



Warum sollt ich mich denn grämen? Hab ich doch



Christum nennen? Wer



will mir das Leben geben? Wer schon



Gottes sohn bin ich?

Stand Firm and Sing

PAUL GERHARDT & THE POWER OF LUTHERAN SONG
IN OUR WANDERING THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE

After ten years of waiting and 30 years of preparation, Paul finally received his call into the pastoral ministry. 15 years after he met her, Paul finally had enough to support a wife, and so proposed and was married to his love at the age of 48. After a year of marriage, Paul finally was blessed to become a father, 37 years after his own father died when Paul was only 12.

But after eight months of joy, Paul's life returned to normal—no, not the “new normal”—the age-old normal that Paul had spent 49 years living and that every sinful human-shaped pile of dust experiences until he is finally blown away with the wind of death.

The almost 400-year-old plaque still stands in the church today as a testimony the brevity and difficulty of this life, and to the grieving love of a father and mother who knew it too well:

Maria Elizabeth... has here her little bed as a resting place, and
this small plaque as a memorial from her loving parents. Genesis
47:9, “Short and full of trouble are the days of my life.”

Their beloved daughter of eight months was dead. She, like the Patriarch Jacob who spoke the words after 130 years of life, now knew first-hand how short and full of trouble are the days of this life, however many years—or only months—God may give us this side of heaven.

A few nights ago, I tucked my 3-year-old daughter Ellie into her bed after our evening devotion. She snuggled into the blankets with a little smile on her face, humming contentedly. She was so secure—not a worry in the world, surrounded by warmth and love. It almost hurt to see, because even as I thought, “I would do anything—even die—to keep my little girl feeling like that,” I knew that I couldn't. I'm not that strong. I'm no better—probably worse—than my fathers, and I can prevent her days from being few and full of trouble as little as I can prevent that for my own.

How can a Christian man prepare for a moment like this? How can he respond? What can he do when he, like Jacob, looks back on anything between eight months to 130 years of life and is filled with shame at how he, even less than his fathers, could do nothing to withstand the winds of death, for himself or those he loves? *“The days and the years of my wandering are one hundred thirty years. The days and the years of my life have been few and full of trouble, and they have not been as many as the days and the years of the lives of my fathers during the days of their wandering.”*

What did Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, do?

In 2 Chronicles 20:2-3, “Jehoshaphat was told, “A huge horde is coming against you from beyond the sea and from Edom!... Jehoshaphat was afraid.”

It was not only himself, or a little girl, he was tasked with protecting. Jehoshaphat, whose name means “The LORD judges,” was king of Judah. He would be judged on how well he protected the entire kingdom of God and the promises that came with it. How could this man who believed in the Christ to come prepare for a moment where hordes of enemies threatened to sweep them and the promises of the Christ away like dust? 2 Chronicles goes on:

He focused on seeking the Lord. He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord. From all the cities of Judah people came to seek the Lord.

Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem in the House of the Lord in front of the new courtyard. He said:

Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God in heaven? You are ruling over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might. There is no one who can stand up against you...

Now look! Men from Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir have invaded... Our God, will you not judge them? For there is no power in us to face this huge horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

All Judah was standing before the Lord along with their dependents, their wives, and their children.

Jehoshaphat faces the winds of death and he knows that “there is no power in us” to face it. He is not alone. All of Judah, their wives and children, stand before the Lord powerless. How can they respond? How can a king respond? He doesn’t know! So he looks the LORD for the answer, and he is not disappointed.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite from the descendants of Asaph. He was standing in the middle of the assembly. He said:

Listen, all Judah, all you residents of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat. This is what the Lord says to you. Do not be afraid. Do not be terrified because of this huge horde, for the battle is not yours. It is God’s. Tomorrow go down against them...

It is not up to you to fight this battle. Just take up your position. Stand still, Judah and Jerusalem, and see that the victory of the Lord is with you. Do not be afraid. Do not be terrified. Tomorrow go out against them. The Lord will be with you.

