for passing down the message of salvation from generation to generation.

Yes, God can indeed overcome the worst influence of mother and father in the home by the power of the Holy Spirit in church and school. But we are tempting God and playing spiritual Russian roulette with our children's eternal welfare if we expect God to do just that for our children by neglecting the home as the foundational place to share the promise.

We cannot deny that has happened too often in all of our homes. The evidence of that neglect is staggering. While no formal survey of our WELS people has been conducted, informal surveys indicate that regular home devotions and reading of the Bible with family members may be taking place regularly in only 5-10% of our households! Even among our called workers, less than 40% may be leading their families regularly at home in the Word of God. God has not promised to work his wonders in our hearts by any other means than the means of grace - Word and sacrament. If the witness of the Word is stifled in our homes, we are *subtracting* the power of the Holy Spirit from the daily dynamic of our family lives. Is it any wonder that families are stumbling and that many are crumbling under the pressures of Satan, of the sinful world and of our own sinful flesh? If we fail as parents to personally equip our families with the defenses of the full armor of God, then we are sending our children out into the world stripped of God's full armor to face a well armed opponent. The Enemy doesn't mind if we say that we revere and honor the Bible; he just doesn't want us to actually use it in our homes. When Martin Luther wrote in his great Reformation hymn, "The Word they still shall let remain, nor any thanks have for it," he had the world in mind. He was not writing about the Christian home.

Consider the spiritual devastation and havoc we wreak on each part of the family when we fail to share the promise with them in our homes! If the only place our children hear of Jesus is in church and school, what



conclusion might they readily draw? Aren't we by default telling them that such "Jesus stuff" is not what real life is all about? If we allow the pursuits of this world and its crying crush of responsibilities to choke time for the Word from our homes, aren't we telling our children that all those other things are what life is really about? What spiritual confusion we sow when our children hear from school and church that the one thing needful is the Word of God, but from watching mom and dad it appears to be the last thing needed - except for an hour or two now and then on a Sunday morning! If we exert more effort polishing our latest purchase or checking out our chip shot than we do sharing the Word with our families, our children will indeed get the message about what really counts to their folks. Satan wants to make shipwreck out of the faith of our children. Are we blindly punching holes below the water line to help him out?

Husbands and fathers, consider also the effect on our spouses of neglecting our Christ-like servant-leadership in our homes. Haven't we all too often acted as if the spiritual training of the children were our wives' responsibility? By doing that, we have put our wives and our children's mothers into a role that God has given to us. While we as a church body have struggled to keep a grip on the scriptural teaching of the roles of man and woman, have we at the same time in practice forgotten that the most important part of the husband's headship is taking the spiritual leadership role in his family for the benefit of his wife and children? By default, far too many wives and mothers have been forced to be the chief spiritual influence in the home - the very role which God has entrusted to husbands and fathers. Could some of the struggle in our church body over the roles of man and woman in God's world be the direct result of husbands and fathers abdicating their spiritual responsibilities towards their wives and children? Without excusing those who do not wish to be guided by the scriptural principles, we who have failed to practice in our homes what we have preached in our churches bear the greater responsibility for the trouble and confusion that ensues. How many wives have grown bitter and discouraged in their own faith by husbands who would not be the Christ-like servant-leaders of their homes?

The final sad toll of such male spiritual immaturity and irresponsibility falls on the husbands and fathers themselves. It is the burden of guilt for having failed their Lord and their families. It is the sense of helplessness as they watch their families drift aimlessly with the winds of popular values and trends. How many Christian men, perhaps very successful at work and very active in their congregation, are carrying a heavy burden of guilt for homes that lack a strong spiritual center in Christ? Many of those husbands and fathers may even be standing in our pulpits and in our classrooms.

We must understand what is at stake here. The battle is for the souls of our families. We can have the finest churches and schools in Christendom, but if we lose the spiritual struggles on the battlefield of the home, all may be lost. The eternal welfare of our children, our spouses and our own eternal welfare is at stake. If we are too proud to admit where we have failed, where we have adopted the agenda of the world around us and let God's agenda drop to the ground, we and the generations to come may pay an eternal price. Each of us must begin by looking in the mirror of God's law and facing squarely where we have missed our call to arms and where, because of that, we and our families may be spiritually wounded and bleeding.

## **II. God's Awesome Grace**

It isn't easy to take an honest look through the eyes of God's Word at how we have done in handling the awesome responsibility that God gives to share the promise with our families. Who of us cannot read here a record of our own failures? Who of us cannot trace the sad fruit that this bears in the lives of the next generation. All of it is a burden too heavy to bear.

Thank God, we need not bear it, for as soon as God shows us our failures at living up to this awesome responsibility, he reminds us of what he has done with that load of guilt. **"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool"** (Isaiah 1:18). God's grace to us in Jesus Christ has removed from us the guilt of every sinful failure in our lives. No matter how miserably we have stumbled and fallen in sharing the promise in our homes, God's promise of forgiveness and grace is still new every morning. It is not just with others that we must share the promise. Daily we must share that promise of forgiveness with our own hearts. As we live personally in repentance and forgiveness each day, God is doing the most important work of all in preparing us to **"teach [other] transgressors [his] ways"** (Psalm 51:13a). His mercy is still new every morning, and drawing personally each day from that refreshing well of salvation is where every spiritual leader must begin. We must not attempt to drag around with us a burden that Christ has already lifted from our shoulders. Such is the burden relieving gift of his forgiving grace. As spiritual leaders in our families we take our daily run to the cross of Calvary and there hang on that cross all our failures.

Never forget, then, fathers and mothers, that we do not walk away from that cross empty handed. We carry with us a promise. It is the same promise by which Paul carried out the work God had given him: **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength"** (Philippians 4:13). With that same confidence, we who are the spiritual leaders of our homes can face our responsibility to share the promise. It is God himself who has allowed us to become fathers and mothers, spiritual leaders in our homes. Yes, that is an awesome and frightening responsibility. But where God gives awesome responsibility, he always at the same time gives the awesome power of his grace to carry out our responsibility. The competence, strength and ability to carry out our task is God's gift to us.

By his grace and through his Word, God is enabling us to cut through the blizzard of demands on our time so that we take time with our families to focus on the one thing needed. By his grace through his Word, God is overcoming our fears about being ill-equipped to share our faith with the next generation. Through Word and sacrament God is equipping us to carry out our task so that what we pass down proves an eternal spiritual blessing to the second, third, and fourth generations.

And don't let Satan fool you into thinking that now is not the time to get busy using God's strength in your homes. It is never too early or too late to be busy about this responsibility of sharing the promise with our families. No matter how young the children at home may be, God can use a spiritually strong leader in that home to bless them. Even if the children are already gone from home, it is still not too late to let them know more clearly than ever what your Savior means to you. Your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren can still benefit from you. God's grace is never at a loss for a way to bring a stunning victory from what looked like certain defeat.

And lest we forget, let's say a special prayer of thanks to God for what he has accomplished through those Christians who are struggling to raise their children without the benefit of two Christian parents. There too, God promises that his grace is sufficient to help those parents accomplish the task. Though God may have allowed a Christian husband or wife, father or mother to be absent from your home, rest assured that he can more than make up the difference by his grace. The life of Paul's dear son in the faith and co-worker, Timothy, is proof of that. Timothy grew up in the home of a believing Jewish mother, but, it appears, an unbelieving father (Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:1-5; 3:15). God overcame that obstacle through the witness of Timothy's believing mother, Eunice (and grandmother, Lois). Just as God blessed Eunice's efforts to share her faith and beliefs with young Timothy, so God has blessed many a spiritually single Christian parent with the strength to do double-duty in sharing the promise in the home. May our congregations also be keenly aware of the special needs of these families and be ready to offer help and encouragement!

### III. CONCLUSION

Dear parents, and especially you fathers, let us pray to God for a renewed commitment to the awesome task that God has laid before us right within our homes. In daily repentance may we confess our failures in carrying out this responsibility. At the same time, let us revel in the wonders of his grace that has forgiven us. Then, trusting in his equipping and enabling grace, we can move ahead in sharing the promise with our families. Thank God for his awesome grace to accomplish our awesome task! In heaven, your children and your children's children's children, will thank God for you!

## WE SHARE THE PROMISE WITH OUR FAMILIES

### Bible Study

**Introduction** Every politician with his finger to the breeze knows that to get elected today he must talk about the deterioration of the American family and what he is going to do in Washington D.C. to return our country to family values. No matter how sincere that talk may be, Congress really can do very little about the problem. However, armed with the Word of God, each Christian family can accomplish great things within their homes. Let's take a closer look at God's plan for sharing the promise in our homes.

This Bible study seeks to accomplish three objectives:

- 1) to remind us that our homes are the front lines of the spiritual battles we are called to fight;
- 2) to remind us that spiritual leaders must first be in the Word themselves so that they are growing in faith through daily repentance and forgiveness;
- 3) to encourage us by the promises of God to seize with confidence our responsibility to share the Word with our children.

#### **Part 1: The Home and Family: God's Key Place to Share the Promise**

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

**(4) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (5) Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (6) These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. (7) Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.**

- (8) Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.**  
**(9) Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.**

**Setting the scene:** Remember that Deuteronomy is a series of "farewell sermons" which Moses preached as he was about to relinquish the leadership of Israel. These are the final words of the one who had been the spiritual father of this nation for 40 years. In chapter 5 he had repeated the Ten Commandments. The advice he now gives not only provides fitting guidance for sharing those commands with our children, but gives us direction in sharing both law and gospel.

**Understanding the point:** What are some of the every day opportunities Moses urges Israel to use in order to share his Word with the next generation?

Some of the Israelites took verses eight and nine very literalistically and wore portions of Scripture on their bodies [consider the Pharisees of Jesus' day about whom Jesus' said, "**They make their phylacteries wide**" (Matthew 23:5)]. What was the Lord really trying to tell them with those verses?

**Taking it home:** What is unique about the home setting that makes it such an important place for the sharing of our faith?

What can happen when the next generation doesn't hear God's word around home but only in church and school?

## **Part 2: We Cannot Share a Promise to Which We Don't Hold Firmly**

**Matthew 23:25-28** (25) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (26) Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (27) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. (28) In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

**Setting the scene:** This is some of the sharpest rebuke you will find from the lips of Jesus - and it was addressed to those who considered themselves spiritual leaders! It must have stunned the people of Jesus' day to hear him speak this way to those whom they considered to be the pillars of society, their religious leaders.

