

Session 1

Act Boldly with Balance

by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp



Introduction

As we write this, we're 800 miles apart. Ron has accepted a call to be a parish pastor and Sue Ann has resigned her position as parish nurse. Ron has moved to Denver and has begun serving at the church. Sue Ann is still in Minneapolis working at her second job, as a nurse at the Veterans Administration. She is also trying to get the house ready to sell. We have been told that we are in a good location and the house should sell quickly.

During the past 18 months the following things have happened:

- Ron's mother, Levera, died after a long illness,
- Hannah Grace, our youngest, graduated from high school and left for college,
- Ron and Sue Ann led a mission trip to Panama with 26 young people and nine adults,
- Noah, our middle son, has gone to the Middle East to study for six months,
- Nate, our oldest son, has changed jobs,
- Sue Ann ran her first marathon as a fundraiser for stroke victims,
- Sue Ann said goodbye to Tobie, her faithful beagle and running partner,
- Both of us have a parent who is widowed and aging.

So we know what it's like to have balance and also experience imbalance. We know what it's like to act boldly and also to refrain from acting boldly.

Our calendars are full of many things: service commitments, family events, obligations, appointments, celebrations, and times to exercise and rest.

In the midst of all this we are mindful of Jesus' words to Martha, who was "worried and distracted by many things; 'there is need of only one thing,'" (Luke 10:41-42).

We are committed and dedicated to *Act Boldly with Balance*. We know that *balance* comes when we are in harmony with God and one another. It is our hope and prayer that this Bible study will provide you with information and inspiration on how to *Act Boldly with Balance*. In a "multi-tasking" world, how can we practice "uni-tasking" (that is, "there is need of only one thing," in Luke 10:42). Note that "uni-task" is a new word, making its debut in this June issue of *LWT*. It could also be solo-tasking or mono-tasking, or maybe, in recognition of our Reformation heritage, *sola*-tasking, but what we are trying to lift up is the challenge between the many voices that urge us to multi-task and do more and more, and the simple "there is need of only one thing" that Jesus tells us.

Mary and Martha | Luke 10:38-42

The story of Mary and Martha is well known to us. Traditionally, Mary is revered as the heroine of the story and Martha is the one who is rebuked. Most of us can remember feeling a lot like Martha (worried and distracted) and secretly jealous of people like

Mary, who could focus simply on the presence of Jesus. At other times in our lives, we have been able, like Mary, to sit at the feet of Jesus and have been concerned about our sisters and brothers who seem to be overwhelmed by the demands of hospitality and service.

At the beginning of this year we made a resolution to spend about 30 minutes each day attending to balance. So we made a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Trackable). We try to begin the day or end the day by following Bishop Murray Finck's *Stretch and Pray: A Daily Discipline for Physical and Spiritual Wellness*.

As the book jacket tells us, "Finck provides a step-by-step guide to 40 stretches to improve physical and spiritual well-being. He incorporates devotional thoughts and Bible verses to jump-start spiritual reflection and prayer during the movements. Journal pages allow participants to record their physical progress and reflect on their spiritual meditation during the exercises."

As our lives have become more in balance, we seem to find more energy and desire for hospitality and service. We're also realistic about the fact that some days we can and some days we can't.

As we mentioned in the introduction, our house is perceived to be in a good location. Location is an interesting thought. What is the immediate location of this Scripture text? It is sandwiched between the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-5). It, too, is a good location for affirming the tension of balancing the need and opportunities for action and contemplation.

The five verses of the Martha and Mary story, although short in number, are long in meaning. Ron is fond of saying, "Never put Martha in charge of the Bible study and never ask Mary to be in charge of the dinner at the annual meeting." However, there

is something much deeper here. It is all about keeping life in proportion. The Revised Standard Version translates the words of Jesus in verse 42, "one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

Over the years we have both participated in Weight Watchers. One of the things you hear early on at meetings about our daily intake of food is "portion distortion."

Martha was experiencing portion distortion, not in terms of food, but in terms of activity. The text tells us she was *periespato peri pollyn diakonian*, "distracted by her many tasks" (verse 40).

DISCUSSION | Look at the story of Martha and Mary again (Luke 10:38-42). What are the verbs, the action words, in the story? Can you list them?

There are at least 15 verbs in this account. There is no doubt that Martha is busy: she *welcomes* Jesus (v. 38), she was *distracted* by her many tasks (v. 40); so she *came* to him and *asked* (v. 40). The verbs of this text provide another sort of assessment. Think about these words: *sat, listened, distracted, worried, chosen*. We need to ask ourselves who (or what) is the subject of these verbs for us, for our communities, for our world.

We have all heard the expression, "she bit off more than she could chew." It is interesting to delve deeper into the word translated as "distracted." Literally, it means "pulled or dragged away." It is only used in this text in the New Testament. And what exactly is Martha distracted by? The translation of *pollyn diakonian* is "many things," but it is literally "much service," with the word *diakonian* translated as "things." So it is possible to be distracted by too much of a good thing? Can we be doing so much service, so many things, that we become distracted and forget

“there is need of only one thing?” How interesting it is to think that often we have too many things on our plates (literally and figuratively) while others in our world struggle for basic needs like adequate food, water, and shelter.

