

...FOR THOSE SEEKING THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *Holy Spirit*

# LutheranRenewal

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## “THERE’S A REASON FOR EVERYTHING”

by Paul Anderson

That’s what I heard coming out of the mouth of a struggling teen. Her mom had tried to commit suicide. I stopped the girl and said, “There’s not a reason for everything, at least not a good one. Your mom should not have done that, and you are not to be carrying the burden for the household.” The difficulty with the statement, “There’s a reason for everything,” is that it implicates God in the action of the mother. Her decision was unfortunate, and the blame cannot be laid at the feet of God, even as an accomplice.

Another problem is that it overlooks the reality of Satan. He gets his licks in, and not recognizing his presence makes God and the devil partners. Their strategies are mutually exclusive, as Jesus pointed out in His clear statement about bringing an abundant life, but a rigid predestination sounds like it puts them on the same team.

A third difficulty is overlooking the brokenness of our world and the fallout that creates. People contract cancer because of unhealthy fumes spewed into the atmosphere. Blame progress. Those who say that “there is a reason for everything” are not usually prepared to point the finger at toxic waste. They are looking into the air of heaven and somehow suspect that God is engineering death and disease to “teach us an important lesson,” something that we couldn’t learn any

other way. So He threatens to take our mother out and tells us to get over it. You might obey a monster, but you wouldn’t love Him.

The glorious truth in the midst of this madness is that *“all things do work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose”* (Rom. 8:28). But don’t jump from “work for good” to “are good.” Don’t try to call the attempted suicide, or the crib death, or the disease that crippled up my sister good.

Those who call things like this good, or at least somehow fitting into the cosmic plan, are fatalists, not people of faith. To say “there’s a reason for everything” sounds suspiciously close to “whatever will be will be.” “Whatever” theology does not stand remotely close to orthodox Christianity. It discounts sin, Satan, cause and effect, and a fallen race in one pathetic phrase.

“There’s a reason for everything” theology makes a ridiculous learning game out of life:

“I ran over my cat this morning backing out of the driveway. I was late to work. I’m not sure what God is wanting to teach me. I’ll sure miss my dear Princess.” (Maybe you need to slow down. Sorry about the cat.)

“I went ahead with the abortion. I feel terrible about it, but there’s a reason for everything.” (No. The reason it happened is that you made a wrong decision. Don’t bring God into your mistake. You should have brought Him in before the abortion.)

“We prayed for him to be healed, but God took him anyway. I guess whatever will be will be.” So are you saying that prayer remains a hopeless exercise against the ironclad will of the Almighty? Somewhere I read that He is



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moved by the prayers of the righteous.

Do our frivolous statements give God an out so He can do whatever He chooses? Or do they let us off the hook so unwise decisions morph into the will of God? That reduces prayer to wishful thinking and faith to a whim.

My daughter Karis, at age twelve, said, "You know how people say, 'Everything happens for a reason.' Everything doesn't happen for a reason, because you could make something happen yourself. If you eat too much ice cream, you get a stomach ache. God can make good things happen. But you're not going to punch someone, then say that everything happens for a reason." She concluded, "There are good reasons for things happening and bad reasons." Karis didn't know it, but she was tussling with the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The conclusion she was coming to is that:

1. Not everything that happens is good, because of sin and Satan.
2. God isn't the cause behind stupid or sinful things (like attempted suicides).
3. God can use everything.

I recently heard a great statement, "Don't believe everything you think." If you think that "there's a reason for everything," stop believing that thought.

We see the cross before we experience the resurrection. And to "survey the wondrous cross" means to see a suffering God, not one coming up with obscure lessons to teach His confused kids. God enters into our sorrow and brokenness rather than simply trying to placate us with answers. Better than an explanation to a girl whose mother almost ended it all is the quiet presence of the One who feels her tragedy better than anyone else—and doesn't explain a thing. That kind of God can be trusted. He is divine—and He is human! He is real—and personal.



Paul Anderson  
Director, Lutheran Renewal

## Attention: Publication Change

Things are going up at Lutheran Renewal:

- ▲ Attendance at our conferences and seminars has gone up.
- ▲ Speaking invitations have gone up.
- ▲ Individual donations have gone up.
- ▲ Expenses have gone up.

It's that last one that has caused us to look at ways where we can lower our costs without compromising our mission. One solution is that we are going to change our newsletter publication schedule.

