



Peace and Hope Found ... Remaining in God's Word

BY BECKY WEHRSPANN, FEATURES EDITOR

Holy Scripture and traditional Lutheran liturgy have been a part of Staci Geiger's life since she was born. As an infant, she was baptized, confirmed, and married in the same Lutheran church where she now attends with her husband and three children. "I am Lutheran through and through," Staci says with a laugh. That upbringing — even memorizing Bible verses and the Catechism during confirmation class — sustained her when a medical diagnosis threatened to unravel her and her family.

During a routine 20-week ultrasound of her third pregnancy, Staci and her husband, Brian, received very non-routine news: the baby growing in Staci's womb only had half a heart, known as Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS). They were devastated. "It turned my world upside down," Staci says. Prior to her son's birth, Staci moved nearly four hours away from her home and family in central Texas. "My mom, dad, and husband stayed here and took care of our older two kids (then age two and three), and I had to move to Houston by myself and live in an RV park near the hospital. It was a very difficult time. I was desperately missing my family, and I was terrified because I knew my son was going to be born with half a heart. I was angry, and I just wanted God to make it go away and to heal him completely." During those dark days and weeks, Staci turned to God's Word, to prayer, and to music.

“The *Venite*, the *Nunc Dimittis*, the *Agnus Dei* — I would sing them over and over again, because they were imprinted in my brain from 30 years of Lutheran worship. I hadn’t thought about the Small Catechism in 15 years — then random things I had to memorize would come to me and be comforting at the right moment. I know it was the Holy Spirit bringing these things I’d been training for without even realizing it.”

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer! (Psalm 4:1)

“A lot of time, I was praying through the Psalms,” Staci says. “It was in the Psalms I realized David was angry and upset and forsaken — all these emotions that we feel sometimes aren’t appropriate to take to God. David brings all those things to God through prayer. I started immersing myself in Christian music and reading my chronological Bible.

“The things that kept me as my rock were the songs in our liturgy,” Staci says. “The *Venite*, the *Nunc Dimittis*, the *Agnus Dei* — I would sing them over and over again, because they were imprinted in my brain from 30 years of Lutheran worship. I hadn’t thought about the Small Catechism in 15 years — then random things I had to memorize would come to me and be comforting at the right moment. I know it was the Holy Spirit bringing these things I’d been training for without even realizing it. I see the beauty of our liturgy and our traditional services in a whole new light, because they stayed with me.

“I always felt like I could handle things, not intentionally taking God out of the equation, but thinking, ‘I got this, I can work with this.’ The situation with my baby was one I could not handle,” Staci remembers. “I was having a really hard time, and I was helpless; there was nothing I could do.”

For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Staci recognized a transformation taking place. “I was seeing God move in obvious, clear ways as I was reading His Word every day — I was closer to Him and His Word than I’ve ever been in my life,” she remembers. “You might expect to be further away from Him in a difficult situation, but that’s the opposite of what happened. I let the Holy Spirit do His work through His Word. It’s never been clearer to me than in those dark times waiting for my son’s birth and when I was with him in the hospital.”

Her son, Daniel, was born on July 14, 2018, with half a heart and six weeks premature. He was 18 inches long and barely five pounds. His first surgery, at six days, was Pulmonary Artery Banding. He had four more surgeries and spent 110 days in the hospital before he was five-months old.



“A lot of the time, I was alone in Houston. My husband came any time he could, but he still had to work. I was trying to hold it together while my baby was

intubated — I couldn’t even hold him for weeks; his chest was open, and he had IVs everywhere. It was absolutely horrifying being so helpless,” Staci remembers. “Yet God was with me. All these people would just come in and pray with me — right when I needed it the most. I felt like it was a hug from God. People I didn’t know were sending us care packages and Christian support. One lady brought us a little Christmas tree with cardinals clipped to it with little scrolls of paper. It was pretty — I thought the scrolls were decoration. A week later, I unrolled one of the scrolls and they were Bible verses! Every day I would unclip a scroll and read the Bible verse. For the first time, I really understood my inadequacy, my weakness, my helplessness, and understood God’s greatness.”

