

Northminster Daily Devotions

Seek
and Ye Shall
Find



Vol. 34 No. 7

July 29 - August 25, 2007

It is our belief that reading through God's Word is a transforming experience as we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us Biblical truths and as we connect and find our place in God's story of calling, redeeming, and sending.

The One Year Bible reading plan takes us day by day through the bible with an Old Testament, New Testament, Psalm and Proverb reading every day. Those readings are listed on each day in this devotional guide. Use your own bible and four bookmarks, or you can pick up a One Year Bible in the church office or at a bookstore. The devotionals written here are the fruit of a dedicated team of writers who base their writing on one of the Scripture verses for that days reading. It is our hope that each devotional opens a door for you to have an encounter with the scripture and that it can even be shared with family and friends as you discuss the themes, challenges and hopes that the reading brings.

Also discover the Sunday Study Guides that have been provided here for small group, family or individual use. They complement Sunday morning worship at NPC, and are a launching point for going more in-depth into the bible reading for the morning.

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

If you would like to use your God-given talent to become a part of the devotional writing team, 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!

Is Satan Real?

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Sunday Study Guide

Sunday, July 29

2 Chronicles 24:1—25:28

Romans 12:1-21

Psalm 22:19-31

Proverbs 20:8-10

Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. -1 Peter 5:9

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?)*

S What is the longest you went without eating? How does hunger affect you?

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

1. Read **1 Peter 5:8-11 & Matthew 4:1-11**
2. In these two passages, one is an account of Jesus' encounter with the devil, and the other is a warning to resist the devil's attacks on us. How are these two passages similar and different?
3. What were the circumstances of Jesus' temptations?
4. For each of the three temptations:
 - a. What is its nature?
 - b. What potentially might appeal to Jesus?
 - c. What price would there be if he were to yield?
5. Compare Satan's and Jesus' use of scripture. How can we take care to interpret the Bible correctly?
6. What kind of temptations surround you?
7. How does Peter suggest we can stand firm?

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

S How can you be in prayer for those who struggle to resist temptation?

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

S How can you demonstrate God's power in your life to resist temptations that encourage others to find strength in God's grace?

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?

Too Big For His Shores

by Norman Spindler

Monday
July 30

2 Chronicles 26:1—28:27

Romans 13:1-14

Psalm 23:1-6

Proverbs 20:11

Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen and made him king in place of his father Amaziah. -2 Chronicles 26:1

As we look through 1 and 2 Chronicles, written by the priest Ezra, which tells the history of the kings of Israel, we find that it is a little different from the history related in 1 and 2 Kings.

Verse 3 tells us that Uzziah ruled for 52 years and verse 4 states he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

He and his nation of Judah did great things, winning many battles with the Lord's help. He constructed many helpful things for the people of Judah, and had a well-trained army. His fame spread throughout the area, all the way to Egypt.

However, Uzziah, like some persons we read about today, became filled with his own self, and believed he was above the laws of God.

This type of people are vain in their thinking, believing that no one can or will come up against them.

Uzziah went into the Lord's temple and would not listen to the priests, and lit incense. Soon sores appeared on his body, he developed leprosy, which caused him to live the rest of his life separate from his family, until he died.

Some would say he became too big for his shores. No one is above the laws of God.

Youth: Have you seen some friend or acquaintance think they were above the rules, but soon are put down to size? How can you help them?

Adults: Set the right example for your family, that right is right all the time.

Prayer: Dear Lord instill in us the right ways we should travel. We pray for help in achieving success in our endeavors, and have knowledge that you strengthen us, and acknowledge your assistance. Amen.

Real Rejoicing

5

by Norman Spindler

Tuesday
July 31

2 Chronicles 29:1-36
Romans 14:1-23
Psalm 24:1-10
Proverbs 20:12

Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned for twenty-nine years. -2 Chronicles 29:1

Ezra wrote of all the kings, some good and some bad, like Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Verse 2 says that Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Hezekiah's initial task was to get his kingdom on the right side of the Lord, because his father was unfaithful and the country lost God's protection and assistance. They were defeated in battle and the sons, daughters, and wives were subjected to captivity.

What would he do to get the Lord to look favorably on Judah again? He called all the Priests and Levites and told them to consecrate themselves, and then consecrate the Temple in Jerusalem. The task was so big that the Levites had their kinsmen assist them, as the people brought 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep and goats as burnt offerings and thank offerings. When the Temple was opened the people rejoiced.