**Understanding the point:** Verses 25 and 27 point out the problem behind all hypocrisy and phariseeism. What basic principle of spiritual life had the Pharisees neglected?

**Taking it home:** If we are going to be spiritual leaders in our homes why do we daily need the Word to first lead our own hearts to repentance?

**Psalm 1:1-3**

**(1) Blessed is the man  
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of mockers.**

**(2) But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

**(3) He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.**

**Setting the scene:** Who of us doesn't take comfort in the sight of the leaves of spring finally making their appearance? Instead of the stark and dead appearance of winter, all over we see the signs of life. So too, the psalmist pictures the Christian as showing abundant signs of the life which the Holy Spirit has planted in us.

**Understanding the point:** What is the point of the comparison the psalmist makes between the believer and a tree? (Please note: the word "law" is used in verse 2 in its most basic meaning of "God's revealed Word" not in the sense of only God's commandments.)

In our world where "meditation" has become a popular word, what does the psalmist mean by meditating on the Word?

What encouraging promise for the Word-filled believer is found at the end of verse 3? (Be sure you understand God's definition of prosper!!! In Isaiah 53:10 it says about the Savior, "the will of God will prosper in his hand.")

**Taking it home:** What does this Psalm say to us if we are going to be spiritual leaders in our homes who are bearing fruit to the glory of our Savior?

What do you say to the harried and hurried Christian husband/father or wife/mother who just cannot find time for the Word in his/her daily life? (Consider what you would "say" to a tree that found no time to drink up any nourishment because it was so busy providing shade and nesting area for those taking refuge in its branches?)

### **Part 3: Imparting the Promise to our Children**

**Ephesians 6:1-4** (1) Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (2) "Honor your father and mother" - which is the first commandment with a

**promise - (3) "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (4) Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."**

**Setting the scene:** It's too easy for parents to dismiss the Fourth Commandment as speaking only to children. However, it has at least as much, if not more, to say to parents. At the same time that the commandment reminds children that God has given them parents in the home as his representatives, it holds before us also the awesome responsibility we parents have with our families. We represent God in our homes! Take note of the reminder also to fathers - mentioned specifically - concerning their spiritual leadership role in the home with their children!

**Understanding the point:** When Paul urges us not to "exasperate" (literally: move to anger) our children, certainly he is thinking both of harsh unloving discipline as well as the lack of any discipline, both of which frustrate our children. At the same time, how might failing to give children "the training and instruction of the Lord" be the most exasperating thing parents could do to their children?

**Taking it home:** Here is a paraphrase for parents of Jesus' words in Mark 8:36, "What good is it for a parent to train his children to gain the whole world of business, sports, recreation, and entertainment, and yet allow them to forfeit their souls?"

How do Paul's words conflict with the role of father as it is pictured by American society?

The two most common excuses parents give for not sharing the Word with their children are these:

- 1) We don't have time to gather the whole family around the Word on a regular basis.
- 2) We don't feel capable of sharing the Word with our children - pastors and teachers are the experts.

How would God direct us to help parents overcome these obstacles?

#### **Part 4: Making the Most of Your Partnership with Your Church Family**

Here are some suggestions to help you use the resources your congregation already has available to aid you in sharing the promise in your homes.

Look carefully at **Christian Worship**, it provides a wealth of home devotion resources for you and your family. Use hymn verses as prayers or sing them with your family. Take a look at the devotions found on pages 150-152.

**Worship and commune every Sunday (except when an act of God makes it impossible!) Regular public use of the means of grace (together with home worship) is the heart and center of the Christian family!**

On the way home from church, regularly discuss as a family the word you have heard in the worship service. You will be telling your children that this was not just an hour out of your life that you gave to God to keep him happy. You will be telling them that worship is life and life is worship!

Attend Bible classes regularly and listen with "two ears" - one for your personal faith and one for your role as spouse and parent. Not only will you grow spiritually through the Word, your children will be reminded that your confirmation certificate is also not your graduation from the need to grow in the Word. (Defeating the confirmation = graduation "sin-drome" among us begins in the heart and life of each of us!)

Make use of the blessing of the Lutheran elementary school and area Lutheran high school where available. When coupled with a Christ-centered home, Christian education really doesn't cost - it pays eternal dividends. Be sure to regularly ask your children what they have learned from God's Word at school. That reminds them in yet another way that what they learn about Jesus is what life is all about.

Make a point to attend your pastor's Bible Information Class when your children are approaching confirmation age. Not only will you be surprised how much you may have forgotten since eighth grade, but this review of basic Christian doctrine will enable you to fulfill your role in the Catechism instruction of your children.

Talk to your pastor about some doctrinally sound Christian music CDs or tapes to play around the house. You will be surprised how this can improve the "atmosphere" around the house! Remember to be sensitive to your children's ages and tastes when it comes to the style of music.

Find spiritually strong families in the congregation and ask them how they keep their family devotional time going strong.

What are some other ways to make the most of your partnership with church and school as **We Share the Promise with our Families?** (Include here other ideas of what our congregations could do to further aid you as Christian leaders in your homes.)

**Closing** (Psalm 145:1-10)

**Leader:** I will exalt you, my God the King;  
**Group:** I will praise your name for ever and ever.

**Leader:** Every day I will praise you  
**Group:** And extol your name for ever and ever.

**Leader:** Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;

**Group:** His greatness no one can fathom.

**Leader:** One generation will commend your works to another;  
**Group:** They will tell of your mighty acts.

**Leader:** They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty,  
**Group:** And I will meditate on your wonderful works.

**Leader:** They will tell of the power of your awesome works,  
**Group:** And I will proclaim your great deeds.

**Leader:** They will celebrate your abundant goodness  
**Group:** And joyfully sing of your righteousness.

**Leader:** The LORD is gracious and compassionate,  
**Group:** Slow to anger and rich in love.

**Leader:** The LORD is good to all;  
**Group:** He has compassion on all he has made.

**Leader:** All you have made will praise you, O LORD;  
**Group:** Your saints will extol you.

Richard Gurgel



## BIBLE STUDY LEADER'S GUIDE

(N.B: Please do NOT use this leader's guide to read the answers given as the "pat" answer to every question asked in the Bible study. These answers are given only to help get the discussion going if needed.)

### Part 1: The Home and Family: God's Key Place to Share the Promise

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (4) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (5) Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (6) These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. (7) Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (8) Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. (9) Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Setting the scene: Remember that Deuteronomy is a series of "farewell sermons" which Moses preached as he was about to relinquish the leadership of Israel. These are the final words of the one who had been the spiritual father of this nation for 40 years. In chapter 5 he had repeated the Ten Commandments. The advice he now gives not only provides fitting guidance for sharing those commands with our children, but gives us direction in sharing both law and gospel.

Understanding the point: What are some of the every day opportunities Moses urges Israel to use in order to share his Word with the next generation?

*Moses mentions walking along the road. Traveling together as a family was an opportunity to share the Word. Think how many times in casual conversation while traveling that a family has unique opportunities to communicate. Moses also mentions the early morning and bed time. Parents the world over know that bed-time especially is one of the most teachable moments they will ever have with their children.*

Some of the Israelites took verses eight and nine very literalistically and wore portions of Scripture on their bodies [consider the Pharisees of Jesus' day about whom Jesus' said, "They make their phylacteries wide" (Matthew 23:5)]. What was the Lord really trying to tell them with those verses?

*To write God's commands on their hands and foreheads*

*certainly was impressing them with the truth that God's Word was to guide everything that they thought and everything that they did. To put God's words on their doorframes and on their gates was to impress on them that the Word of God was the heart of their home as a family.*

**Taking it home:** What is unique about the home setting that makes it such an important place for the sharing of our faith?

*It is the place where the beliefs and values of the believing Christian get put to use in every day life. The children, taught in the home, and then watching mom or dad live that faith in the home, get to see the "whole package" of doctrine and practice at work. Pastors and teachers certainly can exert an influence on our children, but in our homes by repeated contact we can be God's most important human influence on our children.*

What can happen when the next generation doesn't hear God's word around home but only in church and school?

*Perhaps without realizing it, we are telling our children that our faith is not what real life is all about. We also give the impression that our faith is not something to be talked about - as if we are ashamed of what we believe.*

## **Part 2: We Cannot Share a Promise to Which We Don't Hold Firmly**

**Matthew 23:25-28**

**(25) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (26) Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (27) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. (28) In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.**

**Setting the scene:** This is some of the sharpest rebuke you will find from the lips of Jesus - and it was addressed to those who considered themselves spiritual

leaders! It must have stunned the people of Jesus' day to hear him speak this way to those whom they considered to be the pillars of society, their religious leaders.

**Understanding the point:** Verses 25 and 27 point out the problem behind all hypocrisy and phariseeism. What basic principle of spiritual life had the Pharisees neglected?

*They neglected to apply God's Word first of all to **their own** lives so that they could live in daily repentance and faith. God had work to do on their own hearts, but they refused to see that need.*

**Taking it home:** If we are going to be spiritual leaders in our homes why do we daily need the Word to first lead our own hearts to repentance?

*We would be in danger of being hypocrites who preached one thing but practiced another. If we are going to be proclaimers of the Word, we first of all need it working its wonders of repentance and greater trust in Christ's forgiveness in our own hearts and lives. Without God working on our hearts first, our own faith will stumble, and our witness to our family will be severely hindered.*

**Psalm 1:1-3**

- (1) **Blessed is the man  
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of mockers.**
- (2) **But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.**
- (3) **He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.**

**Setting the scene:** Who of us doesn't take comfort in the sight of the leaves of spring finally making their appearance? Instead of the stark and dead appearance of winter, all over we see the signs of life. So too, the psalmist pictures the Christian as showing abundant signs of the life which the Holy Spirit has planted in us.

**Understanding the point:** What is the point of the comparison the psalmist makes between the believer and a tree? (Please note: the word "law" is used in verse 2 in its most basic meaning of "God's revealed Word" not in the sense of only God's commandments.)

*Just as a tree needs a regular supply of water to continue to be alive and growing and producing fruit, so the believer needs a regular supply of the Word of God to remain alive and growing and producing fruits of faith. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can produce genuine fruit in our lives. The picture of the vine and branches of John 15 certainly also comes to mind upon hearing Psalm 1.*

In our world where "meditation" has become a popular word, what does the psalmist mean by meditating on the Word?

