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DORIS JUNCO, PIVABAY

Always the Banana _____



Essay by Tara Heil

In 2001, my sister joined me from Nebraska for 10 days between semesters of my student exchange program in Uruguay. I booked a bus trip for us from Montevideo to Tres Fronteras, the region where the borders of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil meet.

In Asunción, Paraguay, I remembered to ask the hotel clerk: “El agua aquí es potable?” (“Is the water here safe to drink?”) Insulted, he assured me that yes, of course — anyone could drink the water! I filled my bottle, drank it, refilled it, and drank half of the refill. And then I noticed the red swimming things.

Oh, yeah (mental forehead slap). ALWAYS CHOOSE THE BANANA.

During the first week of class, my freshman-year World Geography Overview professor showed us a slide of him with a half-eaten banana on a street somewhere in Asia. He digressed for five minutes to explain that differences in food handling and water treatment in another country might make a traveling American quite ill or dead. For example, he told us, if you’re seeking a snack in a street market where vendors are selling all different kinds of fruits sliced and ready to eat, always choose the banana. Sure, buy whole fruits, take them with you, and slice them yourself with your own clean knife later; but for an immediate snack, get the bacteria-free banana in its own undisturbed natural wrapper.

“If you don’t remember anything else, keep this bit of advice,” he said. “Always choose the banana!” I dutifully triple-underlined it.

But by not carefully inspecting the tap water in Asunción, I had figuratively failed to keep the professor’s advice. All I could do was stop drinking and wait for the effects.

To my relief, those effects never came. I never even got sick. So maybe the hotel clerk was right, and the water really was safe. Or maybe not, and I was just fortunate.

Keep this advice, the professor had told us. Jesus said something very similar — not about choosing bananas, but about keeping his advice. In Luke 11:28, he tells a crowd: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” Again in John 14, he tells a group of disciples “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (v.15) and “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me ...” (v.21) and, later, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word ...” (v.23).

So. How’s that going for you? Are you good at keeping Jesus’ words? Are you proving every day through perfect living that you love Jesus? Or are you like me realizing that evening in Paraguay that nope, I failed — and now you’re just waiting for the distress to begin?

There’s only one Jesus — only one perfect Savior of the world who truly could keep every single word he gave to us to follow — and not one of us is him. Where does this leave us? We’ve failed because we can do nothing but fail.

You can’t love the Lord while pretending his word doesn’t apply to you, but also, these words aren’t a step-by-step formula for getting into heaven. It’s the realization of failure when remembering Jesus’ words — failure to love your neighbor, to pray, to not worry, to forgive, to keep the commandments — that makes you aware that you have sinned, that moves you to repent and ask for his forgiveness. That’s how you know that you do, in honesty and truth, love him, and you are, in fact, grasping, retaining, remembering, and holding close his word.

Holding tightly to Jesus’ words and the Commandments always leads to Jesus, the only way to salvation.

Doing so is like always choosing the banana. 

Tara Heil of Ulysses, Kansas, is a partner in [Heil Harvesting LLC](#) and a copy editor with [Sola Publishing](#).

Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



PSALM 7:1-2,9-11

O Lord my God, in you do
I take refuge;
save me from all my
pursuers and deliver
me,
lest like a lion they tear
my soul apart,
rending it in pieces, with
none to deliver.
Oh, let the evil of the
wicked come to an
end,
and may you establish
the righteous —
you who test the minds
and hearts,
O righteous God!
My shield is with God,
who saves the upright in
heart.
God is a righteous judge,
and a God who feels
indignation every day.

I'm no stranger to thunderstorms, but the year I spent alone in a parsonage tested my bravery. There were times I'd be startled awake under the assumption that a bomb had been detonated or the manufacturing plant down the street had exploded. Thunder would bellow into the night so loud that my teeth rattled, the china in my cabinet clinked together, and knickknacks shook off the shelf. On those nights, when I sat awake in bed, clutching my trembling dog, I was glad my home was nearly a century old. On those nights I understood refuge. I couldn't stop the storm, but the walls that offered me protection had been standing for generations. I wasn't stronger than the storm I weathered, but I was confident that my home was.

When David wrote Psalm 7, his enemies threatened to eat up his heart like lions. Their lies seemed so inevitable and unstoppable that they came screaming into the world like a squalling infant born from a wicked mother's womb. This is the kind of spiritual storm that wakes us up at night and puts our teeth on edge, and nothing David tried stopped it. So he turned to the only refuge he knew: the God who has delivered the generations. In this psalm, David is confident that his righteousness is found when he puts his trust in God. The God of his fathers, who delivered Isaac from death, brought Israel out of the land of slavery, and hears David's cry, will be his shield and deliverance. In God — not in David's own power nor in the world's own justice — in God's own strength and righteousness, he will find refuge.

