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MOP 2021
A Jump-Start to
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THINKING IT THROUGH

BY ALLAN WILKS

Living in the Age of Rage

Recently, much has been made of the polarization of our culture in the USA. Political debates reveal little common ground, protests turn violent, conversations quickly become heated, relationships break over differing opinions—these are but a few of the ways this polarization manifests itself. Certainly, such behaviors have existed throughout history. What is new is the frightening rate at which they accelerate in our age, to the point that today’s polarization is worse than five years ago and much worse than 50 years ago.

Unfortunately, this cancer has not failed to be felt within the church. Often, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ—those who are meant to be salt and light in the world—are anything but that as they react to the current news cycle with fear, anger, and aggressiveness. This behavior then affects relationships within their church community and, eventually, their wider communities. How has this happened?

We could argue about the source of modern aggressive behavior. But its increasing impact on our church life does seem to follow a general pattern: constant cultural pressure eventually takes its toll on even the most diligent. As time goes on, we become acclimated to the increasingly acidic rhetoric around us, and we gradually succumb to the cultural pressure, eventually exhibiting similar behavior ourselves. The change in our behavior is slow enough that we might not notice it from day to day; only when we look back in time can we recall that we were once gentler and kinder in our interactions.

Polarization is nowhere more apparent than in social media, where it is possible to react quickly but at a distance so as not to feel the consequences of our anger. I believe, in these situations, we sometimes feel we are defending God’s kingdom when, in fact, we are reacting and speaking in unbiblical ways, causing damage.

We find a good example in 1 Samuel 25. When Nabal slighted David, David’s anger immediately flared, and he said to

his cohorts, “Every man strap on his sword!” (v. 13, ESV) Only through the gracious, humble, and kind (though still challenging) words of Abigail, Nabal’s wife, was slaughter avoided. One of the things she helped David see was how his behavior would work against God’s long-term plan for him, even though he felt that he was about to deliver God’s righteous judgment on Nabal.

Righteous anger has a place: “Be angry, and do not sin,” Paul quotes in Ephesians 4:26. But we have become so accustomed to anger in our culture that we often mistake sinful rage for the sort of anger Christ showed when purging the temple of inappropriate commerce (Matthew 21:12–13).

What can we as Christ’s followers do? Let us first recognize that God is inexorably building His church and that it is not up to us whether or not the gates of hell will prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Let us keep our focus on the big, long-term picture. As Peter writes in his first epistle: “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:13, ESV)

Let us also renew our determination to filter all of our words, spoken and written, through the wisdom of the Bible, in which much is written on this subject. Solomon says, in Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” and, in 16:24, “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.” In Colossians 4:6, Paul enjoins us, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

Lord, I pray that you will constantly remind me of the great power of my tongue. You know I get angry at what I see around me. Help me to suppress that anger and to respond as You did when You were on earth: kind, gentle, and gracious. Help my words not to be caustic but, rather, be a salve that is sweet like a honeycomb. ■

Allan Wilks is the CMML vice president, technology.

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WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES

God's Plan Supersedes Changing Circumstances in Austria

BY LESLIE WALT



Besides much suffering, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it many changes to how people live—how we socialize, how and when we leave our homes, how we worship and share the Gospel. One of the ways it affected Scott and me was postponing our furlough. In early 2020, we made plans to travel to the US for a three-month stay later in the year. But, when we were forced to cancel that trip, we each found ourselves asking the Lord how we should use the three months that were now free of commitments. He answered my prayer in an unexpected way!

Flashback to 1992

A few years after Scott and I arrived in Austria, he met regularly with Hannes, a man from our young adult group. Although active in our church in Baden bei Wien, Hannes lived in the town of Schwechat, about 30 minutes away. One day in June, Scott and Hannes were working through the whole book of Acts. While taking a break out on the balcony of Hannes's apartment, which overlooked the city, Hannes told Scott that the Lord had burdened his heart that He, the Lord, was going to start a work in Schwechat and the surrounding area, and someday, it would have an evangelical church.



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God did in fact use Hannes and Christiane, his wife, along with another couple from our church, to form a core of believers dedicated to this calling. After about 10 years of planning and sowing, they established a vibrant church—Freie Christliche Gemeinde Schwechat—and it continues to grow and be effective today.

