On Living Grace

Orientation Guide

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Welcome to Living Grace,

Thank you for taking an interest in our congregation. You are most welcome to browse and glance at the different chapters of this booklet. May you gain a better understanding of who we are and where we are going.

God bless you richly

Pastor Edgar Mayer
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On Who We Are

**Living Grace Values**

Living Grace had its beginning on Sunday 6 August 2000 when the first worship service was held in the Concordia College Chapel. As traditional Lutherans who were used to organ music and the liturgy, we wanted to plant a church that was contemporary and less formal. However, God had more in store for us and surprised us with the Holy Spirit which – in time – led to the following mission statement and values of Living Grace:

-One citywide people of prayer
-Operating in the power of the Word and the Spirit
-To disciple nations
-For the praise of His glory

-**Hunger for More:** God – by making us see the glory of Jesus – keeps transforming us from one degree of glory to another – through the Holy Spirit.

-**Worship:** God “inhabits” the praises of his people and intensifies his presence in worship.

-**Prayer:** God invites us to work with him through prayer.

-**The Word and the Spirit:** God has called us to minister in the power of the Word and the Spirit.

-**Signs, Wonders and Miracles:** God calls us to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified with demonstrations of the Spirit’s power – not with wise and persuasive words.

-**Healing:** God wants us to preach the kingdom of heaven and heal the sick.

-**Christian Unity:** God makes people one with the other Christians in their congregations and city.

-**Family:** God makes us members of a Christian household (the church) with spiritual fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters.

-**Culture of Honour:** God bestows honour on all members of the church family. He makes us cherish one another on account of our identity, gifting and calling.

-**Acceptance:** Everyone is welcome.

-**Accessibility:** God offends human pride but you do not have to be "weird" to be spiritual.

-**Freedom:** God invites us to be authentic before him, to give it a go and make mistakes and follow him wherever he leads.
• Inheritance: God grants us the joy of passing on spiritual breakthroughs as an inheritance to the next generation(s).

The story of Living Grace is also contained in Pastor Mayer’s book “Surprised by the Holy Spirit” (available at reception).

The Local & Lutheran Identity

According to the Scriptures, Living Grace belongs to the one people of God in Toowoomba; therefore we endeavor to love one another and partner with other Christians and ministries.

We belong to each other:

1. ... because we have the same Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. Ephesians 3:14-15
2. ... because those who believe are all the children of Abraham and blessed through him. Galatians 3:7-9
3. ... because we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:26
4. ... because through Christ we all have access to the Father by one Spirit. Ephesians 2:18
5. ... because all of us who have been baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ and therefore are one in Christ. Galatians 3:27-28
6. ... because all of us who have been baptized have been united with Jesus in his death and will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. Romans 6:3-5
7. ... because we, who are many, partake of the same Jesus Christ in the meal of Holy Communion. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
8. ... because together as the church we become one flesh with Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:31-32
9. ... because Christ is not divided. 1 Corinthians 1:13
10. ... because we are the body of Christ and the fullness of him dwells within us – the one church. Ephesians 1:22-23 / Colossians 2:10
11. ... because Jesus is praying that we may be brought to complete unity. John 17:23
12. ... because we submit to the same Lord who is the head of the church. Colossians 1:15-20
13. ... because in worship we are one with each other as we are one with the angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven. Revelation 5:11-14
14. ... because unity brings praise to God. Romans 15:5-13
... because we have received the same commission from Jesus Christ. *Matthew 28:18-20*

... because unity lets the world know that the Father in heaven sent Jesus Christ and has loved us. *John 13:34-35 / John 17:23*

... because unity attracts others. *Acts 2:42-47*

... because we are labouring in the same mission field of the one city. *Romans 1:7*

... because we live on the same land which needs healing. *2 Chronicles 7:14*

... because we are one in our brokenness at the foot of the cross. *Galatians 2:20 / 1 John 1:8 / Hebrews 12:1*

... because the cross tears down the dividing wall between people. *Ephesians 2:14-18*

... because agreement in prayer moves God to respond. *James 5:16 / Matthew 18:19-20 / Psalm 133*

... because our unity in love is the key to the knowledge of God. *Colossians 2:2-5 / 1 John 4:7-8*

... because we want to become mature together attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. *Ephesians 4:13*

... because together we are the temple of God. *1 Corinthians 3:16*

... because the same Spirit makes us complement each other. *Romans 12:4-13 / 1 Corinthians 12:12-13*

... because the same Spirit inspires us for the common good. *1 Corinthians 12:7*

... because the same Spirit makes us depend on each other. *Ephesians 4:15-16*

... because the same Spirit guides us all. *John 14:16-17 / John 16:13*

... because God makes us bear with one another in love. *Colossians 3:9-15*

... because we are accountable to each other. *Colossians 3:16 / Romans 15:14*

... because we forgive one another as the Lord forgave us. *Colossians 3:13 / Matthew 6:14-15*

... because we all preach Christ. *Philippians 3:15-18*

... because we do not judge one another in disputable matters. *1 Corinthians 4:5 / Romans 14:1 / Matthew 7:1-5*

... because whoever hates his brother or sister in Christ is in the darkness and does not know where he is going. *1 John 2:9-11*

... because the evil one’s strategy is to divide and conquer. *Matthew 12:25 / 1 Corinthians 6:7 / Ephesians 4:26-27 / James 3:14-18*
... because the weeding out of the undesirables also results in the pulling up of some children of God. *Matthew 13:24-50*

... because the greater we become the more we serve each other. *Matthew 20:24-28*

... because we together are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. *1 Peter 2:9*

...because there is only one heaven for all of us. *Ephesians 4:5-6*

Living Grace belongs to the one people of God in Toowoomba but also relates to the Lutheran Church of Australia, a national church denomination, as one of its congregations.
• In Australia and New Zealand almost 250,000 people call themselves Lutherans. There are 648 congregations, 298 parishes, 533 pastors (including those who have retired) and 92 lay workers.

• Australian Lutheranism in the twenty first century reflects the multicultural nature of the Australian nation itself - with 22% of Australians being born in another country. Aussie Lutherans have their roots in every continent – from Argentina to China, from Sudan to Papua New Guinea, from Cambodia to Canada, and from Britain to South Africa.

• The Lutheran church has been in Australia and New Zealand for more than 150 years. In the 1830’s small groups of European Lutherans emigrated in search of religious freedom. They settled mainly in rural areas in various parts of Australia.

• LCA membership decreased during World War 1 when the use of German was prohibited and many Germans were interned. Numbers increased again after World War 2 with the influx of northern European migrants.

• The Lutheran church is one of the world’s major Christian churches. It is the largest Protestant church. At the beginning of 2006 there were nearly 83 million Lutherans in the world.

• European Lutheran churches have 38.6 million members, a decrease since 1999. The populations of Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway have a high Lutheran concentration.

• The fastest growing Lutheran population is in Africa with more than 14 million members. Ethiopia, Tanzania, Malawi and Cameroon have substantial Lutheran memberships.

• The Lutheran church is the oldest Protestant church. It dates back to the Reformation in the sixteenth century when Martin Luther challenged some of the teachings and practices of the church of his day. Luther insisted that the Bible is the authority that decides what the church should teach and do.

• The name ‘Lutheran’ was given to people who believed that Martin Luther was right in his interpretation of the Bible.
On Staffing & Ministry Shape

God bestows grace on all of his people and, according to his will, calls everyone into service and ministry. Therefore, it is our joy to see people released into their givings and passions through the appointed leadership.

Ephesians 4:7-13: “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it … So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all … become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

The following are our paid staff:

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On Functioning as a Congregation

At Living Grace we operate on three levels of congregational involvement. There are the worship services with all of us being present. Then there are small groups for mission, mutual encouragement, pastoral care, learning, prayer and support. Finally, we also encourage the one-on-one sharing of the faith.

In many respects our Christian community functions like a family with spiritual “fathers” and “mothers” taking care of “children” and “babies” in the faith.

The following is an excerpt from the Leader’s Guide: How To Launch Your CORE Discipleship Group Network (Doug Morrell), [http://www.corediscipleship.org/home.html](http://www.corediscipleship.org/home.html):

**DISCIPLESHIP IS LIKE PARENTING**

“... but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

Having three children, I am discovering that the process of making disciples is a lot like raising my kids; to equip my children for all of life’s issues and to help them become fully mature, I must to be there for them - for life! We have a relationship and I have to be intentional in my efforts. Something I learned in athletics is that you can never go any higher than your headship and that wherever your head goes your body follows. In essence, the more effective those you join with, the more effective your growth will be. However, our tendency is to associate with those who are like us – they strengthen and reinforce our belief system whether good or bad. We also don’t like to submit to godly counsel.

To live an examined life is the hallmark of integrity and spiritual maturity. To submit our lives to God and other more spiritually mature believers is a very humbling experience and process. To ask another person for their godly advice is expressed wisdom. There is strength in numbers.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).
On Belonging to Living Grace

God designed us to be in community and attached many promises to congregational life. For instance, we read in the Bible:

Ephesians 4:4-16: … the body of Christ may be built up until we all … become mature … From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Romans 12:5: … in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

In our congregation we do not sign formal membership documents but we do expect support for our faith confession and agreement in the way we function as a community.

We are committed to the value of honouring one another because any other behaviour quenches the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Philippians 4:2: “Here is what I’m asking Euodia and Syntyche to do. I want them to agree with each other because they belong to the Lord.”

Mark 6:4-6: “Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not honoured in his hometown. He doesn’t receive any honour among his relatives. And he doesn’t receive any in his own home.’ Jesus laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. But he could not do any other miracles there. He was amazed because they had no faith.”

Matthew 6:14-15: “Forgive people when they sin against you. If you do, your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

For the purposes of formal church meetings which require formal voting procedures and regular attendance, our church has decided to form a reference group (about 120 people). The people in this group have been members of the church for at least three years.

If you are reading this Orientation Guide and want to pursue membership at Living Grace for yourself, please contact us: living.grace.toowoomba@gmail.com; 07) 4638 8555, 0437 154 961. You are welcome.
On the Main Message

From a tract by Dr. Richard P. Bucher:

Lutheran teaching can be summed up by what are called the “Three Alones”: (1) Grace Alone; (2) Faith Alone; (3) Scripture Alone.

**Grace Alone**

A Lutheran believes in “Grace Alone.” That is, a Lutheran believes that on the basis of God’s Holy Word that a person is forgiven and enters heaven by God’s grace alone. The Biblical word “grace” refers to God’s attitude of undeserved kindness toward us. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It is not our conduct or performance that moves God to save us, it is his grace that moves God to save us. In fact, we can’t do a thing to save ourselves. According to the Bible we are dead in sin (read Eph. 2:1; Romans 5:6). But God offers us full forgiveness and heaven as a free gift because Jesus lived and died to atone for our sin. Our salvation is not teamwork between us and God. It is not a matter of us doing our part and God doing His. We are not saved by God's grace plus our good works or anything we do. We are not saved by God’s grace plus anything. We are saved by God’s grace ALONE.

We don’t deserve this. What we do deserve is eternal punishment in hell for our sin. But God, because Jesus bore our punishment on the cross, gives us what we don’t deserve: eternal life. “For the wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

**Faith Alone**

A Lutheran also believes that we are forgiven and enter heaven by “Faith Alone.” “For we maintain that a man is justified [declared innocent, righteous] by faith, apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28). Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have been tempted to believe that faith in Jesus as Savior (or faith in the Gospel promise) is not enough. They have been tempted to believe that something WE do must be added to faith: our keeping of God’s Commandments, our love, our holiness, our victory over sin, or something else that we do. But the Scriptures consistently teach that we are saved through faith plus NOTHING. We are saved by faith ALONE.

Since God truly promises heaven as a gift to the human race on account of Christ, then there is only one way to receive a promised gift:
faith. The moment we think that our entrance into heaven is contingent upon our conduct in any way, at that moment heaven ceases to be a gift and begins to be something we have earned and deserve. For a gift to remain a gift it must simply be received. Faith in Jesus as Savior is the open hand that receives God's gift of salvation. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

**Scripture Alone**

A Lutheran believes in “Scripture Alone.” That is, a Lutheran believes that all teaching that claims to be Christian is to be drawn from the Bible alone. The canonical books of the Bible are the only source, the only authority, and the only judge of Christian teaching. When the question is raised, “is this teaching or practice Christian?” the Holy Scriptures are the highest Court of Appeals and only they can decide the matter.

The reason the Bible is such an authority for Lutherans is because we believe that Holy Scripture is not merely the word of man; it is also the inspired and inerrant Word of God himself. The human authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down exactly what they did. Every word of the canonical Bible is the Word of God. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16) and “Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

**The Lutheran Confessions**

For a fuller discussion of what Lutherans believe one need only turn to a group of writings called “the Lutheran Confessions.” Written by Martin Luther and others, these are historical statements of faith taken from the Bible that Lutherans believe to be a correct exposition of God's Word. They provide a standard of what is truly Lutheran and what is not. They include the three ecumenical creeds (Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian), the Augsburg Confession of 1530, as well as seven other Confessions. They are gathered together in the “Book of Concord” of 1580.

