

Love Your Church By Witnessing

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, 1 Peter chapter 3, 1 Peter chapter 3, and if we read at verse 14, we're going to focus mainly on verse 15, but if we read verses 14 to 16 again, where Peter writes, but even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. And even verse 17, for it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will than for doing evil. But as I said, particularly verse 15, where Peter says, and this is the rendering I have of it in front of me this evening, always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you.

Chapter 7 of Tony Marida's book, Love Your Church, it begins with a line from the 1989 film, Field of Dreams. And the line is, if you build it, they will come. If you build it, they will come.

I don't know if you've watched the film, Field of Dreams, starring Kevin Costner. I'd never heard of it until I read about it in Tony Marida's book. But the film, Field of Dreams, is about a farmer who hears a voice telling him, if you build it, they will come. If you build it, they will come. But what the farmer was being told to build wasn't a church, but a baseball field. And so the farmer, he obeys the voice by harvesting all his cornfields and building a baseball field. And of course, the neighbours, they think the farmer is crazy for building a baseball field in the middle of nowhere. But if you've watched the film, you see that the farmer is determined. But as Tony Marida points out in his book, he says the classic line, if you build it, they will come. That classic line has sadly become the evangelism strategy for many in the church. If you build it, they will come. Or if our doors are open, they will come. Or if they see the lights on the church on, they will come. If they read the sign on the church wall, they will come. If they like us and follow us on Facebook, they will come. They know we're here. So if they want to come, they will come. But you and I both know by looking around this evening that that's not true. Because as Tony Marida wrote, most unbelievers have no interest in joining us this coming Sunday. Simply offering a good product isn't enough to attract people in post-Christian contexts. It doesn't matter how cool our venue is, he says, or how great the acoustics are, or even how hip the pastor looks. Those who turn up on a Sunday are almost always there because someone brought them.

And this is why we're exhorted and encouraged in chapter 7 to love your church by witnessing. Love your church by witnessing. As you know, for those of you who are here regularly, as you know, our study is based upon the helpful and yet hard-hitting book. And I hope you've read it by now, or bought it at least. This book by Tony Marida called Love Your Church, where we are to love our church. Love your church because Jesus loves your church. Jesus loves Barba's free church.

[5 : 05] And this evening we're looking at chapter 7, as I said, and which is all about love your church by witnessing. Love your church by witnessing. And using Peter's statement, I want us to think about the two key words in the verse. So, boys and girls, the two key words are always and anyone. Always and anyone.

They are the two key words this evening. So, always and anyone. There are two headings as well. Always and anyone. So, first of all, always. Always. Peter says, always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. Now, I don't know about you, but every time I read this verse, I'm reminded of old, ever-ready batteries. Ever-ready batteries. I'm sure maybe those who remember these old, ever-ready batteries. Of course, ever-ready batteries, they were later replaced by energizer batteries, which the boys and girls will be very familiar with. But energizer batteries were once called ever-ready batteries. And, you know, when it comes to loving your church by witnessing, I always have in my mind that Peter is telling us here, we need to be like those batteries. We need to be like those batteries. We need to be full of Christian charge. We need to be full of evangelistic energy. We need to be ready like a battery is when you take it out of the packet. You need to be ready and useful for service. We need to be ever-ready.

We need to be ever-ready. That's what Peter says, always be ready. Always be ready, he says. We need to be ever-ready. We need to be ever-ready. But truth be told, most of the time, we don't feel ever-ready, do we? We don't feel full of Christian charge and evangelistic energy because we feel more like a flat battery than a full battery. We feel that we should be called never-ready rather than ever-ready.

But the thing is, when Peter wrote these words, he wasn't trying to make us feel like a fraud or a failure as a Christian. He wasn't trying to put down on Christians. No, Peter was trying to encourage and enable us to speak and share our faith in Jesus Christ. Peter was seeking to strengthen us and stir us up to work and to witness the grace of God in our lives. He says, always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. Always be ready.

But as you know, evangelism, it isn't easy. No one finds evangelism easy. I don't find evangelism easy. In fact, evangelists don't find evangelism easy. There's a brilliant book written by the evangelist Rico Tice. He's an evangelist in All Souls Church in London. He's written many books. He's the face of Christianity Explored, Life Explored, Hope Explored that we saw recently. He's written a book called Faithful Leaders, a book that I've mentioned to you often. But he's also written a brilliant book that every Christian needs to read. And I want to stress that to you. It's a book that every Christian should read. So read it. It's called Honest Evangelism. Honest Evangelism. And it really does say or explain what it says. It is honest. Rico Tice is honest in his evangelism. Because from the outset, as an evangelist, Rico Tice, he introduces the book by saying, I find evangelism hard.

