Capturing essential Lutheran doctrines in his inimitably winsome style of storytelling, Paavola portrays familiar life-relationships as insightful analogies to God’s growing and loving relationship with us. He draws upon common family situations and homey personal experiences to weave three central teachings of Lutheranism into a beautiful theological tapestry. This is no dreary doctrinaire discourse, but a warm armchair conversation with a friend who delightfully engages you with his scriptural-based narratives of grace and faith. It was a joy to read each chapter as they related to my own life, and it’s certainly worth sharing with others.

Rev. Dr. Timothy Maschke, emeritus professor of theology, Concordia University Wisconsin

Dr. Paavola has taken the great heavenly ideas of the Lutheran Reformation (Scripture alone, grace alone, and faith alone) and brought them down to earth in this wonderfully profound and accessible book. With a mix of story, analogy, and scriptural truth, these pages serve up a delightful appetizer to the meal that is Lutheran theology. For anyone curious about what it means to be Lutheran, this book will prove to be a valuable introduction. For the seasoned Lutheran, it will provide a delightful reminder of the joy we have in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Rev. Bob Hiller, senior pastor of Community Lutheran Church, content editor for www.craftofpreaching.org.

*Grace, Faith, Scripture* by Daniel Paavola is a “Portrait of a Lutheran” in two ways. In his own winsome, conversational, and faithful way, he shows how grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone were and are essential for his own spiritual life
and relationships. He also shows through personal story and Scripture how these foundational slogans of the Lutheran Reformation actively paint the portrait of any faithful, Bible-based, confessional Lutheran in his or her life of faith under the cross of Christ in Word and Sacrament. For some, *Grace, Faith, Scripture* will be an introduction to the Lutheran confession of the Christian faith. For others, it will serve as encouragement to remain faithful to our confession, dig deeper in God’s Word, and walk together with Christ alongside Paul, Luther, Walther, and the author in the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Paul Cain,
editor, Lutheran book reviewer,
pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church
GRACE

PORTRAIT

FAITH

OF A LUTHERAN

SCRIPTURE

DANIEL E. PAAVOLA

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Lutherans are both unique and ordinary. Certainly, we have a distinctive heritage with Martin Luther and all those who came after him who upheld the faith as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions. But Lutherans are centered on three aspects of Christianity that are essential to the faith of all Christians. We are people of the Bible, basing our faith on God’s Word alone. In that Word, we find that grace alone is the central message of God in His relationship with us. To accept that gift, we need faith alone. Those three—Scripture, grace, and faith—are Lutheran hallmarks; however, they are also God’s gifts to all Christians.

This book uses the three gifts of Scripture, grace, and faith as an introduction to the Lutheran faith. If you are a Lutheran already, I hope this strengthens your understanding of the faith and gives you ways to express it to others. If you are not yet a Lutheran, here is your invitation to understand us better and to share these same gifts from God with us.

Thank you to the many at Concordia Publishing House for their creative work on this project. Special thanks go to Laura Lane and Scot Kinnaman, whose careful editing and creative ideas make every page better. Thank you to my colleagues and friends at Concordia University Wisconsin for their support. Finally, thanks go to my family: to my wife, Holly, and to our three children, Christy, Steve, and Nicole, for being the center of these stories about relationships.
They are a model of relationships, centered on grace, lived by faith.

Blessings to you as you read His Word, with its message of grace received by faith.
CHAPTER 1

These Three Keep Us Together

People know only so much about you. Your neighbors, the people at work, even your friends—they all know only a part of you. However, what they know paints their picture of you. My neighbors know that I love motorcycles and ride almost every day. They know I teach at Concordia University, but they might not know I teach theology. They know I go running most days, and they remember that I used to run a lot faster. That’s about it. It’s not the whole picture, but it starts the sketch.

What do people know about you? It could be that you faithfully leave for work every morning at 5:00 a.m. Maybe they know that beautiful red 1970 Chevy Nova that you drive on sunny days. Or perhaps they remember your kindness of mowing the lawn and shoveling the snow for the widow next door. Those few things are the sketch of you, a version of you that others would be glad to get to know better.

