

# CONNECTIONS online

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## Under Construction

Essay by Rev. Khrystle Sullivan



Sunlight streamed through the windows and spilled across the altar. The air was thick with anticipation and an overwhelming sense of the sacred. After 14 years as a mission congregation worshipping Saturday nights in a rented space, we finally had a place to call home.

In the early morning hush before our church's dedication, it felt like everything had found its place. The century-old, hand-carved altar and pulpit, long abandoned in a shuttered Lutheran church in the West Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago, and the matching lectern languishing in a Minneapolis salvage outlet, had fallen effortlessly into our empty hands. Now, restored and reunited, the three pieces stood as a thundering proclamation of God's unfailing provision. A testimony that, in God's plan, roadblocks are just roundabouts awaiting completion.

As a mission congregation, Emmanuel Lutheran learned a few things about roadblocks and roundabouts. From the outset, conventional wisdom said the risk was too significant, and the odds too slim. It said eight couples were required to plant a church. After an eight-week Bible study, only two individuals committed. But the Holy Spirit was moving, so despite the treacherous ground, those two faithfully plowed ahead.

Astoundingly, God kept paving the way.

About 17 pastors provided pulpit supply, some driving hundreds of miles each Saturday evening before serving their own parishes the next morning. Eleven congregations provided not just financial support, but most importantly, the encouragement to keep going.

God was clearly at work. Eighteen months after that discouraging Bible study, 22 members moved in faith and called a full-time pastor. The congregation grew, and soon 50

courageous souls purchased five acres of land and laid plans to build.

Then came a devastating blow: the sudden illness and death of our beloved pastor. For any fledgling congregation, this could have been the end. But God wasn't done working. So, two years later, and without a pastor, Emmanuel boldly broke ground and began to build. God flung the doors open wide. Within two months, a new pastor was called, and within six months, construction was miraculously completed.

The dedication felt like a finish line, but God's work is far from over. His plans are still unfolding as we grow, both as individual disciples of Jesus and as a church family.

Growth always disrupts the soil, and often that broken ground looks treacherous and foreboding. But we know that God's plan is trustworthy and true (Joshua 1:5-9).

Currently, our building is marooned in a sea of road construction. All points of entry are obstructed. Massive ditches and heaps of dirt precariously border our long driveway, and we must navigate a rutted maze of bright orange traffic cones, gigantic construction equipment, and a series of daunting "Road Closed" barricades just to reach the front doors.

But even this is part of our story. The upcoming roundabout will increase our visibility and strengthen our connection with the community. And maybe that's precisely what God is doing — connecting us as living stones, built up as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5).

Our dedication acknowledged that a church is more than a place of worship. We are God's holy temple, constructed of living stones gathered from afar, our different shapes and sizes carefully fitted together in

*Continued on the back page*

# Journey Through the Psalms

## Mini Bible Study Installment



### PSALM 8:1-5

O Lord, our Lord,  
how majestic is your  
name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory  
above the heavens.  
Out of the mouth of  
babies and infants,  
you have established  
strength because of  
your foes,  
to still the enemy and  
the avenger.  
When I look at your  
heavens, the work of  
your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in  
place,  
what is man that you are  
mindful of him,  
and the son of man that  
you care for him?  
Yet you have made him  
a little lower than the  
heavenly beings  
and crowned him with  
glory and honor.

**M**ajestic is a familiar word, but one that we don't often get to use in our everyday comings and goings. It's much more encompassing than most adjectives we use to express how impressed we are.

For example, we use "grand" in the names of both the Grand Canyon and the Dodge Grand Caravan, while "awesome" can apply to seeing a humpback whale leap in a Greenlandic fjord and also to the third-string, freshman quarterback's fourth play ever that became a touchdown by accident. Of these four, it's no coincidence that "majestic" could only apply to the two examples from nature — straight from God, and nothing a human could have influenced.

Even "majestic" pales in comparison to God's own nature, but it's what we have — a reasonable approximation of a superlative to describe "his name in all the earth" — and a great way to bookend David's Psalm 8, the first psalm of praise in the psalter and the only psalm spoken solely to God.

Psalm 8 covers a lot of ground in just nine verses:

- Creation.
- The creation of man, specifically, as the image of God and the focus of God's entire purpose in creation.
- The role God gives to man in this created earth.
- The incarnation of Jesus, the praise of him

from children and babies, and his death and resurrection.

- The new heavens and the new earth.

In this entire psalm, David praises God for who he is — a God who loves to give his people gifts, up to and including the gift of salvation and eternal life.

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

1. In the face of the greatness of God — or even in the face of some grueling realities of life — have you ever felt the emotion of "Who am I that God could possibly care about me"? What does this psalm say about the significance of each human? How could praying Psalm 8 build and restore hope?