Then Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the residents of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord to worship the Lord. Then the Levites from the Kohathites and the Korahites stood up to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

They got up early in the morning and went out into the Wilderness of Tekoa. As they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and you residents of Jerusalem. Have faith in the Lord your God, and you will find him to be faithful. Believe his prophets and you will succeed.”

After he consulted with the people, he appointed singers to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness, as they went out ahead of the army, singing:

Give thanks to the Lord, for his mercy endures forever.

The king looks to God for how to respond to a horde of enemies he is powerless to face. The Lord’s answer? *Sing*. Before the enemy comes—sing! When the enemy comes—sing! After the enemy perishes—sing!

[The singers] went out ahead of the army, singing: Give thanks to the Lord, for his mercy endures forever.

At the time when they began the jubilant songs of praise to the Lord, he set ambushes against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who were marching against Judah, and they were routed, because the men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to destroy them and wipe them out. When they were finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped destroy each other.

When Judah came to a spot overlooking the wilderness and looked out toward that horde, they saw nothing but dead bodies lying on the ground. No one had escaped.

Jehoshaphat and his people came to gather the spoils. They found huge amounts of equipment and valuables among the bodies. They collected so much for themselves that they could not carry it. It took them three days to gather the spoils because there was so much.

On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berakah, where they blessed the Lord. That is why that place is named the Valley of Berakah to this day.

Then all the men of Judah and Jerusalem joyfully returned to Jerusalem with Jehoshaphat at their head, because the Lord had given them reason to rejoice over their enemies. They came to Jerusalem to the House of the Lord with harps, lyres, and trumpets.

The dread of the Lord was upon all the kingdoms of the lands, when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel.

Then Jehoshaphat's kingdom was quiet. His God gave him rest on every side.

How can a king, a father, a brother, a Christian respond to the short and troublesome days on earth? The Lord's answer: *Sing!* Before the enemy comes—sing! When the enemy comes—sing! After the enemy perishes at the hand of the LORD—sing!

This is the story of Paul Gerhardt. Yes, it is the story of a man who lost a daughter, and so much more, in his few and troublesome days on earth. But more than that, it is a story of a man who couldn't stop singing—of the victory of the LORD that will come, is coming, and has come. Even at times of tragedy, he could sing:

1. Why should sorrow ever grieve me;
Christ is near, / What can here
E'er of Him deprive me?
Who can rob me of my heaven
That God's Son / As my own
To my faith hath given?

7. True believers, shrinking never,
Where they dwell, / Should reveal
Their true colors ever.
When approaching death would scare them,
Still should they / Patient stay
And with courage bear them.

8. Death can never kill us even¹,
But relief / From all grief
To us then is given.
It doth close life's mournful story,
Make a way / That we may
Pass to heavenly glory.

10. What is all this life possesseth?
But a hand / Full of sand
That the heart distresseth.
Noble gifts that pall me never,
Christ so free / There gives me
To enjoy forever.

11. Lord! Thou Fount of joy forever,
Thou art mine, / I am Thine,
No one can us sever.
I am Thine, because Thou gavest
Life and blood / For my good,
By Thy death me savest.

12. Thou art mine, I love and own Thee,
Ne'er shall I, / Light of joy,
From my heart dethrone Thee.
Let me, let me soon behold Thee
Face to face, / Thy embrace--
May it soon enfold me!

¹ „Kann uns doch kein Tod nicht töten“ Reported as one of the verses Gerhardt was singing as he died.



O Lord, how shall I meet you, / How welcome you aright?
Your people long to greet you, / My Hope, my heart's Delight.
O Jesus, let your Word be / A lamp to light my way,
To show me how to please you, / To guide me every day.