On Keys for Worship

The Word of God says in James 4:1-10:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble**.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

All of our worship is initiated by God himself because “when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly … while we were still sinners, Christ died for us … “ (Romans 5:6-11). God is always taking the first step of grace towards us and then wants to sustain us further by grace as we are learning some of the keys for worship from the Bible reading above:

a) **We cannot be friends with God and the world at the same time.**

We have to make a choice because our God is a jealous God and views any of our friendship with the world as hatred towards him.

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?

b) **We unlock the grace of God with humble hearts.** None of us deserve the favour of God. None of us is good enough but God always responds to radical repentance and humility.

Scripture says: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God … Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
c) **We stir ourselves up in being active towards God.** No matter how we may feel on the inside we determine to come near to God in worship because the promise is that then he will come near to us.

   Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

   d) **We will have and receive when we ask God with pure motives.**

   You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

These keys for our worship at Living Grace are worth repeating.

   a) You cannot be friends with God and the world at the same time.
   b) Unlock the grace of God with a humble heart.
   c) Stir yourself up in coming near to God and he will come near to you.
   d) You will have and receive when you ask God with pure motives.

As we come to worship, feelings of failure and shame may weigh us down but God has made provisions for us. None of us need to remain discouraged. The Bible sums up our situation with honesty and grace. 1 John 1:8-10:

   If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
On Holy Spirit Foolishness

God frequently offends us on purpose. For instance, people were continually offended at Jesus. They questioned where he came from: “Nazareth? Can anything good come from there” (John 1:46). They attacked how he shared meals with people: “…Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners’” (Luke 7:34). They objected to his healings and driving out demons: “It is only by … the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons” (Matthew 12:24). They objected to his teaching. Even the disciples struggled: “Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” (John 6:61).

Jesus offended because: “…the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing … we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block for some [original: to Jews] and foolishness to others [original: to Gentiles]…” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Then God continues to offend by using the “wrong” kind of people for ministry. The apostle Paul made reference to this and also spelled out the deeper principle of God’s strategy in offending people: “…Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

How else does God try to offend us? We do not have to look far. The Holy Spirit is another great source of offense even among churches. Not only does he move in unlikely people (you and I), he also – frequently – comes causing strange manifestations. Even when the Holy Spirit came with power on the disciples for the very first time the outcome was offensive. Some mistook the influence of the Holy Spirit for alcohol saying: “They have had too much wine” (Acts 2:13). What caused this impression? The Bible reports in other places that the apostles Peter and Paul both fell into trances (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:12-13). Then the Bible knows of people falling in the presence of God (Daniel 8:17; 10:7-10,15-19; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Revelations 1:17), faces shining supernaturally (Exodus 34:30; Acts 6:15), temporary blindness (Acts 9:4) or numbness (Luke 1:22), etc.

Thus, here at Living Grace we want to recognize God’s strategy in offending us and our pride. We want to humble ourselves before his “foolishness” because he “nullifies the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). We recognize “God’s foolishness” as another key in our relationship with him. Therefore, we let our pride be broken by possible Holy Spirit manifestations such as falling to the floor under the power of God, speaking in tongues, etc.

Furthermore, many of us have also learned to accept the “foolishness” of lifting our hands in praise. This was not the practice of our traditional Lutheran church background and, therefore, it felt strange at first but the Bible is our guide: “I spread out my hands to you; My soul longs for you like a thirsty land” (Psalm 143:6; cf. Psalm 63:4; 141:2; 1 Timothy 2:8).
The following are further Bible examples of what may happen when the Holy Spirit moves in power. Mike Bickle with Michael Sullivant: Growing In The Prophetic, Orlando: Creation House 1996, p201:

- Daniel fell, had no strength, terrified by God’s presence (Daniel 8:17; 10:7-10,15-19).
- Fire from heaven consumes sacrifice (Leviticus 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38; 1 Chronicles 21:26).
- The priests couldn’t stand because of God’s glory (1 Kings 8:10-11).
- Solomon and the priests couldn’t stand because of God’s glory (2 Chronicles 7:1-3).
- King Saul and his antagonistic men are overcome by the Holy Spirit and prophesy as they near the camp of the prophets (1 Samuel 19:18-24).
- Bush is burning but not consumed (Exodus 3:2).
- Thunder, smoke, shaking of the grounds, sounds of trumpets and voices upon Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16).
- Moses sees the ‘glory of God’ pass by him; Moses’ face supernaturally shines (Exodus 34:29-30).
- The Holy Spirit descends in bodily form as a dove (John 1:32).
- Unbelieving guards thrown to the ground (John 18:6).
- Peter and Paul fall into trances and see and hear into the spirit world (Acts 10:10; 22:17, 11:5).
- Saul of Tarsus saw brilliant light, thrown from his horse, heard Jesus audibly, was temporarily struck blind (Acts 9:3-4, 8).
- John fell as dead, had no bodily strength, and saw and heard into the spirit world (Revelations 1:17).
- A virgin conceives the Son of God (Luke 1:35).
On Worship Banners

Worship banners are not magic wands and they are not holy in themselves. They are simply tools to express the prayers of our hearts. For instance, when we pray for someone’s healing we may act out the words of the prayer by waving the banner of healing over the person. Likewise, when we praise God we may act out the words by waving a banner toward God with joy. There are banners representing the Holy Spirit, joy, the breath of God...

Another purpose of the banners is to declare our faith. We do not simply state our faith with words but also declare the truth of God by waving an appropriate banner. For instance, we believe that according to the Bible Jesus is “the lion of Judah” and thus we declare that truth by waving the banner which depicts “the lion of Judah”. Likewise, we declare our faith in the power and joy of God by waving the banners which take up those themes.

Even if one particular banner does not have any specific meaning or we may not know the symbolism of the banner, we can worship by waving them, thus combining our words with actions which express our innermost thoughts and feelings. God loves worship which involves everything we have: mind, body, emotions and will. Mark 12:30: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Waving banners may look a little “strange” but then God seems to have a habit of making his people look “strange”. In the Bible Isaiah went naked for three years to illustrate a point (Isaiah 20), Jeremiah carried a wooden yoke on his neck (Jeremiah 27:1-28:17), he tied a stone to a scroll of prophetic words and threw it into the Euphrates river (Jeremiah 51:62-64), Hosea married a prostitute (Hosea 1:1-11), Ahijah tore the king’s new garment into 12 pieces (1 Kings 11:30-40), and there are many more examples like that.

God may not command us to do “strange” like the prophets of old but we may well consider the following Bible passage – 1 Corinthians 1:27-20: “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” Maybe the waving of banners does humble us a little, reduces our pride, overcomes our worries about other people’s judgments, frees us up and thus makes room for the foolish things of the world which God is using to bring glory to himself.

In many ways congregations of a traditional denomination like ours should not have problems with the use of banners because we have used them all along for centuries. There are altar vestments, stoles, gowns, wall banners, liturgical colours, etc. The only difference is that these banners are not waved.

Lastly, banners are mentioned in the Bible. God’s people rallied for battle with the raising of banners: “Lift a banner in the land! Blow the trumpet among the nations! Prepare the nations for battle against her” (Jer. 51:27). Psalm 20:5 says: “We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God.” Isaiah 62:10: “…Raise a banner for the nations.”

None of us should feel any compulsion to wave banners or do anything which we do not feel called to do. We are free and allow each other to be free because we are a community living in grace.
On Prophetic Action

The following explanation is from the sermon “Kooky Behaviour” (Edgar Mayer) which was preached on Sunday 2 October 2005:

The prophet Ezekiel cut his hair, burned and scattered it according to God’s instructions: “…[Ezekiel,] take a sharp sword and use it as a barber’s razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind…” (Ezekiel 5:1-4). Then this now bald prophet with his hair burnt and scattered was to prophesy: “…this is what the Sovereign Lord says: …I myself am against you, Jerusalem,…A third of you will die of the plague or perish by famine inside; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword” (Ezekiel 5:8-12).

Strange behaviour! Ezekiel’s burnt and scattered hair was to enforce the message: A third will die inside the city, a third outside the city, and a third will be scattered.

This is not an isolated incident. God said to the same prophet – Ezekiel 4:1-8: “Now, son of man, take a clay tablet, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it. Then lay siege to it: Erect siege works against it, build a ramp up to it, set up camps against it and put battering rams around it. Then take an iron pan, place it as an iron wall between you and the city and turn your face toward it. It will be under siege, and you shall besiege it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel. Then lie on your left side and put the sin of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their sin for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the same number of days as the years of their sin. So for 390 days you will bear the sin of the house of Israel. After you have finished this, lie down again, this time on your right side, and bear the sin of the house of Judah. I have assigned 40 days, a day for each year. Turn your face toward the siege of Jerusalem and with bared arm prophesy against her. I will tie you up with ropes so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have finished the days of your siege.”

A city drawn on a clay tablet, ancient play-dough siege works, battering rams, an iron pan as an iron wall, lying on one side for 390 days and then on the other for 40 tied up with ropes. What are we to make of this? Strange prophets acting out their prophecies! To illustrate a point Isaiah went naked for three years (Isaiah 20), Jeremiah carried a wooden yoke on his neck (Jeremiah 27:1-28:17), he tied a stone to a scroll of prophetic words and threw it into the Euphrates river (Jeremiah 51:62-64), Hosea married a prostitute (Hosea 1:1-11), Ahijah tore the king’s new garment into 12 pieces (1 Kings 11:30-40), and so on and so on.

Kooky behaviour! Why? Well – any of these strange acts would catch our attention and fire up the imagination. The words of God would not just be measured pronouncements but come with emotional impact. These acts would play on our minds and encourage us to go
beyond what we may have expected – dare to consider the impossible. They encourage faith and a faith response.

But is this not just a game – eccentric prophets seeking an audience using shock-value? I am not so sure any more. Elisha said to the king of Israel – 2 Kings 13:17-19: “Open the window to the east” And the king opened it. Then the prophet said: “Now, shoot!” And the king shot an arrow. Elisha said: “The Lord’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram.” Elisha declared: “You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.” Then he said: “Take the arrows,” and the king took them. Elisha told him, “Strike the ground.” He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times.”

According to this incident, prophetic actions – not just the prophetic words – carry power to fulfill the prophecy. Since the king of Israel had not struck the ground with his arrows in a decisive manner (not often enough), he forfeited decisive victory over his enemies. Likewise Naaman, the commander of king Aram’s army, was told to wash himself seven times in the Jordan River to be cleared of his leprosy. Only when he consented to do that – dip himself in the Jordan seven times – he was healed (2 Kings 5). Moses had to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea to divide the water for the deliverance of his people (Exodus 14:16). Prophetic actions carry power.

Again, why is that kind of weirdness needed? I am not completely sure because the Bible does not explain that. It simply happens that way. However, here are a few suggestions. God purposed to do things by faith. Our faith honours him while unbelief declares God to be a liar. Acts 3:16: “By faith in the name of Jesus this man [was healed]...” Matthew 17:20 – Jesus said: “...if you have faith as small as a mustard seed...nothing will be impossible for you.” Jesus told the woman – Matthew 9:22: “Your faith has healed you.” God loves to be trusted. God is honoured by our faith.

Now, prophetic actions support God’s emphasis on faith. I repeat what I said before. Strange prophetic acts catch our attention, fire up the imagination and come with emotional impact. They play on our minds and encourage us to go beyond what we may have expected – dare to consider the impossible. They encourage faith and a faith response...Prophetic actions are faith actions which God...infuses with power...

Of course the key-prophetic actions of the Christian church are Holy Communion and baptism. God bound himself to the hands-on business of eating and drinking and the immersion in water. In the case of Holy Communion Jesus tied his words and the power of his words to bread and wine speaking over them: “This is my body. This is my blood shed for the forgiveness of your sins. Eat and drink to remember me and receive from me.” We repeat Jesus’ words and we repeat the prophetic action every time we celebrate Holy Communion. In the case of baptism Jesus tied his words and the power of his words to the water speaking over the baptism: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” God claims a person and creates
something new in this act. Who would have thought? By faith and obedience we have already joined the ranks of weird prophets enforcing the message of God with kooky behaviour – having alcoholic mini-snacks and splashing water.