*In our country, meditation, often patterned after one of the Eastern religions, is being taught as a way to empty our minds. To the Christian, it is just the opposite. Meditation is filling our minds with the Word of Christ - taking to heart law and gospel. Meditating on the Word is simply taking time to ponder what it has to say to us and not just letting it go in one ear and out the other. Meditation is giving the Holy Spirit plenty of time to work in our hearts.*

What encouraging promise for the Word-filled believer is found at the end of verse 3? (Be sure you understand God's definition of prosper!!! In Isaiah 53:10 it says about the Savior, "the will of God will prosper in his hand.")

*God will see to it that our work for him in our homes prospers. Of course, that means that his name is hallowed and his kingdom comes among us. That does not necessarily mean monetary gain and worldly recognition.*

Taking it home: What does this Psalm say to us if we are going to be spiritual leaders in our homes who are bearing fruit to the glory of our Savior?

*We cannot afford to be without the water of the Word in our daily lives. There is no spiritual leadership without the means of grace - or you have the impossibility of spiritual leadership without the Spirit!*

What do you say to the harried and hurried Christian husband/father or wife/mother who just cannot find time for the Word in his/her daily life? (Consider what you would "say" to a tree that found no time to drink up any nourishment because it was so busy providing shade and nesting area for those taking refuge in its branches?)

*As is obvious from the analogy of the tree, without the Word we will soon be no spiritual refuge for our children. A dead tree has no purpose*

*but to be cut down. Its purpose of shady protection and strength is lost. We must cut through the crush of other responsibilities to make time for what is truly needed. Remember: God created the seven day week and the 24 hour day. That too he included in what he called "very good" (Genesis 1:31). We will always make time for what we have determined is important to us. Imagine if someone was given four front row tickets to the NCAA Final Four and an all expense paid trip to the game. Do you think they would go? Or would they be too busy?*

### **Part 3: Imparting the Promise to our Children**

#### **Ephesians 6:1-4**

**(1) Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (2) "Honor your father and mother" - which is the first commandment with a promise - (3) "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (4) Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."**

#### **Setting the scene:**

It's too easy for parents to dismiss the Fourth Commandment as speaking only to children. However, it has at least as much, if not more, to say to parents. At the same time that the commandment reminds children that God has given them parents in the home as his representatives, it holds before us also the awesome responsibility we parents have with our families. We represent God in our homes! Take note of the reminder also to fathers - mentioned specifically - concerning their **spiritual** leadership role in the home with their children!

#### **Understanding the point:**

When Paul urges us not to "exasperate" (literally: move to anger) our children, certainly he is thinking both of harsh unloving discipline as well as the lack of any discipline, both of which frustrate our children. At the same time, how might failing to give children "**the training and instruction of the Lord**" be the most exasperating thing parents could do to their children?

*If we are not giving our children "the training and instruction of the Lord," we are withholding from them what life is really all about. What could be more eternally exasperating than that? As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, without God and his Word everything else, no matter how outwardly wonderful, is meaningless. So too, is everything meaningless for our children if we fail to bring them up in "the training and instruction of the*

*Lord." The anger of the unbelieving soul in hell will last forever.*

Taking it home:

Here is a paraphrase for parents of Jesus' words in Mark 8:36, "What good is it for a parent to train his children to gain the whole world of business, sports, recreation and entertainment, and yet allow them to forfeit their souls?"

How do Paul's words conflict with the role of father as it is pictured by American society?

*Even in many Christian homes, the father may see his chief responsibility as the one who teaches the kids how to hunt, dribble, shoot, score touchdowns, mow the lawn, make a living and keep a job. There is nothing sinful about any of that. But it is not the chief role that Paul pictures here in Ephesians. It is the father's chief role in the Christian home to be the "pastor" of his family - to pray for them, share the Word with them, and to constantly be on the look out for any spiritual dangers that are threatening his family. One Christian author compared our role as spiritual leaders to being the point man on a patrol in the jungles of Vietnam.*

The two most common excuses parents give for not sharing the Word with their children are these:

- 1) We don't have time to gather the whole family around the Word on a regular basis.
- 2) We don't feel capable of sharing the Word with our children - pastors and teachers are the experts.

How would God direct us to help parents overcome these obstacles?

*The first obstacle we have begun to discuss already with the tree analogy from Psalm 1. However, it is also good to point out that we need not wait until we have everyone in the family at the same place at the same time every day. Why not start with the best time available at least 2-3 times per week with as many family members as we can? We can always add on from there. Sometimes while waiting for the ideal, we miss the steps God is providing to work our way there!*

*For the second obstacle, while God has not called all parents to be pastors and teachers, he has called all parents to be the spiritual leaders of their homes. As we grow in the Word, trust God to make us capable*

*to accomplish his purposes. That is God's promise. Again, remember that God is not asking us to present 20 minute sermons with flawless English. He is simply asking us to share the Word and our faith with our children. He most definitely can equip us to do just that! Of course, we must be in the Word ourselves!*

**Part 4: Making the Most of Your Partnership with Your Church Family**

*Here we can point out to those in our study that "family ministry" is really something that our congregations are carrying out when they faithfully proclaim law and gospel in worship and Bible classes. While specialized ministries to aid the family will certainly also be offered, most of all we need to avail ourselves of the full plate that God already has prepared for us!*

# **WE SHARE THE PROMISE WITH OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS**

## **Introduction on the Convention Floor**

Consider the case of twins Chantell and Nicole. Several years ago, at the tender age of 18, they were asked to leave their father's home and fend for themselves. By God's grace they were led to become baby-sitters for a WELS family that was well-tuned into friendship witnessing. The family did not hesitate to speak about spiritual things. They also took Chantell and Nicole to church to assist in the nursery while they listened to the sermon. Spiritual interest was aroused. Soon the twins participated in worship, completed the pastor's Bible Information Class, and became active members of the mission congregation which virtually adopted them and saw to it that they were not without food and shelter. While Nicole went to college, Chantell stayed with the missionary's family. "Finally I found a home, and I know where I belong," Chantell said recently, referring not only to the congregation and its pastor, but especially to Jesus, who is the solid rock of her salvation and the center of her faith and life. This past week Chantell was united in Christian marriage to one of our fellow WELS members.

Consider the case also of another young woman, a university student. Her WELS friend spoke to her of spiritual things and brought her to the missionary's Bible Information Class. Having learned to know Jesus as the joy of her salvation, she witnessed to her unchurched parents in her hometown. Now her parents are seeking the spiritual guidance of one of our home missionaries.

Or, consider the example of an eighth-grader who sought permission to bring his unchurched friend to Confirmation class. There was only one problem. The boy's unchurched mother had to drive him some distance to attend the class. Rather than waiting in the car outside, she decided to sit and listen while the pastor taught the lessons to her son and his friend. But she made it clear to the pastor that she had absolutely no interest in the church. This spring, when Confirmation time approached for her son, the unchurched mother who had also attended all the classes asked our missionary, "What would it take for me to become a member of this church?"

These examples and many like them are not really new. They occur annually in the majority of our congregations. The history of Christianity is loaded with accounts of people like this, people like Andrew and Philip sharing with their friends, relatives, neighbors, and associates the message of all the wonderfully-fulfilled promises in Christ Jesus the Savior. Today we call it **friendship witnessing**. It is much more than simple friendship. It is personal evangelism. It has been the way of Christian lives for centuries: one person telling another through Law and Gospel the message of mankind's sin and God's grace. Person-to-person, this is how the Promise is shared; this is how the Gospel is spread.

Isn't it almost strange that this is a topic that must be emphasized in our age? Isn't friendship witnessing the natural way of life for all Christians who cannot help but speak about



what they have heard and seen in Christ? Jesus says, "You (Christians) ARE the light of the world; you ARE the salt of the earth." We used to know that. Our families used to remind us of that. But intact nuclear Christian families in smaller communities are no longer the standard among us. We are spread across the continent. Many young people today do not have the mentoring example of grandparents or aunts and uncles speaking freely about their faith and their church. All too often today the feeling is advanced that the work of Gospel outreach is the sole responsibility of the evangelism committee. What a difference could be made if every individual man, woman, and child worked in concert with the outreach committee by making an effort in his or her own field ripe for harvest!

That mission field ripe for harvest is not only located in faraway places like southeast Asia and Africa. More and more our North American continent resembles the world of the first apostles. The mission field is pressing in right outside our front and back doors. It is there. It faces us. And while we know it, we also often ignore it. There is a great amount of fear in our hearts, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of rejection. But have you ever thought about what is going on in the heart and mind of the unchurched? There is more fear on their side than you or I can possibly imagine. There is only frustrating fear and desperate death and horrendous hell in hearts that do not know the peace and comfort of the reconciliation completed on Calvary's cross and gleaming through the resurrection grave. Some of your friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors lie in such hopelessness, covering it up, perhaps, with elaborate facades and walls. How will they hear God's promises in Christ unless someone tells them? How will they come to the wells of salvation unless someone invites them?

In Christ God has armed you and me with the water of life and the bread of life to give spiritual food and water to those who hunger and thirst. You are not a sorry sort of slippery parasite scurrying for shelter under the rotting bark of some bent-over willow tree as you confront the godless culture of this age. You and I are mighty oaks of righteousness marching forward with the Victor Jesus Christ and armed with his Word, the only tool that can blast through the facades and walls with which people surround themselves. You are God's people living in special communities. You may not look like a large army ready to take on the world. But you represent thousands of people in WELS congregations. And, combined, you live in communities from all across Canada and the USA and the world, communities that represent millions of people. You have the privilege and responsibility of displaying God's splendor to these millions!

What shall we do? First, the Bible study will ask for some quiet time on your part to think about what the fulfilled promises of God in Jesus Christ mean for you personally. Second, the bible study will ask you to examine what is in the heart of the unchurched and how you can strive to be more fully involved in sharing the Promise personally among your family, friends, neighbors, and associates, and, together with your WELS Christians, in your conferences, districts, and through the home and world mission programs. How can we get excited about world mission work in Russia or India if we are not getting a good taste of mission work in our own personal mission field? How can we fully comprehend the obstacles and joys of home mission work in some of the faraway places of Canada and the USA if we are not doing what the Lord expects in our own personal lives, if we are not inviting others to taste and see that the Lord is good? How can we prepare future workers for the great mission field of the world if we are not fully-tuned

into that part of the world in which we live, striving to turn more hearts to the truth and joy of the Christ-centered Scriptures?

