

Looking for God?



Northminster's Daily Devotions

Vol. 34 No.5

May 27-June 30, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When was the last time you felt embarrassed because you didn't know something? Was it awkward to ask a question?

Sometimes, walking with Jesus by faith brings more questions than answers. The complexities of life are so puzzling, yet as Christians, we see a world experiencing redemption as the Kingdom of God breaks in. It takes great wisdom to know how to live a godly life in pursuit of the things God is in pursuit of.

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.
-James 1:5*

This summer we will be exploring the questions that young people in our church, and perhaps you, have been asking. We are not ashamed or threatened by the act of asking tough questions - even when the answers are difficult to find or hard to take. God does not find fault in our asking and seeking answers. A classic phrase that characterizes Christian theology is, "faith seeking understanding." So ... ask away, and as you daily journey through God's Word, may these devotionals and Sunday study guides help you in discovering God's will for you and your life.

Don't forget...this entire resource is on our website www.godmorning.org, so don't forget to tell your friends.

In Christ,



Pete Seiferth

Associate Pastor for Spiritual Formation and Church Life

We are in need of more contributors to share the gift of writing, so that this devotional resource may continue to bless the many who make it a part of their spiritual disciplines.

If you are interested, call the church at 327-7121 and talk to Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

Sunday Study Guide

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Sunday
May, 27

2 Samuel 12:1-31
John 16:1-33
Psalm 119:65-80
Proverbs 16:4-5

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

-Acts 2:12

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

Connect Together *(How can we connect better together as Christ's family?)*

1. Do you like public speaking? What is your best and worst public speaking moment?

Grow Together *(How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?)*

1. Read **Acts 2:1-21**
2. Imagine the mood in the room in the space between verse 1 and What might the discussion and feeling been in the moments prior to Pentecost?
3. The miraculous coming of the spirit had a powerful demonstration in the ability to speak in many different languages. Yet, what is the main question on everyone's minds (v. 12) and the response of some (v. 13)? What would your response be more like?
4. Peter begins to explain what is going on, by quoting the prophet Joel in the Old Testament. Why would this be significant for the crowd that was gathered?
5. How would you describe your experience of the Holy Spirit now?
 - W On fire?
 - W A glowing ember?
 - W Up in the air?
 - W Gone with the Wind?

Serve Together *(How can we serve better together both each other and the church?)*

1. What powerful work of God have you seen lately?

Share Together *(How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?)*

1. How can you be more intentional of being aware of the Spirit's movement each day?
2. In the midst of the questions that ask, "What does this mean?" - how can you respond more like Peter and less like the naysayers?

Worship Together *(How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?)*

1. Sing or pray these lyrics to "Spirit of the Living God"
2. *Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me ... melt me, mold me, fill me use me ...*
3. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

4 Getting Beyond “God Please Bless ... !”

by Andy Ross

Monday
May 28

2 Samuel 13:1-39
John 17:1-26
Psalm 119:81-96
Proverbs 16:6-7

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. -John 17:24

There was a time in my life when I thought just running through my list of “Please bless so-and-so and so-and-so” was just fine. And then, as I did some growing up in my prayer life, I realized the value of getting specific.

Look at John 17 - an amazing and detailed prayer of our Lord, shortly before he was hauled off to be crucified. Look at how he prayed the details. Look at how he was specific! Look at the tone and perspective that Jesus has for us - his heart concerns about our future, our unity, our hope and destiny in God.

Love compels us to get specific doesn't it? I have found it so enriching to think of those in my life - and to offer a simple yet specific request - as a part of my prayer.

It's one of the best ways we can care for those the Father has given to us - to lift them up in prayer - and seek God's glory and grace.

Young People: Can we talk? Can we talk about how we talk to God? What do you think about prayer, and the way you pray? Is it working?

Adults: Develop your list - your key list of those whom you feel God has called you to pray for. Get specific. Lift them to the Lord.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus - for praying for us, for praying for the world! May your Spirit of love and compassion fill our hearts this day. Amen.

Following the Rules

5

by Jennifer Monroe

Tuesday
May 29

2 Samuel 14:1—15:22
John 18:1-24
Psalm 119:97-112
Proverbs 16:8-9

Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end. -Psalm 119:111-112

Some people envision Christianity as one long series of rules that start with the word “don’t.” Don’t sleep in on Sunday morning. Don’t associate with people who are different from you. Don’t smile very much. Don’t have fun. On the other hand, while it might be nice to be able to reassure people that there are no rules and being a Christian can basically mean whatever you want it to mean, that’s not exactly true.

It is true, as Christians are often fond of saying, that following Christ is not about rules, but about a relationship. But just as there are guidelines that ought to govern our human relationships, so there are statutes and decrees that govern our relationship with Christ. The problem isn’t in the existence of these “rules”, but in our attitude toward them. Rather than seeing them as burdens, great heavy loads that are strapped to our backs and which we must struggle to carry our entire lives, we need to learn to see God’s guidelines as life-giving and protecting. We should follow them not because we have to, or because we are afraid of what will happen to us if we don’t, but rather because we understand that God has designed the world to work in a certain way, and when we respect his boundaries, we find joy, wisdom, safety, and strength.

Our God is not a capricious, vindictive master who gives us laws only to make us suffer and to exercise his power over us. Rather, he is a loving Father who wants to see us grow up into the men and women he designed us to be.

Young People: What is one rule that you have a hard time following? Can you see how it might ultimately help you and keep you safe?

Adults: Do you find yourself resenting God’s laws or perceiving them as burdens, rather than as blessings?

Prayer: Father, give us your eyes to see that you want only the very best for our lives. Give us patience and humility when we are faced with rules we don’t want to follow and give us faith that your way is best.

Crowd Pressure

by Dick Leon

Wednesday
May 30

2 Samuel 15:23—16:23
John 18:25—19:22
Psalm 119:113-128
Proverbs 16:10-11

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. -John 19:16

How many times have you been caught in the middle of multiple forces in making a decision? It happens to us all. A friend wants you to do something you feel is wrong and you are caught between friendship and conscience. A boss asks you to cut some corners in a business deal but you know it would hurt a customer who has been good to you in the past. At school you could start to hang out with one crowd but it would mean turning your back on some long time friendships.

Poor Pilate. He is caught in a huge trap. His best advice comes from wife (*So, what else is new?*) who tells him to have nothing to do with Jesus. The crowd presses Pilate to send Jesus to the cross lest he look disloyal to Rome. Jesus doesn't help himself or Pilate because he remains silent in his defense. Pilate's own conscience tells him there is nothing in Jesus worthy of death.

In the end he caves in to the crowd. He must figure he can find a way to make it up to his wife and that he can somehow rationalize his deed to his own conscience. But by following the cries of the angry mob he makes the worst decision of his life by sending an innocent man to die the ugliest death devised by man.