... What we all may do right now is reconsider the prophetic act of anointing each other with oil. The Bible says – Mark 6:12-13: “The disciples went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” James 5:14: “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.” …As we anoint each other with oil we signify the anointing which we receive through the Holy Spirit. Especially in times of need – when we are sick or discouraged – we apply oil by faith and obedience trusting God who commands and empowers this prophetic action…

Thus, considering the Bible, we at Living Grace will also – on occasion – act out the Word of God in prophetic actions by faith and with power.
On Healing

The following are sermon message excerpts which explain what – according to the Bible – we believe at Living Grace


... In the Bible preaching the kingdom of God and healing so often – if not always – belong together. The Bible says – and we hear a few references – Matthew 4:23-25: “Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among people … people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them…” / Matthew 12:15: “…Jesus…healed all their sick.” / Luke 4:16-44: “… [Jesus said:] The Spirit of the Lord is on me …to preach good news to the poor…and recovery of sight for the blind…On the Sabbath he began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority… people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them…” (cf. Luke 6:17-19; Acts 10:38) / Luke 9:11: “…He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.” / Luke 9:1-2: “…Jesus…sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” / Mark 6:12-13: “The disciples of Jesus went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” / Acts 5:12-16: “…bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.” / Acts 8:4-8: “…Philip proclaimed…Christ…With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed…” / Acts 28:7-10: “…When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured…”

I am not getting tired of this. Could we not keep reading one Bible passage after another and then have our faith stirred into expecting more than we currently have? What God does in Nepal and in China and in other places – healing people – saving people through healing prayer – 80 per cent figures – that is normal church procedure according to the Bible and therefore can be – must be – normal among us as well. For us it may be the new normal but it is the Bible normal.

...Fact is that at its deepest root the Christian faith is about healing. In the Bible the very word “to save” includes the meaning “to cure” – “to heal” – so that, for instance, Matthew 1:21 could be translated thus: “…Jesus will heal people from their sins.” Fact is that according to the Bible the whole human race suffers from a sickness unto death, that is: sin – which in due course leads to the following human outcry – Romans 7:24: “…Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

The Bible explains that – Romans 5:12: “…sin entered the world through one man [the first man committing the first act of disobedience against God], and [with that] death [entered the world] through [this
man’s] sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned...“ Therefore, the terminology fits. We all became sick. Our whole human nature became dead and diseased – Ephesians 2:1-10 – I read: “...you were dead in your transgressions and sins...gratifying the cravings of our sinful [diseased] nature...by [that] nature objects of God’s wrath...“

But then came the cure and from the outset note what motivated the cure. I read again from Ephesians 2:1-10. And there it says in the Bible: “But [– and what a glorious ‘but’ this is –] because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...“ But because of love – great love – from God to us – new life came – healing came with Christ – to our bodies of death.

This is how it happened – 1 Peter 2:21-25 – I read: “...Christ suffered for you...He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [on the cross of his death], so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed...

Did you notice again the last word: “...by his wounds you have been healed...“ – healed – and – the Bible leaves us in no doubt that – this healing was more dramatic and demanded more divine medication than any earth-bound cancer or spinal bifida ever would (cf. Luke 5:23-26). Untold love made Jesus suffer untold wounds – on our behalf – so that his blood – flowing from his wounds – would cure us from sin.

...By his wounds you are healed – on account of his love – and – know this – the love of Jesus overflows with compassion for you even when you suffer from less than the terminal illness of sin. I read from the Bible – Matthew 9:35-36: “Jesus went...preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them...“/ Matthew 14:14: “When Jesus...saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”/ Matthew 20:34: “Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.”

Again and again the Bible makes us look into the heart of Jesus: “He had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Therefore, dare to hope. When Jesus sees you and your sickness, he will also have compassion on you.

...the Bible records many different methods of healing and with playful trust – child-like – we may simply experiment and have a go at healing.

One of the easiest ways to heal the sick seems to be by touch. Jesus said – Mark 16:15-18: “...in my name they...will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” It is said about Jesus – Luke 4:40: “...laying his hands on each one, he healed them.” Acts
Sometimes healing comes when the sick take the initiative, reach out and touch the person that is filled with the Holy Spirit. For instance, Luke 6:19: “Everyone was trying to touch Jesus, for when they did healing power went out from him and they were cured.” Mark 6:56: “…as many as touched him were made whole.” Cf. Mark 5:25-34.

Then there is the anointing with oil – Mark 6:13: “The disciples…anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” James 5:14: “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil…”

Still another method for healing is by command. A centurion said to Jesus – Matthew 8:8: “…just say the word and my servant will be healed…” and so Jesus just said the word. Mark 7:33-35 records this: “…Jesus put his fingers into the deaf man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, Ephphatha! (This means, ‘Be opened!’). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.” Cf. Acts 3:6-7; 16:18.

Many people receive healing by faith. Again and again Jesus said to the person in front of him – Matthew 9:22: “…your faith has healed you…” Luke 18:42: “…Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” Then frequently a faith action was required to complete the healing. To a man with a shriveled hand Jesus said – Mark 3:5: “Stretch out your hand.” When the man stretched it out, his hand was completely restored. John 9:6-7: “Having said this, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ‘Go,’ he told him, ‘wash in the Pool of Siloam’ … So the man went and washed, and [healing came through that faith action and he] came home seeing. Luke 17:14: “…‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed.”

This may all sound a little confusing – so many methods – but on the other hand why not keep this simple and persevere with some kind of playfulness. One experienced couple writes: “You need to be persistent, too! If you lay hands on someone, and nothing happens, try the next person! Lay hands on him or her. If nothing happens, don’t give up! Sometimes we [original: Charles and I] have ministered to the same person as many as five different ways. We have tried commanding, laying on of hands, casting out devils, but finally the persistence pays off and we see the individual healed” (Charles & Frances Hunter: How To Heal The Sick, New Kensington: Whitaker House 1981, p30).

Even in the Bible there are instances where the healing procedure required persistence. Jesus himself had an encounter where the first attempt did not work. He needed to place his hands on a man twice to heal the man – Mark 8:22-26: “…Once more Jesus put his hand on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly…” Cf. 1 Kings 17:17-22; 2 Kings 4:32-35.

Thus, according to God’s promises in the Bible we do pray for the sick with faith and are not shy in persevering with prayer.
On Glory Gold & Other Miracles

Since the last Sunday of 2009, our church has been experiencing the miracle of gold glitter manifesting on the skin of our members and visitors. The following is an excerpt from Edgar’s yearly report in 2010:

... In the first week of August we preached and prayed for the sick on six consecutive nights at Toowoomba City Church. At the end of one service Peter and Faye Grieshaber were found to have gold dust on them. It looked like body glitter but they wore no make-up. This was a miraculous manifestation out of God’s glory. Then, in November we had a Friday night prayer watch where the presence of God manifested in some kind of foggy mist for about one and a half hours. In December, a woman was lying on the floor after the service and she was weeping in repentance with her eyes closed. After some time the person that was praying for her noticed that the back of her hands were covered with very fine gold dust. There was none on the palm of her hands. However, two minutes later he checked the palm of her hands again and this time the gold particles had also appeared on the palm of her hands.

Finally, on the last Sunday of 2009, I was preaching on the glory of God and at the end of the service asked the congregation to check their hands for any manifestation out of God’s glory. Two or three people immediately noticed the gold glitter on their hands but after the service there were dozens of people who could see gold sparkles on their skin under the bright lighting of the stage area. In my own experience everyone that checked their hands under the bright light discovered the presence of gold dust on their hands. Some had the gold also on their faces and upper chest. Even babies had received this manifestation.

Two weeks later the glory gold from the presence of God manifested again (10 January 2010). After the service dozens of people were checking their hands, arms, faces and upper chest for signs of the gold sparkles which looked like very fine glitter. There was such joy and excitement among children, teenagers and older people. Together we experienced the grace of God which was given to everyone and had nothing to do with personal faith maturity.

What do these miracles and manifestations mean? At this point, I do not want to give a long answer. Miracles are meant to confirm the word of God, strengthen our faith and lead us to repentance. However, in our particular case I have the strong sense that God wanted to encourage us and confirm our first year after having “crossed the Jordan”. He is pleased with us. He makes us sparkle in his presence, which is saying to us: “I love you.” Furthermore, this is giving us the necessary boldness for more to come in 2010. We are on the right track – with HIM ...
Some question the manifestation of gold dust because they have never experienced this manifestation themselves and do not find the same in the Bible. Yet, these manifestations occur during the worship of Jesus Christ – among many mature Christians – and are therefore not likely to be of the devil. The Gospel of John points out that Jesus himself performed many miracles which were not recorded in the Bible (John 20:30); therefore we can also expect miraculous manifestations which go beyond the limited precedents of the Bible account. At one time, Jesus encouraged people to believe “on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (John 14:11) and then promised his disciples that they would “do even greater things than these” miracles which he performed. Thus, Jesus again left scope for God to do new things and even greater things.

The purpose of miracles is to confirm the word of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Romans 15:18-19), build faith (cf. John 2:11,23; 3:2; 4:39; 9; 10:21,25-26,32,38; 11:45; 12:18; 14:11; 15:24; 16:30; 20:30-31) and work repentance (cf. Luke 10:13-15). They are also an expression of God’s character – his holiness in wrath and love. The manifestation of gold sparkles on the church seems to be a declaration of love for his people which is important to remember because otherwise even miracles can become “boring”. We will not tire in our excitement when we understand the miracles as an expression of our relationship with God. We are not growing tired of him saying to us: “I love you.” And then we respond with worship.

Some may feel condemened when the miracles do not happen to them in person. However, God sent his only Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for all people so that no one would ever miss out on the goodness of God. There is enough grace for everyone. The important miracle is not gold dust but the new creation in God through the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, miracles are given to the church community (1 Corinthians 12:7) and therefore benefit not only the select few who happen to experience manifestations. They are not rewards for maturity.

At Living Grace gold dust may manifest out of the glory of God on some persons but absolutely everyone is surrounded by the same glory in that particular worship service. No one is missing out on the “atmosphere” of God’s presence. When an angel appeared to shepherds in the field, the glory of God shone around them and terrified them but in walking distance Jesus was born and the glory was present without the glory shine.

The most important key is never to take offense at God and believe the devil’s lie that God is holding back from us. The Bible declares: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32; cf. Ephesians 3:14-21).

There is enough grace for everyone. Last but not least, I believe that when the door opens to manifestations, there are more coming (cf. Romans 11:29; Acts 2-4). Therefore, we do not grieve or quench the Spirit by calling his work into question but remain full of expectation and praise.
On Prophecy

Prophecy is not always an exact science. Prophecies need to be carefully weighed by others. The Bible says: “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said” (1 Corinthians 14:29). The apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians saying: “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20), but he also added: “Test everything…” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). There is a weighing and testing of prophetic words that is needed because people with prophetic gifting do not always get the prophetic message right. On account of sin human vessels may not always discern correctly the pure signal of God’s prophetic word.

Thus we operate with certain guidelines for the exercise of the prophetic word among us (adapted from St Andrew’s Church, Chorleywood)

We understand prophecy to be a revelation about a person or a situation, given by the Holy Spirit, and spoken out for the benefit of others. We expect these words to be in the form of a message, a statement, a vision, a picture, a passage of Scripture, an impression and/or sensation. We value the gift of prophecy and welcome the prophetic. We teach that every believer can prophesy, and we seek to encourage everyone to ‘have a go’, and at the same time to be accountable to the leadership. Therefore we require everyone (including ourselves) to observe these guidelines:

1. We believe that the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus, so we look to glorify Jesus Christ and not ourselves through the use of this gift.
2. We urge that before any prophetic words are given the person in question first submits to the leadership and asks for permission to utter the prophetic word.
3. We ask people to speak prophetic words clearly, briefly, calmly and lovingly, on the basis that the spirit of the prophet is subject to the control of the prophet.
4. We also ask people to be wary of prophesying about subjects in which they have a personal, emotional involvement.
5. We only allow those who are members of Living Grace to give prophecies out loud (for the sake of ongoing accountability), though we encourage visitors to write down any words they receive and to send them to us.
6. We seek to pause after two or three words have been given in order to weigh what has been said, before continuing with more words if appropriate.
7. We believe that genuine prophecies are to strengthen, encourage and comfort God’s people.
8. We actively discourage directional or manipulative prophecies (i.e. words that tell people what do with their lives, health, relationships, jobs and so on, in the future).
9. We urge people to offer words with humility and to think of prefacing their comments with ‘I sense the Lord may be saying … ‘ rather than ‘Thus says the Lord …’.

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10. We believe that character is as important as charisma, and therefore we reserve the right to ask those who are struggling with character issues (particularly sin issues) not to prophesy until the matter in question is resolved.

11. We recognize that God allows his gifts to dwell in imperfect people and that prophetic giftedness is not necessarily a sign of superior holiness or of a closer relationship with the Lord.

12. We remember that our value to God lies in the fact that we are loved and accepted as his children, and not because we prophesy well or badly.

13. We believe in encouraging and training people to grow in their prophetic gifts so that they can reach deeper levels of maturity and ministry.

14. We believe that prophets are accountable to their leadership and that once they have delivered a word they have relinquished ownership of it and responsibility for it.

15. We hold fast to the view that prophecy is subject to Scripture, not Scripture to prophecy, and in the light of this we urge people to put the Bible first.

