

# Speak out!

**“The Christian life is a pilgrimage  
from earth to heaven,  
and our task is to take as many  
as possible with us  
as we make this journey.”**

—Warren W. Wiersbe

"Life is a journey." Like many clichés, this phrase is overused because it feels so resoundingly true. More than just a journey, however, Scripture tells us human life is a pilgrimage with God Himself.

Pilgrimage conveys the sense of going somewhere in search of deeper meaning or significance. Adherents of many religions undertake pilgrimages, but Christianity has deep roots as a traveling faith since God's call for Abraham and Sarah to leave their homeland and God's deliverance of His enslaved people in the Exodus from Egypt under Moses.

As time went on, each year God's people would travel to the Jerusalem Temple in celebration of three main festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Booths (Exodus 23:14-17). The Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) were pilgrim prayers, a sort of spiritual soundtrack to transform their Jerusalem journey into a pilgrimage echoing the nomadic faith of Abraham and the liberation journey of the Exodus.

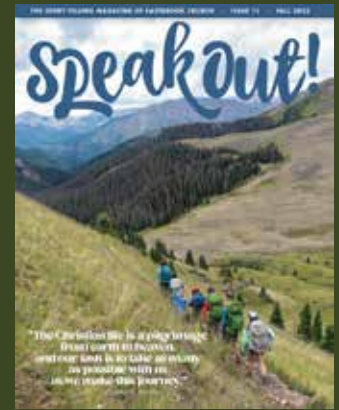
In Hebrews 11, the writer rattles off brief stories of many notable people of faith. Each walked through ups and downs in response to God's leading, shaping their life into a spiritual pilgrimage with God instead of a mundane journey through successive days. "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own" (Hebrews 11:13-14).

In this latest edition of *Speak Out!* we read stories of how getting outside our normal environment sometimes helps us remember who we are and the God who daily walks with us. Going far away does not really make us pilgrims, for that is already what we are with God. But sometimes as we share these stories it renews us in our daily pilgrimage with the Triune God who pursues us.

*"As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them."* (Luke 24:15)



Matt Erickson, Senior Pastor



The cover image for the Fall 2022 issue of *Speak Out!* was taken by summer intern Seth Herlinger as he led a group of high schoolers on the annual High School Wilderness Trip this past July to Colorado. Read the story of Seth's experience on page 7.

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## Practice Pilgrimage this Fall:

As you'll read in this issue of *Speak Out!* a pilgrimage can take many forms. However, all pilgrimages share three goals: to leave the distractions of the world, to arrive and find a deeper relationship with Christ, and to return home changed. You don't need to walk 500 miles across northern Spain or even be outdoors to practice pilgrimage. Here are some ideas our team came up with to help you take the first step:

- Participate in the 2nd Tuesdays Prayer Walk on Tuesday, September 13 at 7 pm here at Eastbrook Church! Meet in the Worship Hall.
- Travel to Holy Hill, a nearby site famous for attracting Christian pilgrims.
- Prayer labyrinths are a way to practice pilgrimage without "leaving." Walk slowly through a prayer labyrinth. You can find one indoors in the Big Red Church on 10th and Wisconsin, an outdoor version at Alice's Garden or Lynden Sculpture Garden, make your own, or trace one!
- Participate in a virtual pilgrimage. Find some ideas online at [pilgrimforless.com](http://pilgrimforless.com)!

# STORY

## Megan Kautz



The word ‘pilgrimage’ makes me think of a journey. Even in my personal life, the past couple of years have been a journey: figuring out, in the “post-pandemic” world, what I’m doing and where I’m going with my life.

Since spring of 2020, I’ve had a goal that’s kept me grounded and working toward something. It has been a constant. I’ve been able to bring others on the journey with me and see them enjoy it as well: I’ve been hiking the Ice Age Trail.

### Nature has always been one of the places where I can see God the best.

I have always liked being out in creation, and I like the contemplative aspect — even if you’re not speaking, just being present and thinking through things.