It puts us in mind of a successful season for a sports team and the winning of a championship. A lot of rejoicing after some down years.

Also there is rejoicing in some Christian communities when a nation allows missionaries to enter and proclaim the words of The Bible through the nation. As more people learn of Jesus and his beautiful life and words, they turn from self to believing and helping others to change and receive his blessings. We reflect on the Northminster youth and young adults that spread the word in far off places, and come home rejoicing not only for those that have received the word, but for the blessings they receive for having been there and seen the change in the people and also in themselves. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Young People: Have you ever thought of the impact you can make on friends by talking to them about Jesus?

Adults: Your duties begin when your family is very young, and does not end. You can also receive an awakening when you talk to others.

Prayer: Jesus, we ask your blessing upon us to release our thoughts and tongue to deliver your Word to people we come in contact daily. In your name we pray. Amen.

6 *How Many Snares There Seem To Be!*

by Brice Menaugh

Wednesday
August 1

2 Chronicles 30:1—31:21

Romans 15:1-22

Psalm 25:1-15

Proverbs 20:13-15

*"My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only he will release my feet from the snare."
-Psalm 25:15*

And how many snares there seem to be! Look at your life. How many brambles and small thorns attempt to prick us and hold us back on a daily occasion? How many opportunities there are to give up, lose patience, speak a dreaded word, or pass by someone in need? While Romans 15:1-22 speaks mainly of hope here in Psalm 25 the author declares that the Lord - your Lord, my Lord, ... our Lord, is the only one who can save us, save us from the snares. Isn't this world one big snare, always trying to "bring us down", wipe us out, frustrate and confuse us? Whenever I hear that word snare I always picture a giant steel bear trap and an unsuspecting tender barefoot planting firmly into its center. Ouch. But with God with us (*or us with God*) how many of those "snares" become opportunities for hope, for trust, for faith, for witness and challenge? How different life is with God. When our eyes are "ever on the Lord" our views change. No longer is life one big mine field to navigate, but suddenly it becomes an opportunity to help others and serve the Lord.

Young People: How can just thinking about Jesus prevent you from getting into a bad situation?

Adults: Though the language of the Psalmist is metaphorical and allegorical, can we, and/or how can we, really have our eyes "ever on the Lord" in our daily journey?

Prayer: Dear Lord, May our eyes always be on you. May our thoughts always be with you. May we seek your direction for each fork in the road that we come to and God help us to be calm so that we may better hear your word. Please be with us, continue to speak to us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

King of Chump

7

by Scott Coverdale

Thursday
August 2

2 Chronicles 32:1-33:13

Romans 15:23-16:9

Psalm 25:16-22

Proverbs 20:16-18

And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom.

-2 Chronicles 33:13

Manasseh was a total chump of a king. He did things that God had commanded against, including building altars to strange gods, worshiping the stars, sacrificing his children, and practicing witchcraft. Finally, God had enough of him, and sent him into exile with a ring in his nose. Then, of course, Manasseh repents and pleads to God for mercy. The funny thing to me is that God is “moved by his entreaty,” and restores him to the throne. I think that if I were God, I would have turned a jaundiced eye to Manasseh and made some cynical remark about opportunistic repentance.

God had mercy on an undeserving fool. After God saves him, Manasseh actually makes good on his repentance, clearing out the idols and altars, and restoring the worship of Yahweh to the kingdom.

It seems to me that there may be a lesson for us in this story. We have all known people who have risen and fallen like the tide in a seemingly endless cycle of sin and repentance. It is hard not to become jaded to the pleas of people with the look and feel of circumstantial hardship on them, asking for one more chance. I know my own tendency is to be skeptical of folks who promise to clean up their act after getting some huge break on the consequences of their behavior.

I don't see into the heart of a person the way that God did to Manasseh. I cannot judge whether a person is sincere or not. The truth is that I can barely know my own heart, whether it is sincere or not. But in this story, it begins to look as though God is eager to redeem us, eager to forgive, eager to extend mercy to the most desperate sinners. It looks like there is hope for all of us. Thank God.

Young People: Do you ever feel like God cannot forgive you? What does the story of Manasseh tell us about God?

Adults: Is it hard to accept forgiveness from God? Is God happy or reluctant to forgive us?

Prayer: God of forgiveness, please allow us to have confidence in your forgiveness of us, and be quick to forgive others. Amen.

