

Devotions for Christian Educators

That they may
have **LIFE**

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*To Jean, who has shown
me what it is to be a caring,
loving, Christian teacher.*

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Preface

Why write devotions? Better yet, why read devotions? Doesn't it seem that a professional church worker's life is already full of God? With Christian coworkers, chapel services, a curriculum permeated with a biblical perspective, and the constant reminders of God in our workday and workplace, a devotional life might not seem that necessary. Yet it is that very sense of complacency that should spur us on to a more devotional life.

Satan doesn't need to spend a lot of time with those who don't know Christ; he already has them in his back pocket. It is those of us on the frontline—those charged with bringing the good news of Jesus to God's young people—that Satan targets. The tactics he uses are subtle: job dissatisfaction, tensions with coworkers, disappointment over a failed lesson, a student gone bad, bickering over funding, scheduling, professional turf, the inordinate amount of time spent away from family, or just the false sense of invulnerability that comes from being a church worker.

And that's where a devotional life fits in. Devotional reading can strengthen and enrich our spiritual conversations with others. It can give us a deeper reverence for God's inspired Word. It establishes a disciplined routine for studying God's Word and speaking to him often in prayer. It links faith to the cycles of the church year and the school year. In

short, the devotional life makes faith flourish. Surely we want that for our own lives. And we also want that for the lives of the young people we serve.

I started writing these devotions more than three years ago because I saw a need for all of those things in my own life. Throughout the process I did feel God speaking to me as I struggled, or rejoiced, at particular moments in my own ministry. At first I tried to write to high school teachers because I hadn't seen much written for them. As time went on, I realized that the challenges of being a teacher in a Lutheran school are similar regardless of the students' ages. I also realized that most of these challenges are experienced by all Christians, not just those of us in education.

I want to thank my wife, Jean, who has always supported me beyond duty's call. The fact that God placed her in my life is no accident. I see him working through her each and every day. I also want to thank my fellow faculty members for being the live guinea pigs for these devotions. Their feedback has been invaluable.

The phrase used in the title of this book, *That They May Have Life*, comes from John 10:10. There Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The *they* that he is speaking about are all people who belong to him in faith. Through his Word and sacraments, we are given a glimpse of that full life now and the sure promise of its final fullness in eternity. You and I are committed to sharing that good news with those of the next generation. May the

readings that follow encourage you for this awesome and wonderful privilege during the coming school year so that through you and your work, they too may have life.

When Little Things Become Big

. . . Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! . . . Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. . . ."

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." *2 Samuel 12:1-14*

A couple of weeks ago I backed my car into our basketball hoop's pole. Needless to say, the pole won. I managed to collect myself (after declaring myself to be one of the most stupid drivers who ever lived) and drove away before inspecting the damage.

That night, mustering all the male bravado I could, I said to Jean, "Well, it's not too bad, I don't think it should cost that much." Two estimates later I realized how wrong I was. Both estimates were much higher than I had anticipated. To make matters worse, I couldn't shake the fact that it was the same pole I'd been reminding everyone else in the family to be careful about. So there were subtle implications I hadn't even thought of when the incident happened.

Many of my sins are like that. A careless word or action hurts people more than I could imagine. Trying to get away with something often leads to consequences never considered. Acting before thinking quite often leaves me with regrets. The repetition of

what I might have once considered small sins can lead to larger sins and habitual sinning that brings my whole faith relationship with God into question.

In dealing with people and students, I can think of times I've said something that left people with a wrong impression—an impression that led to deeper misunderstandings and confusion. A little throwaway statement can cause big problems.

King David ran into the same problems in his life. When he gave in to temptation and slept with Bathsheba, David failed to consider all the problems his behavior would create for so many people. And the more he tried to undo the problems he had created, the more problems he caused.

In his great love for David, God knew just how to handle both the sins and the problems that resulted from those sins. He sent his prophet Nathan to communicate with David.

Notice Nathan's words in verse 13; David really needed to hear this: "The LORD has taken away your sin." Then, without skipping a beat, Nathan let David know that there would still be consequences for what he had done. David had no one to blame but himself. Worse, the things he had done were things he would have told others not to do.

I'm not trying to equate running into a pole with what David did. But the results of my action and the resulting consequences of my many sins have caused many problems of their own. That is why the words of Nathan have an impact on me.

When God says, "I forgive you," it changes everything. I can move on with my life, free of the nagging

guilt connected to my foolish sins. Even the consequences serve a different purpose than to punish me; they remind me that, for Jesus' sake, things are right in my relationship with God. Each day they help me remember my own human shortcomings and flaws, and then I am again reminded of God's abundant grace.

As you have time to reflect during these remaining days of summer, may you also know the joy of Christ's forgiveness. And through the strength that his forgiveness gives you, may you understand the consequences of sin in your life in a way that brings testimony to your faith relationship with him who loves us.