The Ice Age Trail is a national scenic trail that covers the entire state of Wisconsin. It starts on the Minnesota border, and it goes all the way up to Sturgeon Bay at the bottom of Door County. My family has always liked camping and going to state parks, and a lot of the segments go through different parks or natural areas, so I’d seen the signs before when with my family, and I had always been interested. I thought, *one day, it would be fun to hike the whole thing.*

Around 2020, I got laid off from my job and moved back up to Appleton with my parents. It all started with my dad and my sister — we didn’t really have much else to do! My dad got a guidebook that laid out all of the different segments of the Ice Age Trail. We decided it would probably take us awhile, but it would be fun to see how much we could do.

We started in the spring of 2020 with some day hikes, knocking out some segments near the Waupaca area. At this point, I’ve completed all of Waukesha County and

Jefferson County, a lot of the trails around the Milwaukee area, but I need to start driving further out and taking longer trips to do more of it. There are some really awesome areas up north that I think will require some backpacking—in Lincoln County and Taylor County—pretty far up there. I think in total, I’ve done around 150 miles; the whole thing is around 1,000 miles. It’s going to take me awhile!

Once I started, it became a family thing. We’d pick a weekend and meet up to do a couple of miles in different areas around the state. Now, I also try to get people in Eastbrook’s 20s and 30s community to come with me! When I moved to Milwaukee for graduate school in 2018, I started coming to Eastbrook and that’s how I got plugged in to the church — I came to the young adults group on Thursday nights and fell in love with that group (back then, it was called Kaleo). I had been on the leadership team until recently, and I’m still a big part of the 20s and 30s community. That has also led to my involvement with the Student Ministry, where I help lead the high schoolers.

Especially when I’ve been on hikes with people in the young adult community, we get into really good discussions on trail, a lot of which turn spiritual. Walking together is a good way to take in the beauty around you and it helps facilitate meaningful discussions.

Here’s what I’m learning: It’s okay that you don’t have it figured out. Especially as I was coming out of high school and college, I felt like I had this plan and I knew exactly what I wanted to do. Seeing those things not work out the way that I wanted, not holding anything too tight was key. My prayer for Eastbrook is that each of us would have trust that God’s going to lead you where you need to be, even if it’s not what you originally had in mind. ■



Megan Kautz is involved in the Thursday night 20s & 30s group, and leads a small group within the high school arm of Student Ministry, which serves the community of 7-12 graders at Eastbrook. Interested in serving in this way — or even working with our younger kids (birth-grade 6)? Get started by filling out a volunteer application at [eastbrook.org/nextgenapp](http://eastbrook.org/nextgenapp).



# THE PILGRIM WAY →

## HOW 5 EASTBROOKERS ENCOUNTERED GOD ON THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

by Megan “Mac” Littel

Imagine sweeping mountain views, picturesque villages with cobblestone streets, golden wheat fields dancing in the breeze under endless skies.

These images only represent part of the beauty to behold on the Camino de Santiago, a network of intersecting trails all over Western Europe ultimately leading to Santiago de Compostela, Spain — home to the tomb of St. James. Pilgrims have traversed these sacred paths dating back to the Middle Ages. To see a deeper beauty, pilgrims must endure hardships on the trails: blisters, sickness, becoming lost, and much more.

Is all of this worth it? Five Eastbrookers answer with a resounding “yes!” Bryan Browning, Lisa Bueth, Liz Carver, Dan Ryan, and Audrey Smith have each traversed the Camino Francés, beginning in France. They say it is not just a beautiful trek, but a journey of the body, mind, and soul, revealing a depth of community and a dependence on both God and others.

To use a timeworn cliché: it’s about the journey, not the destination. Part of what makes these paths sacred is how God shows His provision in tangible ways amidst the hardships. A common phrase on the trails is “the Camino provides.”

Recently, this group of Eastbrookers gathered to discuss their Camino stories and provide a glimpse of the provision of God they witnessed while on their journeys.

→ **Mac Littel:** What were some reasons you decided to tackle the Camino?

**DAN:** I hiked the Camino on my own in February of 2005. I’m someone who likes the combination of challenge and wilderness, and I was really looking for a “mountain top experience.” Additionally, my wife and I both felt led to go overseas, so while I was on the Camino, I was planning to pray through where I felt

God leading us.

**LISA:** I did it in 2013 with my sisters and my father. We did it because my sister had survived cancer — when she was sick, it was a really difficult time. She came to us with this idea — she said, “if I make it through, I want to do the Camino.” When she became tumor-free, we were like, okay, the miracles are starting! It was a very spiritual and intense time in my life.