Two things come of this. First, Pilate pays a huge personal price for buckling under the pressure of the crowd. Face it, no crowd cares about our well being! Crowds only care for their own agenda ... or maybe nothing more than the thrill of seeing someone do something stupid.

Second, God takes the worst thing imaginable and turns it into the best thing that ever happened to the world. This seems to be God's habit with us. Nothing we do - even the grossly stupid things - can outwit this God who loves us so much he makes our black Fridays into Good Fridays!

Young People: Think about all the things the "crowd" wants you to do. Are those things ever good for you? Does the crowd really care?

Adults: When pressed between conscience and expediency, what do you do?

Prayer: Lord, deliver us from being so weak of character that we follow the crowd rather than the Christ. Amen.

Arms

7

by Scott Coverdale

Thursday
May 31

2 Samuel 17:1-29
John 19:23-42
Psalm 119:129-152
Proverbs 16:12-13

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. -John 19:30

This is the scene of the crucifixion, and it is not a pretty sight. It runs contrary to good taste, to decorum. The cross is ignoble, is violent and unattractive in every way.

I will be the first to admit that I am offended by the cross. I think that we all are, on some level. How can the cross be God's best plan? We need comfort in a dangerous, uncertain world. We need assurance that God will rescue us from the Romans that occupy the land of our lives. What do we get? We get a Messiah that dies on a cross. That's not what we were hoping for; not how we would have written the story. But how do we respond? We can cross our indignant arms and go our own proud and wounded way - away. Or we can try to know him by his wounds; try to know ourselves by the injuries we have suffered.

Can we love him; reach out our lonely, wounded arms to him in hope that the one who was crucified is also our healer? I think we will find that his wounded arms have long since suffered our rebellion - have long since known our loneliness. I think we might find that he loves us still, and wants to love us right through our hurt, our offense, wants to uncross our indignant arms and surround us with his own uncrossed arms. I think that there are continual surprises for us if we let God love us, and if we learn to love him back. Love can take us to astonishing places. Like to crosses and graves and then back into the light but only better. Look at where it took Jesus ...

Young people: There are two sides to the cross. What do you think that means? How can something be terrible and good at the same time?

Adults: What does the cross mean to me? What did God say to me by allowing or causing Jesus to die on a cross? What is my response to this?

Prayer: Thank you for the inscrutable love that you mysteriously demonstrated on Calvary, and the amazing power that you demonstrated by overcoming death. Please teach me to let myself be embraced by your uncrossed and loving arms. Amen.

The Lord Jesus In Us

by Jennifer Hagar

Friday
June 1

2 Samuel 18:1—19:10
John 20:1-31
Psalm 119:153-176
Proverbs 16:14-15

“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” -John 20:15-16

I am writing this the day after Easter. I chose June 1 to write a devotion because today is my mother’s birthday. How delightful and gracious is the Lord that key Scripture verse is the same passage used in Pastor Andy’s sermon.

How often to we look upon the children of God and not see Jesus in them. We are all his sheep, yet sometimes in our daily, worldly life, we encounter our Lord in his people and don’t recognize him.

When others encounter us, are they puzzled about who we are? Or do they see our Lord in us? Is our countenance peaceful like Jesus’ was? Are our actions kind? Do we love the gardener, the pool man? Or what about the person who zooms past us in traffic?

Like Mary, we cannot always recognize the Lord in this world.

Young People: Who do you know that treats you nicely?

Adults: How can we become more like Christ in all we do in spite of this world and its condition?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Almighty God, my prayer is that when people see me, they can see Jesus Christ in me. I ask you Lord to shape me and mold me in your love so that I can be you to those I meet. Amen.

Gone Fishing Lately?

9

by Frank Shallenberger

Saturday
June 2

2 Samuel 19:11—20:13
John 21:1-25
Psalm 120:1-7
Proverbs 16:16-17

He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. -John 21:6

Here's a great fish story. Peter and his six buddies fish all night long. Not even a nibble. Just as they decide to call it quits a fellow appears on the shore and asks if they've caught anything. Replying in the negative, he suggests they fish on the right side of the boat. And what happens? When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Peter and his buddies were no different than most fishermen are today. Bad luck! Trying what a stranger suggests can't be any worse than what you're doing. So they did just like the fellow on the shoreline said and caught so many fish, they feared the net might break.

As fishers of men most of us have never caught a thing. Is that the way it's been with you? If Peter had consulted the Lord before he started fishing he would have fished on the right side of the boat to start with.

I've fished on the wrong side of the boat and on the right side of the boat but I must confess, I have never caught so many fish that the net was filled to overflowing. In fact my fish stories fall far short of being fantastic but I have had a few successful ones. If I started out relying on myself I usually didn't accomplish very much. But if I took time out to discuss with Jesus what I was going to do, to seek his advice and his help and listen to his response I did fairly well.

Remember, always check with Jesus before you fish and always fish where he tells you.

Young People: Did you know that Jesus told you to go fishing? Did you know that the kind of fishermen Jesus wants you to be doesn't use a hook with a worm?

Adults: Have you been fishing lately? Catch anything? Did you do the right preparation and take along the right equipment?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you called us to go fishing but most of us never see you standing on the shore. Fill us with a sense of desire to be the kind of fishermen you want us to be. With your help we will surely catch a fish or two. In Christ's name. Amen.

Sunday
June 3

2 Samuel 20:14—21:22
Acts 1:1-26
Psalm 121:1-8
Proverbs 16:18

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

-Joshua 1:9

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

Connect Together (*How can we connect better together as Christ's family?*)

1. What is your first thought when you hear the phone ring?
2. Describe the time when you pretended to not hear someone calling after you.

Grow Together (*How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?*)

1. Read **Joshua 1:1-9 & Exodus 13:17-22**
2. These two passages serve as bookends of the time the people Israel followed Moses out of slavery in Egypt, depended on God for 40 years in the wilderness, and then were about to enter the promised land.
3. What was the significance of bringing Joseph's bones with them? What was Joseph especially known for in seeing God's provision in his life (Genesis 50:20)?
4. How did God initially guide Israel as they left Egypt?
5. What promises and commands does God give to Joshua?
6. What would be the most challenging to believe and follow for you?
7. Significant change brings significant challenges. What changes are you currently facing that are difficult? Is change something you welcome or resist?
8. How do you hear God's call?

Serve Together (*How can we serve better together both each other & the church?*)

1. Is there someone facing a particularly difficult circumstance or change? How can you support them in hearing God's call (without giving easy answers)?
2. Are there new people in the church who you might look out for as they experience a new place of worship and new family of faith?

Share Together (*How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?*)

1. Our world brings constant change. How can you help others experience the strength of God in the midst of a shifting culture?