Instead of sending out a monthly newsletter, we are going to send out six newsletters a year, plus a special December issue. During the opposite months, we will post a one-article Bulletin on our website. You will receive the March newsletter as always, but the April Bulletin will be posted online.

We understand that some of you do not have internet access. If that is the case, please complete and send back the enclosed form, and we will send you a copy of the Bulletin by regular mail.

Thank you for your prayers and support as we labor in this corner of the Vineyard called "Lutheran Renewal."



## HAVE YOU MOVED?



If so, please let us know. The post office no longer forwards non-profit mail after 90 days. That means we are charged \$0.42 for every envelope that comes back to us. Thanks for your help!

*Tending Your  
field of Dreams*

**Women's Conference • April 17-18, 2009**  
Featuring Judith MacNutt and Kristi Graner

Location: Hosanna! Lutheran Church  
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Sponsored by Lutheran Renewal

**Save the date!**

**Holy Spirit Conference**

**August 5-8, 2009**

**"The Prevailing Church"**  
with Graham Cooke, John Paul Jackson,  
and more!

# The Fields are White

by Mark Anderson

My lack in evangelism has embarrassed me. Though I am a Spirit-filled pastor, I have gone months, sometimes years, without personally leading anyone to Christ.

One night last year God impressed me, *“Lift up your eyes and see the fields, that they are white for harvest”* (John 4:35). Weeks passed until I finally thought, *“If God said that, I better test it out.”* So when a man came to buy a lamb I had raised, I asked him straight out, *“Have you received Jesus Christ into your life?”*

“No,” he replied.

“But you’d like to, wouldn’t you?”

He paused pensively for a moment and then stated, *“Yes, I would.”*

I gave him a brief gospel lesson, *“Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again from the dead.”* *“Would you pray to receive Jesus Christ right now?”* I asked.

**“LIFT UP YOUR EYES  
and see the fields,  
that they are white for  
harvest.”**

John 4:35

“Yes, but I don’t know how,” he said with fright in his face. I led him in a simple prayer, which he repeated after me. After prayer, he looked up with the sweetest expression and words of gratitude.

The next day I brought a Bible to his house. He was cutting down a tree, so I took the axe and helped. When his wife came out, I introduced myself and asked her if she had received Jesus Christ into her life. She replied no, but that she wanted to. I gave her the same gospel message. She wanted to pray silently, so I acknowledged her wish.

This began a series of encounters with people I met in everyday life. I’ve been able to lead a girl to Christ at a flower shop, a young man at Wal-Mart, and a fellow at an auto repair shop. Not everyone receives Christ on the spot, of course. Recently, while waiting for someone, a college girl named Cassie was in the same room. After chit-chat, I asked her, *“Have you received Christ Jesus into your life?”* Unlike most, she couldn’t say “yes” or “no” although she admitted she was searching. This opened the door to give her a Josh McDowell booklet to help answer her quest and boost her along the road to discipleship.

I’m still learning. Here’s what I’m discovering: evangelism is a lot of fun!

Jesus is right—the harvest is ripe. People are ready; they just need to be shown how to receive Christ.



Surprisingly, this key question, *“Have you given your life to Jesus Christ?”* does not seem to offend people; rather, they welcome the opportunity to talk about their faith. Almost everyone—more than 9 out of 10—answers the question “yes” or “no.”

The great commission is best translated, *“As you are going . . . make disciples.”* I’m able to begin this discipleship process in the normal course of life without going out of my way.

This simple question is a great opener, but more than a starter. It leads to salvation. We are called to reap, not just sow or water (John 4:37). If appropriate I often ask, *“Is there any reason why you wouldn’t want to receive Jesus Christ into your life right now?”* Some people are prepared and waiting. Other Christians have already done the legwork. We come along and follow up on their labor. Jesus gave this principle about evangelism, *“One sows and another reaps.”* Jesus said, *“I have called you to reap”* (John 4:37-38).

There is power in the gospel. Invariably, I give a clear gospel summary according to I Corinthians 15:1-4. Jesus Christ died for our sins. Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Get a handle on this one if you can! Use the simple gospel. Use the name of Jesus.

Jesus didn’t follow up everyone. If He didn’t try, why should we? Let the Spirit lead.

When I’m filled with the Holy Spirit and have vision for people (seeing the fields), evangelism comes more naturally. The risk is still breathtaking—but what an adventure!