DISCUSSION | Can you think of times when you or someone you know was “distracted by many things”? Are you feeling that way these days? If you feel comfortable, share a story of what that was or is like for you.

Meanwhile, Mary sits at the feet of the Lord and simply listens. She is able to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

Jesus is speaking and Martha comes to him and asks, “Don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?” The word *melei* translated as “care” raises the issue of balance. Martha has too many cares and it appears to her that Jesus doesn’t care enough. It also seems to her that Mary has not a care in the world. In Martha’s world, there appears to be an imbalance, and Jesus and Mary seem to be part of the problem.

Later on, in John 11:21, Martha speaks to Jesus and says, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” While trying to multi-task, to keep all the plates spinning at home, work, volunteering at church and school, one can stand in Martha’s sandals and say, “Lord, don’t you care?” Or maybe, “Lord, do you care that I am doing so many things here?”

Jesus assesses the situation with Martha and says, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things.” The word translated as “worried” is also used in Matthew 6:25, when Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, do not *worry* about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or

about your body, what you will wear.” The word translated as “distracted” has the sense of being troubled. (Note that it is only used in this verse in the New Testament.)

Jesus says, “There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” The first part of this verse, “there is need of only one thing,” is the word of relief for Martha who was distracted by many things. Mary, who has chosen the *tyn agathyn merida* (“the good piece or part”), has peace—and it will not be taken from her. This is the portion that puts all things into proportion.

It is natural at times to be like Martha, who we can see is making molehills into mountains. At the same time, Jesus enters into her imbalance and ours as well and promises that “there is need of only one thing.” This one thing is made clear when he was crucified on a mountain (Luke 23) and rose from the dead (Luke 24). We have the gift and call to *act boldly with balance*.

DISCUSSION | When are you more like Martha? When are you more like Mary? Can you explain?

Wholeness and Balance

Henry Ford said, “There are two types of people in this world, those who *can* and those who *can’t*—and they’re both right!” The question for us is: How do we see ourselves? Quite honestly, there are days when we know we *can* and when we *can’t*. Perhaps you feel the same way. But, with Jesus at our side, we *can*.

The Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness has given us the Wholeness Wheel as a very helpful tool to remind individuals, couples, families, circles, committees, and congregations about balance.

The Wholeness Wheel



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At the center of the Wholeness Wheel is the core belief—and ultimate relief—that in baptism, we are a new creation in Christ. Balance is achieved when we realize *who* we are and *whose* we are. Daily reminders of our new life in Christ come from staying “wet behind the ears.” Proper hydration (at least six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day) is necessary to keep one’s physical system functioning properly. The same holds true for our spiritual system. Our *thirst* is quenched (John 4:14) when we drink the living water that comes from Jesus.

Spiritual well-being surrounds or undergirds the five aspects of our lives: social/interpersonal, emotional, physical, vocational, and intellectual. The categories are not delineated with hard lines because many of these parts overlap one another. For example, Martha’s emotional well-being (she was worried and distracted) was most likely connected to her physical well-being (perhaps she was tired), and instead of dealing directly with her sister Mary (which would have represented social/interpersonal well-being), she created a triangle of sorts by going

to Jesus and talking about her sister.

On the other hand, Mary appears to have been nurturing her intellectual well-being and also her vocational well-being, but seems indifferent to her sister’s hard work and her feelings. If that is the case, Mary could have benefited from spending some time developing social/interpersonal and emotional well-being. It isn’t too hard to sense the heat coming from the kitchen when the host or hostess is worried and distracted. Sometimes it is easy to know when our lives are out of control. At other times, it takes an event or a loved one to make us see our lack of balance.

DISCUSSION | List some ways our lives can get out of balance. Next to each entry, write a suggestion on a way to re-balance or ease the imbalance.

Control

One of the truths Sue Ann learned in nursing school is that there are many risk factors in our lives. Some we have no control over, like our family history, genetics, some environmental factors, and our age. But there are factors we can control. These are the factors we focus on when we strive for balance and seek ways to glorify God. So, what are the risk factors that you and I have some choice and control over?

If you take a Health Risk Assessment, it would typically focus on these areas: age, family history, smoking, use of alcohol or drugs, exercise or physical activity, dietary fat and sugar, weight, daily fruits and vegetables, stress, sleep, wearing seat belts, regular visits to a health-care provider.

We invite you to consider these risk factors in your life. A helpful tool for self-assessment can be journaling. Keeping the Wholeness Wheel in mind, along with the key words *balance* and *control*, spend some time this summer writing in a journal about

each of these risk factors. Perhaps focusing on one each day (or one per week) would give you some insight into balancing the areas of the Wholeness Wheel.

DISCUSSION | With confidence we can consider each risk factor and ask ourselves these questions:

1. How much control or choice do I have with this factor?
2. Do I exercise my choice with this factor each day?
3. What does a typical day with this factor look like?
4. Can I achieve better balance in this area? Write about how that might look.
5. Do I need to change something today about this factor?
6. Write a prayer to God asking for insight, guidance, and motivation.