**LIZ:** I walked a single day of the Camino in 2012, and that day was such a powerful experience, it made me want to do the whole thing. I read a lot about pilgrimage, and realized this is a tenet of faith that is missing in America and in modern times. I really wanted to do it in 2020, but that didn’t happen! When Audrey and I finally went this past summer [2022], God showed up in a big way.

**AUDREY:** Liz threw it out to our friend group in 2019. After two years of praying about it, saving for it, and learning more about it, this was finally our year to go. Liz and I took walks together to train, and she would ask, “how are you preparing spiritually?” which was good, because I had been spending all my time preparing physically. I showed up on the Camino with these big questions I wanted answered, and was open to hearing from God.

→ **ML:** Audrey, Liz, Dan, and Lisa all walked the Camino — but Bryan, you rode on your bike!

**BRYAN:** I rode it in September 2021 with my friend Duane — we had done adventures together before. Duane and I started doing some research and found out that about 20 percent of those that do the Camino ride it and so we thought that would

be fun. Like Audrey, I was prepared really well for the physical parts, and I was open to the rest — and God surprised me.

→**ML:** How did God surprise you? Share a Camino miracle or win.

**LISA:** Neither my [78-year-old] father or my sister who had recovered from cancer got one blister. She never even said she was tired! It was amazing.

**BRYAN:** On the first day, I found out my friend didn't ride at the same speed as me. At one point, I was far ahead of him and took a wrong turn — but didn't realize it until it was too late. I ended up having to carry my bike up this big hill because I was off the trail. The day was almost ending and I found myself praying, because I had to go all the way back the way I came—another 15 miles—and I was already exhausted. I found a little opening at the top of the hill, squeezed through with my bike, and ended up back where I was supposed to be! I started singing the song lyrics, "God will make a way when there is no way." My attitude changed dramatically. I had an energy like I hadn't had for a long time and flew back to meet Duane. I started praying about patience after that.

→**ML:** It sounds like there was a transformation for you. Did anybody else experience something like that?

**DAN:** I wanted to do the Camino alone, in winter [when there are fewer pilgrims], and spend a lot of time with God. I got to the hostel on the first night and the only other person there was a 72-year-old Frenchman who spoke English. He was really nice, but I didn't want anyone to bother me. The next morning, I left before him, pushed harder and a little further, trying to lose him. At five o'clock that night, he walked into the hostel where I was staying! This kept happening the first few days of my journey. That was a transformation for me — I had my own agenda and then moved into thinking, 'maybe God has something completely different for me.' It didn't dawn on me until halfway through the Camino: one of my grandfathers died when I was five, the other really struggled with alcohol. So I guess I didn't really have a grandfather who was present and wanted to hang out and talk — and here's this older guy who is my grandparents' age and who wants to go to dinner with me! The Camino provides. I didn't even know I had that hole, and here

*Left: Bikers have to push or carry their bikes up rough terrain. Right: Duane and Bryan.*



God used this man. Fifteen years later, I met up with him in Paris — we hugged and sat and talked about the Camino (*see inset photo lower left*).

**AUDREY:** Well, I got COVID at the beginning of our trip! I didn't test until a few days into our hike, trying to rationalize away my symptoms and blame them on altitude, heat, or travel. It was really stressful because we had to immediately change our plans and get off trail to find a place to stay. Liz booked us a hotel so we could isolate — the hotel employees were so kind, and Liz took care of me for two days. It was really hard because I like to be very independent, and I had to rely on another person. God really humbled me through this experience: I had prepared physically for the Camino for months, and I thought my body was ready for anything! It was also a huge blessing because there were wildfires happening in the next two sections of the Camino — the people ahead of us were evacuated and could not hike it, and we missed all of the danger. God's provision.

**LIZ:** I went into the Camino with my little agenda — I had planned everything, read everything. But it was much harder than I'd thought. I was in my apps constantly, in my book, in my head way too much about the trail and how hard it would be. By the end of the Camino, I felt a shift from, "I need to know what's around the bend" to being excited about what's coming next. I learned to release control and just be in the present moment. Another humbling shift: I went in very prepared for and thought I was going to have a personal "mountain top experience" on this spiritual pilgrimage. Instead, what God gave me was the most physical challenge — and one of the most communal experiences — of my life.