Paul Gerhardt² was born on March 12, 1607 in Gräfenhainichen, a village near Wittenberg. Through his mother's family he was from a family involved in the ministry. His mother's father was a Superintendent (like a district president in our synod) and her grandfather was a court preacher in Dresden. Paul's father was a hotel keeper as well as Gräfenhainichen's mayor. Paul's family had enough money to send him to "The Prince's School" in Grimma when he was fifteen, despite the fact that his father had died when he was only twelve, and his mother when he was fourteen. Paul had been prepared for this "prep school" by his grammar school in Gräfenhainichen where he had learned Latin and Catechism.

At Grimma the students said their daily chapel prayers in Greek, Latin and German. Latin was the language of instruction and orthodox Lutheran theology was one of the major subjects. The students had long and well-ordered days which began at 5 AM each day and ended at 7 PM. There were no vacations, and students were rarely permitted to head into town.

In 1626 the plague came to Grimma, taking more than 10% of its population of 3000. More than half the students left the school to avoid the disease, but Paul Gerhardt and 32 others remained.

By January 2nd, in 1628, Paul had enrolled at the University of Wittenberg, a city in which he would live for a good number of years, first as a student of theology, then as a tutor, and in which he would experience both



² All biographical sections adapted from "The Gospel in Song: Insights and Applications from the Life and Hymns of Paul Gerhardt," Rev. Timothy H. Buelow, paper presented at the 2008 WELS National Worship Conference.

highs and lows. To the former belongs the 100th anniversary celebration of the Augsburg Confession in 1630.

From June 25-27, 1630, the centennial of the Augsburg Confession was celebrated. Between 3 and 4 a. m. the orchestra played from the garlanded towers. The guns of the fort followed, firing a salute. At 6 the university and the magistrates paraded into the Court Church, at 9 to the City Church, where the whole Augsburg Confession was read, the princely and noble guests following audibly from printed copies in their hands. The Holy Communion was received by 1,381 persons. The next day, Saturday, was given over to a great musical celebration.

The second highpoint of his time as student came in 1631 when Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden came to the university. Gustavus was viewed as the conquering Lutheran hero from the north, without whose intervention, the Lutheran cause would have been lost in the 30 years' war. At the university he spoke to the students, including Paul Gerhardt and said, *"Gentlemen, from you at this place the light of the Gospel has come to us. But because enemies would darken it here, we must come to you and with God's help relight that light."*



Ask yourself what university student would not have always carried the memory of these two momentous occasions in his heart, and been profoundly influenced by those memories when asked in later years to compromise his Lutheran convictions?

1. We might say that our whole life is simply preparation for meeting Jesus on the last day. Look at the Advent (Advent=Jesus is coming!) hymn verse above, from Paul Gerhardt's, "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?" In what ways does "growing up into" God's Word answer his question, "O Lord, how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright?"
2. List two influences that God has used/is using to put the song of the gospel in your heart. Then, add one influence you would like to add into your life.

3. What are some ways *you* can be a good, gospel influence that helps people have the song of the gospel in their hearts?

4. Read some other verses of the hymn “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?” below. Despite some high points of his young life, Gerhardt had low points too. Gerhardt lost his parents at a young age, and saw war, plague, and death. Note the different ways singing of Jesus’ Coming (now through his Word, in the future in glory) was the comfort Gerhardt needed in “few and troublesome” days.

1. Rejoice, then, you sad-hearted,
Who sit in deepest gloom,
Who mourn o’er joys departed
And tremble at your doom.
Despair not; he is near you,
He’s standing at the door
Who best can help and cheer you
And bids you weep no more.

2. Ye need not toil nor languish
Nor ponder day and night
How in the midst of anguish
Ye draw Him by your might
He comes, He comes all willing,
Moved by His love alone,
Your woes and troubles stilling;
For all to Him are known.

3. Sin’s debt, that fearful burden,
Let not your souls distress;
Your guilt the Lord will pardon
And cover by his grace.
He comes, for you procuring
The peace of sin forgiv’n,
His children thus securing,
A heritage in heav’n.