16. We welcome interpretations of words of revelation from the body, and ask that these be written out and forwarded to the pastor.
On the Offering

What Good Is My Giving?

By Rick Warren (Adapted)

Probably one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible is Luke 6:38. It says, “Give and it will be given to you. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” For a long time I wanted to believe that verse but it just seemed to good to be true. I wanted to believe it and I kept asking myself how exactly does God give back to me. When I give to others how does God give back to me?

1. GIVING MAKES ME MORE LIKE GOD

God’s a giver. Everything we have is a gift from God. When I give, I’m like God. The Bible says “God so loved the world that He gave...” (John 3:16) You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. It makes you more like God.

2. GIVING DRAWS ME CLOSER TO GOD

The Bible says “Where your treasure is, there your heart is also.” (Matthew 6:21) Wherever I put my money that’s where my heart is … If you put your money with the Lord, it always draws you closer to God.

3. GIVING IS THE ANTIDOTE TO MATERIALISM

1 Timothy 6:17-18 “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. [Circle “enjoyment”. God wants you to enjoy what you have.] Command them to be generous and willing to share. In this way they may take hold of the life that is truly Life!”

First it says, “Command those who are rich...” That’s all of us. If you live in Australia, you’re rich. You could be the poorest American, but you’re richer than the rest of the world. He says it’s ok to enjoy life but true living comes from giving. We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give … It makes me more like God. It draws me closer to God. It’s the antidote to materialism.
4. GIVING STRENGTHENS MY FAITH

God uses finances to test your faith … Have you ever had to decide between paying a bill and tithing? You only have so much money so where is it going to go? This is a test. God's saying, “Do you really believe that I can take care of your bills? Or do you think you have to take care of them on your own?” He's saying, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, test me [circle that] in this, says the Lord. See if I won't throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing you won't have room enough for it.” (Malachi 3:10) God says, I dare you. I dare you to see if you become a giving, generous person, you tithe all the time, see what happens to your life. There are more promises in the Bible regarding giving than any other thing. God talks more about giving and promises more about giving than any other thing. Jesus talked more about giving than He did about heaven or hell. It’s the essence of the Christian life — “God so loved the world that he gave… “Giving gives God the chance to do a miracle. So my giving strengthens and stretches and tests my faith.

5. GIVING IS AN INVESTMENT FOR ETERNITY

You can’t take it with you but you can send it on ahead. The way you send it on ahead is by investing it in people who are going there. Jesus said, “Store up treasure in heaven.” How do you do that? 1 Timothy 6:18-19, “Give happily to those in need and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasures for yourself in heaven. It is the only safe investment for eternity.” And has better rates too! Jesus said you store up treasure in heaven. He says when I give to somebody else; God accepts it as a gift to Him. It says “…give happily to those in need and be ready to share with others…” When I give to other people, I’m storing up treasure in heaven…Are you storing up treasure in heaven?

6. GIVING BLESSES ME IN RETURN

Proverbs 11:25 “A generous man will prosper but he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” Whatever you give out, you’re going to get back. If you’re generous with criticism, you’re going to get a lot of criticism. If you’re generous with gossip, you’re going to get gossip back. If you’re generous with encouragement, you’re going to get encouragement back. It is the law of sowing and reaping. If you’re generous with your money, you’re going to get money back. It’s a law of life. The generous man will prosper. “He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

Jesus also said, “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.” Giving makes me happy. We don’t believe that verse. If we did, we’d give more. But He’s saying that it really feels good to give. Have you ever heard anybody say, “You ought to give ‘til it hurts!” No way! You ought to give until it feels good. Giving makes me happy.
Luke 6:38 “Give and it will be given to you... For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

There are only two kinds of people in life. There are givers and there are takers. You’re one or the other. You’re either giving and generous with your time, your money, your efforts, your energy, your life. Or you’re a taker. The more giving, the most generous people I know are the happiest people I know. The root word of “miserable” is “miser”. The more I hold in, the more stingy I am with my time, with my money, with my tithe, with my effort, the more unhappy I’ll be. Orange County residents are out there thinking, “If I get more, get more... I’m going to be happy.” And God says wrong! If I give more, give more... the happier I will be. I didn’t say that, Jesus said it. I think He’s an authority. He says the way to happiness is not to amass personal wealth, but to give.

How do I get the most out of giving?

That’s what God gives back to me when I give. The question becomes, how do I get the most out of giving? Remember that God is more interested in my attitude than the amount. So what’s the right attitude?

If you’re going to give and get a reward out of it …

1. GIVE WILLINGLY

2 Corinthians 8:12 “For if the willingness is there, your gift is acceptable according to what you have not according to what you don’t have.” The amount is not important. What is important is your attitude when you give. Reward for giving is based on willingness, not on wealth.

2 Corinthians 9:7 “Each one of you should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under pressure.” This will save you from a lot of scams: Never give under pressure. The Bible says you are not to give under pressure. If you ever feel pressured to give, don’t give because you’re not going to get any credit for it.
2. GIVE JOYFULLY

The Bible says, “God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7) When I don’t feel too joyful about giving…I go back and remind myself of the six things that giving has done for me: It makes me more like God, it draws me closer to God, it’s the antidote to materialism, it strengthens my faith, it’s an investment for eternity, and it’s going to bless me in return. Then I get joyful.

Give willingly, joyfully, thankfully.

3. GIVE REGULARLY

“On the first day of every week [Sunday] set aside some of what you have earned and give it as an offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn.” I hadn’t been doing that. I get paid twice a month, so I give twice a month. I get the paycheck and write my tithe off that. I give twice a month. God says give weekly.

Why? He wants it to be a weekly reminder of who’s first place in your life. When you give the first part of your money on the first day of every new week, it is a reminder that says, “God, You’re really number one.” I may say God’s number one in my life, I may say I’m seeking first His kingdom, but if I’m not giving Him the first part of my money and not giving it the first day of every week, how can I say He’s first? It’s a reminder. I’ve committed my life to start doing this.

Notice it uses the phrase “set aside”. Circle that phrase. That involves planning. It’s not impulsive. When my wife and I got married we said if anybody’s going to get paid, God’s going to get paid first. When we get a paycheck, I divide it up. Ten percent first goes to account number one. Account number one is tithing. I write it in there and when I write the check I cross it out. Account number two is my offering. That’s what I give above a tithe. When I finish that I cross that out. That’s the only way I know how to keep track of things like the commitment to Possess Our Land or weekly giving or tithing, it’s to keep a record of it. He says set it aside.

How much should you give? He says the amount depends. Circle the word “depends”. “On the first day of every week set aside some of what you have earned and give it as an offering. The amount depends [circle that] on how much the Lord has helped you to earn.” What you give should be based on what you make. If the Lord didn’t help you to earn anything this last week, then you shouldn’t give anything this last week. But in proportion to what you’re earning, God says as an offering, as a reminder – gratitude for the past, priorities right in the present, and expectation for the future – I’m to give. So I give weekly.
4. GIVE EXPECTANTLY

2 Corinthians 9:6 “Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will reap generously.”

This is a law that every farmer lives by. He lives and dies by it. When a farmer wants to plant a crop or harvest a crop, all he knows he has to do is sow. He doesn’t sow one acre and expect to reap five acres. He doesn’t sow ten acres and expect to reap a hundred acres. Because wherever he sows, that’s where he’s going to reap.

He’s saying, you plant the seed and God will provide for your need. He’s saying you get to decide how much God blesses your life. You, right now, are deciding how much God blesses your life. You sow generously, you reap generously. What do you need more of? Whatever you need more of you start sowing. You need more time? You give some time to the Lord and watch your time multiply. You need some more energy? Give some energy to the Lord and watch your energy multiply. You need more income? Give some of your income to the Lord and watch it multiply. You sow sparingly, you reap sparingly. You sow generously, you reap generously.

I’ve had people say, “That sounds real good. As soon as God gives me some money, then I’ll start giving.” God says, “Wrong! That doesn’t require any faith. You give first. You prime the pump.” That’s how it stretches your faith. Watch what happens.

I’m a farmer at heart … One of the laws that every farmer knows is that you always reap more than you sow. It’s a law that God’s planted. I planted about fifty kernels of corn. One little seed will grow a stalk. About the middle of July or August this little seed is going to produce a stalk with two, three, maybe four cobs of corn. There’s over a thousand kernels in a cob. I plant one little seed and God returns on that, 3000 - 4000 seeds.

That is the law of the harvest. And it’s a law that works in every area of life. It works for believers and unbelievers alike. What you sow, you reap. If you sow bountifully, you reap bountifully. You cannot out give God. You just can’t do it. The more you give the more God gives back to you. You cannot do it.

I could tell you example after example of letters and cards I get from you saying, “I decided to start tithing or I increased over and above my tithe and giving more and look what happened!” It would blow your mind.

The Bible says that the essence of the Christian life, not a minor activity in the corner, but the essence of the Christian life is giving.
Key words in the Bible:

The word “believe” is used 272 times.
The word “pray” is used 371 times.
The word “love” is used 714 times.
The word “give” is used 2,162 times.

You tell me where the emphasis is in the Bible! If you’re going to study the Bible you eventually have to study giving. God so loved the world that He gave and He wants us to become like Him. It’s not “How little can I give and get away with it and still call myself a Christian?” It says, “Good will come to him who is generous.” (Psalm 112:5) I should be constantly looking for ways to give more and more because you cannot out give God. You plant a seed and you’ll reap a harvest.

Review: Would you like to be more like God? Would you like to be closer to God? You say, “I feel far away from Him. I’d like to be closer.” Would you like to have the antidote to materialism living in Australia? Would you like to have your faith strengthened? Would you like to start investing for eternity and laying up treasures in heaven? Would you like to be blessed in return? A generous man will prosper and there’s more happiness giving than receiving. Do you want those things? They will happen when you start obeying God in this area.
On Baptism

In the first sermon that was preached after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, Peter declared to the crowd before him:

“…’Therefore let all … be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers and sisters, what shall we do?’ Peter replied: ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:36-41).

From this passage we learn that in order to become a Christian three things need to happen: (1) You need to repent and (2) be baptized. (3) Then you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We need to repent which means that we turn away from everything that we know is wrong in our lives. After that we need to be baptized because God responds to us when we ask him for forgiveness and promises to cleanse us with the water of our baptism. On top of that we also receive the promise of the infilling with the Holy Spirit.

In another Bible passage Jesus said: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Thus, as we repent, put our faith in Jesus Christ and are baptized, God saves us to eternal life. That is his promise.

We – together with all of humanity – are “by nature [sinful] objects of [God’s] wrath” (Ephesians 2:3; cf. Psalm 51:5). Therefore everyone needs the washing with forgiveness in baptism.

Whatever happens in baptism, only God can do. The Bible says that we are “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). The phrase “born of water” is instructive. In baptism God grants us the birth of a new self – a new person belonging to him – and no person has ever birthed himself.

Then the Bible says that “we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4). Here we are to understand that in our baptism we are incorporated into the saving work of Jesus Christ. As Jesus suffered and died to remove any claims for the punishment of our sins, so we die to sin at our baptism into the life of Jesus; and as Jesus then rose again from the dead after three days in the grave, so we rise again from the water of our baptism into the new life which we now have in Jesus. In this new life we are free from sin, death and the devil. Once again we cannot do this ourselves because only God can make anyone die and then rise again.

The Bible also says that “you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ…” (Galatians 3:26-27). In other words this means that in baptism we become the children of God. In baptism God adopts us as his children and no person has
ever adopted himself. This is something that gets done to us – apart from our ingenuity and strength – which in turn – together with the previous images of “being born anew” and “dying and rising in baptism” – illustrates that our baptism does not depend on anything we do. God is the one that is active – birthing us, making us alive, adopting us.

In a way we can only receive our baptism and we do so by faith and we do that every day. As we keep trusting God and acknowledging him, he releases the blessings of baptism into our lives.

In the earliest days of the Christian church all of the converts to the Christian faith were adults because they were the first to hear the good news of Jesus’ saving death but then with these adults whole households were baptized. Peter already said in his first sermon that “the promise is for you and your children” (Acts 2:39). Consequently, we read in the Bible that when the adult Lydia came to faith, she was not baptized on her own but together with her entire household (Acts 16:15). Likewise Paul said to the jailer of a Roman prison: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household. Then…immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:31-33). Together with the jailer his whole family was baptized which means that children were included (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:16).

From a broader biblical view this is not surprising. God has always placed us in families and designed that his blessings are meant to be passed on from generation to generation in families. For instance, God promised Abraham that “…in you all families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3) and then God spelled it out very clearly in the ten commandments: “…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, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4). Thus, families become channels of blessings which means that when God gives me faith and makes me a Christian, he does not just think of me alone but my entire family: my children and children’s children, whom I can in good faith, according to his design, therefore bring before him in baptism to be blessed by him (cf. Psalm 22:9-10).