So, ask yourselves some questions! **Pastor**, how can you with the help of your family make several more contacts each week with those who do not know Christ? How can you make a greater effort at funeral luncheons and wedding receptions to try to get to know more people, to make more contacts for your future sharing of the Promise? **Teacher**, how can you think of ways to instill in your children the desire and the love to share the Promise? How can you remind yourself that your ministry is not limited to the 25 or 35 in your classroom, and that you can be of great help in the forward march of the Means of Grace through the church by being a soldier of Christ among the people of your congregation and community? **Lay-person**, you who have greater access to the unveiled field ripe for harvest than most full-time church workers, how can you look at people with a greater purpose than you have before? How can you share the great love of a forgiving God with this ripe field? What might you do to involve more of your congregation members in friendship witnessing and inviting others to the rich banquet of the means of grace? **Professor**, as you train young people for their future ministries in their neighborhoods and communities, how can you "go the extra mile" to get to know these students personally, to be mentors in your care and concern for them so that when they take the next step of Christian service, they will be ready as servants of Christ to share the Promise to the unchurched world in which they serve? How can you be a Gospel-influence in the community and neighborhood in which you live? **Synodical worker and officer**, how can you keep your own eyes focused, as Jesus asked, on the field ripe for harvest? How can you encourage inward-looking workers and congregations to widen their outlook to scrutinize the greater picture, to work hard at planning to bring God's fullness in Christ to the world's emptiness?

How do we begin our personal lives of witness to our Savior's work? Let's take some time away from budgets, and amalgamations, and programs, and organizational restructuring. Let's spend a quiet moment for introspection, if you will, some time to delve into the Word, to absorb the soothing comfort of Isaiah 61. Then ask yourself and one another an army of questions about who you are in God's eyes and about what you will be doing to share this most comforting Word of God with your friends and neighbors.

The asking of these questions may begin in the Bible study of this hour, but the answering will be completed throughout the course of the convention, on your way home, and when you settle back into your communities. May the worship and messages of this convention make a difference for you in the rest of your lives!

**WE SHARE THE PROMISE  
WITH OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS**

**Isaiah 61:1-3**

- 1) **The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,**
- 2) **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,**
- 3) **to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion -  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord  
for the display of his splendor.**

**A. Background--This Lesson is:**


- one of the most comforting in the Old Testament
- an extraordinary promise of good news to the sinful, wayward, exiled, captive, exhausted, and frustrated people of God
- an introduction of the One who is to bring the future blessing to Zion (the Church)
- a promise to be taken to heart by Old Testament believers living in their ADVENT SEASON, waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Messiah)
- a promise fulfilled in the New Testament, the content of which is to be shared by us Christians today as we await the Lord's final advent

**B. Fulfillment of This Promise**

- Read Luke 4:14-21 and compare it with the reading above.
- Who is the perfect fulfillment of the promises in Isaiah 61? \_\_\_\_\_

- Jesus, anointed for his work, not only announces the great gifts of God; he also dispenses them.
- To whom does the Lord dispense his gifts?

### **C. Content of This Fulfilled Promise and Its Meaning for You**

- 1) Who are the **poor**?
- 2) Who are the **brokenhearted**?
- 3) Who are the **captives**?
- 4) Who are the **prisoners**?
- 5) What is the **day of vengeance** for all of the above who have not heard and believed the Gospel?
- 6) For discussion:
  - a) Do unchurched people think about their spiritual plight?
  - b) "The soul is never at rest until it finds its rest in God" (Augustine).
  - c) Do you believe that most unchurched persons are turned off by the suggestion of a conversation about spiritual matters, or do they hunger for spiritual talk about the welfare of their soul?
- 7) During the course of this convention and when you return home, think of people you may know or consider as friends among your associates (at work or play) or your neighbors who may still be living in the categories listed above (questions 1 - 5). **Make a list of their names:** 

Since the gracious Lord, through the Means of Grace, has delivered you from the status of spiritual captivity, give sincere thought to the possibility that **you** may be the person to bring the good news of Jesus as Savior to the people listed above!

- 8) A witness is one who has seen, knows, and believes that God has been good in Christ. Look at **THE PROMISES** fulfilled in Christ! Look at the gifts God has given to the poor in spirit, those who see their **ALLNESS** in the Lord's Christ! Look at the gifts of God to you! Although they are represented in physical pictures, they are really spiritual gifts of forgiveness, rejuvenation, and

sanctification. They are the prized possession of all who are attached to Christ, the Vine (John 15). **They are your gifts!** ~~ESKES~~

**Good news instead of bad news!  
Bound up wounds instead of brokenheartedness!  
Freedom instead of captivity!  
Comfort instead of grief!  
A crown of beauty instead of ashes!  
The oil of gladness instead of mourning!  
A garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair!**

9. Take five minutes right now to answer the following question. (Add to your thoughts during the course of the convention as you worship and as you listen to the various reports.)

**QUESTION: "What does everything in #8 mean for me?"**

- a) personally/spiritually:
  
- b) for my life with my spouse/family:
  
- c) for my life in my neighborhood and among my friends (personal evangelism):
  
- d) for my life in my work/calling:
  
- e) for my participation in my congregation's outreach work:
  
- f) for my participation in my District's mission work:
  
- g) for my participation in my Synod's mission work:

- 10) What does it mean to be called an **OAK of righteousness** (v.3)? (Read Isaiah 61:10 for an additional commentary.)
- 11) God plants and establishes you, an oak of his righteousness, **for the display of his splendor** (v. 3). How can you display God's splendor to your friends and neighbors?
- 12) **Thank the Lord and sing his praise! Tell ev'ryone what he has done!** How will this song of thanks (CW p.36) before dismissal serve as a reminder to you of this convention Bible study?

**D. Raise Your Voice Like a Trumpet (Isaiah 58:1)!**

Sometimes even veteran Christians shy away from witnessing to their friends and neighbors because they do not feel confident in what they should say. Take some time now (and later). Gather the thoughts from this Bible study. **Put them into the form of a personal mission statement.** Your personal mission statement might include answers to questions such as these:

- 1) Who am I?
- 2) What am I?
- 3) Who has made me what I am?
- 4) Whom can I serve with the Gospel? (Think of C. 7 and 9)

**My Personal Mission Statement** ✍

**E. Some Examples of Friend/Neighbor Witnessing**

- 1) Read John 1:35-50.  
Whom did Andrew tell about Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_  
Whom did Philip tell about Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

- 2) Read John 4.  
What two doctrines did Jesus use when talking with the Samaritan woman?

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What can we learn from Jesus' approach to this woman? \_\_\_\_\_

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What did the woman do after she learned that Jesus was the Messiah (vv. 28-29)?

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## F. Concluding Thoughts

Jesus said, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). We are living in an increasingly non-Christian country and world similar to that of the first apostles. The mission field is right outside our front and back doors. There is only DEATH without Jesus Christ. But God has armed you and me with LIFE in Christ. Share the GOOD NEWS!

Wayne I. Schulz

# **WE SHARE THE PROMISE WITH OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS**

## Notes for Bible Study Leaders

### **A & B. Background and Fulfillment**

This study is intended to lead the participants into a greater appreciation of Christianity through the words of Isaiah 61:1-3. The reading certainly shows us what we were (lost) and what we are (found and redeemed). It also portrays vividly what life is like for the lost (unbelievers, indifferent, unchurched, unshepherded friends, acquaintances, neighbors). The study attempts to lead the participant into a greater awareness and understanding of the heart of the lost and their consequent needs. It also shows that the only remedy for the lostness of the lost is the comforting Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ.

While we often use the term "friendship witnessing," much more than "friendliness" is needed. Friendship witnessing is building bridges to people, listening to them, understanding them better, in the hopes of leading them to the Christ-centered Word of God. Friendship witnessing means **finding** the lost, **caring** for them, **sharing** the Gospel with them, and **inviting** them to dig into the Scriptures by attending the pastor's Bible Information Class and, ultimately, the congregation's worship. Friendship witnessing could also be called "personal evangelism."

The emphasis in this lesson is to lead people to concentrate on Christ and the special gifts which he has won for us. This is in contrast to conversations which turn to the subject of "church" and often end there. In such conversations Christian witnessing seldom takes place. The subject of "churches" can deflect a Christian witness. This lesson literally begs the reader to look at Christ and life with or without his supreme sacrifice. This is the heart of personal evangelism.

You may have individuals read the various verses of Isaiah 61:1-3. Or, divide the class into two groups and have the groups read these wonderful words antiphonally.

When Christ said, "This day this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," he meant that the time of which Isaiah spoke had now arrived. The prophecy would be fulfilled in the life and work of Christ and in the course of the history of the Church through the proclamation of the Gospel. Israel's deliverance from extinction in Babylon served as "predictive analogy of the worldwide release of all prisoners languishing hopelessly under sentence of eternal death" (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, p. 488). See also chapter 60.

### **C. Content of This Fulfilled Promise and Its Meaning for You**

The objective of questions 1-6 is to enlist discussion. What is in the heart of the unchurched? Many of the unchurched have structured tall facades around their lives. In this way they attempt to protect themselves from what they know they are.



How are the unchurched "poor, brokenhearted, captives, and prisoners?" Wrestle with these concepts!

Often in speaking about the unchurched, remarks are made about not seeking to witness to wealthy people. Perhaps the wealthy have built higher structures around themselves. At the same time, they have the same spiritual needs as all people. It is interesting to note that when Jesus discussed the difficulty the wealthy have in entering into eternal life, shortly thereafter Jesus went to the home of Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector "and was wealthy" (Luke 18:25-27 and Luke 19). And we know the rest of that Law-Gospel witness!

Question #6 reminds us that the unchurched think about church more often than we might expect. Many people are dying with the hope that someone would just talk to them about spiritual things. Heart-to-heart listening and conversation that leads to Christ is a most precious gift to offer to people.

Question #7 asks that you allow for a couple minutes of silence so that people can think of names to write down. If they cannot think of a single unchurched person, it may be good for them to remember that they are Christ's light and salt on this earth. As such, they are to look at the fields white for harvest. It is time for all Christians to make a special effort to search for the lost.

Point #8 leads into the discussion of #9. Give participants ample time to reflect on their particular lives and situations. Let them apply Isaiah 61 to their lives and their service to the Lord. Some may wish to share something with the group at this time. Do not force anyone to read what he has written. It can be somewhat emotional to work through #9. Some may wish to complete #9 as the week progresses.

Question #10 refers to Christians as OAKS, not dried out twigs or weeping willows. Let the students discuss this picture of Christians. Christians are on the side of Christ the Victor! They find their strength in him.