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28 NIV).

“One of the biggest questions I had to wrestle with while I was in the RV waiting for my son’s birth was ‘How can this be good, Lord? How can it be good that my baby will be born and suffer and possibly die before he has a chance to live life?’ Seeing my five-pound baby hooked up to all these things with an open chest was just incredibly difficult. After they wheeled him away, I had this moment of incredible peace. ‘Lord, I don’t know how this could be good, but if it is Your will, it must be.’”



“I didn’t fully appreciate how much I needed God. It’s one thing to know in your brain, it’s another thing to be faced with it: your inadequacy, your helplessness your total inability to accept change at all. It’s all by the grace of God.”

“While I was in the hospital, I had nothing but time. I was not busy at all. I was watching my baby suffer, and there was nothing I could do about it,” Staci says. “What I would do is read my Bible, and I was immersed in it. But then Daniel came home, and he was on 18 different medicines, 12 times a day, with continuous G-tube feeds, and hooked to oxygen. I did not have a nurse or any kind of medical support. It was just me during the day — day after day — with a four-year-old and a two-year-old and a medically complex baby. Thank God I live next door to my mom and dad and aunt and uncle. I could not have done it without them. Once we got home, there was a whole new set of complications that make it really difficult to stay rooted in God’s Word because of the busyness and exhaustion.”

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

“My husband and I have our struggles and are not perfect, but we both keep the forgiveness of Jesus in our minds. God wants our marriage to remain intact and strong, and, so, we are trying our best. I’m not going to lie, it’s extremely difficult. We pray, we go to Bible study and worship regularly, and we try to stay in God’s Word as much as we can.

“As soon as we take our eyes out of the Word and try to tackle things on our own, thinking we know what we’re doing or we know better than God, that’s when disaster happens,” she says. “It’s one of those lessons you have to learn over and over again, because when I think I know better than God, things start to unravel.”

Staci saw her own life begin to unravel in a new way as Daniel’s body became stronger. “As Daniel got better and got well, I went the other direction. I became depressed and isolated and was tackling lots of issues. It was a very challenging time; I was dying on the inside,” Staci says. “There’s all kinds of aspects that you don’t know until you’re in it — in terms of mental health, spiritual health, not having any time to do your own thing. There’s this element of PTSD that stays with you. It’s not fear of the unknown: it’s fear of the known. Fear can grip you and overtake you if you lose sight of the Word and you let yourself go down the rabbit hole of worry. It is all-consuming.”

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

“In my journey with Daniel, it exposed some serious spiritual weakness in me. I didn’t fully appreciate how much I needed God,” Staci admits. “It’s one thing to know in your brain: it’s another thing to be faced with it — your inadequacy, your helplessness, your total inability to accept change at all. It’s all by the grace of God.”

“We spend a lot of time talking about the sanctity of human life, but what I experienced first-hand: it’s extremely life-changing and difficult to care for a child with medical needs. We could do a better job to provide for those who have chosen life for babies who they know are medically complex. I saw God at work clearly in my life, and I can’t keep quiet about it — I have to share it.

“My singular focus is sharing with people how great God is. The people who have touched my life tremendously have experienced hardship, too,” Staci says. “It was incredible to see people hungry for God in a culture that seems self-sufficient. There is an entire population of people who are absolutely aware of how helpless they are and how much they need God. I want to be able to share my hope with them — certain hope in our Creator, in Jesus.”

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Romans 15:13).

“Hope doesn’t mean God is going to heal your baby. Hope means having peace regardless of what happens,” Staci says. “It is coming to the point of having peace and acceptance of God’s will even if that means the unthinkable for your child. It’s something I have to relearn — I have spent night after night agonizing over an upcoming procedure. Even though I know that if God wills it, it must be good. I constantly have to come back to the Word and have the Spirit remind me of His promises all over again.” **Q**

Brian and Staci Geiger attend St. Paul Lutheran Church in The Grove, Texas, with their three children, David, Hannah, and Daniel. Staci was a YWR for the Texas District at the Des Moines convention in 2015. She authored the Bible study, *Anchored in God’s Word*, on page 22.