4. What though the foes be raging,
Heed not their craft and spite;
Your Lord, the battle waging,
Will scatter all their might.
He comes, a King most glorious,
And all His earthly foes
In vain His course victorious
Endeavor to oppose.

5. He comes to judge the nations,
A terror to his foes,
A light of consolations,
And blessed hope to those
Who love the Lord’s appearing.
O glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth your beams most cheering,
And guide us safely home.



Why should cross and trial grieve me?
Christ is near / With his cheer, / Never will he leave me.
Who can rob me of the heaven
That God's Son / For me won / When his life was given?



Early in Gerhardt's life, the low points would begin to outnumber the high points. Tragedy in his early life would leave a permanent mark on Gerhardt, reminding him that he was just a wandering pilgrim passing through this life to a better place (a constant theme in his hymns). The year after Gustavus' speech to the students, having defeated the papist generals Tilly and Wallenstein, the latter of which had occupied Gerhardt's former school at Grimma, Gustavus met his death. His body was carried through Wittenberg in solemn procession on its way back to Sweden. After the death of the Swedish hero, the elector of Saxony switched sides in the war, and the land of Luther would pay the price. The Swedes, already provisioning themselves at the expense of the Saxon farm fields, began burning down towns, one after the other, among them Paul Gerhardt's home town of Gräfenhainichen. Paul's older brother Christian, who had quit school and become a farmer, was living there at the time, and the family farm suffered the Swedish devastation. The town was reduced to ashes in what became known as the "Red Easter" of 1637. Shortly thereafter, 322 of the survivors had succumbed to the plague's return. Three miles away, in Wittenberg where Paul was living at the time, he saw much of that town abandoned due to the plague and then partially burned due to an accidental fire in 1640.

All these heart-rending experiences, endured in staunch Lutheran faith, shaped the words Paul would later write in his hymns. But the difficulties were hardly over. In fact, they would continue throughout his years as a hymn writer, which were perhaps just beginning. In 1643 Paul moved to Berlin, at that time still a very small city of 6000. Berlin had also not been spared by the ravaging Swedes. The suburbs had been burned down. Many had died of the plague and thus many of the homes stood deserted and crumbling. Paul moved there to continue on in his work as a private tutor, by which he had supported himself in Wittenberg. He remained unmarried, thinking his income unsuitable to support a family. As tutor in the home of Andreas Barthold, senior lawyer of the Elector's Court, Gerhardt instructed a daughter, Anna Maria, who was later to become his dear wife.

During his time in Berlin, Gerhardt began writing his hymns in earnest. Among his friends he counted Johann Crüger, organist and minister of music at the Nikolaikirche (St. Nicholas Church). By the end of Crüger's life, he had published eighty-eight of them. Both by setting Paul's hymns to music and then by publishing them for congregational use, Crüger is perhaps most responsible for the fact that we still sing Gerhardt's musical words of faith today.



After many years of tutoring, the trained theologian finally received a call to serve as a pastor at the age of forty-four in 1651 at Mittenwalde, now part of greater Berlin. By that time war and pestilence had reduced Mittenwalde's 1000 parishioners to 250. Their ability to support a pastor was therefore understandably meager.

Gerhardt's recommendation on the call list given to Mittenwalde has been preserved. It says Gerhardt is "a person of known diligence and learning; of a fine mind and pure doctrine; of honest, peaceful disposition and Christian, blameless life; highly thought of by high and low in Berlin, from whom he could at any time get the testimonial that with his splendid gifts he had often earned the love and thanks of the church." This is a high recommendation, considering at this time there were many pastors who were lacking in either education or morals.