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

1. What emotions do you associate with “shelter” or “refuge”?
2. David asks to be “vindicated according to [his] righteousness” (v.8). This follows on the heels of Psalm 6, in which David confesses his sin. How does David's righteousness stem from faith and not his own works?
3. David speaks of emotional wounds as if they have been inflicted through physical means. What does it mean that God promises to heal not just our bodies but our full being? What comfort does that provide?
4. Most of the psalms so far have spoken about God guarding and protecting us. How does the Lord guard you physically? How does he guard you spiritually?

PRAYER

O Lord, you are our refuge. Guard us from the enemies in our life and shield us from sin, death, and the devil, so that we may gather in the shelter of your kingdom and rejoice around your heavenly throne. 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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Ministry Partner Focus by Marian Christopherson

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Psalm 78 recounts the history of God's people and emphasizes the importance of remembering and teaching, passing on the faith from one generation to the next. Verses 6-7 explain *"that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God."*

The ministry of Ambassador Publications provides tools to help families and congregations in three areas reflected in Psalm 78:

- **Remember your history** — recall the great things God has done.
- **Put your confidence in God** — trust in him.
- **Teach your children** — keep passing on the faith.

Ambassador Publications publishes and distributes a variety of historical, devotional, and educational resources to that end. One of our most significant tasks is producing biblical Lutheran Sunday school curriculum, which is thoughtfully and intentionally designed to give students a complete overview of the Scriptures as they move through the series from Preschool through Level 6. The middle levels also focus on Luther's Small Catechism. Ambassador curriculum teaches Law and Gospel and emphasizes sin and grace, daily repentance and faith. Our



"O send out Your light and Your truth; let them lead me."

Psalm 43:3a

curriculum promotes Scripture memory and daily devotions, recognizing the value of God's Word being written on the minds and hearts of children from a very young age. Our prayer is that our Christ-centered curriculum and other resources will be used by God as an instrument for congregations to promote true and living faith that grows and thrives in the hearts of those who hear and study His Word.

Ambassador curriculum has been translated into Spanish and is free to download at iglesialuteranalibre.org. Recent messages from around the world, including Mexico, Peru, and Spain, express gratitude for the wonderful Bible teaching materials being utilized in churches and mission plants. 

Marian Christopherson serves as Director of [Ambassador Publications](http://AmbassadorPublications), Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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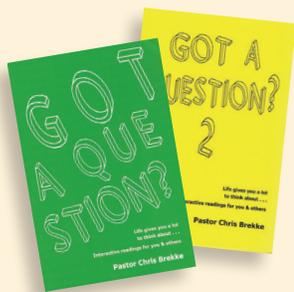
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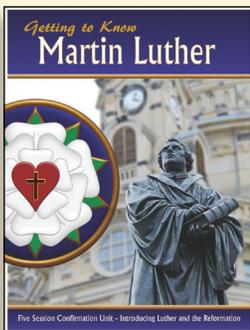
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SAMPLE CHAPTER

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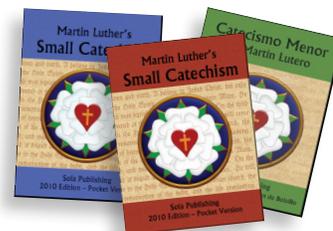
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The full text of the Small Catechism is online, translated in 2010 by Sola.

Printed pocket editions are available. The [red edition](#) uses the phrase "holy catholic Church" in the Creed; the [blue edition](#) uses "holy Christian Church". The [green edition](#) is a 2017 Spanish



translation by Lissette Colón.

The printed editions are also available as six-packs for distribution to new member instruction or confirmation students. 

... AND A GAME

Reading in print? Find the Apostles' Creed words in **bold** in the word search.

Reading Connections Online through your browser? [Work this word search online.](#)

I **believe** in **God**, the **Father Almighty**, creator of **heaven** and **earth**.

I believe in **Jesus Christ**, his **only Son**, our **Lord**. He was **conceived** by the **power** of the **Holy Spirit** and **born** of the **Virgin Mary**. He **suffered** under **Pontius Pilate**, was **crucified**, **died**, and was **buried**. He **descended** into **hell**. On the **third day** he **rose** again. He **ascended** into **heaven**, and is **seated** at the **right hand** of the **Father**. He will **come** again to **judge** the **living** and the **dead**.

I believe in the **Holy Spirit**, the **holy Christian church**, the **communion of saints**, the **forgiveness of sins**, the **resurrection of the body**, and the **life everlasting**. **Amen**

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