House of the Lord

by Anne Price

Friday
August 3

2 Chronicles 33:14-34:33

Romans 16:10-27

Psalms 26:1-12

Proverbs 20:19

I love the house where you live, O Lord, the place where your glory dwells.

-Psalm 26:8

As I read the Psalm I think of all of the churches that I have attended over my lifetime. As a child in my hometown of San Pedro, California, I spent every Sunday at Holy Trinity Church. My parents were in the choir, so we may have been in attendance for all three services every Sunday. I can picture in my mind even now the stained glass windows, the statues of the Saints, the Stations of the Cross, and of course the massive cross with Jesus dying for our sins above the altar. Bells would ring, incense would fill the church. The organ would give out heavenly sounds. The memory is still so strong in that all of my senses were involved.

Over the years I have been in a variety of churches around the country. I have been awed by massive cathedrals and touched by a small church in East Texas that held only a handful of people. As we sit in our own house of the Lord at Northminster we can be apart from the rush of earthly things.

God, I love being in your house wherever it is. Your people worship, praise and pray together. Your temple glows with your Glory.

Young People: Do you feel the love of Jesus as you walk into your own special church?

Adults: God, I feel the glow of your love in your house.

Prayer: Lord, I love the Temple where you live, whether it is in a building or my own private place of prayer. You are with me everywhere. Amen.

What Name Do You Claim

9

by Jerry Smith

Saturday
August 4

2 Chronicles 35:1—36:23

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Psalm 27:1-6

Proverbs 20:20-21

... One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? ... -1 Corinthians 1:12-13

What if we substituted Presbyterian for Paul, Baptist for Cephas and Methodist for Apollos? Isn't that the principle that Paul was opposing? No church or denomination can save you. Only Christ has that authority. That's why I claim the name of Jesus Christ and proclaim to be a Christian worshiping in a Presbyterian church. Why Presbyterian? I believe the Presbyterian Constitution (*made up of The Book of Confessions and The Book of Order*) to be the finest expression of faith and orderly conduct of that faith ever assembled by man.

Why Northminster? Let me count the ways;

1. Because Jesus Christ is preached by all four of our pastors. The Church can't save but God honors the lifting up of His Son and people are saved by it.
2. Northminster is a Confessional church. Every Doctrine used in the confessional statement is a direct quote from our constitution.
3. Northminster is a lighthouse directing the lost in a dark world into God's glorious light.

We should thank God daily for Northminster and hold up our Shepherds that they might continue to be effective witnesses for Christ; that every function, every class, every program and every committee be Christ centered and Christ honoring. We should also be vigilant to protect this Christ-centered objective we have at Northminster for we are a minority in our own denomination and presbytery. There is an ever building pressure to go with the flow of culturally motivated, watered down theology.

Young People: There are many forces vying for your allegiance but Jesus is the only one who will never let you down.

Adults: All who call upon the name of the Lord are your brothers and sisters regardless of their denomination.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for all our brothers and sisters and especially those at Northminster and for the shepherds you provided to watch over and guide us and for Jesus Christ who made it all possible and in whose name we pray. Amen.

10 **Does God Predestine People To Believe And Not Believe?**

Sunday Study Guide

Sunday, August 5

Ezra 1:1—2:70

1 Corinthians 1:18—2:5

Psalms 27:7-14

Proverbs 20:22-23

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

-Ephesians 1:4-6

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. When you "count your blessings" what is at the top of the list?
2. Whom do you know that has been adopted?

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

1. Read **Ephesians 1:3-14** (*for further study see Romans 9:14-29*)
2. What mystery has God revealed as part of his ultimate plan and purpose?
3. What is God's mark?
4. How is it to know that God has chosen you before the creation of the world?
5. In the Romans passage, what does Paul say is the relationship between God's mercy and humanity's desire or effort?
6. What seems to be the limits of God's wrath and mercy, and can they be measured or known?
7. What urgency do you feel to be a part of sharing God's goodness and glory with others?

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

1. How can you pray for those who struggle or doubt that God really loves or has "adopted" them as his precious child?

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

1. Do you know people who are resistant to the Christian faith because they see God as overly judgmental or capricious toward those who do not follow Jesus? How can you pray for them, and be a living example of God's purpose and love for them?

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?