Having a more respectable income, Paul Gerhardt finally proposed to his former student Anna Maria and the two married in February 1655. Gerhardt was forty-eight. Anna Maria was thirty-three. Their first child was a daughter born in 1656 who lived only eight months. The grieving parents placed a plaque on the wall of the church dedicated to her which is still there. "Maria Elizabeth... has here her little bed as a resting place, and this small plaque as a memorial from her loving parents. Genesis 47:9, 'Short and full of trouble are the days of my life.'" During his six years at Mittenwalde, Gerhardt wrote sixty-six hymns, many of them meant to bring God's comfort during these short and troublesome days in this life, such as this verse of "Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me":



*Though a heavy cross I'm bearing, / And my heart / Feels the smart, / Shall I be despairing?
God can help me who doth send it, / He doth know / All my woe / And how best to end it.*



Paul Gerhardt's Ministry Trials

If God himself be for me, I may a host defy;
For when I pray, before me my foes, confounded fly.
If Christ, my head and master, befriend me from above,
What foe or what disaster can drive me from his love?



In 1657 Gerhardt received a call to be the second pastor at the Nikolaikirche in Berlin where his friend Johann Crüger still served as organist and the two served in “harmony” together until 1662. In that fateful year Johann Crüger was called home to heaven, and more tragic for Gerhardt, Elector Frederick William of Brandenburg expanded his efforts to merge the Lutheran and Reformed faiths in his territory. On June 2 of 1662 he published an edict forbidding Lutherans to preach anything against the Reformed doctrine.

Gerhardt was not by nature a polemical preacher, and so he had not fallen directly under the prince’s wrath. But now that the Great Elector had decreed it forbidden to speak of the doctrinal differences between the Reformed and the Lutherans, it had become a matter of confession and conscience for the peaceable pastor.

From September 1662 to May 1663 meetings were held in the Elector’s castle to try to resolve the differences and form a working agreement between the Reformed and the Lutherans which would allow the Lutherans to remain confessional. The Lutherans were willing to be cordial, as long as they could be allowed to remain faithful to their Lutheran teaching. Nevertheless, after seventeen meetings, the Lutherans withdrew from the talks when it was insisted they give up their allegiance to the Formula of Concord. Gerhardt was one of the most often consulted and influential brethren among the Lutherans, though he offered his advice in writing and personal consultations, not being himself publicly involved in speaking at these meetings. William Dallmann quotes Philip Wackernagel’s assessment:



Paul Gerhardt appears in the course of all these proceedings as the purest character; he was the soul, I might say, the good conscience of the Berlin clergy. He was led neither by stubbornness nor by passion. His official business was to outline the documents of attack and defense; these are written with the greatest skill and acuteness, frequently with Lutheran boldness in surprising countermoves, yes with logical humor, and they furnish a new proof that a critical mind and poetical faculty may very well be united.

Once again, the discussions having broken down, Frederick William demanded that the Berlin clergy sign an edict in 1664 forbidding any doctrinal polemics. Under threat of removal from office, some 200 of

them gave in. Many refused, including Gerhardt. Gerhardt was given more time, but on February 6, 1666 he was summoned and urged again to sign the edict abolishing the Formula of Concord. It appears the Elector gave him more time due to his relative tranquility and his well-known popularity among the people of Berlin, but when Gerhardt appeared he himself forced the issue by refusing the extra time given him to reconsider his opinion. He told the elector he had thought enough and would not be changing his mind. On February 13th he was removed from office. And thus began the period Gerhardt would refer to as his “little Berlin martyrdom.”

Gerhardt had been so popular as a pastor, preacher and hymnist, that there were good-sized protests in the city before the mayor and the aldermen, who, listening to their constituents and also expressing their own convictions, presented resolutions to the Elector on behalf of their “beloved preacher and pastor” Paul Gerhardt. Even some Reformed aldermen signed the resolutions, pleading for this peaceable man whom they said had never slandered the Reformed or their faith and reminding the Elector that he had approved the printing of thirty-three of Gerhardt’s hymns in the Reformed Brandenburg hymnal.