→**ML:** It has become clear from this discussion that community is central to the pilgrim experience. What did God teach you about taking the journey through life together?

**LIZ:** God taught me how much I need community. The Camino was such a strange paradox: I have to walk this on my own, yet we are doing it together. I had to put one foot in front of the other, yet I did the whole thing with Audrey and couldn't have done it without her. Probably because I am so fiercely independent, the idea that it wasn't one or the other, but both at the same time [was really powerful].



*Clockwise from upper left: Dan's friend Jean-Luc in 2005; Dan in 2005; Jean-Luc, his wife Kathy, and Dan reunited in Paris in 2019.*



**LISA:** Three days before [the end], my feet were hurting, and I was just weeping. My father told me, ‘we really can’t tell people you wouldn’t finish — you just have to get up.’ He was very gentle about it, and it motivated me to keep going and finish.

**DAN:** I think the pilgrimage is an allegory for life: as you go, different people come in and out of your life for different seasons, for different purposes. I had my own ideas, my thoughts, my ambitions, but I got something so much better. The pilgrimage and the journey of life is understanding that process, and moving toward living life as a gift.

The paradox of pilgrimage is that it is about the journey and the destination, moving forward as an individual and being part of a community forging ahead together. Serving one another, depending on others, and receiving from them. It’s about both the spiritual and the physical; our bodies play an integral part in our experiences of God. Accepting these paradoxes, the intersection of seemingly opposite things, is where transformation happens. When, like these five Eastbrook Camino pilgrims, we have the courage to let go of our perceived control and practice openness with God, we learn the pilgrim way.

The Camino taught Audrey, Bryan, Dan, Lisa, and Liz so much — and we, too, can take away much from their stories: an emphasis on the communal nature of our faith, practicing trust in God when we have our own expectations, and being open to what God will do in our lives when we surrender and humble ourselves.

As they say on the Camino, God provides. ■

Megan “Mac” Littel (née Carlson) is a longtime Eastbrook who, along with her husband Ethan, leads a small group for the 20s and 30s ministry.

*Clockwise from upper left: Lisa and family at Cruz del Fierro, a spiritual peak of the Camino; Lisa, Kimberly, Michelle, and their dad James in Spain’s famous sunflower fields; Liz & Audrey reach the end of the Camino, the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.*



## GET TO KNOW AN EASTBROOKER (OR TWO!): Marshall & Terri Plant



Although they are not physically present in Milwaukee for most of the year, **MARSHALL AND TERRI PLANT** are a big part of what makes Eastbrook, Eastbrook. They joined the church in 1985 and spent 10 years worshipping here before moving to the Middle East as missionaries, what we here at Eastbrook call “field workers.” They have served in Egypt, Morocco, and most recently Jerusalem, where they have lived for the past 10 years.

Stationed in the Holy Land, they have witnessed many modern-day pilgrims make the journey to meet with God. Let’s help make our big church feel smaller as we get to know Marshall and Terri, and hear their reflections on pilgrimage.

### What called you to do the work that you do?

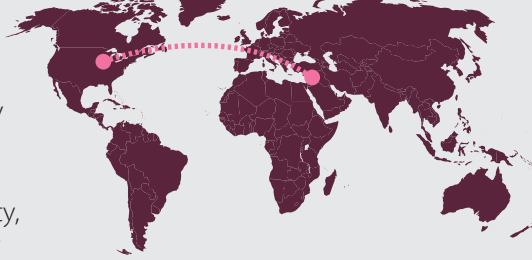
**TERRI:** We met at Moody [Bible Institute], where every year the school hosted a Missions week — people came and told stories of what was going on in the world. I could not contain myself in all of those meetings, it really broke my heart to hear all these stories of other places in the world, and it opened my mind and my heart to [go out].

**MARSHALL:** It was the first time I knew people hadn’t heard the Gospel.

### What have you learned in the places you have served?

**MARSHALL:** It has confirmed that this [Earth] is not our home. We are all pilgrims, rooted elsewhere. That’s a big advantage of living in a place that’s not your own — it’s not our home, we’re just passing through. It helps us focus on the work and helps us see: this doesn’t last.