I have made a decision not to criticize but rather be supportive of various forms of evangelism. There’s a lot of variety. *“Different strokes for different folks.”* What works for one may not work for another. Find a style that works for you and use it.

The world is waiting. We’re winning not just “souls”. It’s Judy or Jim or Megan or Brett who are going to hell. We turn them around by caring enough to ask simple questions and giving the simple gospel.

*Mark Anderson is the pastor of the Church of the Living Water in Muscatine, Iowa. Please see: [www.livingwatermuscatine.com](http://www.livingwatermuscatine.com). He and his wife, Kari, have travelled extensively abroad. They are the parents of seven children.*



# RESOURCES

NEW!

## Church on Fire

Morris Vaagenes tells of the transformation and spiritual renewal that came to North Heights that continues to this day. The lessons learned can be applied to individuals and churches—to whoever is crying out for renewal. (\$13)

## Six Prayers God Always Answers

Mark Herringshaw and Jennifer Schuchmann point out that the most authentic prayers aren't about a specific posture or a recitation of words, but rather the foundation of a relationship—a relationship where some unexpected results can occur. (\$13)

## The Mantle of Esther

Larry Christenson uses the story of Esther to show the marvelous promise and power that God attaches to the ministry of intercession. Esther's mantle is not foundationally a description of something the intercessor "does" or "causes," but something that happens when the intercessor draws close to the Lord. (\$11 That's lower than at Amazon!)

## Answering Your Questions About Speaking in Tongues

Larry Christenson addresses questions like: "Is the gift of tongues for today?" "What does speaking in tongues mean?" "Is speaking in tongues for me?" and many more. (\$8)

## Baptism, God's Activity of Grace

Dr. Morris Vaagenes answers questions such as, "Why is baptism important?" "Is baptism a passport to heaven?" There are questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. (\$16)

## Breaking Strongholds in My Life

A booklet by Paul Anderson that identifies key strongholds of bondage in our lives and how we can break free through the power of the Spirit and not merely by our own effort. (\$2)

## Building Christian Character

An inspiring and challenging study by Paul Anderson of 34 Christian character traits. The study gives a biblical meaning and practical application of each trait. (Workbook or Teacher's Guide: \$6 each; 8 or more, \$5 each)

## Dare to Dream

Do you want to discover your dream? Learn how to pursue it? Need to recover broken dreams? In Dare to Dream, Paul Anderson will help you to discover what God has placed inside of you! (\$10)

## Dare to Dream Workbook

This journaling book by Paul Anderson will assist you in creating the kind of climate in which God-sized dreams can grow. Each page has a Dream Reflection and accompanying questions. (\$6)

## Dare to Dream and Workbook Set (\$14)

## Especially for Pastors

Edited by Paul Anderson, a monthly newsletter to encourage and assist pastors as they shepherd the Lord's flock. (\$24 annually for hard copy or \$12 annually for e-mail. Include e-mail address.)

## The Father's Gift

Paul Anderson has written a book that answers many of your questions about the Holy Spirit. Are you wondering about the gifts? Would you like to be filled with the Spirit? Can the Spirit really lead us? There are questions at the end of each chapter. (\$10)

## The Gift of Tongues (Booklet)

A biblical study of this spiritual gift by Larry Christenson. He also traces its connection with receiving the Holy Spirit, answers questions, covers theological concerns, and discusses practical aspects. (\$2.25)

## Healing From a Father Wound (Booklet)

A message by Paul Anderson that brings emotional and spiritual healing to those who carry wounds from the past. (\$2)

## Prayer Ministry (Expanded)

A booklet by Paul Anderson with practical help in training prayer ministers. Twice the size of the original. (\$3)

## The Renewed Mind

This book by Larry Christenson touches on five major areas of spiritual experience: Dependence on God; Facing challenges with the authority of Christ; Patience; Discipline; Prayer. (\$9)

## Ride the River

Using a parable of Lewis and Clark's exploration of the American West, Larry Christenson helps you discover how God the Father puts your life journey under the co-leadership of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. (\$11)

## What About Baptism? (Booklet)

The topics in this booklet by Larry Christenson include: Infant Baptism, Immersion, Re-baptism and Baptism with the Holy Spirit. (\$2.25)

## You Shall Be Baptized in the Holy Spirit

This book, written by Elsie Fuhrman, teaches believers how to receive empowerment of the Spirit and how to minister it to others. (\$7)



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