The Elector had not been unaffected by all these pleas. He declared Gerhardt restored to his position in January 1667, but sent him a private message that he would be expected to obey the decree even without being required to sign. Now it was Gerhardt’s turn to refuse, albeit graciously. He told the city council that he would not enter the pulpit until it was made clear he was not giving up his allegiance to the Formula of Concord. Gerhardt’s wife was dying, and urged him not to give in. She was taken to heaven the following March, her remains buried behind the altar in the Nikolaikirche where three of her children had been laid to rest. Four months later Gerhardt’s brother-in-law was removed from office. In August, a replacement was named for Gerhardt. The members of the Nikolaikirche, however, locked the doors and would not admit him to the church on the day he was to preach his inaugural sermon, and he never did take the pulpit. Subsequent calls for a replacement were returned.

That summer, Frederick William withdrew his demand that the Lutherans sign his decree. That same year his own wife died and he subsequently married a Lutheran woman, and his sour disposition toward Lutherans faded gently. Gerhardt had “won.” But he would never again serve in the Nikolaikirche.

Read verses of Gerhardt’s powerful hymn, “If God Himself Be For Me.” Imagine him singing this as the Elector removes him from his church and livelihood. **Pick out thoughts that will give you comfort to stand on the truth of God’s Word despite difficulty and persecution.**

1. If God Himself be for me,
I may a host defy;
For when I pray, before me
My foes confounded, fly.
If Christ, my head and master,
Befriend me from above,
What foe or what disaster
Can drive me from his love?

5. He canceled my offenses,
And saved my soul from death;
‘Tis He who ever cleanses
Me from my sins through faith.
In Him I can be cheerful,
Bold, and undaunted aye;
In Him I am not fearful,
Of God’s great Judgment Day

6. Naught, naught, can e'er condemn me
Or set my hope aside.
Now hell no more can claim me;
Its fury I deride.
No sentence now reproves me;
No guilt destroys my peace,
For Christ, my Savior, loves me
And shields me with his grace.

7. His Holy Spirit dwelling,
and ruling in my heart,
Drives out my pain and wailing
Removes my every smart
He flourishes and blesses
The fruit he grows in me,
And helps me cry, "My Father!"
To God unceasingly.³

8. And when my soul is lying,
Weak, trembling, and oppressed,
He pleads with groans and sighing
That cannot be expressed;
But God's quick eye discerns them,
Although they give no sound,
And into language turns them
E'en in the heart's deep ground.

10. In yonder home doth flourish
My heritage and lot;
Though here I die and perish,
My heaven shall fail me not,
Though care my life oft saddens
And causeth tears to flow,
The light of Jesus gladdens
And sweetens every woe.

11. Who clings with resolution
To Him whom Satan hates,
Must look for persecution
Which never here abates;
Reproaches, griefs, and losses,
Rain fast upon his head;
A thousand plagues and crosses
Become his daily bread.

12. All this I am prepared for,
Yet I am not afraid;
By Thee shall all be cared for,
To whom my vows were paid:
Though life and limb it cost me,
And all the earthly store
Which once so much engrossed me,--
I love Thee all the more.

13. No danger, thirst, or hunger,
No pain or poverty,
No earthly tyrant's anger
Shall ever hinder me.
Though earth should break sunder,
You are my Savior true
No fire or sword or thunder
Shall sever me from you.

14. No angel and no gladness,
No throne, no pomp, no show,
No love, no hate, no sadness,
No pain, no depth of woe,
No scheme of man's contrivance,
Though it be great or small,
Shall draw me from Thy guidance
Not one of these, nor all!

15. My heart for joy is springing,
And can no more be sad,
'Tis full of joy and singing.
Sees only sunshine glad.
The sun that cheers my spirit
Is Jesus Christ, my King;
The heav'n I shall inherit
Makes me rejoice and sing.