**TERRI:** We had to leave Egypt and



Morocco abruptly, we had to basically sell everything and give things away and start fresh again. I think most Americans don't have that opportunity, they spend most of their life in one or two places and just collect.

**MARSHALL:** I've also learned that it's exciting, but the thrill of the adventure wears off. But the advantage is spiritual. It's Him who makes it worthwhile.

**With a physical pilgrimage, there's the thrill of getting started, thinking about your endpoint. And then two weeks in, you get blisters, it's hot, you're eating the same thing every day. Does that equate to what you've experienced, or what you've observed of pilgrims you encounter traveling to the Holy Land?**

**MARSHALL:** A pilgrimage has a start and an end, and then you going to go back home. It's just a temporary thing to purge you, to reboot. Three times a year, Jews were expected to go to Jerusalem from wherever they were. The walk itself was a good cleansing— getting there to reaffirm what they believe and what's important in life. But it was also a sacrifice. You had to leave your work, drag your kids. I think of the people from Capernaum or Galilee: fish was a big part of their diet [living by the sea]. They'd go to Jerusalem and be like, 'where's the fish?!'

**TERRI:** Some pilgrims have psalms of ascent they recite as they walk that they had memorized over years and years. It's so intentional that they are on the journey, making it for the Lord. I think sometimes we totally miss this on this "life journey" that we're on. We can make it about us, or our stuff, our jobs, our identity as a partner, a parent, or whatever else we may be.

**How has witnessing this impacted you as believers?**

**MARSHALL:** The whole world comes to Jerusalem, you can hear every language. The more we're exposed to different ideologies and religions, we are more

firm than ever in the Gospel; that the Word of God is for us; that Jesus Christ became a man, sent from God, who went to the Cross for our sins and rose again. Our confidence has just grown.

**TERRI:** I also feel like, even though we can see people coming from different backgrounds and faiths, if they're actually really seeking the One, God's going to meet them in some way.

**MARSHALL:** I've heard that from my friends, the tour guides. Romans 10 says, *'Unless someone goes, how will they hear?'*

**It sounds like no matter where people are coming from or why, sacrifice is consistent along their pilgrimage. For people who read this at Eastbrook, in the city of Milwaukee, how can they "do pilgrimage" without actually physically going to the Holy Land? What actions translate wherever you are?**

**MARSHALL:** It doesn't matter where you are, you're doing the work for Him. We just happen to live in Jerusalem, but the things we give our life to are the exact same things we would do here in Milwaukee. We would have an Afghan woman live with us. We would go to Friday night international group. We would go to the southside center [ICC] and tutor people.

**TERRI:** Pilgrimage costs you something. I do think we Americans have a bit of a problem with being able to give up things or be uncomfortable because our life is built around our own personal comfort. Self-preservation has become so much a part of our culture — but it goes against pilgrimage in a way, because pilgrimage is about leaving all the comfort and security and seeking something bigger than yourself. I think the goal is to set ourselves with our focus on something else, something bigger, and go in that direction. ■

## Choose Your Mission at Eastbrook

One of Eastbrook's core values is to reach out beyond ourselves through engagement in our neighborhood, city, and world. You can support field workers like Marshall and Terri and answer that call to service in a number of ways throughout the year:

- **PRAY FOR OUR FIELD WORKERS:** Petition the Lord on your own, or participate in either Missions Prayer Class (Sundays at 9:30 am in Fellowship Hall) or Women's Missions Prayer (Thursdays at 9 am on Zoom) for a chance to pray in community.
- **GIVE TO THE MISSIONS FUND:** This designated fund provides finances to support Eastbrook field workers and programs across the globe. Place your offering in the boxes during worship services, or give online at [eastbrook.org/giving](http://eastbrook.org/giving).
- **PARTICIPATE IN MISSIONSFEST 2022:** This week-long focus on how God is at work in our church kicks off Sunday, October 9 with events running through Sunday, October 16 —including many regularly scheduled groups that will take on a special, missions-focused message. Check out a full schedule at [eastbrook.org/missionsfest](http://eastbrook.org/missionsfest).
- **VOLUNTEER LOCALLY:** Community members are invited to serve at our Bread of Healing Clinic, Food Pantry, and International Community Center. To learn more, contact Dan Ryan ([dryan@eastbrook.org](mailto:dryan@eastbrook.org)) or Jim Dressner ([jim@iccmke.org](mailto:jim@iccmke.org)).