[9 : 08] I find evangelism hard. The problem with being an evangelist, he says, is that people assume you find evangelism effortless. But I don't find it easy. And I never have. There may not be persecution in our land. But in our culture, we have a growing hostility to Christianity. It's not just apathy we face. It's antipathy. People don't really like the gospel. Sometimes they express that politely, he says. Sometimes not at all. So if you're going to talk to people about Jesus, he says, you're going to get hurt.

You're going to get hurt. There is a pain line, he says, that needs to be crossed. But the thing is, we all want to stay on the comfortable side of the pain line. That's the main reason we don't do evangelism. But I want to be honest, says Rico, if you tell non-Christians about Jesus, you will have to cross the pain line, and it will be painful. You have to cross the pain line, and it will be painful. It'll cause you to be nervous. It'll cause you to worry and be anxious.

It'll cause you to wonder what they're going to say in response. You have to cross the pain line, and it will be painful. But you know, that's what Jesus said to his disciples, is it not?

Jesus said, behold, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. I'm sending you out as sheep among wolves. And as you know, Peter, Peter the apostle, he was there when Jesus made that statement.

Peter heard Jesus say it firsthand. Therefore, Peter knew that in order to speak to people about their soul, you have to cross the pain line, and it will be painful. You have to cross the pain line of speaking to people about their soul, and it will be painful. In fact, that's why Peter wrote his first letter. He wrote this first letter to Christians, encouraging them and exhorting them to love their church by witnessing. Because in the first century, Peter knew that Christians would suffer just for being Christians. More often than not, if you confessed your faith in Christ in the first century, you were signing your death warrant. You were practically going to be crucified because you came out on the side of Jesus. Persecution was real in the first century, and persecution was rife, which is why Peter sought to exhort and encourage the Christian church to love their church by witnessing. Witnessing for Jesus. And to witness for Jesus, even in the midst of their various trials and temptations and tests. And you see that throughout his letter, he's always talking about trials and temptations and tests, where they're going to be rejected by people, they're going to endure sorrows, and they're going to suffer unjustly. And yet, he says, keep looking to Jesus, and keep witnessing for Jesus. Because if you follow after Jesus, you should expect nothing less.

[12 : 29] That's what Jesus said, is it not? Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. If you're going to speak to people about their soul, you have to cross the pain line, and it's going to be painful. And you know, that's why Peter, what, why, what Peter says here is so important. He's speaking about our Christian witness. But what he does here in these verses, is that he sandwiches this verse, verse 15, between warnings of suffering and warnings of slandering.

Peter sandwiches verse 15 between warnings of suffering and warnings of slandering. He, he says in verse 14, he says, but even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. And then he says in verse 16, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it's better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. Peter sandwiches his statement about witnessing between the warnings of suffering and slandering, which only seeks to emphasize and to explain what he's actually saying here in verse 15. And he's saying to us, always be ready.

Be an ever ready battery. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. Always be ready to give an answer. Always be ready to give an answer.

And the word that Peter uses for answer or defense, it's very interesting. Now the ESV uses the word defense, but in the Greek, it's the word apologia. Apologia, which is where we get the word apology from.

Apologia, apology. And as you know, when you submit an apology to someone for not attending a meeting, you give your reason. You're giving your reason for your current situation. So when you submit your apology for not attending a meeting, you're giving a reason for your current situation. You're giving your apology. And this is where we actually get the word apologetics from. As you know, Christian apologetics, it's where you make a defense of the Christian faith. They defend the existence of God. They debate the authority of Scripture with atheists and other religions. And there are many Christian apologists with whom we're familiar. There's Dr. John Lennox, who's a professor of mathematics at Oxford University. There's Lee Strobel, who was an atheist who became a Christian apologist. He wrote that brilliant book, The Case for Christ.

[15 : 30] It's been read. It's been changed to a film. You can read the book or watch the film, The Case for Christ. If you've never read it or watched it, please do. It's brilliant. There's also C.S. Lewis, another Christian apologist. There's Tim Keller. There's R.C. Sproul. They've written many books about defending the Christian faith. But here's the point. When Peter wrote this letter, he wasn't writing to educated Christians. He wasn't writing to professors of theology. He wasn't writing to people who are a doctorate in Christian apologetics. No, Peter was writing to you and me. He was writing to the normal, everyday Christian who loves Jesus and looks to Jesus and wants to live their life for Jesus.