³ Newly translated for this study to closer reflect the German



And when Thy glory I shall see / And taste Thy kingdom's pleasure,
Thy blood my royal robe shall be, / My joy beyond all measure.
When I appear before Thy throne, / Thy righteousness shall be my crown,--
With these I need not hide me. / And there, in garments richly wrought
As thine own bride, I shall be brought / To stand in joy beside Thee.



In Autumn of 1667, Gerhardt received a call to Lübben, a small town parish in a Lutheran jurisdiction which, however unfortunately, was reluctant to appreciate or take good care of its pastor. After several delays, some due to the Lübbeners' slowness in making the parsonage livable, Paul Gerhardt finally began his service there the following Trinity Sunday. There he lived out the rest of his years, never fully loved by the Lübbeners as he had been by his dear Berliners. It seems his days of hymn writing had also come to an end, perhaps coincidental with the death of his dear wife.

Nevertheless, it is in the church in Lübben that the one life-sized painting of Gerhardt hangs, from which all other drawings of the poet are derived. On that painting is written his now famous epitaph: *Theologus in cribro Satanae versatus* (A Theologian sifted in Satan's sieve). It is there also that his remains lie in repose awaiting the great day of resurrection.

Besides his hymns themselves, we have a wonderful testament to Gerhardt's faith in a testament that he prepared on his 70th birthday for his son. His wife and other children had already died. It offers insight into this important Lutheran writer of many great chorales.

"Now that I have reached the 70th year of my life and also have the joyful hope that my dear, holy God will soon rescue me out of this world and lead me into a better life than I have had until now on earth, I thank Him especially for all His kindness and faithfulness which, from my mother's womb until the present hour, He has shown me in body and soul and in all that He has given me.

Besides this, I ask Him from the bottom of my heart that when my hour comes He would grant me a happy departure, take my soul into His fatherly hands, and give my body a peaceful rest in the ground until the dear Last Day, when I, with all of my [family] who have been before me and also may remain after me, will reawake and behold my dear Lord Jesus Christ face to face, in whom I have believed but have not yet seen. To my only son whom



I am leaving behind I leave few earthly goods, but with them I leave him an honorable name of which he will not have to be ashamed.

My son knows that from his tender childhood I have given him to the Lord my God as His possession, that he is to become a servant and preacher of His holy Word. He is to remain now in this and not turn away from it, even if he has only few good days in it. For the good Lord knows how to handle it and how sufficiently to replace external troubles with internal happiness of the heart and joy of the spirit.

Study holy theology in pure schools and at unfalsified universities and beware of the syncretists [those who mix Lutheranism and Calvinism], for they seek what is temporal and are faithful to neither God nor men. In your common life do not follow evil company but rather the will and command of your God. Especially:

(1) Do nothing evil in the hope that it will remain secret, for nothing is spun so small that it is not seen in the light of day.

(2) Outside of your office and vocation do not become angry. If you notice that anger has heated you up, remain still and speak not so much as a word until you have first prayed the Ten Commandments and the Christian Creed silently.

(3) Be ashamed of the lusts of the flesh, and when you one day come to the years in which you can marry, then marry with God and with the good advice of pious, faithful, and sensible people.

(4) Do good to people even if they have nothing with which to repay you, for the Creator of heaven and earth has long since repaid what humans cannot repay: when He created you, when He gave you His beloved Son, and when He accepted you in Holy Baptism as His child and heir.

(5) Flee from greed as from hell. Be satisfied with what you have earned with honor and a good conscience, even if it is not all too much. But if the good Lord gives you something more, ask Him to preserve you from the burdensome misuse of temporal goods.

In summary: Pray diligently, study something honorable, live peacefully, serve honestly, and remain unmoved in your faith and confessing. If you do this, you too will one day die and depart from this world willingly, joyfully, and blessedly. Amen.”