Worship Together (*How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?*)

1. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

The Fellowship of a Believing Church 11

by Marie Ruiz

Monday
June 4

2 Samuel 22:1—23:23
Acts 2:1-47
Psalm 122:1-4
Proverbs 16:19-20

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. -Acts 2: 42-43

In today's passage in Acts we are told about the miraculous signs of the Holy Spirit that came to rest on the apostles who were probably in or around the temple. The Scriptures tell us that a wind (*a symbol of the Holy Spirit*) came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. Scripture goes on to say that tongues of fire separated and rested upon each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. The God-fearing Jews who were present from every nation understood their respective language the apostles were speaking. The entire crowd that included Jews, Cretans and Arabs heard the apostles declaring the wonders of God and asked what this meant. Peter spoke up and helped those who had witnessed the Holy Spirit's anointing understand that these things had been spoken of before by Joel the prophet (*Joel 2:28*).

These signs to those that witnessed this revelation were filled with awe and overwhelmingly devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and prayer. What could have been a divisive turn of events instead united the fellowship of believers; in verse 47 we are told that the Lord added numbers daily those who were being saved.

This sets the stage for us today and how we should respond to our pastors and teachers. We need to devote ourselves to the body of believers, fellowship with one another, breaking bread until Christ's return. And this is how unbelievers will come to know of God's love for us all - the way that we fellowship with one another.

Young People: We are called, young and old, to take advantage of every opportunity to do good. Look for a way to help someone in your family today. You'll be showing them God's love.

Adults: As we grow in our faith, let us to devote ourselves to the fellowship of believers

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for the Holy Spirit that comforts and completes us while here on earth. Amen.

12 *If You're Happy and You Know It ...*

by Renee Guth

Tuesday
June 5

2 Samuel 23:24—24:25
Acts 3:1-26
Psalm 123:1-4
Proverbs 16:21-23

I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master; as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he show us his mercy.

-Psalm 123:1-2

Later in Peter's life, he writes, "Always be ready to make a defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do so with gentleness and reverence." (1 Peter 3:15-16)

In this true story about Peter, John, and the man crippled from birth, look how easy it is to point to the hope we have in Jesus. This man is able to demonstrate the power of God. Then Peter tells the crowd by whose power this man has been healed. Peter goes on to tell them how God fulfilled what had been foretold about the Messiah to come. The Messiah would suffer and would be raised. Calling us to repentance, we are called to turn away from ourselves and turn to God.

David, on the other hand, gives us a good example of what turning away from God looks like. Instead of trusting in God's provision, he counts his fighting men. The crippled man also wanted something he could count, gold and silver. Don't we do that too? Do we put more confidence in how much money we have in our savings account, our home, our retirement or college fund? Do we rely more on our grades or status than on God's power working through us? Have we put our hope in ourselves instead of God? Have we lost sight of eternity?

There have been studies about who are the happiest people in the world. It was not the good old USA. Despite our wealth, happiness is elusive. Mexican people were found to be the happiest people in the world. Counting our resources does not bring happiness for today nor does it provide hope for tomorrow's happiness.

Young People: What or who makes you the happiest?

Adults: Have you found greater joy in things you can count, or in genuine relationships with God and people he has put in your life?

Prayer: Holy God, help me today count on the things that count most in life, and experience the true joy of knowing Jesus. Amen.

Another Way to God or God's Way to Us¹³

by Dick Leon

Wednesday
June 6

1 Kings 1:1-53
Acts 4:1-37
Psalm 124:1-8
Proverbs 16:24

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. -Acts 4:12

I spent two years in India trying to wrestle with this verse. Are all religions the same? Is each religion just another path up another side of the mountain of God? Is Christianity a way to God that is distinct, unique and superior to all other religions?

A number of years ago a Chicago University professor, Dr. Alan Bloom, wrote a book called *The Closing of the American Mind*. He built his thesis on observations of the shift in thinking he found in his entering freshmen. He said that young people no longer were searching for the "truth" but now they were committed to being "tolerant" of all and every truth. And the best way to be perfectly "tolerant" is to avoid strong convictions of your own.

Is that smart? Are we better off by discarding our beliefs to be more acceptable to others? Do we have to discard our beliefs to be acceptable to others or to accept others? G. K. Chesterton put it this way: "When people no longer believe in God it is not that they will believe nothing but that they will believe anything."

I believe in tolerance. But I believe the only healthy tolerance comes when we hold our convictions with firm confidence and also show respect for the convictions of others. Mindlessness is not a necessary condition for genuine tolerance!

I should add that one of the deep convictions I came to after my studies in India was that people had to be mindless if they believed all religions are the same! A second conviction I came to was that there is no religious system in the world that can come close to the radical claims that Jesus Christ is God's only son and the world's only Savior. Christianity is not another "way to God" it is the shocking story of "God's way to us!"

Young People: Do you feel free to hold firmly your Christian convictions in a world with so many competing religious ideas?

Adults: How do you show "tolerance" to people of other faiths?

Prayer: Lord, we confess you as our matchless King and the only Savior who has come for all people. Help us hold fast to you, always. Amen.

Is the Age of Miracles Over?

by Frank Shallenberger

Thursday
June 7

1 Kings 2:1—3:2
Acts 5:1-42
Psalm 125:1-5
Proverbs 16:25

... more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. -Acts 5:14-15

Have you ever looked back in time and said "Those were the days!?" There was more to the early church than simply numerical growth. The people in those days were so impressed by what they saw that they brought their sick when they knew that Peter would pass by so that his shadow might fall upon them and thus bring healing. Is the age of miracles now over?

Do you remember the story of the paralyzed man? When he was brought before Jesus to be healed Jesus gazed upon him and then told him "Your sins are forgiven you." The people gathered there mumbled to themselves wondering who this man was who claimed to be able to forgive sins. Turning to them he explained that he would now heal this man that they might know that he had the power not only to heal the body but to heal the soul as well.

Does Jesus perform miracles today? The answer is definitely yes. Today God's miracles are mainly the one that Jesus chose to administer to the paralyzed man first. God does heal the body without working through the intervention of a physician at times but he heals the sinner's soul thousands of times each day. I well remember what happened to me when I gave my life to Jesus Christ and the transformation that he worked in my heart. It was nothing less than miraculous.

Have you personally experienced a transformation that only Jesus could make in your heart? There is no better time than this very moment to kneel down and ask Jesus to come into your heart and take control of your life. The age of miracles will begin for you too.

Children: Have you learned of Jesus? Have you talked to your family about Jesus?

Adults: Have you prayed for a miracle in your life? Have you turned your life over to Jesus? If not, what are you waiting for?

Prayer: Father, open my eyes that I might see the daily miracles you perform and work a miracle in my life each day Lord by washing away my sins. Amen.

Servant Ministries

15

by Dick Leon

Friday
June 8

1 Kings 3:3—4:34
Acts 6:1-15
Psalm 126:1-6
Proverbs 16:26-27

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them. -Acts 6:3

Have you ever wondered where the offices of the church come from? As Presbyterians we believe there are three offices in the church that are ordained by God. The proclamation of the gospel belongs to “Ministers of Word and Sacrament.” Leadership in the life of the congregation belongs to the “Elders” ... the Greek word for this office is *presbuteroi!* And the task of serving the congregation belongs to the “Deacons.”