My Christian friend, when Peter said, always be ready to give an answer, he wasn't expecting us to have all these stylish and sophisticated answers for the existence of God and for the authority of Scripture and the problem of evil. He wasn't expecting us to enter into the public arena and start debating with the great minds of the great minds of the day. No, he wasn't even expecting us to have pre-prepared answers for all the deep questions of life. No, Peter was just exhorting and encouraging us to be willing to share and speak about the hope that is within. Peter was saying to us, be willing to share and speak about the hope that is within you. Be willing to share your testimony and speak about Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. Be willing to share your faith and speak about the grace of God in your life with those around you. That's why Ali is sharing his testimony tonight at the Youth Fellowship, because he's sharing, he's speaking about the hope that is within him.

So, boys and girls, I hope that you understand that, that that's why he's telling his testimony. He has a great hope in Jesus Christ, and he wants others to know about it. He wants other people to have that same hope, because the Christian hope is a great hope in Jesus Christ. You know, someone once said that Christian hope is not fingers crossed, but thumbs up. That was brilliant. The Christian hope is not fingers crossed, where we hope, but we're not sure. No, the Christian hope is thumbs up, because in Christ, our hope is sure and certain and steadfast. It is the anchor of our soul.

And that's why Peter says, always be ready. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. Because my Christian friend, you have a great hope.

You have a great hope in Christ, and you should be willing to speak and share about it. So, love your church by witnessing. Love your church by witnessing for Jesus. As you said, there are two key words in Peter's statement, and there are two headings this evening. So, there's always, and there's anyone.

[19 : 01] Always and anyone. So, secondly, anyone. Anyone. Peter says, always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. You know, prior to the ascension of Jesus, Jesus, you'll remember, he issued the Great Commission, and he said, go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone, to the whole creation. And how were they to do that?

Jesus says, you will be my witnesses. You will be my witnesses, starting in Jerusalem, then spreading out to Judea, then spreading further to Samaria, and then you keep going to the uttermost parts of the earth. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, and in Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth. And boys and girls, the word witness is a legal term.

What kind of language is it? It's the language of the courtroom. So, it's the language of the courtroom, because as you know, in a courtroom setting, witnesses are called. They're called to the stand, as we call it. They're called to give an account of what happened. And the witness is to make a solemn oath. The witness is to testify that they will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And Jesus said to his church, he said, that's what you're to be. You're to be my witnesses.

You're to be my witnesses. You're to testify of the grace of God in your lives. You're to speak about your faith and share about the hope that is within you. You're to be faithful witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and keep going to the uttermost parts of the earth. You're to be faithful witnesses. You're to be reliable witnesses that tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about Jesus. You're to be consistent witnesses, consistent in your Christian character, conduct and conversation. And you know, I can't stress how integral and important this is, especially living in a digital age. We're our Christian witness on the street. It might even be different to our Christian witness on social media. You often find that with some Christians. It's not their talk at the filling station that lets them down, but their talk on Facebook, which is why as Christians, and I say this to myself when I say it, we always need to remember that the world is watching our witness. The world is watching our witness. I can't remember who said it, but out of a hundred people, the world will read you. They will read you before they read the Bible. They will read your life.

And we need to remember that the world is watching our witness. They will watch our witness. Therefore, we are to love our church by witnessing for Jesus. We're to witness our Christian character, conduct and conversation. Now, I know that for every Christian that's easier said than done.

[22 : 43] It's not easy to be a faithful witness to Jesus Christ. It's not easy to be consistent in our Christian character, conduct and conversation. It's not easy. But Jesus says it's essential.

And it's essential because we're called, commissioned and commanded to speak and share about the hope that is within. We are called, commissioned and commanded to speak and share about the hope that is within. And you know, when it comes to speaking and sharing about the hope that is within, you know, people often quote, maybe they don't know they're quoting it, but they quote Saint Francis of Assisi. Saint Francis of Assisi said, preach the gospel. Well, we'll come to that in a minute.

He said to have said, preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary. Maybe you've heard that before. Preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary. Which simply means live your life as a faithful Christian witness and only if you have to speak and share the gospel with others.

Now, you might have heard that quote before. But the quote was never actually said. Saint Francis of Assisi never said that. He never said, preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words.

In fact, Saint Francis said the opposite. Saint Francis of Assisi was actually a passionate and powerful preacher who emphasized the need to share your witness and speak about your faith.

[24 : 23] So to quote or to misquote Saint Francis, preach the gospel at all times and use words if necessary. You know, I often hear people saying that, but it's just an excuse.

It's an excuse for not speaking and not sharing about the hope that is within. And we're good at making excuses, aren't we? I make excuses all the time. I really do.