Gerhardt did die willingly, joyfully, and blessedly, with the words of his hymns on his lips. Notably, among his death bed hymns, he sang, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.” Note especially verses 9 & 10 and their faith-filled words:

My Savior, then be near me When death is at my door, And let your presence cheer me; Forsake me nevermore! When soul and body languish, Oh, leave me not alone, But take away my anguish By virtue of your own!

Lord, be my consolation, My shield when I must die; Remind me of your passion When my last hour draws nigh. My eyes will then behold you, Upon your cross will dwell; My heart will then enfold you—Who dies in faith dies well!

Note also the comfort in the face of death which concludes his hymn, “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth.”

*And when Thy glory I shall see And taste Thy kingdom's pleasure,
Thy blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure.
When I appear before Thy throne, Thy righteousness shall be my crown,--
With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought
As thine own bride, I shall be brought To stand in joy beside Thee. (CW219)*

1. Read 2 Peter 1:10-15. What is Peter's goal as he nears the time when he will put of this tent and enjoy his heavenly home?

"Therefore, brothers, be more eager to make your calling and election sure for yourselves. For if you do these things, you will never stumble. In fact, in this way you will be richly supplied with an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That is why I intend always to keep reminding you of these things, even though you already know them and are established in the truth you now have. I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to keep you wide awake by reminding you, because I know that the putting off of my tent is going to happen soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. I will also make every effort so that after my departure you always have a reminder of these things."

2. In what ways can you leave behind a reminder, a testament to the faith, to those in your life?

3. Read Philippians 1:18b-24 below. What sure hope did Christ give Paul (the apostle, and Gerhardt!) and to us, whether we live or die?

"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, because I know that this will turn out for my deliverance, through your prayer and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This matches my earnest expectation and hope that I will in no way be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, so even now, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. Yes, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to go on living in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet which should I prefer? I do not know. I am pulled in two directions, because I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. But, it is more necessary for your sake that I remain in the flesh."



My daughter snuggled in to her blankets. There was nothing I could do to keep her so secure and happy in her few and troublesome years on earth. But I could do *something*, and in fact, I already had. During our evening devotion, we sang. And the LORD's victory resounded again.

The comfort and confidence of the gospel isn't just the song of Gerhardt. It is the song of all who endure during these few and troublesome days on earth and wonder what to do. More than that, it is the song of those who know what God has done. It is the song of those who stand firm with a power not their own, the song of those who know the victory of the Lord that has come, is coming, and will come and resound forever in their lives and in the lives of those they love.

So in your few and troublesome days on earth... Stand firm and sing!



Bonus: Gerhardt Easter Hymn (if time!)

1 Awake, my heart, with gladness,
See what today is done;
Now, after gloom and sadness,
Comes forth the glorious sun.
My Savior there was laid
Where our bed must be made
When to the realms of light
Our spirit wings its flight.

2 The foe in triumph shouted
When Christ lay in the tomb;
But lo, he now is routed,
His boast is turned to gloom.
For Christ again is free;
In glorious victory
He who is strong to save
Has triumphed o'er the grave.

3 This is a sight that gladdens--
What peace it doth impart!
Now nothing ever saddens
The joy within my heart.
No gloom shall ever shake,
No foe shall ever take
The hope which God's own Son
In love for me hath won.

5 The world against me rages,
Its fury I disdain;
Though bitter war it wages,
Its work is all in vain.
My heart from care is free,
No trouble troubles me.
Misfortune now is play,
And night is bright as day.

6 Now I will cling forever
To Christ, my Savior true;
My Lord will leave me never,
Whate'er He passes through.
He rends death's iron chain;
He breaks through sin and pain;
He shatters hell's dark thrall;
I follow Him through all.

7 He brings me to the portal
That leads to bliss untold,
Whereon this rhyme immortal
Is found in script of gold:
"Who there My cross has shared
Finds here a crown prepared;
Who there with Me has died
Shall here be glorified."