That’s the purpose of this book. We’ll outline a few things about Lutherans that start the picture of who we are. Those few things aren’t the whole story of Lutherans, but I hope that they will make you want to fill in more of the picture,
add colors and texture, give some depth and perspective. But to start, let’s get three main points down.

**IT’S THE STORY OF GOD’S RELATIONSHIP WITH US**

A book about Lutherans is a book about a relationship: God’s relationship with us and our unique understanding of that relationship. A story simply about Lutherans might be interesting, but we would be nothing more than another group of people with a distinctive spiritual understanding and history. That sentence alone sounds dull. The good news is that Lutherans tell their story through the relationship God has established with us. It’s God’s actions for us that make this relationship. God’s actions of grace and mercy, His words, and His gifts are not the exclusive property of Lutherans, of course, but Lutherans love to tell the story of those gifts. Through those actions of God, all people are invited into this relationship with Him. This story is not only the Lutheran story, but it is also the story of God’s actions that make His relationship with the world. These few points sketch the portrait of Lutherans, but they could be a sketch of you also.

Since we’re speaking of a relationship, we’ll be going over a story of growing relationships. Relationships grow slowly from first words through first dates to wondering if this is all going to go somewhere. Then come the big steps of marriage and that first home together. However, through all those changes, some constants hold two people together. There are first words that are never forgotten, acts of kindness that show someone’s heart, and the trust that all we’ve begun won’t simply end. Those points also tell the story of God’s relationship with us and our unique understanding of it.
FIRST WORDS FIRST

Relationships begin with someone saying the first word. Before the words, there might be a smile that gives you hope. However, the relationship really won’t start until someone says, “Hello.” Maybe you remember the words that began a relationship that’s still going today. You might still say those words to each other as a secret code between the two of you.

Lutherans focus on the first words in our relationship with God. God speaks those words to begin this relationship, and those are the words we remember and repeat. The good news is that they aren’t a secret code; rather, they are the same open words that can be read by everyone. Our relationship with God stands on His Word alone. Lutherans speak of this dependence on God’s Word with the Latin phrase *sola Scriptura*, meaning “Scripture alone.” By this, Lutherans mean that our faith and our doctrine are founded solely on the words of the Bible. We’ll speak much more on the key messages we find in the Bible, but for now, it’s enough to celebrate this relationship that is begun and centered on His words to us.

“I’VE GOT ONE THING TO SAY TO YOU”

How does that sentence strike you? Of course, it depends on how someone says it, but imagine someone texting you that message. If you text me, “I’ve got one thing to say to you,” I’m nervous. What? Why? What did I do? If someone has one thing to say to me, I’m sure it’s going to be bad. And if that one thing is going to be the center of our relationship, then I’m not sure I want any part of it.

However, the wonderful news is that at its heart, the one thing God has to say is grace. Since we grow in relationship with God by what He says to us, then the greatest gift
is that His message is one of mercy. God’s grace is our second main point, called *sola gratia*, or “grace alone.” By this phrase “grace alone,” Lutherans mean that the central message of God is one of forgiveness. If forgiveness is received, that means forgiveness is needed. Our need to be forgiven of serious wrongs certainly is part of God’s message. But God points out our sin in His Word not as an end in itself. The one thing God has to say is not, “You’re condemned!” The central message of God is that we are saved by the forgiveness of our sins. John 3:17 is an example of His single intention: “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

This second point in our relationship, grace alone, is the reason we can dare to hear the first point, the Word of God. In a wonderful relationship of committed love, you know you’re going to solve your problems, settle the argument, and go to sleep in peace. You might even risk saying something serious: “We should talk about . . .” When you know that you’re going to finish with “I love you; it will all work out,” then you dare to talk.

Grace alone makes us bold to hear God’s Word. We’re like the thief on the cross, hanging beside Jesus on Good Friday. He knew that Jesus was the heavenly King and that He ruled in mercy. He dared to say in faith, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus assured him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). When our words with God are few, they can center on His mercy and grace.