All of these officers are set aside by ordination through the laying on of hands and prayer. (1:6) Ministers of the Word and Sacrament are visible to us all ... and we can be proud of the high standards our four set for us, Andy, Ken, Pete and John. Elders and Deacons are visible to us when they assist in worship each week and serve communion.

Our text from Acts 6 tells how the office of Deacons was established. Those in leadership in preaching the Word did not have time to care for and serve the people without compromising their calling. So they chose from amongst them and selected seven who would take the role of servant ministry to the community.

Some people have thought the office of deacon was like the ‘lower house of the legislature’ and so these men and women were in training to someday be “elevated” to the upper house of the elders! Wrong! The office of deacon is distinct for the gifts of sympathy and service. This office has a dignity and distinction of its own and we are fortunate in our church to have men and women, under John’s leadership, called and set aside with prayer and the laying of hands who reach out to us all with their care and compassion. It all started here in Acts 6.

Young People: God creates us all with different gifts that are to be used for the life of the church. The gift of serving others is just as important as being in power to make decisions!

Adults: If you are gifted in sympathy and service make yourself known to the leadership of the church, you could become a wonderful deacon!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those men and women who serve us so well as our deacons. Amen.

16 *Do Now What You Didn't Do Then*

by Bea Carter

Saturday
June 9

1 Kings 5:1—6:38
Acts 7:1-29
Psalm 127:1-5
Proverbs 16:28-30

When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. -Acts 7:21

When I was a young Mother I didn't bring my kids to Sunday School as often as I should have. It wasn't because I didn't want to, I just didn't make it a priority. Now I know that I should have tried harder to encourage their attendance in Sunday School. I was of the opinion that if I was faithful in attending and led a good life and set a good example when they were old enough to decide for themselves they would attend church.

Now I have a chance to correct that situation with my 6 year old granddaughter. She goes to Sunday School and we read Bible stories together when she's here. Last week when they came down from Chandler we read the story of Moses as a baby floating down the river in a basket. You know that one - where Pharaoh ordered all baby boys to be thrown in the river (*Exodus 1:22*). His daughter rescued Moses and took him to the palace to live.

Young People: Can you retell the story of Moses to your family?

Adults: Is there something in your life you wish you could have done differently? Think about it and with God's help you can do something about it now.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for all you do for us every day. Help us to set the right priorities and show us things we might change now to be more pleasing in your eyes. Hear us, we ask in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday Study Guide

17

Sunday
June 10

1 Kings 7:1-50
Acts 7:30-50
Psalm 128:1-6
Proverbs 16:31-33

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. -1 Peter 3:15

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

Connect Together (*How can we connect better together as Christ's family?*)

1. Did you have a hero as a child?
2. Who is your hero today?

Grow Together (*How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?*)

1. Read together **1 Peter 3:15-18, Matthew 28, Acts 8:4-40**
2. What are the common threads woven through each of these texts?
3. Particularly in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping him talk about Jesus?
4. What kind of things make Christians sound "dorky" when talking about faith?
5. Who helped you learn about faith?
6. Is mission and evangelism (telling the good news) something done near or far away?

Serve Together (*How can we serve better together both each other and the church?*)

1. Is there a place you can receive and offer help and encouragement to grow in faith?

Share Together (*How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?*)

1. What words do you use to talk about God and your faith with others? Are they words that they can understand?
2. Reflect on the "hope you have" in Jesus Christ and why you would want to tell other people about that.

Worship Together (*How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?*)

1. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

Whose Feet Will You Wash?

by Deb Van Scoyk

Monday
June 11

1 Kings 8:1-66
Acts 7:51—8:13
Psalm 129:1-8
Proverbs 17:1

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. -Acts 7:59—8:1

We recall that Saul was the privileged son of a respected Pharisee and Roman citizen, educated in Jerusalem in what was considered the most impressive classroom in the entire Jewish world. Many of the Pharisees and members of the Sanhedrin whom Jesus encountered were Saul’s instructors or classmates. Further, we know Saul lived by the letter of the “Code of Jewish Law” as he described himself as “a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee, ... as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” (*Philippians 3:5–6*)

Our Scripture reading today is even more telling, however, by its accounting of Saul’s giving “approval” to Stephen’s death. I recently learned that the original Greek word for “approval” is “suneudokeo” which means “to take pleasure with others.” Thus, we envision Saul, not just as an idle bystander, but literally cheering with the crowd through each gruesome blow as Stephen’s life was slipping away.

The Scriptures bring us an accounting of only a day in the life of Stephen, but what a day it was! And we later learn that, while it took some time, Stephen’s words were to have a lasting and profound effect on Saul.

I’ve often contemplated, upon review of the many wonderful Christians whose witness has shaped my heart, how I will encounter these dear ones in Heaven. I would like to believe that upon entering the gates of Heaven, one of Saul’s first joys included washing the feet of Stephen.

Young People: Is there someone in your life who has been a great witness for Jesus?

Adults: Given the opportunity to wash the feet of one who shared your earthly journey and profoundly influenced your spiritual growth, who would you choose?

Prayer: Gracious God, we strive to serve you first and foremost - to be, by example, your witness. Remind us daily that this life is our ministry. Amen.

Who Can Stand?

19

by Scott Coverdale

Tuesday
June 12

1 Kings 9:1—10:29
Acts 8:14-40
Psalm 130:1-8
Proverbs 17:2-3

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? -Psalm 130:3

There is something to be said for sin: that when we look back on the past years or months or hours of our lives, even a modest bit of honest contemplation will tell us that there was and is and will continue to be sin in our lives. Whether they are the high crimes of profound depravity or the little indulgences, neglect and self-centeredness that are easily disguised and rationalized by “everybody”, we are sinners and we know it. When we know this, a logical and appropriate response is humility. We might be “pretty good folks.” We might have the approval of our neighbors or the general public or even our own trained conscience. But we know that we are sinners, and when we recognize this, we will be slow to look down on another person whose sin may be more visible to our discerning eye.

David, the “man after God’s own heart,” knew it well. He knew that none of us can stand before God on the merits of our own holiness. In the verse after the one above, we find the key to our relationship with a Holy God: “but with you there is forgiveness ...” Because God is forgiving of our sin, it is pretty obvious that we have no place to withhold forgiveness of those who sin against us. Jesus said that many times. We are all sinners in need of grace. Without that, *Who could stand?*

Young People: How does God’s willingness to forgive us affect our relationships with other people?

Adults: Is there forgiveness that we are withholding from others that we have no right to, in light of God’s forgiveness of us?

Prayer: Dear God, we know that we only stand in your presence by the merit of your grace to us. Please help us to know this deeply, so that we will be quick to extend that same grace to others who need grace from us as well as from you. Amen.