#### **D. Raise Your Voice Like a Trumpet!**

This is an opportunity for each participant to write out a brief mission statement relative to personal evangelism based on Isaiah 61. Leave some time for this, if possible. Again, if someone wants to share what he has written, you may allow it. Others may wish to complete the personal mission statement at a later date.

#### **E. Some Examples of Friendship Witnessing**

There may not be time for this. If time is available, let the participants dig into the two references. In both cases people were brought to see Jesus. Friendship and friendliness are not enough. We strive to bring people to see Jesus through the study of the Scriptures. We plant the seed of the Word (or pave the way for others to plant). The Lord gives the increase.

Additional examples of personal evangelism: Genesis 43:23ff; Exodus 18:9ff; Ruth 1:16ff; 2 Kings 5:2ff; Daniel 1:8ff; Daniel 3:16ff; Daniel 6:10ff; Luke 8:26ff; Acts 8:11-8; Acts 8:26ff; 1 Corinthians 7:13,14; 1 Peter 3:1,2; Matthew 5:14-16; 1 Peter 2:11,12. Offer them for those who wish to do additional study.

**Thank you for serving!**

# WE SHARE THE PROMISE

## WITH OUR OFFERINGS

### A Bible Study on First Timothy 6: 17-19 A Rich Person's Bible Study

The July 7 *Kiplinger Washington Letter* reported annual per-capita church contributions in the mainline denominations. Episcopalians gave the most, \$640 on average. Assemblies of God, \$625. Presbyterians, \$610. Baptists, \$545. Mormons, \$525. Jews, \$510. Lutherans, \$410. Methodists, \$380. Catholics, \$160. Are we to conclude that Lutherans are poor, not very well-off?

It was twenty years ago or so when I heard the suggestion that every pastor ought to conduct "A Rich Man's Bible Study." Since we live in a more gender-sensitive age, we modify the suggestion slightly and offer "A Rich Person's Bible Study."

The Apostle Paul himself singled out this rather exclusive student body when he wrote: "Command those who are *rich* in this present world ... (First Timothy 6:17)." The apostle likely aroused curiosity then just as his words arouse our curiosity now. We wonder: Who are the rich? What amount of wealth qualifies a person to be characterized as rich in this present world?

It is easy to recall Jesus' negative comments on wealth. Jesus targeted the rich fool in one of his parables. Jesus told how beggarly poor Lazarus fared much better eternally than the wealthy estate owner. Jesus also used his words to draw the unforgettable picture of a rich man trying to squeeze through an opening that was only large enough to accommodate a thread.

Perhaps this easy recall explains why we resist the label *rich*.

It is not so easy to remember positive examples of wealth, though the Bible makes it clear that God blesses some Christians materially and abundantly. Matthew and Zaccheus were certainly men of substance even if questions exist about the source of their wealth. It was a rich man from Arimathea who provided our Savior's body a burial place among the rich. Barnabas, Paul's early missionary companion, divested himself of a field and donated the proceeds to the church. (Interesting that the sinful actions of Ananias and Sapphira are better known than the positive parallel of Barnabas.) Lydia, the merchant of purple cloth to Macedonia's rich and famous, was likely a woman of means herself.

Admittedly, it is a daunting and arbitrary exercise to classify people as rich or poor, as below the poverty level or above the wealthy level.

Quintus Servilius Caepio discovered the mysteriously hidden Gold of Tolosa. He gladly claimed it as his own, all of it.

Caepio came to survey the hoard, and gaped. He was flabbergasted. There were roughly 50,000 bars of gold, each weighing about 15 pounds; 15,000 talents altogether. And there were 10,000 bars of silver, each weighing 20 pounds; 3,500 talents of silver altogether. (*The First Man In Rome* by Colleen McCullough)

Who would dispute that the Gold of Tolosa made Caepio a wealthy man? Names like Rockefeller and Hughes, Sam Walton (deceased founder of WalMart) also bring great wealth to mind. Did the Apostle

Paul intend his recommendation for a rich person's Bible study only for people with their vast sums or Caepio's hoard?

About two years ago Prof. John Brug of our seminary shared some thought-provoking statistics on world wealth. The statistics were recorded in *World Monitor* magazine.

The world's richest 20% receive more than \$7,500 per family member per year. They enjoy a lifestyle unknown in the past. They eat meat and processed packaged food. They drink from disposable containers. They live in climate controlled buildings, with major appliances and electrical gadgets. They travel in cars and planes. They use a lot of disposable goods. This 20% receives 64% of the worlds' income, 32 times as much as the poorest 20%. (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 90, No. 2, Spring 1993)

The application is simple. We eat our fill of beef, pork, chicken and fish. We drink our coke and Pepsi out of bottles and cans. We are warmed by furnaces and cooled by air conditioners. We walk for exercise, not out of necessity. We need more and more land to bury our disposable waste. We are counted among the richest 20%.

God, who is the Great Determiner of the times and the exact places that people live their earthly lives (Acts 17:26), has determined that we live in a time and place of considerable wealth. We wring our hands over recessions and fret about money for retirement; all the while we enjoy a standard of living well above 80% of the world's population.

I was born long after the Great Depression and times were no longer tough when I was a youngster. Still, I recall how infrequently we ate at restaurants. I remember what a treat it was when I earned money from a paper route and could stop off at a downtown cafe to buy just a hamburger. I contrast that with today's proliferation of restaurants and the ease with which we frequent them.

It bears repeating: God, the Great Determiner of the times and the exact places that people live, has determined that we live in a time and place of considerable wealth.

We are also glad to confess: God, the Great Benefactor of our Salvation, has made us spiritually wealthy. The Bible even uses financial language to describe our spiritual blessings. Notably, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was *rich*, yet for your sakes he became *poor*, so that you through his *poverty* might become *rich*" (Second Corinthians 8:9). Our Savior willingly gave up everything to make us rich beyond measure or expectation. In our wealth we possess:

- the love God lavishes on us
- a fortune of free forgiveness
- the precious presence of God
- an inheritance in heaven.

Conclusion: Most of us, possibly all of us, ought to take places in *A Rich Person's Bible Study* so we can see how God would have us use our wealth to SHARE THE PROMISE.

Read aloud in unison:

**Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment (verse 17).**

Note the interplay of words:

those who are rich ...

not to put their hope in wealth ...

hope in God, who richly provides ...

List a few of the ways in which God richly provides for you:

### **hope in wealth**

Read Jesus' brief parable (Luke 12:16-21) about a man obsessed with money. How did the rich man put his hope in wealth? What are some of the ways in which modern people put their hope in wealth?

Read Ecclesiastes 5:10. Use your own words to paraphrase the verse.

### **wealth ... is so uncertain**

Our culture tends to equate wealth with security. We even title our program of public insurance *Social Security*. Can you cite other terminology used to give the impression that wealth equals certainty?

Read Ecclesiastes 2:18-19. What aspect of wealth's uncertainty is mentioned in these verses?

A year ago many investment advisers urged clients to purchase shares of the Mexican phone company, *Telefonos de Mexico*, for a solid investment. When Mexico devalued its currency in December of 1994, the company's stock price fell almost overnight from a high over \$60 per share to a low under \$30 per share. Investors saw the value of their investment sliced in half, not because they invested in a bad company, but because of wealth's uncertainty. Can you cite other examples of wealth's uncertain nature?

"Earthly riches may disappear overnight or may dwindle and melt away like snow in the sun."  
(Lenski)

Agree or Disagree? Wealth is so uncertain it can't even be trusted to do the church's work. (Is a large amount of money a guarantee that the gospel will be shared?)

### **God ... provides everything ... for our enjoyment**

Evaluate the following statements in the light of verse 17:

- It is okay for Christians to own a camper but not a boat with a cabin.
- Christians ought to feel guilty about taking an expensive vacation.
- It is sinful for Christians to waste their money on bowling, skiing, etc.

Agree or disagree? God does not begrudge his people the wealth that he gives them.

Read First Timothy 6:6-10. How do these words provide balance to the truth that God provides wealth for our enjoyment?

Summary Sentence:

Use your own words to briefly restate the truth of God expressed in verse 17.

Read aloud in unison:

**Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life (verses. 18 and 19).**

**rich in good deeds, ... generous and willing to share**

Mention several good deeds of which a rich person might be capable (for example, making a poor person's rent payment):

God provides New Testament Christians, not with a law-code that prescribes specific obedience (the Old Testament tithe), but with evangelical principles that we are to apply and implement. That we be generous and willing to share is such a principle. What does it mean to be generous? Why is this such a difficult question to answer?

**treasure ... for the coming age**

The treasures that await us in heaven obviously include:

- no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Revelation 21:4)
- bodies ... like Jesus' glorious body (Philippians 3:21)
- an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (First Peter 1:4)
- the crown of righteousness (Second Timothy 4:8)
- street ... of pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:21)

Another treasure of heaven is presented in Jesus' parable of The Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-9).

Read the parable and discuss the point of the parable.

When we use our worldly wealth to support the work of SHARING THE PROMISE, God's Holy Spirit works through the Word of the Gospel. He calls people from unbelief to faith. They become children of God and heirs of heaven. When we die and enter heaven, those *friends* will await us and will extend a welcome into eternal dwellings.

Recall the names of several people who have been converted to faith in Jesus Christ and recently become members of your congregation. Write their names on the lines below and count them among your *friends* who will welcome you into heaven.

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Recall the names of several people from every tribe and language and people and nation who have been reached through mission efforts supported by our wealth. Use the pages of any *Northwestern*

*Lutheran* as a resource. Write their names on the lines below and count them among your *friends* who will welcome you into heaven.

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**the life that is truly life**

People want “real value” for their money. People want “sound investments” that promise a “good return.” Is there any investment of worldly wealth that offers a better return than investment in the life that is truly life?

**Personal Application:**

The Spirit continually enlightens me through his Word. Today he leads me to reflect on the wealth that God has provided me. God’s great love moves me to put the Word into practice and **SHARE THE PROMISE** by

increasing my offering this next Sunday with an additional  
 \$10     \$100     \$1,000     \$10,000     \$100,000

continuing to make this more generous offering  
 weekly     monthly     quarterly     annually

rejoicing that God enables me to give as generously as I presently give.

**Pray aloud in unison:**

You know our resources, O God. You know the offerings we bring. You know the circumstances from which they come. Purify our hearts, we pray. By the vast riches of the love of Christ move your people to generosity. Bless our gifts that they may be true reflections of your gracious giving. Bless our gifts and use them to **SHARE THE PROMISE**. Amen.