As women of God we can empower one another. Share this journaling process with a trusted friend. We were made to journey with others (social/inter-personal well-being) and are bonded by our baptismal vows to the whole Christian family.

Speaking as a Nurse

All nurses will agree that the nursing process always begins with *assessment*. Self-care and restoration or healing our imbalances also begins with self assessment. It requires some boldness to look at ourselves, but with our core baptismal identity grounding us as daughters of a loving God, we can act boldly to face who we are right now, this day!

Seven years ago we made a major life change, moving just as we are moving now. A fellow parish nurse, Monica, moved six months later. By e-mail

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The ELCA's Social Statement on "Caring for Health—Our Shared Endeavor" states:

Each of us has responsibility to be a good steward of his or her own health out of thankfulness for the gift of life and in order to serve God and the neighbor. This means taking effective steps to promote health and prevent illness and disease (for example, eating well, getting adequate exercise and sleep, avoiding use of tobacco and abuse of drugs, limiting alcohol, and using car seat restraints). It means balancing responsibility for health with other responsibilities. It also means seeking care as needed, recognizing that disability, disease, and illness do occur, even to those who are good stewards of their health.

I sent Monica the lessons I had learned from my move. Last week, Monica "snail-mailed" a copy of that e-mail message back to me. She was gracing my current transition with the very words of support I had given to her. Talk about acting boldly! As sisters in Christ we are not alone on our journey toward wholeness and balance. We can give each other support, encouragement, and understanding, as we share similar pathways.

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Session 1

Act Boldly with Balance

by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp

Getting Ready to Lead

Thank you for volunteering to lead your sisters in this summer *LWT* Bible study, *Act Boldly for Health!* Your stepping up to serve in this way is a bold affirmation of how we can take charge of our own wellness in a spiritual way.

There are some things that are useful for any Bible study session:

1. A well-lit, well-ventilated room with enough space, chairs, and room at the table for everyone who wants to join in.
2. Bibles for everyone. We use the NRSV most often, but it's helpful to have different translations at hand. Some other useful modern translations are the New International Version (NIV) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV).
3. Writing materials for everyone.
4. Writing materials for you, the leader: a chalkboard with chalk or easel with easel pad and markers so that you can post things for the group to consider.
5. Name tags for everyone make it clear that new people are welcome to join the group.
6. Hymnals for everyone, if possible. We use *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice*.

Overview

At first glance, this Bible study, *Act Boldly for Health*, may seem off-putting to some people. Everyone has

a different experience of life balance and health. Some women who are caregivers to children or elderly parents may not see how they can achieve balance in their lives. Some who live with chronic illness, such as arthritis or heart disease, may feel that good physical health is just not part of their life experience. However, our goal is to help each woman consider what balance and wellness mean in the lives of God's people.

Opening

Greet the women as they arrive, and when it's time, gather the group in prayer. You may pray in these words or your own:

Oh God, you who gently hold our hearts,
in our search for balance,
we look to you and your Word.
Help us ever walk with Jesus
and follow his example.
Guide us as we strive to glorify you
with our bodies, minds, and spirits.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

To introduce this summer study, *Act Boldly for Health*, acknowledge that we all come to the idea of health and balance from a different perspective. We are not going to push anyone to make major changes in their lifestyle; our goal here is to consider what wellness and balance mean from a biblical perspective.

The text we use to consider the topic of balance in our lives is the story of Mary and Martha, Luke 10:38–42. Jesus told Martha there was need of only one thing. What does that mean?

Mary and Martha | Luke 10:38–42

Ask someone to read the story aloud, or have a different person read each verse.

DISCUSSION | Look at the story of Martha and Mary again (Luke 10:38–42). What are the verbs, the action words, in the story? Can you list them?

They *went*

He (Jesus) *entered*

Martha *welcomed*

Mary *sat* at the Lord's feet

(Mary) *listened*

Jesus *was saying*

Martha *was distracted* by her many tasks

Martha *came and asked*

Lord, do you not *care*

My sister has *left* me

Lord *answered*

Martha *worried and distracted*

Mary has *chosen*

Martha was experiencing “portion distortion,” not in terms of food, but in terms of activity.

If Martha were to draw a circle representing that day in her life and divide it up in portions—a pie chart—what would it look like? What about Mary? Leader, draw two circles on the board, one for each of the sisters, and ask the group for suggestions. You might lead by saying something like, “Mary probably got her eight hours of sleep,” and marking off a third of her circle.

Martha’s circle will have a bigger portion marked off for “chores” than Mary’s, and a smaller portion

for “being with Jesus.”

Now, offer each of the participants a paper plate and ask them to make their own pie chart by writing down what is “on their plate” and dividing the tasks into sections.

DISCUSSION | Can you think of times when you or someone you know was “distracted by many things”? If you feel comfortable doing so, share a story of what that was or is like for you.

