

# CONNECTIONS online

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MATTHIAS BOCKEL, PIXABAY

## The Sting of Death \_\_\_\_\_

Essay by Rev. Theresa Jacobson



**C**hrist is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Throughout the season of Easter, we are reminded of the gift of life that God has promised to us through Jesus Christ. It's wonderful to celebrate life! It's glorious to sing God's praises! But what about when life doesn't feel so glorious? What about when we feel the sting of death?

Such was the case for a dear friend of mine just recently. Shortly after our family's move to Ohio, God brought a wonderful young lady into my life. We are the same age, and we have children of the same age, too. As I got to know my friend, I also got to know her parents. All of them are members of the congregation my husband currently serves. Last year, right before Easter, my friend lost her mother to a short bout of cancer. It was very hard on her, and it was hard for me to see her go through the pain and loss of losing a mother — a pain I knew all too well myself, having lost my mother when I was 20.

God continued to strengthen our friendship, and I know that God brought us together for a reason. As my friend was dealing with the one-year anniversary of her mom's death in March, another tragedy struck her family, just shortly after Easter. Her father was killed unexpectedly while on his tractor. He was on the highway when he was hit by a driver of a pickup truck, who had been speeding and driving erratically.

"O death, where is your sting?" We hear the good news that the sting of death will be gone, but yet, death still stings. My dear friend felt the sting when her mother died. She was still dealing with that sting when her father unexpectedly died, and it wasn't just a sting anymore. That sting became what felt like an all-consuming fire.

How do we feel the victory of Easter in the midst of the sting of death? It's hard. And



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*"Death is swallowed up in victory."*

*"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 15:54b-57

that's because the sting of death is sin. We will continue to face the effects of sin as long as we live in this fallen world. It's hard to feel victorious when we're planning and attending the funeral of a loved one. That sting is so severe in those moments. It feels as though death is mocking us, as though death sends the venom of sin directly through our hearts. But it is in those moments that we must not forget who has power over sin and death: our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Paul reminds us, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are more than conquerors. There is a funeral coming that we've all been waiting for: the funeral of death itself. Indeed it is coming, but for the moment, we can be encouraged and comforted as we are reminded of what Jesus has accomplished for us. We can choose to hope and rejoice in the victory: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 

**Rev. Theresa Jacobson** of Thornville, Ohio, is Sola Publishing's assistant editor for SOWeR and serves on the executive Council of the North American Lutheran Church.

# Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



## PSALM 17:6-9

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words. Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings, from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me.

When I was a child, I dreaded the bed. I suffered from horrible night terrors, and I would convince my parents to stay a little longer by my bed while we prayed. After they had closed the door behind them, I would whisper intercessions to myself and cling to prayer as sleep dulled my eyes. Even now, nighttime creeps upon me with threats of anxiety and fear that I've ignored throughout the day and the night terrors I've never quite outgrown, but new prayers comfort me. Night has already fallen, but darkness is held at bay during Compline by flickering candles and the voice of the faithful praying in call and response, "Keep me in the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings."

We are all vulnerable, and it is often in the middle of long solitary car rides, small moments of quiet, or with the coming of the night that we can no longer hide behind distractions. We recognize the enmity of our neighbors, our powerlessness in the world, and our own sinful brokenness, and worry that we will never wake from these nightmares.


Psalm 17 is a prayer for shelter as the enemies of darkness, sin, and death close in around us. It is calling out to the Lord for deliverance from all that is beastly, and it is the promise that he will be here when dawn breaks in the morning and when it breaks in new life. It gives us the courage to pray, as the saints before us, "when I awake, God's presence will give me joy."

## FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

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

1. What keeps you from sleeping? How can prayer provide you comfort in the night?
2. Compline is prayer at the close of the day. Why do you think Psalm 17 is an appropriate prayer to chant at that time?
3. How do you feel when others pray next to you in church? How do you feel knowing believers have prayed this psalm for centuries, and they still pray it now?
4. How does this psalm remind you of the promise of the resurrection? What does the promise of the resurrection mean for the things that bring us stress and pain?

## PRAYER

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last; through Jesus Christ our Lord (Lutheran Book of Worship, 158). 

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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Our mission is “To know Jesus Christ and to make Christ known to all,” and it drives all we do. We provide campers and guests with a place to relax, connect, make memories, have lots of fun, and to build a relationship with our Lord!

Here’s what some campers have said about IOLBC:

“Camp is a safe and welcoming place where you can be vulnerable, let down your guard and be who God created you to be. I love seeing a community of believers pour into one another.” — Poldsifer Family

“Camp has made me trust in God and realize who he is.” — Harper, Youth Camper

“When I come to camp I feel like I’m in another world, because of all the fun games, hanging out with friends, and also learning about the Bible more. I love camp!” — Timber, Youth Camper

As we embark on our upcoming summer sea-



*In addition to the camps, retreats and other events, Ingham Okobojo Lutheran Bible Camps has weekly Sunday worship at 9:30 a.m., with brunch at 10:30 a.m., from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Learn more at [www.okobojo.org](http://www.okobojo.org) or call 1-800-OKOBOJO.*

son, we invite you to join us in our ministry. Join us for an upcoming camp or event, invite someone you know to come to camp, donate your time or treasure to help campers continue to grow in the Lord, and pray for the ministry of IOLBC and the ways God is going to work in camper and guests lives this summer and beyond!

Thank you for your partnership!

The author, **Megan Newell**, is the communications coordinator for Ingham Okobojo Lutheran Bible Camps. Contact her at [megan@okobojo.org](mailto:megan@okobojo.org).

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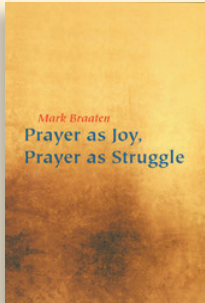
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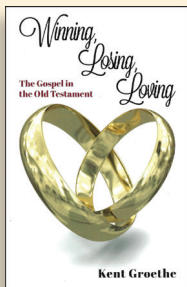
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## PRAYER

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## GOSPEL IN THE OT

Kent Groethe's overview of the Old Testament **Winning, Losing, Loving** shows that God's grace dominates the Old Testament story, and we find there the passionate, relentless love that God lavishes upon those who too often reject him. Softcover, 128 pages. [Item B-G505, \\$10, solapublishing.com](#)

## ... AND A GAME

See how many of the selected words from Psalm 17 you can find in this word search. Reading in your browser? [Visit this word search online to complete it.](#)

S U R R O U N D E Y E S V I O L E N C E  
 H F A C E A W A K E W H S I N F A N T S  
 T W I C K E D O W J O E L B Q B R O S S  
 U D E L I V E R R Z R A O F P E S I K G  
 O I N C L I N E Z D L R V Y O H S T R N  
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 A T T E N D E W O N D R O U S L Y D S K

- |        |             |            |            |             |         |
|--------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|---------|
| shadow | free        | tested     | feet       | adversaries | soul    |
| wings  | presence    | mouth      | answer     | apple       | sword   |
| prayer | vindication | transgress | incline    | wicked      | world   |
| David  | eyes        | works      | wondrously | violence    | portion |
| hear   | behold      | word       | steadfast  | enemies     | infants |
| lord   | right       | violent    | love       | surround    | face    |
| attend | heart       | steps      | savior     | pity        | awake   |
| lips   | night       | paths      | refuge     | deliver     |         |

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