Therefore, if you are not yet baptized or as a parent want to be a channel of God’s blessings for your child, then please consider the state of your own faith. In order to become a Christian three things need to happen: (1) You need to repent and (2) be baptized. (3) Then you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The congregation of Living Grace is always rejoicing over baptisms in our midst.
Martin Luther summed up our understanding of Holy Baptism in the Small Catechism:

**What is Baptism?**
Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

**Which is that word of God?**
Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

**What benefits does Baptism give?**
It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

**Which are these words and promises of God?**
Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

**How can water do such great things?**
Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and not Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying” (Titus 3:5-8).

**What does such baptizing with water indicate?**
It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

**Where is this written?**
St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: “We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father; we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4).
On Holy Communion

Fresh Food
(Sermon by Edgar Mayer)

In the Bible – Jesus granted one man – the apostle Paul – extraordinary access to his truth. Paul explained to his churches – Galatians 1:1: “... [I am] an apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ... ” Galatians 1:11-12: “I want you to know, brothers [and sisters], that the gospel I preached is not something that anyone made up. I did not receive it from any person, not was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” In another letter – Paul continued to explain – 2 Corinthians 12:1-7: “... I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. [Original: I know a man in Christ who] Fourteen years ago I was caught up to the third heaven. And I [original: And I know that this man] – whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows – was caught up in paradise. I [original: He] heard inexpressible things ... [I have been given] surpassingly great revelations ... ”

Isn’t it wonderful? This man – Paul – had visions, revelations, even personal teaching lessons with Jesus in heaven – extraordinary experiences of understanding the truth – which – this morning – is again stirring my interest and raising my level of expectation. What was so important that Jesus chose supernatural ways of teaching Paul?

Are you ready? One of the topics was Holy Communion. Paul writes – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

This is a little unexpected. Holy Communion is as old as the church. Holy Communion is the subject of ancient traditions and enshrined in weekly worship. Why would Jesus see the need to instruct Paul – with supernatural visions and revelations – about something that was so well known and central in the church? Moreover – Jesus gave Paul no new information. We know from other Bible sources that – on the night that Jesus was betrayed – he spoke over the bread and over the wine: “This is my body. This is the new covenant in my blood.” What was Jesus doing? The eye-witnesses of the first communion meal were still alive and their eye-witness accounts had not been forgotten.

Could it be that even in the time of Paul the church was in need of fresh revelation about Holy Communion? Could it be that the traditional eye-witness accounts and the traditional teaching formulas had lost their impact? In Paul’s own church (in Corinth) the regular ritual of the holy meal seems to have dulled the spiritual awareness of the first Christians. The whole celebration had become second nature to many – was no longer special – so that the sense of being one church body in reverence before the Lord was lost and some even became tipsy at the table – 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 – I read: “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk ... ”

Is this our need today? Do we also need fresh revelation about Holy Communion? How many Communion meals have you had in your life-time? Do you
still know what you are eating and drinking or has the manifold repetition of the
same old ritual dulled our senses? Jesus gave Paul fresh revelation and he will give
you (and me) fresh revelation this morning.

When I grew up in Germany, I “hated” Holy Communion because it made
the service longer and many adults must have felt the same because they left
during the hymn before Communion … In Australia – in our church seminary – I
learned that Holy Communion was the pinnacle of all worship but no matter how
awesome the teaching points were, my weekly experience did not match the lofty
expectations (and I was the pastor).

The sameness of the ritual – the same prayers, the same responses, the
same chants, the same pronouncements – (read out by me and the congregation –
word-perfect – from a book) – drove me crazy with boredom and a sense of fake
religion because – mouthing the same old words – my mind began to wander and –
judging by the accounts of many other church members – their minds were also
somewhere else. I used to count down the pages that were left to do in our worship
order. At no time did I get a strong (satisfying) sense that Jesus was blessing me
through Holy Communion. This may be overstating my experience (or lack of
experience) – and I also know that we receive by faith (not everything from God is
tangible) – but – at the Communion table – there never seemed to be a sensation of
receiving from Jesus: (e.g.) faith, love, joy, peace, holiness, spiritual gifts … These
things did come to me in other prayer settings. Why was it not happening at Holy
Communion when it was said to be the pinnacle of all worship?

With further learning there came further disappointments. The Bible
information on Holy Communion is not complicated. Jesus gave bread to the
disciples to eat (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24), and
gave fruit of the vine to drink (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25). This brief meal came at
or near the conclusion of a larger meal (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22) which most
sources identify as the Passover meal. The Bible accounts are clear. Yet – my
disappointment was – (my dismay was) – and is – that Christians had been – and
are – more deeply divided over this meal than I had ever expected.

Jesus gave such a small target for disagreement. He simply said over the
bread: “This is my body.” And he simply said over the wine: “This is my blood.”
(“This the new covenant in my blood.”) How can you make such simple words –
uncomplicated words – few in number: four words to be precise – the bone of
contention among Christians – (the mother of all conflicts) – to the point where
Christians have waged war against each other and shed blood over the correct
understanding of Holy Communion. The very first Lutherans in Australia had come
to this land to escape persecution over their stance on Holy Communion. William
Booth – the founder of the Salvation Army – felt so pressured over sacramental
rites which were prone to “create division of opinion and heart-burning” among
Christians that his organization abandoned the meal altogether – even though
Jesus had said – 1 Corinthians 11:24-25: “ … Do this in remembrance of me … ”
[There were also other reasons.] In our day – many – if not most – current (cross-
denominational) discipleship courses do not teach on Holy Communion for fear of
creating further conflict.

What went wrong? Christians tried to say more than Jesus in the Bible. As I
began to study the conflict, I learned to love the Lutheran position (not surprising as
I was studying as a Lutheran in a Lutheran seminary preparing to become a
Lutheran minister) because Lutherans tried to explain the least. Luther summed up
the entire Lutheran position in less than four hundred words. This is how a father
was supposed to teach the faith to his household. I quote:
The Sacrament of the Altar (The Simple Way a Father Should Present it to his Household)

What is the Sacrament of the Altar? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink, established by Christ Himself.

Where is that written? The holy apostles Matthew, Mark and Luke and St. Paul write this: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to His disciples and said: ‘Take! Eat! This is My body, which is given for you. Do this to remember Me!’ In the same way He also took the cup, after supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying: ‘Drink of it, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”

What good does this eating and drinking do? We are told in the words “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins.” By these words the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation.

How can physical eating and drinking do such great things? Of course, eating and drinking do not do these things. These words, written here, do them: “given for you” and “shed for you to forgive sins.” These words, along with physical eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament. Anyone who believes these words has what they say and what they record, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

Who, then, receives such a sacrament in a worthy way? Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: “for you,” and “for the forgiveness of sins.” On the other hand, he who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is unworthy and unprepared, for the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.

In all conflicts the bone of contention was – and remains – the interpretation of Jesus’ words: “This is my body. This is my blood.” Is the bread really his body? Is the wine really his blood? How? Human logic suggests that this cannot be because a) Jesus’ body and blood are with him in heaven (and not on the Communion tables of millions of Christians), b) the bread and wine still taste like bread and wine and c) the physical presence of Jesus is not needed for a spiritual experience. Yet, Luther resisted these human arguments and – again and again – pointing back to the Bible – quoted the words of Jesus who had said: “This is my body. This is my blood.” In one crucial debate – with the Swiss theologian Huldrich Zwingli – Martin Luther took a piece of chalk and wrote on the table between them – with large letters: “This is my body.” This is what Jesus said and – therefore – this is what we receive. Don’t ask me how. It is happening somehow. The (most common) Lutheran way of saying “somehow” has been the formula “in, with and under”: The body and blood of Jesus are present “in, with and under” the forms of bread and wine. We don’t know how but somehow.

I may give you a glimpse of one of the many debates on Holy Communion in church history. We stay with Luther and Zwingli:
A great controversy over the Lord's Supper arose between Luther and Zwingli, including other theologians in the respective camps. Luther and his associate John Bugenhagen (1485-1558) wrote pamphlets against Zwingli's position. Zwingli and his companion Johannus Oeclamadius (1482-1531) authored pamphlets denouncing Luther's views. The paper debate became quite heated, with Luther declaring that Zwingli and those with him were not Christians, and Zwingli calling the Lutherans flesh eaters and blood drinkers, saying that their Communion was a baked god. Carlstadt suggested that when Christ said the word “this” he pointed to his visible body, so that the Lord’s action implied, “You see my body before you, which I give for you; in commemoration thereof partake of bread and wine.” Oecolampadius did not use “is” as his starting point. He contended that when Christ said “body” he meant “sign, emblem of my blood.” A third theory was that of a lay Protestant mystic by the name of Casper Schwenkfeld von Ossig (ca. 1489-1561). He claimed to know by special revelation that “this” was the predicate of the sentence, “This is my body,” and that the words must be reversed, “My body is this, namely, the true bread for the soul; my blood is this, namely the true position for the soul.”

A German Lutheran political leader, Landgrave Philip of Hesse (1504-1567) believed strongly that the Protestants needed to be united, not the least of which was for political reasons. In an effort to heal the breach occasioned by the Lord's Supper controversy, he invited Luther, Zwingli, and their fellow theologians to a conference at his castle in Marburg, early in October 1529, which came to be known as the Marburg Colloquy. The German and Swiss theologians met for several days discussing and disagreeing about the Lord's Supper. In the main, the debate was exegetical in nature. No arguments that had not already appeared in print were brought forward. The colloquy was primarily a recapitulation of the controversy that had preceded it. The discussions between Luther and Zwingli were surprisingly cordial. They treated each other with gentlemanly courtesy.

Luther took his stand on a literal interpretation of Christ's words “this is my body.” He challenged Zwingli to prove to him that Christ's body and blood were not in the Lord's Supper. With a piece of chalk, he wrote the words “This is my body” on the table in large characters. He constantly returned to this quote throughout the debate, pointing his finger to the chalk written words of institution repeatedly during the proceedings. In response to Luther's position, Zwingli argued that Christ had spoken these words metaphorically in the same manner as when he made such statements as “I am the vine” and “I am the bread of life”. Luther countered Zwingli by stating that any metaphorical interpretation could not be assumed, but had to be proven, and that the burden of proof must fall on those who prefer a nonliteral interpretation.

A basic verse of Scripture used by the Swiss was “It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). Oecolampadius stated that this passage provides the key for interpreting the words of institution, and excludes a literal understanding. Luther contended that
when Christ said, “The flesh profiteth nothing,” he was not speaking of his flesh, but ours. Just as Luther was a literalist regarding his favorite text, so was Zwingli about the words “Christ ascended into heaven.” He reasoned that Christ ascended into heaven; therefore, he cannot be on earth with his body, for a body cannot be in more than one place at a time. Luther quoted medieval scholars to claim that there are two different kinds of presence. Again, they reached an impasse in the discussions.

When it became evident that no consensus regarding the Lord’s Supper could be achieved, Landgrave Philip asked Luther to draw up a set of articles on which there was agreement between the parties. Luther complied and prepared 15 Marburg Articles dealing with fundamental teachings of the Christian faith. All agreed to 14 of the articles. The fifteenth dealt with the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, recognizing the difference between the Lutherans and Zwinglians. [Luther refused to shake hands with Zwingli when he left.]

After Marburg, Luther and Melanchthon became more hopeful regarding the Swiss theologians than at any previous time. In addition, after Marburg, Martin Bucer of southern Germany, who was a member of Zwingli’s delegation at the colloquy, regarded Luther’s doctrinal views more favorably than before. Seeking a middle ground between Luther and Zwingli he proposed the formula “that the true body and the true blood of Christ are truly present in the Lord’s Supper and are offered with the words of the Lord in the sacrament.” In 1534, three years after Zwingli’s death, Bucer wrote a paper in which he endeavored to show that the Lutherans and the Zwinglians were in fundamental agreement. The publication of this writing resulted in a meeting later that year in which Melanchthon endorsed Bucer’s plan for concord between the two camps. Bucer and Melanchthon worked together to achieve unity regarding the Lord’s Supper. Negotiations toward unity reached a climax at a 1536 meeting held in Luther’s study. The Lutherans and the Zwinglians there present gave each other the hand of Christian fellowship. Melanchthon prepared a report of the discussions, known subsequently as the Wittenberg Concord. It explained the common belief in language both sides could accept, even though they interpreted the words differently. The Concord divided the Zwinglians into two groups, those who followed Bucer and those who retained the symbolic view of the Lord’s Supper.