Rev. Ronald Muetzel

## **WE SHARE THE PROMISE INTO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**

As we look to the future we do well to listen to the voices of the past which may encourage and direct us.

When we reflect on the sharing of the promise during the first millennium after the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, we might consider it as a millennium of **RECOGNITION** and **ESTABLISHMENT**.

It was during these years that Christianity was officially recognized after centuries of mission activity and persecution. The apostles together with the early church carried the promise to Africa, Asia, and southern Europe. They turned the world upside down in their zeal and determination to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the world. Persecutions scattered believers. Thus it was in the Mediterranean world, so that the Apostle Paul in about the year 60 could write that "all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing" (*Colossians 1:5-6*).

The spread of the gospel in the early years of the Christian church was largely due to the volunteer work of ordinary, everyday Christians.

The Bible was translated into various languages and Christian literature became an effective method of sharing the promise.

Finally, with the Edict of Toleration in 313 under Emperor Constantine, Christianity became a recognized religion.

It was during the first millennium that the ecumenical creeds were formulated, based on the teachings of the scriptures. This contribution to the doctrinal basis of the church is contained in our Lutheran confessions and in the hearts of our members even today.

The Good News was spread beyond the Roman world in the latter years of the first millennium. Men like Martin of Tours and Patrick went throughout France and Ireland preaching God's Word in the fourth and fifth centuries. Boniface labored in Germany in the eighth century. Ansgar worked in the ninth century as the apostle to the Scandinavians, while Cyril and Methodius reached out into the Balkans and went as far as Moravia. Finally, in 987 Vladimir of Kiev established the church among the Russians. Mission activity to the east seems to have been more extensive than intensive. Inscriptions in India and China indicate that the message of "Jesus Christ, the true Messiah" had reached even to these lands.

The first millennium marked what is perhaps the greatest era for the spread of Christianity in the history of the world.

If the first millennium was a time of recognition and establishment for the Christian church, then the second millennium was one of **REFORMATION** and **EMERGENCE**.

Perhaps the two greatest events of the second millennium in the history of the Christian church are the schism that occurred in 1054 and the reformation begun in 1517.

A major division in the church took place when the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Catholic Churches parted ways. The dark ages of the western church ensued during which time the doctrines and practices of the church were so mutilated and corrupted that reformation was the only answer to the situation.

God led a Luther to examine and restate the doctrines of the church on the basis of the inspired and inerrant Word. A church emerged from this purifying process that we hold dear to our hearts.

The newly invented moveable type printing process made possible the rapid production and distribution of the Bible, catechisms, and other Christian literature.

While the first millennium was a period of vigorous mission activity, the major portion of the second millennium was one of complacency. The Lord's command to go and make disciples of all

nations for a long time was understood, even by theologians, to have been given only to the apostles and to have been fulfilled by them.

Among Lutherans some prominent laymen broached the subject of missions. One Count Truches addressed the theological faculty at Wittenburg saying, "Since faith comes alone from preaching, I would know how east and south and west shall be converted to the only saving faith since I see no one of the Augsburg Confession go forth thither."

New worlds were to be conquered with the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus and the exploration of dark Africa by David Livingstone. A new mission spirit was emerging from the rubble of complacency and disregard for the great commission. And this mission spirit was largely the result of the efforts of laymen. Through mission societies the Lutheran Church followed immigrants from Germany and Scandinavia resulting in the emergence of many Lutheran synods in America including our own Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1850. The modern mission movement had its beginning at the start of the nineteenth century.

By the grace of God, the promise was shared in this new world and throughout the whole world for these centuries of time.

If the first millennium was a time of recognition and establishment and the second a time of reformation and emergence, then let us look to the third millennium as a time of **REAFFIRMATION** and **EXPANSION** of the church.

As we stand at the threshold of the new millennium and look into the future, what do we see and anticipate? What can we learn from the past?

Likely we see a continuation of a degenerating society and one that is ever increasingly hostile to the message of the scriptures. A humanistic and universalistic philosophy invades and will attempt to pervade our society.

Our country, designed to be the melting pot of the world, saw many immigrants arrive from Europe to be integrated into our society. The church was extremely active in expanding its outreach to assimilate these immigrants into its midst. After all, they were our people, they spoke our language, they enjoyed our culture.

The years that lie ahead will likely be similar in nature as thousands, yes millions, of people "invade" our nation from Latin America and Asia. But there is a difference. They do not speak our language, and they may have a completely different culture.

In sharing the promise into the third millennium, the greatest opportunities and challenges in our nation will be to meet these new people and assimilate them into our congregations, or our church will die. We will be a "white" church, an island in a nation where Hispanic, Asian, African and Native American cultures will predominate. In our country cross-cultural ministry may well be the primary means of sharing the promise in the third millennium.

As we lift our eyes beyond the shores of our own country, we see nations where the doors for Christian mission work are closing, and yet in other areas are opening. We need to be aware and prepared for both eventualities.

Muslim and atheistic governments seek to limit or even to eliminate the activities of Christian missionaries. This has happened recently in the mission fields of our own church body in Indonesia and elsewhere.

At the same time new doors for mission work in countries long closed have opened in a most wonderful way. With the fall of the Berlin wall hundreds of millions of people who in our lifetime were not permitted to worship as they pleased and were even put to death for their religious convictions are now free to hear the promise.

Sharing that promise with the people of eastern Europe and Asia may well be the greatest mission prospect in the new millennium.

Personally I have witnessed the religious slavery imposed by many governments. I have met a Bella Kiss, a Lutheran pastor, imprisoned seven years in Romania for preaching the gospel; a



Jewess, Violetta Comfort, scheduled to be shipped to Auschwitz during the Second World War but reprieved to remain in Bulgaria and now baptized as a Christian in our Lutheran church fifty years later; a Durim Shyti, an Albanian, imprisoned twelve years, tortured, left without legs, but baptized by your missionaries a couple of months ago; a Johann Wegner, German-Russian, confined to a Stalin Gulag for eleven years, who taught Luther's Small Catechism to his children when their Lutheran pastor died in the Gulag. Need I go on? There are thousands, yes, millions of people in these nations who can be part of an expanding mission effort into the third millennium. And then, what about a China, an India, a southeast Asia that are virtually untouched by the gospel which needs to be shared desperately with these people?

But we don't have to go overseas to see people in spiritual need, do we? We can see that need in the faces of abused children, divorced women, drug addicted fathers, families divided, work habits warped, greed abounding and abortion destroying. We need to share the promise with our families too, in order to bring about a more stable, biblically-based family life.

Your church today and in the new millennium will have a decisive role to play in all of these activities in our home, our country and our world. But when we look at the church, what do we see?

In many church bodies we see a dilution of doctrine leading to the union of churches without doctrinal unity. We see a denial of basic biblical doctrines concerning the resurrection, creation, the deity of Jesus Christ, as well as the role of man and woman.

The question is, how can we in an atmosphere of declining family values, lowering of doctrinal standards in many churches, and of increasing challenges in the world, share the promise into the third millennium?

First of all, we need to appreciate the message of the gospel that is in our hearts and preached from our pulpits and taught in our classrooms. Churches become weak when members ignore the use of Word and sacrament. Christ himself is the embodiment of the promise. It is he who is the only Way, Truth, and Life. It is he who gives us the word of reconciliation. It is he who instituted the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These are the marks of the church. A family, a congregation, a church body that faithfully reads, learns, and takes to heart the promise will then willingly and aggressively share that promise.

A Lutheran pastor reflects on the naivete and misunderstanding of many church members and also church leaders when he does his part in exposing many misconceptions.

One misconception states, "The church must market the gospel." The gospel is not a product to be sold like sausage. It is to be proclaimed. The time-honored method of preaching was performed by Peter on Pentecost. It has been used ever since. It still remains the most effective way to share the promise. "Nothing keeps people with the church more than good preaching" (Apology XXIV). Preaching the Word is the source of the church's missionary power.

A second misconception is, "The church must have exciting worship." To many that even means a pentecostal style of worship. Is it possible or necessary to "shake out" a new, better worship service Sunday after Sunday when a time-honored liturgical worship service, developed over centuries of time, is available? To be sure, our liturgical practices should meet the cultural needs of the members. But, let us remember, it is also to be Lutheran. And as certainly it is, it is to be Christ-centered.

Another misconception is that the "members are customers." The church is not an ecclesiastical "WalMart." We wish to be a friendly church, but people do not come to worship because we are friendly. They come because they want to be instructed, comforted and/or inspired. It is only through faithful use of Word and sacrament that faith is engendered in the heart and strengthened.

How are we to share the promise into the third millennium? By the use of time-honored methods: through sound liturgical worship, through faithful preaching and teaching of the Word, and through faithful administration of the sacraments.

How are we to share the promise into the third millennium? By making use of every God-pleasing method to proclaim the gospel.

We need to use laypersons as catalysts and workers in God's kingdom. It was laypeople in Europe that energized the church in the later part of this second millennium to carry out the great commission. We use volunteer laypersons extensively in our home congregations to carry out its assignments. But have laypersons considered serving the Lord overseas in our world missions as lay volunteers? There are many opportunities to do so.

We need to expand the influence of the gospel in the hearts of people through a more concerted, organized effort to provide doctrinally sound, soul-inspiring Christian literature in many languages. The church of the early Christian era as well as the middle ages used literature as a means to share the gospel. The day may come when we are forced to leave certain mission fields, but the printed word remains to be read again and again. By the printed word we can reach into societies where we may not have the resources to go personally.

We also need to use the new and modern methods of the age to proclaim the gospel. Cyril and Methodius invented a new alphabet to share the Word with the slavic nations. Luther used the printing press to spread the gospel in his day. We use radio, television, and other means to proclaim the Good News. Then let's always be aware of new, God-pleasing means to preach the Word in the new millennium.

It is our Lord Jesus Christ who tells us and encourages us to share the promise in the third millennium. He says, "**GO**, make disciples, **BAPTIZE** in the name of the Triune God. **TEACH** them my **WORD**. **FORGIVE** the sins of the penitent. **REMEMBER** my death in my **SUPPER**."

It is in believing the gospel and following Christ that men and women will be ready and willing to live and even to die for Christ while sharing the promise also in the third millennium.

## **WE SHARE THE PROMISE INTO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**

### **A Bible Study on Revelation 3:7-13**

#### **THE HISTORICAL SETTING**

The book of Revelation, written by the Apostle John about the year 95 or 96 AD, begins with letters addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor.