Finding A Safe Place

by Anne Price

Wednesday
June 13

1 Kings 11:1—12:19
Acts 9:1-25
Psalm 131:1-3
Proverbs 17:4-5

A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue. - Proverbs 17:4

As I read the Proverbs each day I see how God is showing me how to have relationships with others. The lessons to not change with time. In our lives we can usually pick our inner circle of friends. If I choose negative or evil people to be close to I believe that I will move away from God. It seems like the old saying: “birds of a feather flock together” still holds true.

If I listen to lies and gossip from a malicious tongue, I may be guilty of believing the untruth. This Proverb make me even aware of the television I watch, the use of the computer, the books I read, and the movies that I attend.

We have a church family that offers us a safe place to experience the love of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Our pastor, leaders, small groups and fellow members fill us with love that the outside world may not offer. This is a safe place.

Young people: Do you pick friends that are good and kind?

Adults: How do you protect yourself from listening to evil people?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please keep me aware of my surroundings. Keep me away from dangerous people and places. Cover me with the cloud of your love so that I may stay close to you. Amen.

The Long Haul

by Jerry Smith

21

Thursday
June 14

1 Kings 12:20—13:34
Acts 9:1-25
Psalm 132:1-18
Proverbs 17:6

So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house.

-1 Kings 13:19

This is a story about a man of God from Judah who disobeyed God's direct order and had his long haul terminated by a lion.

At the age of 27 after a miraculous salvation experience I thought that I was all set for the long haul. My walk and talk with the Lord was life changing and life fulfilling. This lasted for about 20 years when some insignificant devil promoted reason I stopped going to church, then stopped reading the Bible and stopped praying.

Then one morning I was awakened and a very clear voice said, "Jerry you must return to your first love."

Returning I found God was waiting with open arms and a loving heart and this walk and talk with Jesus just keeps getting better and better. We have a long haul God who has provided everything in his Son, his Spirit and his Word to make the long haul not only possible but down right enjoyable.

Young people: Everything seems a long way off to you but you have a friend in Jesus who sticks closer than a brother and will see you through to the end.

Adults: Things aren't so far off any more so take the offered help and prosper in the Lord.

Prayer: May God supply all needs for the long haul in accordance with his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Oh, Brother!

by Andy Ross

Friday
June 15

1 Kings 14:1—15:24
Acts 10:1-23
Psalm 133:1-3
Proverbs 17:7-8

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! -Psalm 133:1

I learned to say, “Oh, brother!” early on in life, probably because I was a little brother. But we can’t take brothers getting along in unity for granted, right? Sometimes knowing a person so well, and having to live in close proximity, can only ignite the fires of conflict that would otherwise lay dormant. I have to confess that, while God blessed me with the best of older brothers, I still found ways to torment him and make his life difficult growing up. I would tease Kerry to no end, I would make fun of his clothes, why, there was even a moment that I put gunpowder in his pipe tobacco just for the sport of it.

But over the years, I’ve grown to marvel at what a blessing having a brother can be! Over the years I’ve only grown in my love and admiration for my older brother, Kerry; but also for the many other family members I’ve been blessed to meet and know through the church. And the blessing comes especially when you have a “brother” or “sister” who has differences from you - that’s often what makes them such a blessing.

This past year, I enjoyed meeting a pastor here in town who is known for his liberal views, and standing next to him was his buddy, a man who is an unabashed and outspoken conservative - and they smiled and said they have been the best of friends, for years and years.

It just makes me smile and want to say, “Oh, brother!”

Young People: Do you have a friend who is really different from you? Do you have to sometimes work at living in unity? What makes it work?

Adults: Think about the relationships in your life, and how Jesus calls us to love those who are our neighbors. How can you call upon God to enrich your friendships, so that you are dwelling in unity and delight?

Prayer: Thank you Jesus - for our friends. Please help us to heal any conflicts we are facing. Show us how to celebrate the unity that comes from your Spirit. Amen.

God's Favorites

23

by Jennifer Monroe

Saturday
June 16

1 Kings 15:25—17:24
Acts 10:24-48
Psalm 134:1-3
Proverbs 17:9-11

*Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."
-Acts 10:34-35*

The disciple and apostle Peter grew up as a Jew, someone who would have considered himself and his people special, chosen by God, set apart. They were different from others around them. They ate differently, dressed differently, behaved differently, and worshiped differently. Israelites could trace their history back to the time when God had specifically chosen Abraham and told him that he would bless his descendants and make them into a great nation, blessing those who blessed them and cursing those who cursed them.

To Jesus' followers, the idea of Jewish superiority was not simply a matter of pride or arrogance, but a fact. Imagine, then, the enormous paradigm shift that Peter and the other apostles had to make when God made it clear that the good news was no longer just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles too! It was against the law for Jews to even associate with Gentiles, and yet in Acts it is clear that, not only are these new followers of Christ to associate with Gentiles, but to consider them equals before God and to tell them the good news and baptize them, just like other Jews. It must have taken a great deal of courage and faith for Peter to share the gospel with Cornelius and his family and friends, and yet it is because of the obedience and faithfulness of Peter and many others like him that many of us today were told the gospel, even though we weren't born into the nation of Israel.

Now, we can all be considered "favorites" of God! 21st century Christians may consider themselves immune to the disease of racism, but we must be constantly on guard against the human tendency to show favoritism and to judge people based on anything besides their fear of God and their righteous acts.

Young People: How do you feel about your favorite toy? Did you know that's how God feels about you?

Adults: Is there any area of your life in which you are guilty of showing favoritism?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gift of your good news. Please give us the grace to see all people through your eyes. Amen.

Sunday
June 17

1 Kings 18:1-46
Acts 11:1-30
Psalm 135:1-21
Proverbs 17:12-13

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. - Ephesians 4:2-3

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

Connect Together (*How can we connect better together as Christ's family?)*

1. What is some wise advice you received when you were younger?
2. What is your favorite team sport?

Grow Together (*How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?)*

1. Read **1 Timothy 5:1-8, Ephesians 4, Genesis 2:23-24**
2. What are the common threads woven through each of these tests?
3. What is the "pure" state of human relationships before we experienced separation and alienation from God and each other?
4. What kind of things drive wedges between people?
5. What are we supposed to be doing to all people?
6. How does this work in a culture of competition, busyness, worry, defensiveness, selfishness, and materialism?
7. What does true "unity" and community look like? Does the church look this way? How and how not?
8. What are your most important relationships in life? How would you rank them?

Serve Together (*How can we serve better together both each other and the church?)*

1. How can you be a part of making the church be a place of welcome and refuge for all people to experience the unconditional love of Jesus?