Jesus says, “There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” The first part of this verse, “there is need of only one thing,” is the word of relief for Martha, who was distracted by many things. Mary, who has chosen the good part, has

JOURNALING

A helpful tool for self-assessment can be journaling. Keeping the Wholeness Wheel in mind, along with the key words *balance* and *control*, spend some time this summer writing in a journal about each of these risk factors. Perhaps focusing on a different factor each day (or one each week) would give you some insight into balancing the areas of the wholeness wheel.

Why don’t we try that for a few minutes today? Ask each participant to take a piece of paper and pencil and write for herself; no one else will see what she writes. And let’s consider sleep for our experiment. About how much sleep do you get each night? Do you get about the same amount of sleep every night? Is your bedroom comfortable? Is there something you could do to make it more conducive to good restful sleep?

peace—and it will not be taken from her. This is the portion that puts all things into proportion.

It is natural at times to be like Martha. Jesus enters into her imbalance, and ours, and promises that “there is need of only one thing.” This one thing was made clear when he rose from the dead. We have the call and the gift to *act boldly with balance*.

DISCUSSION | When are you more like Martha? When are you more like Mary? Does that change from day to day, or even within a day? If you are comfortable doing so, tell the group about it.

Wholeness and Balance

The Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness has given us the Wholeness Wheel as a way to remind individuals, couples, families, circles, committees, and congregations about balance.

DISCUSSION | List some ways our lives can get out of balance. For example: Not enough time for friends. Next to each entry, write down a suggestion on a way to

re-balance or ease the imbalance. For example: Reserve half-hour on Sunday afternoon for calling friends.

Control

All nurses will agree that healing our imbalances also begins with self-assessment.

DISCUSSION | With confidence we can consider each of our risk factors and ask ourselves these questions:

1. How much control or choice do I have with this factor?
2. Do I exercise my choice with this factor each day?
3. What does a typical day with this factor look like?
4. Can I achieve better balance in this area? Write about how that might look.
5. Do I need to change something today about this factor?

Ask participants to share their thoughts on this self-assessment. Remind the group that it may seem that we don't have control over some risk factors, for example, family health history, but we can use the information to make good choices, and that is a way to control them. Ask participants to write a prayer to God asking for guidance and motivation.

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Session 2

Act Boldly in Crisis

by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp



A day at the beach

Read aloud Mark 4:35–41.

It had been a day at the beach. A large crowd had gathered and so Jesus got into a boat to preach to the people on shore. And what did those assembled people hear? Jesus told them about:

- The parable of the sower (Mark 4:1–9)
- The purpose of parables (Mark 4:10–20)
- A lamp under a bushel (Mark 4:21–25)
- The parable of the growing seed (Mark 4:26–29)
- The parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32)

Mark tells us, “With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.”

Then it was evening and so it was time for a little boat ride to the other side. “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped” (Mark 4:37).

The frightened disciples are being tossed around in their little boat. Perhaps they had thought that after they left fishing behind as their vocation, they had signed up for a pleasure cruise—something on the Love Boat or maybe even the Good Ship Lollipop. But instead it was beginning to resemble something like the Poseidon Adventure or maybe even the Ship of Fools. This wasn’t what they had imagined. Where was the leader, their captain?

- “Let us go across to the other side.” Where might be the other side for you?
- What great windstorms are arising in your life?
- Can you describe the latest weather report for your life? The 24-hour forecast? 10-day forecast? Stormy? Mild? Foggy? Dry?

“But [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’” (4:38)

In what might be a tinge of humor on Mark’s part, Jesus is in the stern, asleep on the cushion. Jesus is asleep and he is using the equivalent of our boaters’ life vests for his pillow! The verb used for sleep is *katheudo* (kath-YOO-do). It is also used in 13:35–37 when Jesus says, “Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” It is also used to describe the condition in which Jesus finds Peter, James, and John in the garden (see 14:37–42).

The disciples ask the sleeping Jesus a question, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” The word used for *care* is the same word Martha used when she asks Jesus in Luke 10:40, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?”

- Have you ever been in a crisis and felt that Jesus was in the boat with you?
- Have you ever been in a crisis and felt Jesus was sleeping?
- Look up the painting by Eugene Delacroix, "Christ Asleep during the Tempest" (www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/viewOne.asp?dep=11&viewmode=1&item=29.100.131). Can you imagine how you would feel in that boat?
- How do we know when it is time to sleep and time to be awake?

A kind of hush

Jesus acts boldly in this crisis. He doesn't get defensive about sleeping. He doesn't get into a theological discussion or a scientific argument about the cause of the great windstorm, but rather, he "woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'"

The word for *rebuke* is interesting. Jesus rebukes evil spirits in Mark 1:25, 3:12, and 9:25. In 8:31–33, Peter rebukes Jesus and Jesus in turn rebukes Peter. The disciples rebuke those who brought little children to Jesus (10:13) and the crowd rebukes the blind man in 10:48. But in this passage, Jesus rebukes the wind and speaks to the sea.

We've all heard the command, "Don't just stand there, do something!" Could it be that to act boldly for health—in crisis—might entail a reversal of that imperative? Maybe it should be: "Don't just do something, stand there!"