While these letters do not symbolize later events in the history of the New Testament church, there is something of value that the church of today and tomorrow can learn from them.

The church in Philadelphia has survived to the present, the only one of the seven to do so. At the time of John it was found in an important wine marketing region. The city was named after its founder, King Attalus Philadelphus.

The letter was sent to the "angel" or messenger, the pastor of the church, through John as it was revealed to him by Jesus Christ.

**A. WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THIS MESSAGE?**

**V. 7 - Three statements distinguish the Author.**

1. "Him who is holy and true"

Read:

*2 Kings 19:22* - What name is given to the Lord here?

*Isaiah 43:3* - What additional name is ascribed to the Lord?

*John 6:69* - Who does Peter say that Jesus is?

These passages affirm that Jesus, the Son of God, is the Holy One.

Read:

*John 1:9-17 and 14:6* - Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_.

This expression is used by John repeatedly in his writings.

2. The One who "holds the key of David"

Read:

*Isaiah 22:20-22* - Jesus here quotes Isaiah, and Eliakim becomes a type of Christ because of his authority over the keys of Hezekiah's palace.

*Revelation 1:18 and Matthew 16:19* - What two-fold power does Jesus' key have?

This power of the keys is given to the church.

3. The One who "opens" what "no one can shut"

Read:

*John 20:21-23* - What is the key that opens heaven to the believer and closes it to the unbeliever?

*Matthew 18:15-18* - Who has the power to open and close the doors of heaven today?

As Christians we are to exercise the power of the keys. By the preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments, we share the promise into the third millennium. This is the means that Jesus has given to each individual believer, each congregation, and to our church body.

**B. WHAT IS JESUS' MESSAGE?**

1. PRAISE

**V. 8 - "I know your deeds."**  
**"I know you have little strength."**

According to verse 8 and 10a why did Jesus praise this congregation?

Of how many pastors and congregations as well as church bodies can the Lord say this today?

What is included in keeping God's Word?

What are some of the basic doctrines of scripture that are under attack in the world today?

What are some ways we can use to prepare ourselves  
as individuals,  
as a congregation,  
as a church body to remain faithful to God's Word?

Though weak perhaps in numbers or prestige, the congregation in Philadelphia was loyal. God used three hundred men, not thousands as Gideon wanted to use, to defeat the Midianites so that the Israelites could not boast but trust in God (*Judges 7:1-8*). So in the church today, it is the power of God's Word, not numerical strength, that gives promise for sharing the promise into the third millennium.

2. PROMISE

**V. 8 and 9 - The First Promise**

Who comprised the mission field of the congregation in Philadelphia?

What phrase in verse nine shows us that only God can convert people?

What is your role in bringing someone to faith?

What open doors are there in the world that  
you might consider personally for sharing the promise?  
your congregation might consider in carrying out cross-cultural ministry?  
our church body might consider in reaching out to the lost sheep of this world?

What might be some new mission methods that we are not using now but could use in the third millennium?

What happens when we fail to go through open doors the Lord has presented to us?

How can we know that God has presented us with an open door in our church work?

When success, in a worldly sense, crowns our efforts, it is the Lord's doing, not ours. The work of conversion is the Lord's although it is done through believers today.

God promises us (*Isaiah 55:10-13*) that his Word will not come back without results. It will accomplish what he wants accomplished in calling the elect to believe the promise.

#### V. 10 - The Second Promise

What is the "hour of trial" that is going to come on "the whole world"?

What are some of the trials and temptations that will be faced in the third millennium by

you as a Christian?

your congregation in your community?

our church body in society?

Jesus is obviously speaking here about the end time. He promises the elect that the great distress will be shortened (*Matthew 24:22*). He will guard, hold, keep, preserve us against loss and damage. Jesus' promise is not that he will keep us from temptation but that he will keep us in temptation as we patiently wait for his second advent.

#### V. 11a - The Third Promise

Why is the Lord's second coming an encouragement for us as we look to sharing the promise into the third millennium?

How is it a comfort for us?

We cannot determine when Christ will come in glory (*Acts 1:7*). Will it be in the third millennium? "I am coming soon" speaks of his entire coming and not merely of its end. It may seem that the Lord is not keeping his promise when we look forward to a third millennium after Jesus' words as written here. Yet, he continues to show his mercy to the world.

Read *2 Peter 3:9-14*.

### 3. PETITION

#### V. 11b - What are we to hold on to?

Read:

*Romans 3:21-26 and especially verse 22* - Saving faith lays hold onto the righteousness of Christ.

*John 5:24* - Through faith in Christ we have eternal life.

*Matthew 24:13* - One who continues in this faith shall be saved.

Can you think of a special gift of God's grace that he has given to you?

your congregation?

our church body to use in sharing the promise into the third millennium?

What are some ways in which many lose the crown that could be theirs?

This petition of our Lord will not be fulfilled until his coming on the day of judgment. And until that day we have the opportunity and the responsibility to share the wonderful promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ with all the strength God gives us.

4. PLEDGE

**V. 12a - "I will make you a pillar"**

Read:

*Galatians 2:9* - There were and are many "pillars" in the church.

*Revelation 21:22* - The temple of God in heaven is eternal.

*Psalms 16:11* - Once in heaven we will never leave.

**V. 12b - "I will write on him"**

The name of my God - To write one's name on something denotes ownership.

Read:

*Ephesians 2:19* - We are members of God's family.

The name of New Jerusalem - Infinitely greater than the old Jerusalem.

Read:

*Ezekiel 48:35* - The name of the new city is revealed.

*Philippians 3:20* - This is our permanent address.

My new name - A name describes a person. Before Jesus was despised, now he is glorified.

Read:

*Revelation 19:12* - No one knows this name but Jesus himself.

*2 Corinthians 12:12* - This new name will be revealed to the saints of the New Jerusalem.

When did you become a member of God's family?

What name (not personal or family name) did you receive at that time?

What responsibilities do you incur because of your new name?

How does this affect your sharing of the promise into the third millennium?

**C. A FINAL ADMONITION**

**V. 13 - Listen, we can learn from the church in Philadelphia.**

Philadelphia was a faithful church. It remained faithful to the proclamation of God's Word and to the confession of the Lord's name before men. It received a special promise (verses 8 and 9) and special protection (verse 10). The Lord blesses individuals, congregations, and church bodies who faithfully teach and proclaim his Word. The rewards may be different according to God's wisdom and our individual circumstances. May the Lord bless us and keep us, may his face shine on us and be gracious to us, may he look on us with favor and give us peace!

*Harold A. Essmann*

## **SHARING THE PROMISE FROM CONVENTION TO CONVENTION**

Since the first century, Christians have had reason to come together at conventions (see Bible study #1, Acts 15:1-35). At the conventions, they heard reports, addressed issues, resolved differences, set policy. Once a convention disbanded, however, the participants along with the rest of the church were responsible to implement the convention's decisions and continue to share the promise of Christ.

Under God, the church worked together, and an orderly process emerged in fulfilling the church's mission from Christ.

### **1. Bringing the convention to the people**

For a convention to have any effect, the decisions of the convention need to reach the churches.

**Read** - Acts 15:30-33

**Examine** - What happened immediately after the Council at Jerusalem?

What besides information was delivered?

Was the communication one-sided? Explain.

**Read** - Acts 16:4,5

**Examine** - What evidence is there that the "convention" decisions had a lasting impact on the church?

**Apply** - How do we convey the convention decisions to the church today?

In what spirit should we receive them?

List ways we can continue to promote and implement convention decisions today.

### **2. Doing mission work**

Church conventions care about God's work. WELS conventions invariably, therefore, direct the delegates' attention to the world-wide missions of WELS, where we share the promise of Christ with many who never knew his promises before meeting the Christians in those missions.



**Read - Acts 1:8**

**Examine -** Is mission work a choice for Christians? Explain.

Where will Christians carry their witness of Christ? From the text, illustrate what that means. If you can, look up the places on a map in your Bible.

Look up Matthew 28:19,20 (can you recite it from memory?). How does Matthew help us understand how and where to be Jesus' witnesses?

**Read - Acts 16:6-10**

**Examine -** In this case, how did God indicate that he was guiding the mission opportunities for Paul and his group?

With what spirit did Paul and his companions respond to their mission of opportunity?

**Apply -** The WELS convention ratified five new world fields. How many can you name?

In what other world fields do we as a synod have missions to share the promise of Christ?

Several other fields have warranted exploratory looks. Can you name any of them?

If God doesn't show us in a vision where to go with his gospel, how might we determine where specifically he wants us to go at any given time?

How will we want to respond?

Witnessing to Christ begins at home. Explain what a "daughter" congregation is. Is your congregation in the position to consider a daughter? In what other ways might you promote mission outreach at home and in home missions?

### **3. Training ministers to share the promise**

At the WELS 1995 convention, delegates reflected on the blessings of a pastor/teacher educational system that has provided faithful called workers for over one and a quarter centuries. They learned about the amalgamated schools in place to continue the tradition.

**Read - 2 Timothy 2:2**

**Examine - How did Paul instruct Timothy to insure ministers for the church?**

**Read - Acts 16:1-3**

**Examine - Who trained Timothy to be a pastor? How?**

**What made Timothy a good candidate? (See also 2 Timothy 3:10-17)**

**Read - Acts 13:1-3**

**Examine - Who is active in the calling and commissioning of ministers and missionaries? (Give two answers.)**

**Apply - Based on the above passages, name some qualifications we should look for in persons who might become ministers. (See also 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:6-9)**

**How does our ministerial education help assure the qualifications are met in our pastors and teachers?**

**How can the churches help assure good candidates to enter our ministerial schools? What major publishing project is under way to help with the task?**

#### **4. Administering the work**

The work we share nationally and internationally takes direction, coordination, and administration. During this biennium we are asked to consider a restructured synodical administration that will help us work more efficiently and effectively at sharing the promise.

**Read - Acts 6:1-4**

**Examine - Why did the first century church need to restructure?**

**What was the important aspect of the ministry that must not be neglected?**

**Apply - God has not ordained any specific form of New Testament church structure to do his work. Nevertheless, what kinds of concerns must we attend to in developing a structure? What is the primary concern?**

#### **5. Sharing the promise together**

Sharing the promise in the church is not just a stroll in the park. It takes dedication, hard work, sacrifice, cooperation, money, faithfulness, unselfishness, good stewardship. Countless obstacles keep the way from being smooth. Still, by God's grace, we share the promise and we see many believe it.

