

# CONNECTIONS

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FLORENCEIDOT, PIXABAY



## And Jesus Steps In \_\_\_\_\_

Essay by Rev. Dr. Kent Groethe



Joel Rosenberg, a New York Times bestselling author and an expert on Middle East affairs, tells an extraordinary story in one of his books. He relates that two Christian missionaries in Iran were driving with Bibles in their car hoping to distribute them. All of a sudden they had car problems and had to pull to the side of the road. Almost immediately, an old man began to knock on the window.

He asked them where the books were. “What books?” they responded.

“The books about Jesus,” he said.

The old man related that an angel had appeared to him in a vision and told him about Jesus. He later discovered that everyone in his village had had a similar vision. They all came to believe in Jesus. Now there was a village full of Christians who needed to be instructed in the faith.

In another dream Jesus appeared to the old man and instructed him to walk down the mountain and stand beside the road, and someone would bring him books about Jesus. That is how he encountered the two missionaries with the Bibles.

I was very skeptical of this story, so I spoke with a retired Lutheran missionary whose ministry had been in an African country dominated by Muslims in the north and Christians in the south. I asked him if he had heard about Muslims being converted through dreams.


“Yes,” was his immediate response. “My daughter-in-law.” She had a dream when she was a little girl — a very memorable dream — in which Jesus told her he could meet all her needs. Years later, she received a Gideon Bible that taught her about this Jesus she had met in the dream, and then she encountered a Christian group that guided her to faith.

In the following several years, I heard two more stories close to home. My brother was acquainted with an Iraqi woman who attend-

ed a Lutheran church near my home. When she lived in Iraq, her sister had a dream of a man in white who was Jesus; she converted to Christianity. Then the woman my brother knew had a similar dream, became a Christian, and later moved to the United States.

The third story I heard was from a pastor in Jamestown, North Dakota, who was a close friend of mine. In conversation, he said he had recently had a wannabe jihadi in his living room who’d had a vision of Jesus while in bed one night. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” That was what he had been longing for. He was converted and is now a Christian pastor.

In all my years as a pastor in northwest Minnesota and eastern North Dakota, I had never knowingly bumped into a Muslim. I figured that if I had three stories in this land devoid of Islam, there must be tens of thousands worldwide. I began to read other reports of this great work. When at assemblies for Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ or the North American Lutheran Church, I began to stop at the booths of Christian ministries that sought to reach Muslims for Christ. At each one, I first told the ministry representatives that I was telling people that tens of thousands of Muslims have been coming to faith in Jesus through dreams and visions, then asked if that statement was accurate. All were quick to answer: “Yes.” The last one I spoke to thought it was closer to hundreds of thousands.

More Muslims have been reached for Christ in the last 20 years than in the previous 1,500 years during which mission work had minimal effect. Not anymore. This phenomenon is the smoking gun — the resurrection of Jesus is proved through these dreams and visions. Jesus is alive, he wants all people to know him, and he continues to ask us to join him in this outreach. 

**Kent Groethe** of Tucson, Arizona, is pastor at [Desert Hope Lutheran Church](#).

# Journey Through the Psalms

## Mini Bible Study Installment



### PSALM 6 (excerpt)

O Lord, rebuke me not  
in your anger, nor  
discipline me in your  
wrath. ...  
My soul also is greatly  
troubled. But you, O  
LORD — how long?  
Turn, O LORD, deliver my  
life; save me for the sake  
of your steadfast love. ...  
I am weary with my  
moaning; every  
night I flood my bed  
with tears; I drench  
my couch with my  
weeping. ...  
Depart from me, all you  
workers of evil, for the  
Lord has heard the  
sound of my weeping.  
The Lord has heard my  
plea; the Lord accepts  
my prayer.  
All my enemies shall be  
ashamed and greatly  
troubled; they shall  
turn back and be put  
to shame in a moment.


Some pain runs so deep it feels unendurable. Worse than the flu or the creaking joints of age is the empty pit of embarrassment that opens in our stomach when our shame is exposed or the sharp dread of our bad behavior wreaking havoc or the weight of a sin we're fearful to acknowledge so we carry it in silence. It is no surprise that when David describes himself as languishing, he speaks of sin so deep he feels it in his bones like an incurable illness. His sexual misconduct has been exposed. The contagious nature of his sin has played out as his sons inflict pain on his daughter and then on each other and then on the kingdom as a whole. He feels so poignantly this disease that he weeps until he is exhausted and in the midst of all of this is the heavy fear that he is unredeemable and that what his enemies whisper about him is true.

But this psalm ends not with God rebuking David, but rebuking sin itself. In a moment of repentance David sends "workers of evil" running, proclaiming in the face of his enemies and in the face of his shame, that sin will not have the last word over him and he will not languish in death. God has heard his weeping. God has seen his repentance. God has heard a plea for forgiveness. God has accepted the prayer for new life. Our psalm this month ends with a promise: when shame, guilt, and death seek to swallow us, our God delivers us into new life for the sake of his steadfast love.