Jesus said, "Peace! Be still!" The first word is in the imperative voice. It is a command and often it is used to mean something like "be quiet" or "stop talking." So Jesus is telling the storm to "shut up!" The second word, also an imperative, also means

"be silent" or "refrain from talking." The words of Jesus are a holy "Hush!" Twice. Hush to the second power. Hush squared.

Personal windstorms

I have seen many great windstorms over the years in my nursing practice, Sue Ann writes. During stormy weather I have witnessed the waves of life "beating into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped" by loss from illness or injury.

About a year ago, at 11 o'clock at night, Ron and I were returning from a lovely evening out together. The weather that night was gorgeous, but a windstorm quickly arose when the phone rang.

My mother had fallen and broken her arm. She was in an emergency room in St. Louis, waiting. At that point I could only imagine the pain she was suffering. Physical pain, to be sure, but also the pain of a broken heart. She had worked so hard to recover from her stroke and was back living in her apartment with some supportive services. I knew this would be a major setback in her rehabilitation, a big disappointment, and an end to independence. The waves were beating into her boat and she was feeling swamped.

Wounds, injury, pain, loss, suffering, disappointment, and broken hearts. I am sure that if you took the time right now to ask members of your group to share, each one of you could tell of an experience of stormy weather—a crisis—of illness, injury, pain, suffering, disappointment, or a time when your boat was swamped from a loss you endured. Jesus "rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased and there was a dead calm" (Mark 4:39).

Well, I flew to St. Louis the next morning and went directly to St. Luke's Hospital, a place I had visited many times over the years. My mother,

Doris, looked so fragile and frail, so drawn and defeated. As I sat by her side and listened to her story, my heart was also breaking for the hurt she had suffered and the pain she was enduring. Fear was in her eyes as she winced. Her boat had been severely challenged by the storm.

Do you know the greatest fear of senior citizens? Falling! Well, that fear was confirmed when what had happened to my mom. This big fear had become a reality. She was in darkness.

I believe that telling one's story is an important part of healing. So I listened and I shared in her lament and her anxiety: "Why did this happen? If only I hadn't tried to reach that plug! Is God punishing me? What am I going to do? What will happen to me now?"

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38) Have you ever asked those questions? Have you ever cried out to God, "Why?" Thank goodness our God is big enough and strong enough and faithful enough to hear our laments and cries of despair. In fact, every parent wants to hold and comfort their suffering child. Only after my mother shared her story and we agreed this was a rotten deal, unfair and unfortunate, did I read her a passage from Psalm 147: "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds." As I read God's word to my mother, I saw the grimace on her face ease and the tension written across her forehead fade. Holding her hand, I could feel her tension easing. She seemed to be relaxing into God's unfailing love. "Peace! Be still! Then the wind ceased and there was a dead calm."

What a gift we can celebrate. What a promise we can cling to. What a delight we can share, knowing that Jesus does care, that he is in the boat with us, and even "the wind and sea obey him."

Learning to be still

One could hear the chariots' wheels and the pounding hooves of the horses. Clouds of dust were filling the air. The enemy was catching up. The children of Israel were in a crisis: in front of them was the sea, behind them was the Egyptian army.

Ask someone to read Exodus 14:10–14 aloud. This passage in Exodus ends with "keep still." Earlier we read that Jesus commanded the wind storm with "Peace! Be still!" Let's take a few minutes to reflect on what it means to be still. Ask someone to read Psalm 46:10–11:

"Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth."

The LORD of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Take a minute or two to sit together in silence and feel yourself be still. Just concentrate on feeling your breath go in and out, relaxing all your muscles.

Jesus is relaxing when the storm brews up. One of the issues we'd like to address is lack of sleep. The Wellness Council of America states that the five smartest things one can do for one's well-being are:

1. Assess your health
2. Decrease caloric intake
3. Increase physical activity
4. Quit smoking
5. Get enough sleep

Let's think about the last one—sleep. Sue Ann says that many times in her work at the hospital, she sees family members sleep-deprived from standing vigil with their ill loved one. However, in times of crisis we need more sleep in order to enhance our coping mechanisms, to be really present with someone in need.

Jesus was sleeping and at the same time he was alert and ready to respond. He could discern the right time to react. Jesus was rested, and we can learn so much from that. He was teaching us to rest during the storms of life, confident in God's promise to be present.

Perhaps tonight before you go to bed, you can read this verse: "I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety" (Psalm 4:8).

- What helps you be still?
- Can you give examples of times when you felt overwhelmed or in a crisis but were able to quiet yourself? How did you do that? Prayer? Walking outdoors? Listening to a favorite hymn?
- Have you ever been the bearer of those words, "Peace! Be still" in the lives of people who are close to you? Can you share what happened?

Sue Ann Glusenkamp is a nurse and Ron is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Cherry Hills Village, Colo. He formerly served as vice president church/sponsor relations for the ELCA Board of Pensions where he was involved with their special programming on health and wellness.