**Read** - Acts 2:38,39

**Examine** - In your own words, tell what the promise is.

To whom does the promise belong?

**Read** - Acts 5:18,40-42 (If time allows, the entire section 5:17-42 might be read.)

**Examine** - What kinds of obstacles did the apostles face to sharing the promise of Christ?

Did the obstacles discourage or hinder them? Explain.

What did they do day after day? Where?

What was their message?

**Apply** - What is there about the promise that makes you want to share it?

Where can you start sharing it?

In most places where we carry out Christ's mission, we are not threatened with prison or punishment. Do you know of any possible exceptions? What other kinds of obstacles do we encounter that might discourage us and hinder the work?

How can we emulate the spirit of the first century church? Give specific examples of what you can do in that spirit.

**Closing prayer:** O Lord God, merciful Father, thank you for the promise of life and salvation through the forgiveness earned by your Son. Thank you, too, for the opportunities you give us to share that promise with others near and far. Send your Spirit into our hearts by your Word. Give us power and joy to work together every day in every way to continue the mission you've given your believers. Forgive us when we fall short. Bless our feeble efforts for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Gary P. Baumler

**In what spirit should we receive them? In the spirit and with the blessing of peace. In Christ, we should encourage and strengthen one another (locally and synodically) as we work together for the greater good in God's kingdom.**

**List ways we can continue to promote and implement convention decisions today. Pastors keep the members informed. Teachers show their students how the synod works. Congregations set reasonable goals and identify projects to further the work. Make mission offerings a high priority. Stay immersed in God's Word for strength and growth. Pray.**

## **2. Doing mission work**

**Church conventions care about God's work. WELS conventions invariably, therefore direct the delegates' attention to the world-wide missions of WELS, where we share the promise of Christ with many who never knew his promises before meeting the Christians in those missions.**

**Read - Acts 1:8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**

**Examine - Is mission work a choice for Christians? Explain.  
No. With the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, we 'will be' Christ's witnesses.**

**Where will Christians carry their witness of Christ? From the text, illustrate what that means. If you can, look up the places on a map in your Bible. At home (Jerusalem, local town or city), in surrounding areas (Judea and Samaria, other cities and states), all over the world (the ends of the earth, other countries and continents).**

**Look up Matthew 28:19,20 (can you recite it from memory?). How does Matthew help us understand how and where to be Jesus' witnesses? We are to baptize and teach all of Christ's Word in all nations.**

**Read - Acts 16:6-10. Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.**

**Examine - In this case, how did God indicate that he was guiding the mission opportunities for Paul and his group? First, the Spirit prevented them (we're not told how) from entering Bithynia. Then, he gave Paul a vision of a man from Macedonia, begging Paul to go there.**

# **SHARING THE PROMISE FROM CONVENTION TO CONVENTION LEADER'S GUIDE**

**It will be helpful for the class to have markers available to return to the 'read' texts when it comes to applying them.**

Since the first century, Christians have had reason to come together at conventions (see Bible study #1, Acts 15:1-35). At the conventions, they heard reports, addressed issues, resolved differences, set policy. Once a convention disbanded, however, the participants along with the rest of the church were responsible to implement the convention's decisions and continue to share the promise of Christ.

Under God, the church worked together, and an orderly process emerged in fulfilling the church's mission from Christ.

## **1. Bringing the convention to the people**

For a convention to have any effect, the decisions of the convention need to reach the churches.

**Read - Acts 15:30-33. The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers those who had sent them.**

**Examine - What happened immediately after the Council at Jerusalem? Men (Barnabas, Paul, Judas, and Silas) went to Antioch to report the results of the council.**

What besides information was delivered?

**The messengers encouraged and strengthened the brothers at Antioch.**

Was the communication one-sided? Explain.

**No. The brothers sent Judas and Silas back with a message of peace.**

**Read - Acts 16:4,5. As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in number.**

**Examine - What evidence is there that the "convention" decisions had a lasting impact on the church? Paul, Silas, and Timothy delivered the decisions from town to town. The churches were strengthened and grew.**

**Apply - How do we convey the convention decisions to the church today? Delegates report back. WELSNET, WELS Herald, Northwestern Lutheran. Reports from synodical divisions as decisions are implemented.**

**With what spirit did Paul and his companions respond to their mission opportunity? They got ready at once to go to Macedonia and preach the gospel there.**

**Apply - The WELS convention ratified five new world fields. How many can you name? Bulgaria - Dominican Republic - Guntur, India - Russia - Thailand.**

**In what other world fields do we as a synod have missions to share the promise of Christ? Apacheland - Brazil - Colombia - Cameroon - Hong Kong - Indonesia - Japan - Malawi - Mexico - Nigeria - Taiwan - Zambia.**

**Several other fields have warranted exploratory looks. Can you name any of them? Albania, Cuba, Laos, Mozambique, Sioux Indian Reservation, Vietnam.**

**If God doesn't show us in a vision where to go with his gospel, how might we determine where specifically he wants us to go at any given time?**

**People beg us to come to them with the gospel.**

**Countries formerly closed to missions open their borders.**

**Groups of people have no other source to hear the gospel.**

**How will we want to respond? We will want to go at once to share the gospel promise.**

**Witnessing to Christ begins at home. Explain what a "daughter" congregation is. Is your congregation in the position to consider a daughter? In what other ways might you promote mission outreach at home and in home missions? The local congregation begins a second church nearby, usually from a core group of its own members. The mother church helps support it financially until it can support itself.**

**Other ways: Have an active evangelism program, canvass, advertise, adopt a mission and send special gifts, increase regular mission offerings, etc.**

### **3. Training ministers to share the promise**

**At the WELS 1995 convention, delegates reflected on the blessings of a pastor/ teacher educational system that has provided faithful called workers for over one and a quarter centuries. They learned about the amalgamated schools in place to continue the tradition.**

**Read - 2 Timothy 2:2. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.**

**Examine - How did Paul instruct Timothy to insure ministers for the church? He should entrust the Word to reliable men who were qualified to teach others.**

**Read - Acts 16:1-3. He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on**

**the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.**

**Examine - Who trained Timothy to be a pastor? How? Paul. He took Timothy along on a missionary journey.**

**What made Timothy a good candidate? (See also 2 Timothy 3:10-17) Timothy was a disciple with an excellent reputation. He grew up knowing the Holy Scriptures and trusting in Jesus Christ.**

**Read - Acts 13:1-3. In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed they placed their hands on them and sent them off.**

**Examine - Who is active in the calling and commissioning of ministers and missionaries? (Give two answers.) The Holy Spirit and the church.**

**Apply - Based on the above passages, name some qualifications we should look for in persons who might become ministers. (See also 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:6-9) Dedicated Christian, able to teach, good reputation, well-versed in Scripture, self-controlled, gentle, above reproach.**

**How does our ministerial education help assure the qualifications are met in our pastors and teachers? Students are immersed in God's Word, they learn how to teach, they get field experience, they receive good counsel.**

**How can the churches help assure good candidates to enter our ministerial schools? What major publishing project is under way to help with the task? They can identify and encourage likely candidates who, like Timothy, show promise. They can do a thorough job of instructing all members in God's Word.**

**WELS is producing the Christ-Light coordinated religion curriculum for cradle through high school.**

#### **4. Administering the work**

**The work we share nationally and internationally takes direction, coordination, and administration. During this biennium we are asked to consider a restructured synodical administration that will help us work more efficiently and effectively at sharing the promise.**

**Read - Acts 6:1-4. In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the**

**ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.**

**Examine - Why did the first century church need to restructure?**

**The disciples were distracted from the ministry of the Word of God and prayer to try and keep up with the distribution of food. The work wasn't getting done.**

**What was the important aspect of the ministry that must not be neglected?' The ministry of the Word of God.**

**Apply - God has not ordained any specific form of New Testament church structure to do his work. Nevertheless, what kinds of concerns must we attend to in developing a structure? What is the primary concern?**

**We need to involve ministers who are full of the Spirit and wisdom.**

**We need to attend to the many needs of our people.**

**We need to keep the ministry of the Word of God as the primary mission.**

#### **5. Sharing the promise together**

**Sharing the promise in the church is not just a stroll in the park. It takes dedication, hard work, sacrifice, cooperation, money, faithfulness, unselfishness, good stewardship. Countless obstacles keep the way from being smooth. Still, by God's grace, we share the promise and we see many believe it.**

**Read - Acts 2:38,39. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far of f-for all whom the Lord our God will call."**

**Examine - In your own words, tell what the promise is.**

**The promise is the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, given already in baptism.**

**To, whom does the promise belong? The promise belongs to everyone everywhere, beginning with our own children. The Lord God will call those who are his through the promise.**

**Read - Acts 5:18,40-42 (If time allows, the entire section 5:17-42 might be read.) They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail....**

**His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.**



**The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.**

**Examine - What kinds of obstacles did the apostles face to sharing the promise of Christ? They were thrown in jail, flogged, and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus.**

**Did the obstacles discourage or hinder them? Explain. No. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy of suffering for Jesus' name. They never stopped witnessing to Jesus.**

**What did they do day after day? Where? In the temple courts and from house to house they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news.**

**What was their message? Jesus is the Christ.**

**Apply - What is there about the promise that makes you want to share it? The forgiveness and life we have in Jesus is such good news that we want everyone to know about it and benefit from it.**

**Where can you start sharing it? At home and with friends.**

**In most places where we carry out Christ's mission, we are not threatened with prison or punishment. Do you know of any possible exceptions? What other kinds of obstacles do we encounter that might discourage us and hinder the work? China and other communist countries are exceptions. In other countries with unstable governments, the danger is great.**

**Today's obstacles: Fear of ridicule, the indifference of many people, language barriers, materialism, our own self-centered tendencies, etc.**

**How can we emulate the spirit of the first century church? Give specific examples of what you can do in that spirit. We can, in faith, keep on keeping on every day teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. We can talk about Jesus at home and with friends, encourage promising young people for ministry, give more for missions, volunteer to help the work at church, pray for and otherwise encourage those called to serve in ways and in places that we cannot, etc.**

**Closing prayer: O Lord God, merciful Father, thank you for the promise of life and salvation through the forgiveness earned by your Son. Thank you, too, for the opportunities you give us to share that promise with others near and far. Send your Spirit into our hearts by your Word. Give us power and joy to work together every day in every way to continue the mission you've given your believers. Forgive us when we fall short. Bless our feeble efforts for Jesus' sake. Amen.**