Living Well Together

11

by Marshall Worden

Monday
August 6

Ezra 3:3—4:23
1 Corinthians 2:6—3:4
Psalm 28:1-9
Proverbs 20:24-25

... the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem ... When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. -Ezra 3:1b,10-11

I have spent most of my professional life involved in community and economic development work. Oftentimes this has resulted in major building and construction projects that have brought great personal satisfaction and positive community benefits. A great many times, however, I've experienced frustration and witnessed antagonism and division amongst citizens and civic leaders. While completion of the construction project described in Ezra was delayed to a later date because of external forces, we see important principles for successful community life in this passage.

First, the people came together as one. There was unity, a shared passion for the future. My experience has been that splintered communities - church or secular - are incapable of much progress until there is reconciliation, renewed trust and a real appreciation of life together.

Second, there was spiritual preparation and worship to prepare for the work ahead. I've witnessed fabulous building projects here at Northminster. They were successful because prayer and worship undergirded those projects.

Third, praise and glory was given to God. The community understood that it was God's goodness that made progress possible. The secular model of self-congratulation just doesn't work.

Young People: How well are you getting along with your friends? Does Jesus have any suggestions for being really good friends with others?

Adults: Have you experienced disappointments lately in work, family or neighborhood life? What can be done to restore wholesomeness and wholeness in those situations?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us a pattern for living in love one with another. Help us to be one body faithful to you. Amen.

12 **God Shines His Lamp Upon You?**

by Frank Shallenberger

Tuesday
August 7

Ezra 4:24—6:22
1 Corinthians 3:5-23
Psalm 29:1-11
Proverbs 20:26-27

The lamp of the LORD searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being. -Proverbs 20:27

In ancient Greece a philosopher named Diogenes searched the city of Athens holding a lantern. When asked what he was doing with a lantern in daylight he answered “I’m looking for an honest man.”

God does the same thing with us. He looks at us and in us and he sees everything about us both good and bad. He knows every good, kind, decent thing we’ve ever done and every dark and despicable thought that has ever entered our mind. When I ponder that, I become unnerved. Things that I have done or have failed to do, thoughts that I have had and tried to abolish or have encouraged and enjoyed, all of those are an open book for God. That’s rather frightening isn’t it? What do you do when bad thoughts enter your mind? Do you give into them and encourage them or do you try to change to other thoughts?

Paul wrote “Finally, brothers (*and sisters*), whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.” Jesus said “without him” we can do nothing but, with him, we can do anything (*spiritually*). These are the times when we need to turn to Jesus and ask him to take the evil from our minds and hearts and fill them with all that is pure, righteous and holy.

Young People: Did you know you always have a friend at your side to turn to for help when no one else can help you?

Adults: When despicable thoughts enter your mind do you try to rid yourself of them by yourself or do you ask Jesus to take these things away from you and fill your heart and mind with admirable and pure thoughts and ideas?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, strengthen us in our faith so that when the first evil designs of Satan probe us we immediately call upon you. Help us to remember that by ourselves we can do nothing but with Christ we can do anything. Thank you Lord for always being there by our side, aiding us and strengthening us as we pass through the trials and tribulations of this life. Amen.

Rejoice, and Give Thanks to the Lord!¹³

by Marie Ruiz

Wednesday, August 8, 2007

August 8

Ezra 7:1-8:20

1 Corinthians 4:1-21

Psalms 30:1-12

Proverbs 20:28-30

... that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever. -Psalm 30:12

In this Psalm, David is rejoicing over the temple materials gathered to be built. David rejoices and praises God because he didn't allow his enemies to gloat or triumph over him - he thanks God for sparing him in life and protecting him from danger. David had to overcome many battles or obstacles and continually seeks God's forgiveness and mercy. These are the building blocks of character that made David a great king, even one who was called a man after God's own heart.

I have just come back from a short term missions trip in the Yucatan. There were many obstacles we needed to overcome in order to finish the roofs for the homes in the small Mayan village of El Naranjal, Mexico. Because of the heavy workload that most of us were not used to, I was constantly in an attitude of thanks for the safety God afforded us on this trip. So many dangers lurked from the heavy items we needed to carry, the lime from the cement we mixed that irritated our skin, the barely functioning electricity to the village that was on and off every other day that was needed to pump the water and make the cement for the roofs. All these issues could have dashed our hopes of completing the work, but God was faithful to help us complete what we set out to do and protected us from danger.

This Psalm reminds me of the small steps or building blocks that we add each day to our spiritual structure and throughout life that strengthen us and enable us to stand tall and support the faith we build daily as we walk through this life on earth. One of the hallmarks of our walk should be our song of thanks and praise to God.