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Session 2: Act Boldly for Health

Act Boldly in Crisis

by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp



Opening

Greet the women as they arrive, and when it's time, gather the group in prayer. You may pray in these words or your own:

O God, you who calmed the chaos and
quieted the storm,
as we look for health in times of crisis,
we look to you and your Word.
Help us ever trust in Jesus
and follow his example.
Guide us as we strive to glorify you
with our bodies, minds, and spirits.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

There are many ways to look at the idea of Jesus calming the storm at sea, and one way is to examine some of our beloved hymns.

As a mother stills her child,
Thou canst hush the ocean wild;
Boist'rous waves obey thy will
When thou say'st to them "Be still."
Wondrous sov'reign of the sea,
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

"Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 334, verse 2)

What a great image: "as a mother stills her child,/ Thou canst hush the ocean wild." Jesus is Lord of all,

even the wind and the waves. Like a mother, Jesus puts his finger to his lips and speaks a holy "hush."

There might be a storm brewing in your life or the lives of the Bible study participants at this time. As the storm unfolds, Jesus says to the storm, "Peace. Be still."

Lead participants in talking through these questions:

- How does this holy "hush" of Jesus feel to you? Perhaps the "boist'rous waves" are representative of the internal struggle going on in your head, your heart, or in a relationship with a loved one.
- What helps you "be still"? Jesus speaks those words to the wind and waves, but they are a helpful reminder for us as we experience storms in life. Much of what we have written pertains to being troubled by the stormy weather. But because we know Jesus is in the boat with us, we can also see ourselves as the bearer of those words, "Peace! Be still."
- Is there a way for us to act boldly in crisis and speak a holy "hush" to someone who feels that their boat is being tossed about?

Encourage participants to commit to taking a few minutes every day to experience stillness, to sit quietly, and lift up their hearts to God in prayer. When they return for the next session, ask what that experience was like for them.

Inmost calm

There is a wonderful expression, confession, and profession of faith in the refrain of the hymn, “My Life Flows On in Endless Song” (*With One Voice* 781):

No storm can shake my inmost calm while
to that Rock I’m clinging,
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
how can I keep from singing?

I like it when a song ends with a question. It reminds me of the game show “Jeopardy.” So the response, the refrain that any one of us can sing, or the corporate response when two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name is, “Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?”

Given that creedal statement of Christ’s reign, what else is there to do but sing a song? Maybe that’s what it’s all about: “Don’t just stand there, sing something!” And the song we sing, whether it is a lullaby or a hymn of praise, might help another passenger in the storm-tossed boat experience some peace, some stillness in their heart and soul.

Closing

One way to close this session might be to pray especially for those whose lives have been disrupted or devastated by storms and floods, such as the people who are recovering from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. There are resources such as prayers and litanies on the ELCA’s Disaster Response Web site at www.elca.org/disaster/resources/05-09-01-katrinaprayer.asp.

In closing, we know that in our world, there are storms. And yet, we are called to act boldly for health in crisis. We can do so because the Holy Spirit brings closure to the storms and unfolds peace for all.

SOME THINGS THAT ARE USEFUL FOR ANY BIBLE STUDY SESSION:

1. **A well-lit, well-ventilated room** with enough space, chairs, and room at the table for everyone who wants to join in. If possible, arrange the room so that participants can see one another.
2. **Bibles for everyone.** We use the NRSV most often, but it’s helpful to have different translations at hand. Some other useful modern translations are the New International Version (NIV) and the Contemporary English Version (CEV).
3. **Writing materials for everyone.**
4. **Writing materials for you, the leader:** a chalkboard with chalk, whiteboard with markers, easel with easel pad and markers, or the like, so that you can post things for the group to consider.
5. **Name tags for everyone** make it clear that new people are welcome to join the group.
6. **Hymnals for everyone**, if possible. *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *With One Voice* are the ones we use.

SOMETHING USEFUL FOR THIS SESSION:

There is a painting of Christ in the boat during the storm mentioned in the participants’ section. Your public library may have a copy of it that you could borrow. The artist is Eugene Delacroix, a French painter of the 19th century, and the name of the painting is “Christ Asleep during the Tempest.” It hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and can be seen on the museum’s Web site at www.metmuseum.org.

Session 3

Act Boldly toward the Goal



by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp

The theme passage of Scripture for this study is Philippians 3:9–14. What is Paul’s situation as he writes this letter? He is in prison, but he is so filled with joy that he can encourage and exhort the believers in Philippi. He uses the word *rejoice* several ways in this letter. See verses 1:18; 2:17, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 10.

Then there is the wonderful hymn of praise about Jesus in 2:5–11. Paul reminds us to be of the “same mind” as Christ, that is, to live as copycats. We are to follow Jesus, to act like him, to imitate him (also see Ephesians 5:1).

Can you remember a time when you played dress-up and imitated someone in your family? Have you ever seen a young child imitate something you did?

Then we are told in Philippians 2:7 that Christ “emptied” himself. Let’s talk about that for a minute.