Share Together (*How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?)*

1. What relationship in your life needs mending? Ask God to strengthen you to pray for and experience reconciliation.

Worship Together (*How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?)*

1. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

His Love Never Quits

25

by Marshall Worden

Monday
June 18

1 Kings 19:1-21
Acts 12:1-23
Psalm 136:1-26
Proverbs 17:14-15

... to the One who remembered us in our low estate his love endures forever. and freed us from our enemies, his love endures forever. -Psalm 136:23-24

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." -1 Kings 19:5b

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. -Acts 12:7

In today's reading in Kings, we find Elijah alone, abandoned, persecuted, afraid, running for his life and on the verge of quitting and giving up. And then in Acts, we find Peter persecuted, arrested and imprisoned by himself, awaiting public trial the next day, and his life imperiled. Few of us will ever face the extremities that Elijah and Peter confronted, but many of us know the feeling of being abandoned, scared, unloved, desperately alone, and at wits end - even without the strength to pray and seek God.

The psalmist and the stories of Elijah and Peter give assurance that God's love truly does endure forever. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* says it simply, "His love never quits." In these stories of crisis, God suddenly intervenes - he breaks into the circumstances of Elijah and Peter, touching them both and showing that he has not forgotten them.

The stories don't end there. We learn that Elijah was not alone because 7000 others had remained faithful to God. And Peter, while in jail alone, had a house full of friends where "many people had gathered and were praying." And, so, we have two promises in times of crisis: a God whose love never quits and the church that is always there.

Young People: Who are some people you can talk to when you face problems or feel scared? Do you find it hard to talk to God at those times?

Adults: Can you recall a time when God suddenly intervened in your life, showing you a way out of a difficult situation? Have you told someone about that time?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us a church family to pray for us in tough times and thank you for your forever love. Amen.

26 *Divine Guidance from the Holy Spirit*

by Marie Ruiz

Tuesday
June 19

1 Kings 20:1—21:29
Acts 12:24—13:15
Psalm 137:1-9
Proverbs 17:16

When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. -Acts 13:12

Today's Scripture shows us a clear glimpse of the passion that Paul and those younger disciples that came along on the mission journeys had to share the good news of Christ. And this passage also shows us the protestations that Paul faced as he went from town to town. At one point in this passage we learn of Elymas the sorcerer who was employed by the proconsul and his determination to oppose Paul's message so the proconsul would not believe. In those days people who were in positions of authority also had magicians, sorcerers and the like who would advise them and travel with them. No doubt Elymas feared he'd lose his job if the proconsul, Jergius Paulus became a believer.

Paul, armed with the Holy Spirit, faced his opposition. In fact, Paul looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"

The Scriptures also tell us that as a result of this encounter the sorcerer was struck with blindness for a time. This was a sign of God's ultimate power to not only the sorcerer, but also to those around him who witnessed and believed, including the proconsul, Jergius Paulus. I think the big point in this lesson today is that when we seek to do God's will, especially as we witness to unbelievers, there may be times when everything goes against us. But in due season, God's Word will prevail. We never have to worry about his Word coming back void. Hebrews 4:12 tells us the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Young people: When you pray, ask God for opportunities to speak about what God means to you. Your words will be a light to those who don't know Jesus.

Adults: Lord, help us to remember that we represent you in our daily walk. Help us always to point people toward Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the power in your Word. Help me to write this Word upon my heart and speak your Word with confidence as I place my trust in you. Amen.

The Condition of the Heart

27

by Joyce Harrington

Wednesday
June 20

1 Kings 22:1-53
Acts 13:16-41
Psalm 138:1-8
Proverbs 17:17-18

... I have found David son of Jess a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do. -Acts 13:22b

When God called upon Samuel to anoint David's head with oil causing the Spirit of the Lord to come upon him, Samuel was surprised at God's choice because he was the youngest son of Jesse and seemed the least likely choice. The Lord said to Samuel, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

David lived his life with a big heart full of love for God and God's ways, wanting to please God and be used by God. David wholeheartedly sought God's will. He would do what ever God asked him to do, no matter how difficult the circumstance. He accepted responsibility for his bad choices. He stood ready to repent when he made mistakes. He didn't blame others. He wasn't always perfect, but David never questioned who he wanted to control his life. He trusted God.

David poured out his heart to God through poetry in the Psalms. His Psalms were linked to specific circumstances in his life. As Eugene Peterson tells us, "Everything that happened in David's life became prayer, became the occasion for listening to and answering God." David brought to God every emotion experienced in his daily activity. In Psalm 19 we see how God's word was a balm to David. He tells us his word revives the soul, gives joy to the heart, gives light to the eyes, is more precious than gold.

Through David we see that God wants us to seek his priorities for us and make them our own. We can only do this if we allow God to show us our own situations from his perspective. As we adjust ourselves to God, our hearts will desire the same thing God's heart desires. Cultivate a heart for God.

Young people: Is what you want in your heart what God would want for you?

Adults: Have you been asking God to give you the desires of only your own heart, without first seeking to understand what is on his heart?

Prayer: Father, thank you for the example you give to us in David. Help us to cultivate receptive hearts so that your truth will reach our hearts and make a difference in our actions. Amen.

Know My Heart

by Anne Price

Thursday
June 21

2 Kings 1:1—2:25
Acts 13:42—14:7
Psalm 139:1-24
Proverbs 17:19-21

Search me, O God, and know my heart: test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. -Psalm 139:23-24

As I read the entire Psalm for today, I just said to myself, "Wow." I couldn't wait to pick just one verse to discuss with my Church Family. I read and reread verses 23 and 24 thinking that this was a prayer that I needed to carry with me at all times. Just knowing that God knows my heart gives me some peace.

My mind and emotions can take me away from his good plans for me. Do I sadden him when I sin? Yes, of course. God knows our every thought, word and act. Nothing is hidden from him. May we take his promise that he will be with us in all situations to heart. We are never alone.

Young People: Know that God is aware that you may feel bad at times. Yet, He loves you every minute.

Adults: God is our loving Father and he created us from the beginning. We are his treasures.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for being with me. I know that I will have tests in life. You will take me through triumphantly, if I let you. Amen.

Widow's Oil

29

by Scott Coverdale

Friday
June 22

2 Kings 3:1—4:17
Acts 14:8-28
Psalm 140:1-13
Proverbs 17:22

Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't just ask for a few. -2 Kings 4:3

In today's reading we have the story of Elisha and the widow's oil. Her son's are in danger of being sold into slavery to pay the widow's debts, and Elisha bails her out. She has nothing but a little pot of oil, from which she manages, with a bit of divine interference, to fill every pot and jar and Tupperware bowl that she can find. Elisha then tells her to sell the oil to pay her debt, and then live with her two sons on what is left over.

I feel like that widow, sometimes. I feel that God is causing a miracle to happen in my own life. Every day that I live, God pours a gift into it. It is the blessing of having people in my life to love, and the blessing of being loved myself. It is the presence of created beauty in the world, and the capacity to be in awe. There is blessing in work and in sleep and having plenty to eat. Some blessing comes well-disguised - there is pain and difficulty that deepens my life and causes me to come troubled to the Lord. When I bring pain to God there is opportunity for faith, opportunity to receive a kind of comfort that I would not know if my life was just how I would like to write it. That is not to say that I go looking for trouble - no thanks! But even in the most difficult times, I know that every day is a gift, and every day that I bring to the Lord can be filled with the greatest blessing of all - the knowledge of his compassionate love.