So did Moses. Moses made many excuses. You know, that's what I've loved about looking together at the book of Exodus during the morning service. We can glean so much from the experience and the encounters of Moses, the man of God. As you know, Moses, he made excuses. He was called, commissioned, and commanded by the Lord to go and confront Pharaoh. And Moses confessed. What did he say?

He couldn't possibly speak to Pharaoh because he was afraid. He was anxious. He was apprehensive. He said to the Lord, I'll be stammering. I'll be stuttering. I'll be shaking. I'll be sweating. I'll be shuddering as a servant of the Lord. To the point that Moses says to the Lord, don't send me. Send my brother Aaron. He can speak on my behalf. But if you remember the passage, this angered the Lord.

What Moses said angered the Lord because the Lord had called and commissioned and commanded Moses, not Aaron. The Lord had providentially prepared Moses for 40 years to be the leader of the Lord's people, not Aaron. And the Lord had providentially placed Moses where he was to serve him and to speak for him, not Aaron. And you know, my Christian friend, I look at it and I think about my own life, and you should think about your own life too, that the Lord has providentially prepared and placed us.

[26 : 33] Nothing's an accident. It's all according to the providence of God. The Lord has providentially prepared and placed us in our home and among our family and in our community. Your neighbors are placed there by the providence of God. Your work colleagues are there by the providence of God.

The Lord has providentially prepared and placed us there as his witnesses. And he has providentially put people into our path in a day or in a week to speak about our faith and to share our hope within.

Maybe you're asked tomorrow morning when you go to work, did you have a good weekend? Oh yeah, good weekend. What did you get up to? Do you only talk about Saturday and never about the best day of the week? Do you tell them, oh, I was in church yesterday. This is what the minister said. I have a great hope and I need to share it with you. My friend, the Lord providentially puts people in our path to speak about our faith and to share our hope within. And yes, like Moses, we're all afraid.

We're all anxious. We are all apprehensive, myself included. I don't find this easy, but I certainly don't find speaking to people one-on-one easy either. We're all stammering and stuttering and sweating and shaking and shuddering about what we're going to say. But you know, when I look at the encounters and the experiences of Moses, I think, well, if the Lord can use him and if the Lord can prepare him for what he faced, then the Lord can use me and the Lord can use you.

Because the Lord, as the Lord said to Moses, when Moses said, no, send my brother, the Lord said to Moses, go and I will be with your mouth and I will teach you what you shall speak.

[28 : 45] And as I know what Jesus said to his disciples as he sent them out as witnesses, Jesus said to them, do not be anxious. Just as he says to us this evening, do not be anxious about how you're to speak or what you're to say. Why? Because it will be given to you in that hour.

My friend, the Lord has providentially prepared and placed us where we are to be his witnesses. And he providentially puts people in our path to speak about our faith and to share the hope within.

But truth be told, more often than not, we miss or misuse the opportunities the Lord gives to us. And we all do it. That's why, you know, I often think that when you go to work or when you go out of the house, or even when you get up in the morning, we need to seriously pray for these obstacles of fear to be removed and for opportunities of faith to be given.

We need to pray for obstacles of fear to be removed because we all have fear. But we need to pray for opportunities of faith to be given, opportunities of faith to speak and to share about the hope within. And that doesn't mean we're going to have all the answers that for every question that's put in front of us. If we're asked a question, we don't know the answer. Tell them, I'll look it up. I'll find out for you. And then you can resume the conversation at another date.

Say, oh, do you remember the time you asked me that question? And then you tell them. You continue the conversation. You do us. Peter is encouraging us to be an ever-ready battery. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you.

[30 : 41] Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. So the two key words in our verse this evening are always and anyone. Always and anyone.

We're always to answer anyone who asks. And of course, the anyone includes everyone. It excludes no one. The anyone is the whosoever. The anyone is family and friends. The anyone is our neighbors and our work colleagues. The anyone is those in our congregation and those within our community. The anyone is the uncharged and the de-charged. There are many uncharged people in our community. We know that. But there are also many de-charged people in our community.

De-charged people who are connected to our congregation. They're part of our community. They attended church in the past, but have fallen out of the habit of attending church.

People who came maybe pre-COVID and yet never returned. And yet, we're being encouraged this evening to love our church by witnessing for Jesus. Love your church by witnessing for Jesus.

But whatever you do, says Peter, don't be arrogant. Don't be aggressive. Don't be argumentative. Don't have an angry witness. That's what Peter says at the end of verse 15. Do it with gentleness and respect. Never fall out with anyone over the gospel. Never. You don't get into an argument.

[32 : 24] That gets you nowhere. No, Peter says, do it with gentleness and always respect. Even if they're another religion, gentleness and respect. Don't be arrogant. Don't be aggressive.