Extreme makeover

In Philippians 3:4–6 Paul tells us about his past. If anyone could brag about his credentials, Paul could. But all these things (see verse 5) don't add up to

anything anymore. In fact, because of Jesus, the past is past and Paul now understands all those old gains to be less than nothing, to be loss.

Read Mark 8:31–38.

Some people live their lives with the attitude: “finders keepers, losers weepers.” Jesus turns that schoolyard saying upside-down: Finders are weepers and the losers are the keepers. Paul tells us that the Gospel changes how we account for our life.

In Philippians 3:8, Paul tells us, “More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” The word for *rubbish* Paul uses here has the sense of “refuse, leavings, dirt, dung.” Paul is writing about righteousness (verse 9). He makes it clear that what matters most is to be found in Christ, not having the righteousness that comes from the law but the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ.

- What does it mean to empty ourselves?
- Conversely, what does it mean to fill ourselves?
- How might we empty ourselves in order that others might be filled?
- How can we rejoice in all of this?

- Are there times when we appeal to righteousness of our own, as opposed to that of Jesus Christ?
- Do we sometimes think we can gain our way with God?
- How does it feel to turn the old saying around and celebrate being a loser, not a finder?

Keep on keeping on

In verse 12 Paul writes, “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” These words express the challenge and the opportunity that followers of Jesus have to act boldly toward the goal. The word translated as *press on* also means “strive, pursue, seek after.” It is used in other passages such as Romans 9:30, 31; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; and 1 Peter 3:11.

We read about several people in the Gospels who had a simple goal: to have an encounter with Jesus. Do you remember these goal setters and achievers?

- Zaccheus who climbed a tree to get a look at Jesus (Luke 19:1–10)
- The woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment (Matthew 9:21)
- The men who lowered their friend through the roof to be forgiven and healed by Jesus (Mark 2:3–6)

There are many types of goals and many ways to achieve them. Paul’s goal is to strive for the reward of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (verse 14).

Now as Lutheran Christians we get a little nervous when people start talking about “rewards.” What do you think Paul is saying in these passages? Does it add clarity or does it confuse the situation for you?

Take another look at Philippians 3:8b–14.

Paul writes, “but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:13–14). Sometimes groups that have a wonderful history have a hard time moving toward the future. The past can be so satisfying (or maybe memories of it

are a little rosy and romanticized) and feel so secure that people are tempted to stay there. Paul talks about the need to forget what lies behind and strain forward, toward the future.

Toward the goal

Every January people start off the new year with optimism and a bunch of resolutions. The gym I visit sees a dramatic increase in new members at the beginning of each year. We regulars see new people with new gym bags, new shoes, and new outfits crowding our space. We know that in two or three weeks, the new gym bags will be in a car trunk, the new shoes out in the garage, the new outfits in the back of the closet—and most of the new members gone. Their resolutions will evaporate, just like the fancy designer water in their fancy designer water bottles.

Why do most people usually fail when they make resolutions or decide to act boldly toward a goal? There are many reasons (some of which I know all too well), ranging from ill health to sloth, from lack of time to lack of energy. Sometimes we are just not prepared to make a change in our habits or our lives, even though we want to. But I know when I set SMART goals, I have a better chance of meeting them.

How can goals be smart? By being:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Trackable

Sue Ann’s marathon story

On my office door is a small wooden sign: “It’s never too late!”

In 1978 I ran a half-marathon in New Haven, Connecticut, with the intention of running the Boston

The Web site www.elcaforwellness.org is a helpful resource that describes SMART goals. This is a collaborative effort between the ELCA Board of Pensions and the Vocation and Education unit of the ELCA, in cooperation with the Mayo Clinic.

Marathon later that year. On June 5, 2005—some 27 years later—I finally met that goal by finishing my first marathon in San Diego, California. What a thrill! I recall running down the home stretch, tearfully shout-ing, “I’m 50 years old and I’m finally finishing my first marathon! It really is never too late!”

I ran to fulfill my dream and to ease the sting of becoming a half-centenarian, but I also ran to support the American Stroke Association. Running in honor of stroke survivors was very meaningful to me. My mother, Doris, suffered and survived a severe stroke in 2003.

My goal was *Specific*: I would run the San Diego marathon that year. My goal was *Measurable*: I would run a 26.2-mile course. My goal was *Achievable*: I worked with Train To End Stroke (TTES), an organization that helps people train for the event. My goal was *Realistic*: I had a well-thought-out training regimen and changed my routines to accommodate it. And my goal was *Trackable*: My training schedule had weekly goals that took into account what I needed to do every day.

Whether your goal is to set aside time every day for reading the Bible, to get your financial house in order, or to begin exercising, thinking SMART can help you. “It’s never too late!”

The real deal

It seems sometimes that there is some ambivalence in the church about setting goals. Maybe people think that by setting a goal we might be infringing on the

work of the Holy Spirit. Or maybe we don’t want to set a goal for fear of being disappointed. And yet, by not having goals, we set ourselves up for a lack of participation, support, and energy in our parishes.