Young People: What blessing does God pour into your life? Do you always see it, or do you need to be reminded of it to recognize these things as blessings from God?

Adults: Doesn't it sometimes require a shift in perspective for us to see the work of God as it truly is? Challenge yourself to recognize the many regular ways that God brings blessing into our lives. Then challenge yourself to recognize the "backdoor" blessings that are harder to acknowledge, but that, depending on our own response to them, can bring us closer to the Lord.

Prayer: Dear God of many blessings, please help us to see the diverse ways that you bring goodness into our lives; both the regular ways that we tend to take for granted and the difficult ways that we tend to avoid. Please give us eyes to see your work and beauty in the world around us and in our own lives. Amen.

Watch Your Mouth!

by Frank Shallenberger

Saturday
June 23

2 Kings 4:18—5:27
Acts 15:1-35
Psalm 141:1-10
Proverbs 17:23

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. - Psalm 141:3

There are times in my life when I find myself reverting to the old Carnal man instead of being the Spiritual man that God wants me to be. This usually happens when I find myself in an aggravating situation which I should have handled in a calm and sophisticated manner rather than with an overbearing and aggressive attitude. Each time this happens two things occur:

1. I have cast off my Christian cloak and donned the Carnal one.
2. The Lord brings the matter to my attention and I know that I must make every effort to rectify the situation.

When this happens, I see myself the way the Lord sees me and I am ashamed. Jesus sacrificed so much and I have repaid him thusly. David had the same kind of problem for himself and he recorded a prayer for people like me in verse three of Psalm 141.

Have you ever found yourself in a position where you have cast off the mantle that God gave you and exposed the carnal person underneath? When God lets you look at yourself do you imagine what others must see? Jesus told us that he will forgive us our sins when we have made every effort to make things right and confessed them with true sorrow. He wipes away the stain of red and make our souls a glistening white. What a wondrous gift!

Young People: Do you watch your language? Are you careful about the words you use?

Adults: Have you ever found yourself in situations where you “lost it”? If you did, did you make every effort to rectify that situation through repentance and confession to Jesus? And most important, did you make every effort to rectify the situation with the individual or individuals affected by you?

Prayer: Beloved Jesus, how ashamed I am when I cast off the mantle of righteousness you made such a great sacrifice to give to me and expose the base, carnal man underneath. Forgive me Lord for my transgressions and let each one be a learning experience for me so that as time goes by these episodes occur less and less frequently. Amen.

Sunday Study Guide

31

Sunday
June 24

2 Kings 6:1—7:20
Acts 15:36—16:15
Psalm 142:1-7
Proverbs 17:24-25

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." -Genesis 1:28

Each Sunday, we offer a study guide for individual, family, or small group use, based on the week's Biblical text for the sermon.

Connect Together (*How can we connect better together as Christ's family?*)

1. What have been some important pets to you?

Grow Together (*How can we grow better together as students of God's Word?*)

1. Read **Genesis 1:20-31, 2:15-20**

2. What is the relationship between God and creation, God and humanity, and humanity and creation in these texts, and what is their distinctiveness?
3. In 2:19, what is the significance of Adam naming each of the animals?
4. Just as humanity suffers because of sin, in what ways does sin invade the world?
5. The environment is a politically charged topic these days. Without getting political or personal, discuss the current state of the environment and what our role as Christians is in caring for it?
6. What grade would you give the church and Christians in general for being good stewards of the environment?
7. What are things that individuals and churches can do even in a larger society to demonstrate Christ's love for people and the creation he has made?

Serve Together (*How can we serve better together both each other and the church?*)

1. How can we pray for and find ways to be better stewards of the environment?

Share Together (*How can we share the love of Christ better together in our community?*)

1. What are community efforts you can pray for or be involved in which extend care and stewardship over creation?

Worship Together (*How can we worship God better together through our prayers, and songs?*)

1. How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

Faith Expressed Through Love

by Deb Van Scoyk

Monday
June 25

2 Kings 8:1—9:13
Acts 16:16-40
Psalm 143:1-12
Proverbs 17:26

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!' The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' -Acts 16:27-30

Imagine the shock of a jailer whose charge, upon receiving the perfect opportunity for escape, chose instead to stay the course, press the point, take a firm stand in dedicated pronouncement of truth.

How striking are the likenesses of the alleged crimes of Paul and Silas (... *advocating customs unlawful for us ... to accept or practice.* -Acts 16:21) to those causing strife and inhumane practices today. Our world's focus grows increasingly toward our differences, with the resultant declaration of ownership, fear of persecution, and quest for power.

Fifteen English sailors were recently accused of entering waters "owned by Iran," and the world sat, in near breathless fear, anticipating the plight of these young people and the potential for unrelenting atrocities and irremediable devastation. We watch, hearts breaking, as blood pours in the streets of Iraq, all for want of acceptable customs and practices - rules by which harmony can prevail in spite of our differences.

One has to wonder how different the world could be were we to ascribe to Paul's words: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ, you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (*Galatians 5:4-6*)

Young People: Do you have friends who are not Christians? Do you believe God loves them just as he loves you?

Adults: It is possible to rejoice in our differences? Can we hold firm to our beliefs, just as Paul and Silas did, serving as a witness to Christ?

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to embrace all our brothers and sisters, striving to serve as a living example of your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Mighty David

by John McKee

33

Tuesday
June 26

2 Kings 9:14—10:31
Acts 17:1-34
Psalm 144:1-15
Proverbs 17:27-28

God had a plan for his life
From the very beginning ...
As he does for us *all* before birth.

The Psalmist, David, loved God ...
For all the blessings bestowed
By the maker of Heaven and earth.

God led Samuel, his Prophet,
To Jesse's eight sons
To anoint David, the youngest of
all.

And when the king was tormented
They brought David before him
For his music soothed the heart of
King Saul.

One day the Philistine armies
Had gathered for battle ...
Challenging the men of Israel to
fight.

Their champion, Goliath,
Came out to taunt them
Both at dawn and also early each
night.

For forty days Goliath bellowed
To send to him their best man
The vanquished would be
enslaved.

The frightened people of Israel
Had no one who could best him ...
And they cowered as he ranted and
raved.

Leaving the sheep with a keeper,
Jesse sent his son, David,
With food for his three hungry
brothers ...

When he heard Goliath's threat
David volunteered to fight him ...
For he didn't fear him as did the
others.

Selecting stones from a brook
He advanced on the warrior ...
His first stone struck Goliath dead

David then picked up the sword
The slain giant had dropped
And severed the Philistine's head.