Don't be argumentative. Don't be angry in your witness because that's not winsome. And that'll never win them. No, always be ready, he says. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. But you know, as Tony Merida concluded his helpful and yet hard-hitting chapter with us, I'll conclude as well. He suggested an acronym in order to encourage us to love your church by witnessing. And the acronym is NET. N-E-T. NET. He's drawing attention to the words of Jesus when Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea to gather fish of every kind. The gospel net. N is for never, he says. Never stop praying. Never stop praying for opportunities to speak and share your hope within. N is for never. E is for exercise. Exercise your faith when opportunities arise. Exercise your faith. Pray that your fear will be removed. Pray for faith in opportunities. Exercise your faith. E is for exercise. So N is for never. E is for exercise. T is for talk.

T is for talk. Talk gently. Talk graciously. Talk winsomely to win them to Jesus, the friend of sinners. It's the gospel net. N-E-T. N is for never. Never stop praying. E is for exercise. Exercise your faith. T is for talk. Talk graciously and gently. Love your church, he says. Love your church by witnessing for Jesus. Love your church by witnessing for Jesus. How, Peter says, always be ready.

Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. Always be ready. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee this evening for the great challenge for us as Thy people to be faithful witnesses, to be faithful witnesses, and to be witnesses that walk in faith, to walk by faith and not by sight. And Lord, we pray that Thou wouldest give to us to be ever ready, to always be ready to give an answer to anyone of the reason for the hope that is within us. And Lord, we pray that we would be faithful witnesses, that we would witness not only in action, but also in word, that we would be willing, as the psalmist says, to tell it to the generation following, that this God is our God and that He will be our guide even unto death. Lord, bless us, we pray. Watch over us, we ask. Remember Ali Lord as He shares His testimony this evening as He testifies to the hope that is within. Oh Lord, we pray we would all have that hope, a hope that is sure and steadfast, a hope that is the anchor of our soul.

[36 : 30] Do us good and we pray. Go before us. Keep us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening. We're going to sing the words of Psalm 48.

Psalm 48 in the Sing Psalms version. Psalm 48, it's on page 63. Psalm 48. Psalm 48, 48a, page 63. But before we sing, we'll ask the questions. So you all awake?

A few nods. Okay. Question one. What kind of battery do we need to be like? Ever ready. Well done. Is that you, Amelie? Amelie, yes. Good job. Thank you. Ever ready. So we need to be ever ready batteries. Okay. Question two. What kind of language is the word witness from?

No. What kind of language? The courtroom. Isn't it? The language of the courtroom. So we have to be how they're called to be witnesses, isn't it? How people are called to be witnesses and they have to testify about what they've seen. And that's what we're to do. We're to testify to the work of Jesus in our life.

So every Christian is a witness. They're to testify to Jesus. Okay. Question three. What two key words in the verse are in the verse that we were looking at tonight?

[38 : 23] Always and? No. Anyone. Good. Always and anyone. I have to begin with A. Okay. Always and anyone. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason, for the hope that is within you. So always and anyone. So well done. And get your sweets at the door. Okay. So Psalm 48. Sing Psalm's version.

We're singing from verse 9 down to the end of the Psalm. Psalm 48 is a Psalm all about Zion. It's about Jerusalem and the witness that Jerusalem was to the surrounding nations, but also the nation of Israel.

Israel. And how the Israelites, they were to praise God for Jerusalem and what it meant as the Lord's presence and where the temple was situated. And that's why we're told at the end of the Psalm, it says at the end of the Psalm, verse 9, we contemplate your steadfast love within your house, O God. For like your name, your praise extends through all the earth abroad. All that you do is righteous, Lord. Mount Zion's joy is great and Judah's towns rejoice as they, your judgments celebrate.

And then he says, verse 12, he tells us to walk around the city. Round Zion walk and count her towers. View every citadel so that to children yet unborn her story you may tell. For God the Lord, who is our God, forever will abide. He is our God forevermore.

And to the end, our guide. We're to consider who God is in order that we will go out and tell people about our great God. So Psalm 48 from verse 9 down to the end of the Psalm. We'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.

[40 : 17] We contemplate your steadfast love within your powers, O God. For like your name, your praise extends through all the earth abroad. O God, for like your name, your praise extends the holy earth abroad.

O God, you do is righteous, Lord, and Zion's joy is great.

And you just turn, rejoice as they your judgment celebrate.

Outside your walk and counter-touch, you every sit at hell.

So come to children, yet in our mourn, her story you may tell.

[42 : 00] For God, the Lord, who is our God, forever will abide.

He is our God, forever will abide.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.