Luther and Lutherans also maintained their strength in believing Jesus’ words [“This is my body. This is my blood.”] in their disagreement with John Calvin and the Reformed churches:

Ernest Bartels: Take Eat, Take Drink, St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004, p166-167: Calvin tried to find a middle way, an “intermediary view,” between Luther and Zwingli by rejecting the positions of both. Over against Luther’s confession, Calvin held that the presence of Christ is spiritual, not coupled with the elements. Against Zwingli he maintained that the bread is not a mere sign or figure of Christ’s body, but a spiritual feeding of souls … Calvin denied the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, and instead maintained Christ’s spiritual influence, his power and efficacy as the
Redeemer. Calvin said that Christ is not to be sought in the earthly and corruptible elements that we see and touch. Accordingly, he maintained that the body and blood of Christ are not received orally by mouth, but spiritually by faith. Calvin says that the participants at the Lord’s Table must lift up their hearts to partake of the body of Christ in heaven. In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* he rebuked the Lutherans, saying, “They locate Christ in the bread, whereas we do not think it divinely lawful to drag him down from heaven.” [However, Lutherans believe that the human nature has become one with Christ’s divine nature to such an extent that it shares in the divine nature’s omnipresence.]

Lutherans focus on Jesus’ words, believe them and then refuse to go beyond them. They do not try to explain what Jesus and the Bible do not explain. Thus – in response to the Catholic Church – Lutherans also resist the philosophical theory of transubstantiation. This theory speculates that in Holy Communion the substance of bread and wine (though not their appearance) [completely] change into Christ’s real presence. According to this theory – the bread and wine of Holy Communion disappear completely (even though the elements still look and taste like bread and wine) and instead become exclusively Christ’s body and blood. However – for Lutherans – this may be saying too much.

How are we feeling about Holy Communion now? I don’t know how you actually experience the meal on any given Sunday – (has the meal already been impacting you?) – but anyone could be forgiven for turning away from the meal over these bitter debates. If Holy Communion is and remains at the heart of aggressive and wounding controversy – (Christians even refuse to shake hands with each other when they debate its meaning) – we are tempted to stay away from the meal. This is sad – especially in the light of other teachings in the Bible – such as 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” However, emotional turmoil does not make for a good Communion experience.

Then, Lutherans (and I am a Lutheran) managed to turn their greatest strength into their greatest weakness around the Communion table. Let me explain. Lutherans had such strength when they insisted that – and I repeat here again a quote from Martin Luther’s Small Catechism – “... These words ... ‘given for you’ and ‘for the forgiveness of sins’ ... (along with physical eating and drinking) are the chief thing in the sacrament.” These words of Jesus are the one solid foundation of the Holy Meal and – in any conflict – they can be put up in big letters – (like Luther took a piece of chalk and wrote the words on the table which he shared with Zwingli) – because the words of Jesus will never let us down. There is power in Jesus’ words.

However, this emphasis has become one-sided in modern understanding. (At least this is my discernment.) There is this thinking now that as long as the words of Jesus are present in the holy meal – as long as Jesus’ words are spoken over the bread and wine: “This is my body. This is my blood.” – Jesus himself is present. Statements such as this one are taken to the extreme: “... since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled with believers, it is allowable to use the sacraments [Baptism & Holy Communion] even when they are administered by evil men ... Both the sacraments and the Word are effectual by reason of the
institution and commandment of Christ even if they are administered by evil men” (The Augsburg Confession, Article VIII).

It is true that the preaching of God’s Word and the sacrament of Holy Communion can have power and communicate the presence of God despite evil pastors and church leaders – especially in a church that is otherwise alive. However, the Bible norm is that for the Word of God to be effective, those that preach and teach have to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Word of God and the Holy Spirit must go together. After Jesus rose from the dead, he taught his disciples and made sure that they knew all truth, but he also told them that they had to wait for the infilling with the Holy Spirit before they could speak the truth in power (Acts 1:4-8). This is not a new teaching but something that Lutherans have always known. [For instance, they are clear that children at the play-ground (or unbelievers) play-acting Holy Communion will not enjoy the presence of Jesus in the meal because they do not do so in faith which is worked by the Holy Spirit.]

Jesus’ words in Holy Communion cannot be treated as a magic formula which works irrespective of the Holy Spirit and the faith of Spirit-filled people. Thus, Luther and Lutherans have always attacked the teaching that the Lord’s Supper conveys grace simply by being performed (ex opere operato). By this doctrine the celebration of the Lord’s Supper would be converted into a good work on the part of the officiating priest. In sermons, Luther told his hearers that not the Sacrament, but faith in the Sacrament, justifies. Faith must precede, not only accompany, the reception of the Sacrament. The mere performance of Holy Communion does not guarantee any blessings.

This is old Lutheran teaching but my sneaking suspicion is that we nevertheless succumbed to such an understanding in practice. As long as we speak Jesus’ words over bread and wine in Holy Communion, the outcome seems guaranteed. Is this not what we think? We love our strength of relying on the Word of God (sola scriptura) and we are such champions of the Word that we no longer see the danger in some of our confessional statements – for instance the statement which I quoted before: “… it is allowable to use the sacraments [Baptism & Holy Communion] even when they are administered by evil men … Both the sacraments and the Word are effectual … even if they are administered by evil men.”

What does this mean in practice? In a congregation where the pastor is an evil man – an unbeliever living in sin – and – (let’s say) – the congregation is also no longer alive – their faith is no longer the faith of a trusting relationship with God – their faith no longer leads them to step out in faith for anything – their faith has become mere assent to some teaching points (and even demons know the truth) – what will they receive when the evil pastor leads them in Holy Communion? Will there be the body and blood of Christ “in, with and under” the bread and wine? Will there be the power of forgiveness (and judgement)? I would not advise joining them in Holy Communion. Jesus’ words are no magic formula. Unless the Spirit of God is present in Holy Communion, even Jesus’ words – “This is my body. This is my blood.” – do not guarantee his presence.

The strong attention on Jesus’ words – while at the same time displaying an apparent lack of attention on the Holy Spirit – has weakened our experience of Holy Communion. Thus, my journey with Holy Communion has not been a good one: first boredom, then dismay over church conflicts and – finally – a wrong expectation of automatic blessings.

Yet – going back to the beginning now – I am still intrigued by the fact that Jesus spoke to Paul in visions and revelations about Holy Communion. Jesus gave him fresh revelation about this ancient meal and therefore it must be important. This
is on his heart – also for you and me – this morning. Jesus desires to make the bread and wine of Holy Communion fresh for you.

Two months ago (21 Aug 10) in Sydney I witnessed something astonishing. It was during the School of Healing & Impartation with Pastor Randy Clark whom God used to launch what came to be known as the Toronto Blessing. On the last day – before the last message – Pastor Randy Clark invited anyone in the conference to bring forward prayer clothes so that he and others might bless them. I did not anticipate this and therefore did not come prepared but others had. They brought forward neatly folded handkerchiefs, gave them to him, returned to their seats and planned to pick them up later.

The Bible verses that led to this action were Acts 19:11-12: “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.” Pastor Randy Clark ended up with a stack of about forty items. He proceeded with the evening and announced that the next message had been causing more animated responses than any other in his ministry. People either completely loved the message or hated it. Yet, Pastor Randy was interrupted when another person came forward and placed her scarf on the pile of handkerchiefs in his hands. This was a spontaneous action which was taken up by others. Suddenly, there was a stream of more people rushing to him with all sorts of clothing items: jumpers, hats, beanies, shoes – wallets even. The pile of clothing in his arms became so enormous that Pastor Clark had to put everything down on the stage – and still people kept coming – the young and the very old. And this was not even done for fun but everyone wanted the blessing of a piece of clothing because over the last few days hundreds had been healed during the conference. For instance, I remember that God had healed one man’s hand and even the scar from the surgery disappeared. There was an expectation that the blessed clothing items would indeed heal more people.

Finally, no one else came forward and Pastor Randy Clark stood next to the enormous pile of clothing and asked this question [I do not remember the exact wording]: “Do you believe that something will come out of blessing the handkerchiefs and other clothing?” People answered in the affirmative. He then asked: “How come, then, that we attribute such power to God when we bless some clothing but make so little out of blessing the bread and wine in Holy Communion?” This was astonishing. A Pentecostal (a former Baptist) was preaching on Holy Communion in a charismatic church conference and he urged the congregation to believe more than they had about this holy meal. He was aware of the divisive nature of teaching anything on Holy Communion. He shared how he had planted a church and how – in the beginning – they had tense moments over Holy Communion when – after the service – the former Baptist threw the Holy Communion bread into the bin while the former Easter Orthodox Christian still regarded the bread as the body of Christ. For him this other person had just thrown Jesus into the bin. Pastor Clark negotiated all of these pitfalls but then kept making the comparison between the anointing that people expect from blessing ordinary clothing and the far greater anointing that can be expected to come from the blessing of the bread and wine – according to Jesus’ command and promise – in Holy Communion.

Wow! What a controversial way to end a school on healing! And how awesome! The greatest healing is in the body and blood of Jesus Christ [expand and explain the cross] and it comes to us in no better way than the holy meal – as we eat the bread and wine over which Jesus says: “This is my body. This is my blood.”
The experience of this last day at the conference made Holy Communion fresh again. The old truth was coming to me from an unexpected angle and may it be the same for you. Jesus is still in the business of making the old fresh again – like he did it with Paul through visions and revelations.

Another unexpected encouragement – another fresh joy – in the celebration of Holy Communion came through Bill Johnson’s Bible teaching on the power of testimony. The key Bible verse is in Revelation 19:10: “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Pastor Johnson explored what this verse meant and then experienced that as the testimonies of Jesus were shared – everything that Jesus was doing in people’s lives – the words of the testimonies released prophetic power to repeat the miracles. As the testimonies declared the intent and nature of God, they became prophetic words which recreated the same miracles again in other people. This was a simple but powerful principle. Tell what Jesus has done and you will experience Jesus doing the same miracle with the same power again. The God that created the world by speaking the universe into existence, will create again as the words of the testimonies are spoken.

For instance, when Pastor Johnson was sharing the healing of clubfeet, a woman visiting the church had a 2-year-old little girl whose feet turned inward so severely that she would constantly trip over them whenever she tried to run. After hearing the testimony and the teaching, the woman said in her heart, “I’ll take that for my daughter.” When she went to pick up her little girl from our nursery, she found that her feet were already perfectly straight. No one had laid hands on her or prayed. It just happened with God’s supernatural intervention when her faith was ignited through the power of a story.

Later, another person watched a recording of a worship service where Pastor Johnson retold these miracles. After she had heard the teaching on the testimony and the stories that followed, she called to her daughter, who was in another room. The daughter had her feet turned inward so severely that they were actually deformed. She responded: “Yes, Mommy” and came and stood in the hallway. Her mother then told her to take off her shoes. After the girl removed her shoes, the mother told her to come to her. As she walked toward her mother, the feet straightened and were completely healed. Once again, faith was released through the power of a story.

You can learn more about this in Bill Johnson’s book “Release The Power Of Jesus”. There is no time now but this principle became for me another fresh revelation of Holy Communion because in the context of the meal Jesus actively commanded the retelling of the testimony of what happened to his body and blood in his death. He had said – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26: “... ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ ... ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ ... ” We were to celebrate Holy Communion in his remembrance – in the retelling of Jesus’ testimony – in speaking about the significance of his body and blood – and then we were to do the testimony – by consuming the bread and wine. This would release more than the power for the healing of clubfeet. This would recreate the same power that Jesus exercised when his body was broken on the cross and his blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Still another fresh insight into Holy Communion came through an earlier study of prophetic actions in the Bible. For instance, the prophet Elisha said to the king of Israel – 2 Kings 13:17-19: “Open the window to the east” And the king opened it. Then the prophet said: “Now, shoot!” And the king shot an arrow. Elisha said: “The Lord’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram.” Elisha declared: “You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.” Then he said: “Take the
arrows,” and the king took them. Elisha told him, “Strike the ground.” He struck it three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said, “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times.”

According to this incident prophetic actions – not just the prophetic words – carry power to fulfill the prophecy. Since the king of Israel had not struck the ground with his arrows in a decisive manner (not often enough), he forfeited decisive victory over his enemies. Likewise Naaman, the commander of king Aram’s army, was told to wash himself seven times in the Jordan river to be cleansed of his leprosy. Only when he consented to do that – dip himself in the Jordan seven times – he was healed (2 Kings 5). Moses had to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea to divide the water for the deliverance of his people (Exodus 14:16). Prophetic actions carry power.

For Holy Communion this means that we can expect – in fresh ways – that the physical action of eating and drinking at Holy Communion releases power. This is how prophecy works. Physical actions release power. Therefore, when you hear Jesus say to you: “Do this is remembrance of me. Take and eat. This is my body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins,” take him up on the offer. The physical action releases power. As you eat and drink his body and blood in the bread and wine, forgiveness is released.

Is Holy Communion coming to you in fresh ways? Pastor Randy Clark drew a parallel with the blessing of handkerchiefs for healing. Then, there is the power of testimony in the holy meal and the power of prophetic action in the eating and drinking. This morning – Jesus is wanting to make his holy meal fresh for you again. Forgiveness – freedom from sin, death and the devil – all of Jesus – including joy and peace – are available to you in this meal. Eat and drink with fresh expectations.