Read the Psalm and reflect upon the following questions provided for personal devotions or in a short Bible study session with group discussion.

1. This psalm is often prayed during the Lenten season. How do the words of David help us meditate on the season of Lent?
2. This psalm does not point us toward death, but toward life. What in it reflects the promise of Easter?
3. How does the feeling of guilt or shame in your body compare to being sick? How does the promise of eternal life restore our bodies? How does the promise of forgiveness restore our souls?
4. Confession and forgiveness is a gift given to the church to restore us to right spirits and allow us to experience God's grace proclaimed and realized. How does this psalm explain what happens in confession? Who does the healing in both?

### PRAYER

O Lord, you are a God of unwarranted mercy and steadfast love. Please lead our hearts, which moan with the grief of sin, towards the healing promise of repentance. Comfort and strengthen us as we await the day where our weeping will be turned into songs of praise and thanksgiving, when we are reunited with you in eternal life. Amen. 

The author of this installment, **Rev. Taylor Rister-Stempniak** of Fresno, California, is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in the community of Easton.

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# Augustana District of the LCMC

Ministry Partner Focus by Aaron Deutsch



## LEARN MORE

To learn more about the Augustana District, visit [augustanadistrict.org](http://augustanadistrict.org), like us on Facebook or call the district office at 320-234-8403.

You can also contact one of our key leaders:

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The Augustana District, a growing non-geographic network of 103 congregations and 121 clergy within Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, exists to serve the body of Christ and its leaders by promoting confessional Lutheran theology, which we believe builds healthy churches and fruitful mission ventures. Served by a part-time staff of six, the Augustana District seeks to live out our core values (theology, church, and missions) in everything we do.

*"What makes the Augustana District tick?"*

I'm often asked this question. It's a question I'm always excited to answer because I can say that what the Augustana District values, above all, is "handing over the goods." Students of Jim Nestingen will recognize this phrase, as it refers to the work of preachers in proclaiming the Gospel to sinners, which is the good news of God's unrelenting mercy through Christ. For this reason, and to build up our entire association, we as a district immerse ourselves in the Catechisms, Scripture, and the proclamation of God's forgiveness, which call the dead out of their graves.

That means you can anticipate interacting with Jesus, the Bible, and the Lutheran Confessions at our gatherings, which are open to all of LCMC. Each year we host a theological convocation, first-call pastors retreat, confirmation retreat, high school retreat and women's conference. Further, our staff is equipped to walk alongside congre-




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*For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? .*


**Romans 10:13-15**

gations with conflict response resources, call committee coaching, church council retreats, and mission organization vetting. As a non-geographic district, we invest not only in staffing to support the local church, but technology that makes most of our events and resources accessible virtually.

The Augustana District is thankful to have a home in LCMC, and we hope that as we're blessed by our national association, we too can be a blessing to you through the goods we hand over. 

**Rev. Aaron Deutsch** is an LCMC-certified pastor at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota, and also serves as the Augustana District Coordinator. .

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February 2025



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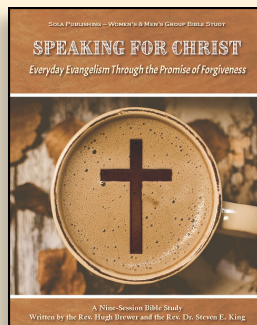
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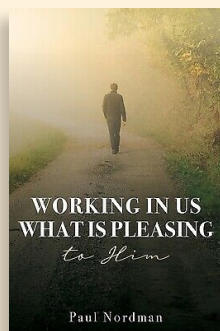


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## DEVOTIONAL

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teaches through 48 reflections about the wonder of transformation into the image of Christ, illustrated with the lives of 12 biblical people. Written by Paul Nordman. [Item B-N110, \\$3, solapublishing.com](#)

## THIS MONTH'S UNEXPECTEDLY AWESOME RESOURCE

How's your church look on the internet?

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See two examples of church websites designed by Rev. Peter Churness for Sola Publishing customers at [onehopechurchgigharbor.com](http://onehopechurchgigharbor.com) and [stpaulslutheran.church](http://stpaulslutheran.church) — very different and yet suited to each congregation's needs.

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Learn more at [solapublishing.com](http://solapublishing.com) by clicking on the Websites tab at the top of the page. 

## ... AND A GAME

Playing in print? Grab a friend and play the dot game. Taking turns, a player connects two adjacent dots (left-right, or up-down). The object is to use your lines and your friend's to create a box. In each box you make, write your initial and take a second turn. When all the dots are done, the player with the most initials on the board wins.

Reading Connections Online though your browser? Try this [jigsaw puzzle](#) from Rev. Mark Ryman.