2. Read Hebrews 2:5-9. How do the words of this writer add greater depth to Psalm 8?

3. The liturgical calendar assigns Psalm 8 to Holy Trinity Sunday. What about this psalm makes that an appropriate choice?

### PRAYER

O God, you are almighty and majestic. When our hope seems dim, restore us through praise of you, our creator and redeemer. Amen. **NN**

The author of this installment, **Karen Nelson** of Bertrand, Nebraska, is general editor of Connections Online and owner of Karen Nelson Editing and Design.

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# Lutheran Church of South Sudan



Ministry Partner Focus by Dave Bartels

## MISSION

Our mission is to share the hope of Christ with vulnerable South Sudanese refugees through education, training, and support. Our goal is to see lives changed as people are empowered and equipped to share that hope with others.

## STRUCTURE

The Lutheran Church of South Sudan is one synod with three districts — Greater Upper Nile, Greater Equatoria, and Gambella — and two mission districts, the Kenya Mission District and the North American Mission District.

## LEARN MORE

Scan the QR code or visit [lcss.church](http://lcss.church) to learn more.



In December 2013, civil war broke out in South Sudan. Tens of thousands died. The Lutheran Church of South Sudan was forced to flee into exile. The church lost everything, save one communion chalice stuffed in a backpack, as people fled.

Refugees fled, on foot, mostly to Ethiopia, which is the closest border. Headquartered now in Gambella, Ethiopia, the Lutheran Church of South Sudan has had to rebuild from scratch, literally. Its seminary started as a chalkboard leaned up against a tree, while students sat on the ground and listened to a lecture. There is now a five-classroom building, a church, and a new library with 15,000 donated books.

In addition to the seminary is Trinity Lutheran College, meant to teach the refugees skills in nursing, midwifery, public health, computer science and business so that they can get a job in society. Without a job, refugees are not allowed by the Ethiopian government to leave the camps.

The seminary graduates about 10 new ministers each year; the college population is 900. So many are helped. But the need is even greater.

Right now, the Ethiopian government is requiring five more college classrooms be built, at a cost of just over \$80,000, in order that the college




*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*

*With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all your brothers and sisters in Christ.*

*Ephesians 6:18*

can continue being accredited.

The Lutheran Church of South Sudan — North America, which has raised about \$50,000 so far, seeks financial help to finish this project. The LCSS-NA is a 501(c)(3) charity set up to financially support the LCSS.

For more detailed information or to donate toward the college expansion project, the Lutheran Church of South Sudan website is [www.lcss.church](http://www.lcss.church). 

Dave Bartels of Grand Blanc, Michigan, is a Lutheran Church of South Sudan — North America board member. Contact him directly at [dbartels@bluestarsportswear.com](mailto:dbartels@bluestarsportswear.com).

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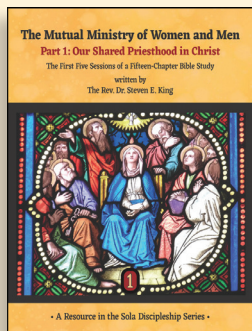


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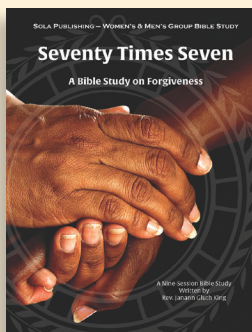
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## FORGIVENESS


**Seventy Times Seven** is a nine-session study by Rev. Janann Gluth King leading participants through the components of forgiveness. Sample chapter and leader guide available. [Item W-2510, \\$9.99, solapublishing.com](#)

## UNDER CONSTRUCTION ... *continued from page 1*

ways beyond our envisioning, strengthened by one another, and held fast in our Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. Our alignment, identity, and purpose all find their place in him as he daily guides, shapes, and sustains us as his Church.

Where Christ is present, there is mercy, hope, and life. Because he is present in us, with us, and through us, so mercy, hope, and life are with us wherever we go.

And go we must. For in God's house, construction is never complete until the end of time. So we go, in search of more living stones, the rest

of the holy nation. We venture into schools and shelters, workplaces and coffee shops, neighborhoods and hospital rooms, "proclaiming the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9), boldly carrying Christ's promise even into the most ominous of terrains, knowing that he is with us, and through us, with this world, now and forever. 

**Rev. Khrystle Sullivan** is the pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Rochester, Minnesota, which is online at [www.emmanuelofrochester.org](http://www.emmanuelofrochester.org) and on [Facebook](#).

## ... AND A GAME

Reading in print? Find a friend and two different-colored pens and try this mathematical game called Sim. Four games are below. Each game starts with six dots which if connected become the vertices of a hexagon. The first player draws a straight line between any two vertices. The second player then draws a straight line between any two vertices. Turns alternate in this fashion until one player has completed a triangle in which all three sides are his or her color and thus loses the game.

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