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An unexpected opportunity

You may be familiar with our friend Christoph, whom we often mention in our ministry reports. Our connection began on May 31, 1980—the day Scott and I married and Christoph was born in Austria. Little did we know back then how much our lives and ministry would intersect with Christoph's over the years. Today, Christoph is a family practice doctor and a young husband and father whom God chose to miraculously heal from life-threatening brain tumors. Active members of our church, he and his wife, Michi, helped lead the refugee ministry for more than four years.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, the number of refugees entering Austria decreased drastically, so Christoph and Michi's ministry involvement also decreased. At the same time, an Austrian doctor who was preparing to retire asked Christoph to consider taking over his family practice in the town of Himberg. Christoph and Michi started to think and pray about it. They sought our counsel and asked us to join them in prayer. They desired God's will for their lives and future. Then, unexpectedly, the retiring doctor died of COVID-19. His death shocked everyone.

So God opened the door for Christoph to take over this practice. He gave Christoph and Michi peace and, most



Left: Today, Hannes and Christiane work with Freie Christliche Gemeinde Schwechat, which the Lord burdened Hannes's heart for in 1992. **Right (L-R):** Christoph and Michi view the medical practice as a vehicle for reaching unbelievers; The community knows Christoph as the doctor with strong faith in God.

importantly, a new ministry direction: from the start, this young couple has viewed the medical practice as a vehicle for reaching the people of Himberg with the Gospel. Every day, Christoph, Michi, and the other staff tell the patients about Jesus and pray with them whenever God opens the door. The whole town talks about the new doctor with strong faith and trust in God.

Where are Himberg and Christoph's practice located? Next door to Schwechat. The Freie Christliche Gemeinde Schwechat is just three miles from Christoph's practice.



A new ministry

One day in September 2020, during the time when Scott and I were praying about how to use our postponed three-month furlough, we were talking with Christoph and Michi about all the



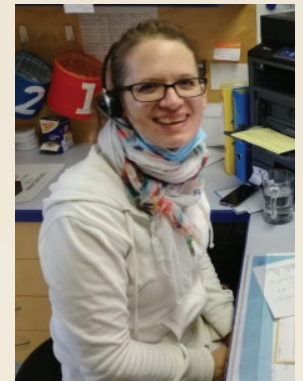
miracles God was doing in and through the practice. Jokingly, I told Christoph if I ever needed to return to work, I would want to work at his practice. Christoph's eyes grew big, and he said he had a job for me—one that was exactly three months long. Instantly, God gave Scott and me peace that this job was what He had in store for me. It was an opportunity to support

and help Christoph and Michi in their new ministry, which God had laid on our hearts too.

Soon, that three-month position extended into an ongoing job that I love. I work two mornings per week at the practice doing lab work, EKGs, ultrasound therapy, IVs, and even COVID-19 tests. Like all the staff, I have opportunities to share my faith and pray with people. God is using our team as lights in the greater Schwechat area. Although the Schwechat church is very evangelistic, a high percentage of the local population might never

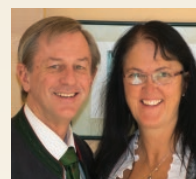
attend a free church or hear the Gospel presented by someone who personally knows the Lord Jesus. These are the people who come in the door of our practice every day.

Besides witnessing to unbelievers, I encourage the young adults I work with. Among them is our receptionist, Christiane—the wife of Hannes, who met with Scott all those years ago and discussed the work God would do in his hometown, Schwechat, and the surrounding area. Each staff member is a believer whom Scott and I disciplined. They are the amazing fruit of the dozens of Bible Weekends (nicknamed "BiWos") that we have hosted over the years.



Prayers for more open doors

This opportunity brings me so much joy! Please pray that I will do an excellent job and develop an eye for details. Pray that I will continue to have daily opportunities to talk about Jesus but also discernment to know the appropriate times. Pray that people will trust Christ and become established in the Schwechat church. Pray that I will be a spiritual encouragement to my teammates. Pray that I will be salt and light. ■



Leslie and Scott Walt are commended from Spring Mountain Bible Church in Portland, Oregon.

Left (from top): The Schwechat church is located just three miles from Christoph's medical practice; Leslie's new ministry brings her much joy. **Right (clockwise from top):** Prayer is an important part of the team's workday; Christiane works with Leslie at the practice; Leslie and her colleague enjoy some cake that a grateful patient gave them.

A scenic landscape featuring a stone path that winds up a grassy hillside. The path is made of large, flat, grey stones. The grass is a vibrant green, and there are some taller, leafy plants in the foreground. In the background, there are rolling hills and a clear blue sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

I foresaw the Lord always before my face,

For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.

Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;

Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.

You have made known to me the ways of life;

You will make me full of joy in your presence.

Acts 2:25–26, 28