For a full listing of Missions events and service opportunities, check out the most recent Fall 2022 Connect/Grow/-Serve brochure.

# 360° View

by Seth Herlinger



For almost two decades, Eastbrook's annual Wilderness Trip has provided a summer backpacking experience for high school students. This year marked my eighth Wilderness Trip; I have done three as a student, one as a junior leader, and now four as a leader. It is always a unique experience due to physical demands, as well as how it pits you against the difficulties of living away from the comforts and conveniences of modern civilization. God routinely uses these raw encounters with nature to speak to us in ways that are much clearer and more definitive than what we might glean from Him in our regular day-to-day.

This year's trip took us to the Uncompahgre Wilderness in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado. Two days in, our group came across a trailhead that led to the summit of Uncompahgre Peak, the sixth highest "14er" (a peak with total elevation surpassing 14,000 feet) in the state of Colorado. We couldn't pass it up! We set up camp near the end of the valley, waking the next morning to empty our packs of anything that wasn't water and snacks for the day before setting out for the peak.

Spirits were high as we ascended the mountain. Unlike our previous days on trail, the weather was perfect: not too windy, not too sunny, and most importantly, not raining. We watched as marmots scrambled across rocks and chased each other along the mountainside. We listened to a chorus of little pikas belting out their signature "MEEP!" call, immediately adopting it as our group's mantra. Best of all were the views; every few hundred feet of elevation gain revealed new panoramic landscapes, a kaleidoscope of peaks and valleys bathed in sunshine or clothed in mist and clouds. On the top ridge, we could see and hear a storm passing behind the mountains lining the other side of the valley. We started to wonder just how

magnificent the 360° view at the summit would be, increasing our excitement and motivation to reach the top.

It was early afternoon as we approached the bottom of the rocky dome that forms the mountain's peak. A steeper portion meant our hike turned into more of a vertical scramble. Despite the increased difficulty, every member of our group was able to make it up to the 14,000 foot mark; now, only about 300 feet of elevation sat between us and the top. A few of us began to scout ahead when my co-leader Megan noticed that the storm appeared to be getting closer. Within minutes, the rain consumed the far peaks, clearly making its way across the valley right toward us. It was hard to imagine turning back now, so close to the summit — but mountain thunderstorms kill hikers every summer in Colorado, and we were not about to gamble with the lives of our students. After a quick group selfie, we reversed course — and not a moment too soon: rain blindsided us just as we began to descend the scramble. It would have been difficult enough to climb down this portion dry! I sensed trepidation spread through the group, and then I felt it myself — a brief but genuine moment of fear for my own life.

I was mentally transported, as if I was looking down from the mountain and observing the last four years of my life from above. Four years ago, I was not in a great place mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. I had dropped out of college with no clear path forward for my career, had neglected my own health, and struggled with some serious doubt towards my faith in Christ. These weren't issues I could fix overnight, but rather by the grace and direction of God, I was able to navigate them to become the more joyful, healthy, and purposeful person that I am today. This

observation immediately filled me with overwhelming peace, the thought that if I were to die in this moment, I was so grateful that it would be as the person I had become now rather than who I had been back then. God has more to show me.

I snapped out of reflection mode and into action mode, praying aloud, asking God to hold back the storm and allow us to descend the mountain safely. Our prayers were answered as the intensity of the rain held steady, any lightning staying miles away. Our entire group got off of the peak safe and sound, albeit wet, cold, and probably a little disappointed.

Despite not getting to soak in the full 360° view from the top, God had given me a 360° view of my own life. He had shown me where He had brought me out of darkness, and that He had great plans for my future. It felt a little like Moses, observing the newly-freed Israelites from the summit of Mount Sinai, and then again just before his death, looking upon their Promised Land from the top of Mount Nebo. There's no guarantee that you'll have such a profound experience every time you step into the wilderness, but I know firsthand that God loves to use the struggles that nature so readily provides to break through our cluttered minds and strike at our hearts with the things He has to show us.

*"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10) ■*

Seth Herlinger is a longtime Eastbrooker, serving this summer as an intern in Communication & Design. He also has served as a leader in Student Ministry for the past few years. He is a recent graduate of UWM and is moving to Chicago this fall.