Young People: Psalm 144 was written by David and titled, 'The Warrior's Psalm.' David was chosen by God when he was but a young lad and given unsurpassed warrior skills. He loved God with a deep abiding love which is reflected in his Psalms.

Adults: Though we do not require the warrior skills of David, we should all strive to emulate his deep, abiding love for our God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father we give you thanks for David and ask that you grant us courage such as his to face the trials we are confronted with in this life. We ask this in the name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.

A New Poem of Praise

by John McKee

Wednesday
June 27

2 Kings 10:32—12:21
Acts 18:1-22
Psalm 145:1-21
Proverbs 18:1

I will write a new poem
Of praise to the Lord ...
For that's what I feel led to do.

I will give thanks to God
For showering blessings on me
Many more than this sinner is
due.

His blessings always begin
At the first light of dawn
As the sun heralds in a new day

Turning the early morning sky
Into a kaleidoscope of color ...
That chases the darkness away.

It is then we commune ...
While everything's still.
And as I stand gazing upward in
awe,

I send to him a quick prayer...
My first of the day ...
In appreciation of the dawn I just
saw ...

I thank him for the colors
As well as my eyes
That transmits the view to my
mind.

Though my eyes are imperfect
I can see well enough,
So I give thanks to him I am not
blind.

As the sun rises higher,
The birds begin singing
Flitting about in their search for
food.

Listening to their sweet songs
Fills me with his peace ...
Putting my heart in joyful mood.

I give thanks then again
For the creatures he's made
In the sea, upon earth and above

He is a wonderful God ...
Who demonstrates every day
He's a righteous God of holy love.

Young People: Psalm 145 was written by David and titled, 'The Goodness of the Lord.' David again speaks of his great love and devotion to God ... extolling his works, his goodness and his justice

Adults: In this Psalm David is very eloquent in his praise to the Lord God. Although David, like us, had feet of clay ... he knew he was beloved by God just as we are, and he returned that love and was thankful for the blessings bestowed upon him by the Father.

Prayer: Dear God, we give you our thanks and praise for all the blessings you shower upon us each day. Asking your forgiveness for the sins we have either willfully or unwittingly committed we humbly seek your unerring guidance that we will be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Just Shoot!

35

by Andy Ross

Thursday
June 28

2 Kings 13:1—14:29
Acts 18:23—19:12
Psalm 146:1-10
Proverbs 18:2-3

“Open the east window,” he said, and he opened it. “Shoot!” Elisha said, and he shot. -2 Kings 13:17

I won't forget the classy and cool bow and arrow set I received as a young man. It was impressive, not like the kiddy-kind, but a for-real bow with arrows you would use seriously for target practice and shooting. I remember learning in my young years how shooting a bow and arrow was not at all easy like they were portrayed in movies. I learned that if I practiced and practiced, I could sometimes hit the target. And on a very rare occasion, hit the center. My fingers got sore, but I had fun in honing my skill.

Sometimes you learn by doing. I could have read seven books on archery, but would never have improved my shot, as I did with that bow and arrow set in my backyard. In our life with God, it's often the same way — the best way to get to know God is to get moving; or trying; or acting out on our faith and beliefs.

The prophet Elisha knew that for the king to understand that God's will was that he should go forth in battle and face his enemy, that he might need to pick up a bow and try it!

Is there a window on acting out our faith that you need to open today? Is there a way you could demonstrate or practice Christian courage today? Is there some way you could demonstrate to God and others that you are ready to not just believe, but DO what you believe?

Young People: What are some things you've had to practice to get right? What is a part of your life with God you need to start doing, or practicing, to really get?

Adults: Think of an area of your life where your courage could use a boost. Is there one thing you could do to call upon God, or act on God's leading, to keep moving forward, in faith?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see, but also open the windows of obedience, with you ... for you. Amen.

Choices

by Jerry Smith

Friday
June 29

2 Kings 15:1—16:20
Acts 19:13-41
Psalm 147:1-20
Proverbs 18:4-5

He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his fathers had done. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. -2 Kings 15:9

It doesn't take long as you read in the Books of Kings and Chronicles to realize what a mistake the Jewish people made when they chose to be ruled by Kings. God's plan was that they would be ruled by Judges who had access to God. God told Samuel that when the people chose Kings that they rejected him and his rule. However, he told Samuel to warn the people and tell them exactly what they were going to suffer under ruling kings. (1 Samuel 8) They persisted in their choice.

We Christians are, “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people” (1 Peter 2:9) who are still responsible for the choices we make. God wants us to make the right choice and he gave his active, living Word to guide us and his Spirit to lead us into all truth. Still, the choices we make are of our own choosing. Even the world we live in is evil and full of trials and temptations, but if you have chosen Jesus as your Lord and Savior be of good cheer because Jesus overcame the world. (John 16:33)

Youth and Adults: We humans do the best we can with our finite wisdom writing these devotionals. So don't let this be your only spiritual exercise. None of us can substitute the infinite wisdom of God found only in his holy Word nor can we provide the wee small voice that can only be heard if you wait and listen.

Prayer: Father as we come to you through your Son we often lack the wisdom to formulate our petitions into meaningful phrases but we are so thankful that you know our hearts and know before we ask what we need and are so gracious to grant those needs and to lead us into all righteousness. Amen.

Imitating Jesus

37

by Jennifer Monroe

Saturday
June 30

2 Kings 17:1—18:12
Acts 20:1-38
Psalm 148:1-14
Proverbs 18:6-7

¹⁴But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the Lord their God. ¹⁵They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their fathers and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the Lord had ordered them, "Do not do as they do," and they did the things the Lord had forbidden them to do. -??

Have you ever played dress-up? As a child, I loved to try on my mother's cast-off finery. Old bridesmaids dresses, fancy hats, and gaudy costume jewelry could transform me from a little girl into a grand lady. Children often enjoy playing in their parents' clothes, pretending to be grown-up and imitating adult behavior. It isn't long before those same children find themselves truly grown-up and behaving exactly like their parents do, mimicking their mannerisms, speech patterns, and behaviors. It seems true that we will eventually become like those whom we follow. If we follow the example of God as he is revealed in Christ, we will become like him. Similarly, if we follow the shallow, useless idols created by the world, we will become just as shallow and useless. The key, then, is in picking a good model. The Israelites followed worthless idols and, in no time, became worthless themselves. They succeeded in their quest to become just like all the other nations around them, but in the process, lost their unique mission and their unique relationship with God. Christians today can learn from this example. Rather than seeking only to imitate the world around us as closely as possible, we should prayerfully consider what it looks like to imitate Christ, even when that means standing out from the crowd.

Young People: Who is one person you know that you would like to become like when you are older? Why do you admire them?

Adults: Who do you think you look more like, Jesus, or the world around you? What's one thing you can do to be more purposeful about imitating Jesus?

Prayer: Lord, we want to be your disciples, to follow you, and become more like you. Please give us the strength and courage we need to live as imitators of you and not of worthless idols. Amen.

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, July 1, 2007.



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