Now – if this meal is so great, are there stories which confirm the teaching points. Yes, there are – even in Lutheran history. Abbreviate and retell in your own words:

http://www.evanwiggs.com/revival/history/moravian.html: … A Moravian historian wrote that Church history abounds in records of special outpourings of the Holy Ghost, and verily the thirteenth of August 1727, was a day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We saw the hand of God and His wonders, and we were all under the cloud of our fathers baptized with their Spirit. The Holy Ghost came upon us and in those days great signs and wonders took place in our midst. From that time scarcely a day passed but what we beheld His almighty workings amongst us. A great hunger after the Word of God took possession of us so that we had to have three services every day, viz. 5.0 and 7.30 a.m. and 9.0 p.m. Every one desired above everything else that the Holy Spirit might have full control. Self-love and self-will, as well as all disobedience disappeared and an overwhelming flood of grace swept us all out into the great ocean of Divine Love.

No one present could tell exactly what happened on that Wednesday morning, 13 August 1727 at the specially called Communion service. They hardly knew if they had been on earth or in heaven. Count Nicholas Zinzendorf, the young leader of that community, gave this account many years later:

We needed to come to the Communion with a sense of the loving nearness of the Saviour. This was the great comfort which has made this day a generation ago to be a festival, because on this day
twenty-seven years ago the Congregation of Herrnhut, assembled for communion (at the Berthelsdorf church) were all dissatisfied with themselves. They had quit judging each other because they had become convinced, each one, of his lack of worth in the sight of God and each felt himself at this Communion to be view of the noble countenance of the Saviour. O head so full of bruises, So full of pain and scorn. In this view of the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, their hearts told them that He would be their patron and their priest who was at once changing their tears into oil of gladness and their misery into happiness. This firm confidence changed them in a single moment into happy people which they are to this day, and into their happiness they have since led may thousands of others through the memory and help which the heavenly grace once given to themselves, so many thousand times confirmed to them since then.

Then, Pastor Randy Clark reported this in his School Of Healing & Impartation workbook: “The Presbyterians had a prolonged communion service which would culminate once a year and last for 3-5 days. There had been 5-6 such meetings in Scotland where the ‘fire fell’ or where God would ‘light the fire again’. The ‘wild meetings,’ as they were called, began in Ulster peaking around 1624. ‘It was in these Ulster communions that we first have reports of people fainting dead away and being carried outside in a trance.’ The largest and most famous of these meetings was held at later in 1742 in Cambuslang. Estimates of the meetings ran as high as 30,000 people that attended” (p8).

There are even stories where God performed a miracle to provide the wine for Holy Communion:

Indonesia: The Spirit of God brought revival to Indonesia during the troubled and politically uncertain times there in the sixties. Much of it happened outside the established church, with a later acceptance of it in some churches. Thousands of Moslems were converted, the biggest Christian impact on Islam in history.

A Bible School in East Java experienced revival with deep repentance, confession, renunciation of occult practices, burnings of fetishes and amulets and a new humility and unity among staff and students. The Lord led individual students and teams in powerful evangelism in many islands.

A team visited Timor and saw evidences of revival beginning which burst into unprecedented power in September 1965. This revival spread in the uncertain days following the attempted army coup on 30 September, 1965 in Indonesia. Four days previously a visitation from God had begun in Timor.

A rebellious young man had received a vision of the Lord who commanded him to repent, burn his fetishes, and confess his sins in church. He did. He attended the Reformed Church in Soe, a mountain town of about 5,000 people, where the revival broke out at that service on Sunday 26 September 1965. People heard the sound of a tornado wind. Flames on the church building prompted police to set off the fire alarm to summon the volunteer fire fighters. Many people were converted that night. Many were filled with the Spirit including speaking in tongues, some in English. By midnight teams of lay people had been organised to begin spreading the gospel the next day. They
gave themselves full time to visiting churches and villages and saw thousands converted with multitudes healed and delivered. In one town alone they saw 9,000 people converted in two weeks.

Another young man, Mel Tari witnessed this visitation of God and later became part of Team 42. Eventually, about 90 evangelistic teams were formed which functioned powerfully with spiritual gifts. Healings and evangelism increased dramatically. Specific directions from the Lord led the teams into powerful ministry with thousands becoming Christians. They saw many healings, miracles such as water being turned to nonalcoholic wine for communion, some instantaneous healings, deliverance from witchcraft and demonic powers, and some people raised from death through prayer.

The teams were often guided supernaturally including provision of light at night on jungle trails, angelic guides and protection, meagre supplies of food multiplied in pastors’ homes when a team ate together there during famines, and witch doctors being converted after they saw power encounters when the teams’ prayers banished demons rendering the witch doctors powerless.

The teams learned to listen to the Lord and obey him. His leadings came in many biblical ways:
1. God spoke audibly as with Samuel or Saul of Tarsus, 2. many had visions as did Mary or Cornelius, 3. there were inspired dreams such as Jacob, Joseph or Paul saw, 4. prophecies as in Israel and the early church occurred, 5. the Spirit led many as with Elijah or Paul’s missionary team, 6. the Lord often spoke through specific Bible verses, 7. circumstances proved to be Godincidences not just coincidences, 8. often when leadings were checked with the group or the church the Lord gave confirmations and unity.

Mel Tari, Kurt Koch and others have told of the amazing revival in Indonesia. The Reformed Church Presbytery on Timor, for example, recorded 80,000 conversions from the first year of the revival there, half of those being former communists. They noted that some 15,000 people had been permanently healed in that year. After three years the number of converts had grown to over 200,000. On another island where there had been very few Christians 20,000 became believers in the first three years of the revival.

So often in times of great tribulation, political upheaval and bloodshed, the Spirit of the Lord moves most powerfully and the church grows most rapidly, as happens in many countries today.

Even the Bible records one incident where the celebration of Holy Communion resulted in a faith breakthrough – Luke 24:13-35. Abbreviate and retell in your own words:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and
“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread."

I come to a close. This morning – as we celebrate Holy Communion now – hear the invitation in fresh ways. Jesus is bidding you to come, saying: “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. This cup is the new covenant in my blood which has been shed for the forgiveness of your sins; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Eat and drink. Receive him now. Amen.

At Living Grace we serve non-alcoholic wine for Holy Communion in order to provide a safe environment for people who are struggling with alcohol.
On the Jesus Tent of the Supernatural

God has led Living Grace into tent ministry in Toowoomba and beyond. The following is from Pastor Mayer’s report after our very first Jesus Tent in Queens Park, Toowoomba:

The Jesus Tent

[In this message I reflect on the Jesus Tent of the Supernatural, Toowoomba (24-28 October 2012).]

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

On the 1st January 2003, we had a worship service with a Lutheran guest-preacher (Gemechis Desta Buba) where two thirds of the congregation were falling to the floor under the power of the Holy Spirit. This was new to me and the congregation. At home, I said to God: “You have to show me this in the Bible. I have to know that this is you.” Then, God showed me 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 which was a favourite passage for Lutherans like me because it magnified the cross of Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:1-5: “... I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ...”) but – for the first time – I actually picked up on what these verses were also saying: “... My message and my preaching were not wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.” I was stunned – embarrassed – that the meaning of these verses never registered with me before – (the logic of these verses is not complicated) – but I also relaxed. If – by the design of God – the preaching of Jesus and him crucified comes with demonstrations of the Spirit’s power, it is okay for people to fall to the ground as one such demonstration.

God gave me the explanation that I needed and we moved on with growing in our faith – exploring many issues such as prayer, forgiving each other and discipleship but also the Holy Spirit. We took baby steps in finding out about the Holy Spirit. (For instance, the gift of speaking in tongues was a rather new experience.) As this continued, the focus began to turn more intentionally towards mission and reaching the lost and – in report after report – I stressed the importance of seeking more of the Holy Spirit for mission work. I kept quoting 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and tied these verses to the summary of Paul’s mission work in the Bible which he gives in Romans 15:18-19: “... I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading people [original: the Gentiles] to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit ...”
At first, I took these Bible references as an encouragement to seek more of the Holy Spirit in terms of general empowerment (e.g.: more prophetic discernment, warfare worship, gift of tongues) but – over the last few years – the conviction grew to use 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (and Romans 15:18-19) in its most immediate sense and simply copy what Paul did himself, that is: preach Jesus and him crucified and then wait for God to confirm the message with demonstrations of power through the Holy Spirit. Maybe we can do mission work in Toowoomba in the same way that was common in the Bible.¹

At Living Grace, we had previous conferences and seminars where the preaching was followed with demonstrations of the Spirit’s power but it happened mainly among Christians (even though we have had a trickle of converts). This was great but many of us were longing to take the message and the Spirit out to those that are lost. Earlier in the year, we took our first tentative steps with the Saturday meetings which we named “Encounter the Supernatural” (4-8pm – two sessions and dinner in between) but the Jesus Tent meetings (in one of the most public squares of our region – Queens Park) were the first time that we invited the city to encounter God – experience him – not through wise and persuasive words – not through a plausible presentation of the Christian worldview – but a demonstration of his power which confirms the simple witness to Jesus and him crucified.

This took courage but God was faithful. The Bible is true. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 still applies today and this makes preaching so easy and fun – for any one of us. Share the good news of Jesus – he saves and no one else – and wait for God to back up the message with an experience which your listeners cannot deny. Hallelujah!

¹ The Spirit confirms the Word with power – John 10:38: “… even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” John 14:11: “… believe on the evidence of the miracles …” Acts 2:22: “… listen to this: Jesus … was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.” John 14:12: “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” 1 Corinthians 4:20: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” Mark 16:20: “Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.” Hebrews 2:3-4: “… This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord … God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit …” Acts 4:29-30: “Now Lord, … enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness by stretching out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” Acts 14:3: “ … the Lord . confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.” Acts 8:6: “When the crowd heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.” 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: “ … My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.” Romans 15:18-19: “ … what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit … I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.” Galatians 3:5: “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?”
Leading up to the Jesus Tent

On 20th March 2012, I approached the Toowoomba Regional Council with a request to book Queens Park for a few days in October but I could not get anyone to look at the application and give me some sort of preliminary approval which I thought that I needed early to have enough time for building a collaborative team among a good number of churches. (In general, churches need plenty of time for joining a new initiative.) After a few weeks of not getting a response from the Council, I paused and reconsidered what was happening. Maybe it was God who was not opening the door. Even though we thought that we had heard from him and were excited about stepping out, I backed off and our leadership agreed to walk away from the project. Finally, on 16th May 2012, I received a notice that someone from the Council was going to view the application the next day and, after a further two and a half weeks, I suddenly received a park approval letter but – at this time – I was no longer excited. The letter came too late. No emotions stirred in me.

On 10th July 2012, we had a board meeting. I had prepared Genesis 18:1-21 as the opening devotion. The Bible story was about God visiting Abraham and Sarah and renewing his promise of a son and heir. By this time, Abraham and Sarah were past child-bearing age and they seemed to have made peace with their barrenness. Sarah laughed at the suggestion (prophetic word) that she would have a baby at their advanced age. According to her, it was too late but it was okay. The pain had subsided – the grieving was done – there was acceptance of not being with child – and she laughed freely (as did Abraham previously). Yet, this was the time when God confirmed the old promise of a son and resurrected hope. At our leadership meeting, I also wanted to make the point that the long time of waiting for an heir and countless descendants – a big nation that would bless all other nations – prepared Abraham to be indeed a father of nations because something had formed in him that made him intercede for the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah despite God’s plans to destroy them (Genesis 18:16-33).

As we began our meeting, I asked one of our members (Vicki) to read the opening verses of Genesis 18 but she could not get past the first verse and the phrase “he [Abraham] was sitting in the entrance to his tent”. Whenever she came to these words, the Holy Spirit would overpower her so that she could not continue reading. What was going on?

We had our meeting and at the end of the meeting – as an item of information, not discussion – I told the board that the park approval had come but was no longer relevant. Even so, Vicki said that she had “heard” the word “tent” throughout the meeting. She did not understand what significance this should have but together we began to connect the dots. God was bringing the tent outreach back
on the agenda. The Holy Spirit drew attention to the tent in the Bible story – God meeting Abraham there – when he moved on Vicki in her reading of the Bible verse. Then, he became specific in giving her the word “tent” throughout the meeting. It seemed like God made us share Abraham and Sarah’s experience of receiving back an old promise. When we had walked away from our hopes and dealt with our grief, God renewed his commitment and gave us back the tent. It may have been a roller-coaster of emotions but, as the time of waiting prepared Abraham for his role, so the time of waiting built fortitude in us. Finally, God impressed on us that he is always good. Years may pass before his promises come true but he is wise and can be trusted.

On Sunday 9 October 2012, we were to commence five days of prayer and fasting for the tent outreach. During the service – (after the sermon and some prayer ministry) – Vicki “heard” from God these words: “Utter in his presence.” I asked her how she had heard God’s voice. Was it a voice inside of her or was it audible to her ears? She thought that it was so clear that she must have heard the words with her ears. She did not know what they meant. When we talked in the evening, I first thought that God may have said: “Usher in his presence.” This would have been a more plausible English sentence but Vicki is very precise when she is listening to God.