I have come to believe that if we don’t set goals in certain areas of our individual and corporate lives, we are not practicing good stewardship. When we are clear about what we are trying to achieve, we can harness resources and create energy around a project, event, or issue.

Press on

Read Philippians 3:12.

Both Sue Ann and I try to do some kind of physical activity each day. We get lots of positive benefits from running and cycling, and we enjoy them. But we didn’t start by running or cycling miles each day: we started with baby steps.

Often when people want to do something new—whether it is starting a new exercise program or increasing the number of people coming to circle meetings at church—they focus on the whole project, on going the entire distance. It’s helpful to remember that two SMART goals are: *Achievable* and *Realistic*. Starting small is smart. As we grow in ability and confidence, we can stretch a bit and increase the goal.

Sue Ann and I can also tell you about the many times we have stumbled. It seems that all is going well, we’re enjoying what’re doing—and *oops!*—we’re on the ground, rubbing a knee or elbow. Acting boldly toward the goal isn’t always smooth: expect some slips along the way. The important thing is to get up, bandage the scrapes, evaluate what went wrong, and either keep going or adjust your plan.

A key part in pressing for a goal is our *motivation*. As Lutheran Christians we believe that we are saved by grace through faith. Apostle Paul in the Philippians text (3:8b–14) delicately balances the re-

In the first session of this Bible study, we looked at balance. If you were to set some goals to help you achieve more balance in your life, what would they be?

In the second session of the study, we looked at acting boldly for health in crisis. If you are experiencing a crisis or difficulty in some area of your life right now, what goals can you set to help you weather the storm? If you are not in difficulty right now, what goals could you set that would help you prepare for the inevitable storms of life? What goals could you set for yourself to help someone close to you weather the storms in her life?

activity of humanity with the pro-activity of God. So if we are asked why we do what we do, our answer is simple: “because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” That’s the real deal!

Health, our shared endeavor

So now you’re wondering what might be a good goal to press toward. Consider these resolutions, which arise from the church’s social statement, *Caring for Health—Our Shared Endeavor*, and were adopted by the church at the 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The title accurately describes the reality: Health is a shared endeavor. What would it look like if we would act boldly toward these goals?

To challenge all members of this church to become good stewards of their own physical and mental health by attending to preventive care, personal health habits, diet, exercise, and recreation, and by making prudent use of health-care resources;

To urge all members of this church to develop

reasonable expectations for their own health and for the health care they receive at each stage of life and to engage in thoughtful preparation with health-care professionals and loved ones for difficult choices in their health care.

Caring for Health—Our Shared Endeavor

You can read the entire social statement at: www.elca.org/socialstatements/health/resolutions.html

Women of the ELCA has launched a health initiative, “Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls,” committed to promoting women’s complete health: physical, spiritual, and emotional. To learn more and find resources, go to www.womenoftheelca.org/getinvolved/health.html.

Sue Ann Glusenkamp is a nurse and Ron is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Cherry Hills Village, Colo. He formerly served as vice president church/sponsor relations for the ELCA Board of Pensions where he was involved with their special programming on health and wellness.

SUPPORT HEALTHY HEARTS

Women of the ELCA is supporting new federal legislation aimed at fighting heart disease in women, and your participation will help. The Heart Disease Education, Analysis, Research, and Treatment (HEART) for Women Act would amend the Public Health Service Act to improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases in women. To find out more and to see a letter we hope you’ll print, fill out, and send to your state’s lawmakers, visit www.womenoftheelca.org/getinvolved/health.html.

Session 3: Act Boldly for Health

Act Boldly toward the Goal

by Sue Ann and Ron Glusenkamp



Getting ready to lead

As you prepare for this session, turn to page 33 of this issue of *LWT* for some tips on how to prepare. The main text we are examining in this session is Philippians 3:8b–14, with glances at other parts of Philippians.

Opening

Greet the women as they arrive, and when all is ready, call the group together in prayer. You may pray in these words or your own.

Holy God, you who inspired St. Paul
to rejoice in his prison cell,
and called him to press on toward the goal,
we look to you and your holy word for wisdom.
May we treasure the surpassing value
of knowing Christ above all things.
Guide us as we strive to glorify you
with our bodies, minds, and spirits.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

You might gather the group to sing “Rejoice, the Lord is King!” (*LBW*, 171).

Exploring rejoice

Paul uses the word *rejoice* in several ways in his letter to the Philippians. Ask participants to take turns reading the verses listed in the first paragraph on page 42.

What is it that makes Paul so joyful, even though he is in prison awaiting execution?

We are told in 2:7 that Christ emptied himself. Talk about the questions in the box on page 42.

Take a few minutes to ask participants to write out their answers to the questions in the box on page 42 of the Bible study. Invite the group to share their responses, if they feel comfortable doing so. If some answers call forth group discussion, welcome the opportunity.

To close the session, call the group together in prayer. You may use these words or pray in your own.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings
with your most gracious favor
and further us with your continual help,
that in all our works,
begun, continued, and ended in you,
we may glorify your holy name,
and finally, by your mercy,
obtain everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.
(*LBW*, p. 49)