After Vicki had heard about uttering in God’s presence – a few minutes later – she felt compelled to speak out loud – (with authority): “The Lord is good; his love endures forever.” As she was speaking, the words came to her. (I remember that in the service I was sitting on the other side of the building and did not know that the loud voice belonged to Vicki. My thoughts were: “I hope that this is not another weird person.”) Then, Vicki shared how she felt a cool wind blowing in that side of the building even though the doors were closed and the day was quite warm. The cool wind came from God and – later – others also testified that they had felt the breeze.

We closed the worship service – spoke the blessing and sang our last song – but no one left their seats. Everyone was quiet. I did not know what to do when Kirsty came up and asked for permission to have the microphone. She began to repent with tears. She was heartbroken. She confessed how she was not ready for the fasting and prayer. She was not ready for the tent outreach. She had known about the call to put up a Jesus Tent but left everything to the last minute and did not prepare herself. Kirsty ended up lying on the carpet – sobbing. I knew that she had prayed the prayer of the church because only a minority of our members had so far engaged in the spiritual battle over the Jesus Tent.

On reflection, everything made sense. Vicki did utter in the presence of God when she spoke the words: “The Lord is good; his love endures forever.” The scenario came straight out of the Bible. When God’s people were in trouble, they cried out to him and he answered them – saying: “The battle is not yours, but God’s” (2 Chronicles 20:15). As the worshippers went ahead of the army –
proclaiming: “Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever” (2 Chronicles 20:21), God set ambushes against the people’s enemies and defeated them. As the worshippers uttered in his presence, the Lord fought the battle – not the people. The same was happening among us and God further confirmed this interpretation by the song that he had given Marty in the season leading up to the tent. The chorus also featured the words: “The Lord is good; his mercy endures forever.”

**The Jesus Tent Outreach**

On Monday 22 October 2012, we put up the tent and organized the interior. From the beginning, we had favour with the community. The Chronicle approached me for an interview which I gave on site. The reporting was fair and respectful over two days. The newspaper even recommended the tent as one of the top ten places to be over the weekend.

We also had favour with the local Christian Leaders’ Network and the Toowoomba Ministers’ Association. The Mayor also received us and expressed his support for the tent. Two Senior Pastors – Ian Shelton and Bruce Armstrong – came on the first night of the tent meetings and blessed everyone. They laid hands on the team of pastors that were working together in the outreach.

There was unity among the pastors and churches working together: Rev Dr Edgar Mayer and Living Grace; Pastor Alan Small and Range Christian Fellowship; Pastor Mike Barrett and Transformations Ministries (Mike was the one that first expressed the desire for a tent outreach); Pastor Eloum Tiya and Arise All Nations; Pastor James Njino and Victory Life. Even more churches were represented in our prayer team and worship band.

We had meetings every morning (10am-12pm) and rallies every night (7pm-late). On the first night, the attendance was good but the remaining nights the tent was full (about 250 people). Every day we had salvations, healings, gold dust (looks like body glitter) and demonic stirrings. Here are some of the testimonies:

From a discussion at a church meeting on 4th November at Living Grace: Shannon Hutton had Pneumonia – after prayer was breathing better. Her hip also adjusted during prayer. She came healed of pneumonia on Wednesday night.

Man had an injured shoulder from work. On Tuesday night, after the tent meeting, he was at Bible study where they were all praying for each other and his shoulder was healed. Lyn Crighton was healed of arthritis in her knees.

There was a man walking past the tent. The closer he came to the tent, the more his pain left. He came because his doctor told him that it would take two years to be weaned of his medication. He did not want to wait that long.

Two mediums came to a tent meeting. They were respectful, introduced themselves and asked where they could sit. Vicki said that they were welcome and could sit wherever they wanted. Both ended up going up for prayer, one went down in the Spirit. After they got up,
they were overheard to have said “I went out like a light … that wasn’t supposed to happen … I saw his light” The other medium received the gold dust which intrigued them both.

Kirsty Humphrey let out a scream during worship in the tent, jumped off the stage and the whole congregation rose up in warfare worship. While Helen was sharing this, another person added: “Someone saw lightning hit the tent when this happened!”

Young mum shared that her two little girls (only been saved for a few weeks) saw angels in the tent and some were standing at the door pushing demons out that were trying to get into the tent.

Some people were prayed for and said that they were not even planning on coming to the tent but were drawn in on their way to other activities which they would probably regret later.

Twelve people from the residential drug rehabilitation program (Transformations Ministries) gave their hearts to the Lord.

Man that had his knee strapped. On the last day strapping was off and his knee was healed. Renée had painful skin condition for six years. He received prayer and had major healing (not complete yet). He had the best night’s sleep for a long time. Lots of demonic activity – people healed of poor sleep, bad dreams.

Five Muslim brothers were at one meeting and are now in contact with Pastor Eloum. He will be visiting them. Hutty had seven dreams before the tent outreach. His last dream was of an old style harvester which had a motor on it – wouldn’t start. Hutty was frustrated that it wouldn’t work. A pastor interpreted the dream at the Tent and said (something like): Doesn’t matter what you do, God will bring the harvest – not you. Hutty spoke about seed breeders having to plant first lot of new seed and only reaping a small amount before being able to plant larger amount and reaping larger harvest.

Adrian keeps getting Amos verse about ploughman being overtaken by reaper (Amos 9:13: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.”) We won’t be able to keep up with what God will be doing.

Pastor Eloum said that God had spoken to him about a Conference that would not be in a building, but would be in Toowoomba and he was not to initiate it but someone else would. He spoke to James Njino about it. Eloum said that this happened around three months before he was asked to be a part of the Jesus Tent.

There were dozens and dozens of healings, gold dust every meeting and lives touched by God. At this point, I want to draw attention to four moments which were significant to me and maybe for all of us. On the Thursday night, despite the strong presence of God, I went home down-hearted and crushed. Where were the non-Christians? Where was the harvest? I did not want another glory conference – another soaking night – for the same Christian crowd that already knows the Spirit of God. We can do that in any prayer meeting and do not need a tent in Queens Park for that. I cried out to God and – while the total number of converts was not high in the end – the next night there were about a dozen that gave their hearts to God. Every soul is precious to God.
What took me by surprise was the strong emphasis on deliverance over the five days. Every night, the glory of God confronted the darkness in people so that demons were coming to the surface before they were expelled through prayer and commands in Jesus’ name. On Saturday night – when most people had already left the tent – one woman (with deep involvement in witchcraft for generations) was set free from many demons. The deliverance was like a horror movie – with demons looking out of her eyes, using her vocal chords – (I heard them say that they are many) – and her body writhing on the ground. It must have been so traumatic for the woman but she went home a new person and the whole family was rejoicing. On the Sunday night especially, we had the witches in the tent and Satanists taking up position on the ridge behind the tent – cursing the meeting while fire twirling.

On Sunday morning, there was the joy of the Lord in the tent. At one time, I needed a chair and could not go on but was laughing so hard that tears came to my eyes. This was refreshing and beautiful. When Alan Small was preaching, he looked like a drunken sailor but a happy one.

On the Sunday night – after the opening worship bracket – I saw a man in a wheel-chair on the side of the platform. (He had suffered a stroke.) I felt prompted to pray for him which changed all my plans. Walking towards him – I asked: “Did you come for healing?” He answered: “Yes.” I said: “If you have the courage to come for healing, I have the courage to pray for you.” The whole tent was behind the healing prayer and – with loud cheers – we encouraged the man (Trevor) to get up from his wheel-chair and attempt to walk in faith. He did but was not healed.

At the end of the meeting, we prayed for him again and again and he attempted again and again to walk – one lap after another – until exhaustion. All the time, we were exercising faith, rejoicing, taking pictures and recording video footage, praising God but he was not healed. I wondered what was going on but – even at the time – had a sense that God was very pleased. We were not becoming despondent. We were not backing off but kept believing his promises and did what he called us to do.

[On the Thursday morning, a local minister from the Uniting Church expressed interest in what happened at the tent outreach (even though he was not familiar with such workings of the Spirit’s power) and then encouraged me by saying that – at one time – the Evangelist Arthur Blessitt prayed for a blind person in Africa. This person was also not healed but the next one.] On the Thursday after the tent meetings, I traced Trevor and paid him a visit. He and his fiancé gave their lives to God and were saved. On the Saturday, he began to walk and, on Sunday, Trevor came to church without a wheel-chair and no crutches. He was still limping but he could put weight on his leg – (while before it was simply shaking uncontrollably) – and even ran a few steps. Hallelujah!
Tent ready with a miracle menu

Mayet said: There is a miracle birth, healing the son of God died and rose again.

People saying it’s not a miracle, unless they encountered Him.

Rev. Mayer said it was the first time the church had "moon on it" and "come out on land and not a lodger one, two miracles.

The first time was in 2009, and blessings will be held from 10am to noon, and public will be held from 7am each day.

People say it is not plausible unless God confirms these words and they are not convinced.

Jesus Tent

Watch video at: thechronicle.com.au

By ANtheA GLEeson

www.thechronicle.com.au

GOD'S ENCOUNTER: Living Grace Lutheran Church, in Queen Park, prepares to pitch the Jesus Tent for the Supernatural in Queen Park.

Picture: ROGER O'KEEFE

6 The Chronicle, Wednesday, October 24, 2012

Local News
Healing hands at miracles tent

By ANTHEA GLEESON
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TOOWOOMBA'S first Jesus Tent is open for business.

The Jesus Tent of the Supernatural is set up in Queens Park and offers visitors blessings and the chance to "encounter God". Among yesterday's visitors was James Lavender from the Gold Coast.

Mr Lavender is one of 25 people from the Transformation Ministries drug and alcohol rehabilitation program who are in town to support the tent.

"I am hoping for an encounter with God," Mr Lavender said.

"I like to serve God and will be here everyday."

The tent is the initiative of the Living Grace Lutheran Church and its pastor Reverend Dr Edgar Mayer.

Rev. Mayer expects miracles will happen in the tent over the next few days.

"At the public rallies we invite non-Christians with no previous knowledge to experience God," Rev. Mayer said.

"Every night we will provide healing."

"Every time we pray for healing in our church, some do (heal)."

"We had a lady who was in the church for the first time."

"She had chronic back pain."

"But as we prayed for her, she said the pain went up and moved out of her spine."

"And she left happy."

"I believe God can do that."

"The Jesus Tent will be in Queens Park until Sunday."

The 500-seater Jesus Tent of the Supernatural is in Queens Park and is open to the public. The tent will be open until Sunday from 10am to noon for blessings, and from 7pm for public rallies.

"... as we prayed for her, she said the pain went up and moved out of her spine."

Reverend Dr Edgar Mayer

Have your say at thechronicle.com.au or SMS us on 0428 725 483
The Next Step

(For me at least), another source of great joy over the five days of the Jesus Tent was the sense of vision in our church. No one (at least this is how it felt to me) was really satisfied. No one was disappointed either or coming under condemnation, yet we remained hungry for more. Unless the glory of God made movement in the tent impossible and the city was impacted with thousands of new Christians – saved treasures of God – we were not having our expectations met. The Bible encourages us to aim so high. Therefore, the Jesus Tent was a beginning – a good one – but we keep exercising faith for more.

The five days of the outreach have impacted our faith. God has renewed our minds so that it has become easier now to expect salvations, healings, miracles and freedom from demons. We cannot deny what we have seen and build from there.

On the Sunday morning, two prophecies were given in our combined worship service:

Sonia Pocock: Jesus says I am here. I am here. I am waiting for you. Would you come to me? Would you come to me? I am more than you need. I will satisfy your thirst. I will satisfy your hunger but will you come to me? Will you surrender to me? I have everything you need. I am here. Will you come? Will you come?

Mike Barrett: (Band was singing: “Greater things are yet to come in this city.”) I feel the Lord saying that today the drought is finished. As of this day, you will start to see that things that were hard before will become easy. Things that were hard to break through ... Prayer will become easier. Worship will become easier. Souls will become easier. God says: As of this day, the spiritual atmosphere over Toowoomba has changed.

[A few days later, Adrian Saal reminded me of a prophecy that he gave more than two years ago (September 2010). Isaiah 37:30 was to apply to us: “This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah: ‘This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit.’”]
On Prayer Ministry

We encourage prayer for one another during the week and on Sunday. At the end of our worship services, all attenders can pray informally for one another and, in addition, we have a designated prayer ministry team which has received training and authorization by the church leadership. The prayer ministry team can be identified by their name tags.

Living Grace also offers prayer ministry during the week:
Welcome again to Living Grace,

We hope that this Orientation Guide has helped you in understanding us better and draw you closer to our community.

God bless you richly

Pastor Edgar Mayer