Young people: Can you thank God for something that He's done for you today?

Adults: God loves to hear us utter the words **thank you**. Talk to God today and tell him what is on your heart. But most of all don't forget to say **thank you!**

Prayer: Dear Lord, how often we come before you with our requests and fail to thank you for sustaining the very life we owe to you. Thank you Lord for giving us the very breath we need to **thank you!** Amen.

Our Refuge is Rock Solid

by Amanda Place

Thursday
August 9

Ezra 8:21—9:15
1 Corinthians 5:1-13
Psalm 31:1-8
Proverbs 21:1-2

Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. -Psalms 31: 2

Even though the global population is soaring into the billions, ultimately there are only two kinds of people: There are those who are certain the world is going to hell in a hand basket and those who believe the best is yet to come.

(Actually there is a third kind of person who thinks traditional Scottish music is the highest form of creative expression, but I don't want to add that group here, even though you know who they are)

Now it hardly takes a genius to point out that we live in dangerous and uncertain times.

As much as we often want to find our own answers, be our own font of knowledge, we will not reach those answers without asking for help from our heavenly Father. Each of us walks a path that has distress and at times we weep. When trust is given to God the distress becomes manageable and the tears subside. God is our strength, a rock in the rocky shoals of modern living.

Young People: Can you remember what caused you to be sad and needing help some time during the past school year? Did you find a new way to handle the situation? Did you ask for God's help in finding an answer?

Adults: Have the worries of life and realities of aging caused you deep sadness? Have you experienced death of a loved one before his or her time? Have you only looked to yourself or in books or on the internet for answers on how to cope? What would be a better way to assuage your worries?

Prayer: Father, no matter our worries we have you to turn our hearts to and to bend our knees in respect and love before you. Thank you Father for the strength you can offer when we are at our weakest. Amen.

Our Litigious Nature

15

by Deb Van Scoyk

Friday
August 10

Ezra 10:1-44
1 Corinthians 6:1-20
Psalm 31:9-18
Proverbs 21:3

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! -1 Corinthians 6:1-3

I spent nearly twenty-five years making my living as a paralegal, primarily in law firms specializing in litigation. Through the course of my career, I was privileged to support the work of two particularly dedicated and learned judges for whom I developed great respect and admiration.

However, upon review, I find those cases that most profoundly touched my heart and that have had the most far-reaching influence are those whose ultimate resolution came about through mediation or arbitration. For this reason, I was awestruck by Paul's challenge to the Corinthians to settle their personal differences without the need for one brother to go to law against another. He even goes so far as to attempt to shame them by pointing out their practice of engaging in litigious behavior "in front of unbelievers." Further, Paul reminds us that we (*"the saints"* - set apart by our relationship with Jesus Christ) will one day be called upon to judge the world with Christ in his kingdom. Imagine participating in judging angels!

With this knowledge in mind, when we are next wronged by a brother or sister, might our impulse to take the matter "before the ungodly" give us pause? Will we recall Paul's words, clearly still pertinent today, and recognize that the fact of a lawsuit among us means we are completely defeated already?

Young People: If someone makes you really mad, how are you going to solve your differences?

Adults: Are we preparing ourselves for that day when we will judge angels?

Prayer: Lord, we earnestly seek your strong hand in stifling our shortsighted impulses toward gaining quick retribution. Guide us instead toward wisdom, compassion and grace, that we might be prepared for more than the things of this life. Amen.

16 *Your Body Does Not Belong To You*

by Brice Menaugh

Saturday
August 11

Nehemiah 1:1—3:14
1 Corinthians 7:1-24
Psalm 31:19-24
Proverbs 21:4

The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. -1 Corinthians 7:4

Your body does not belong to you? Your body is not your own? Ahhh!! Less than a year after being married I realized that my every action and emotion affected my wife's emotions and overall state of well being, and inversely, hers affected mine. It wasn't until after the first two weeks of our first born son's birth did I realize my sleep patterns would never be the same. But it really wasn't until the birth of my second son did I realize that my life was not my own. Who doesn't struggle with the concept of sacrifice and selflessness daily? But looking at this description of a physical and biblical marriage above concerning how a couple should view their relationship possibly also reveals how I should view my relationship with God. It is said that our bodies are from and for God, our lives are for God, our words, our hearts, and our minds are for God. My non-Christian friends think this type of relationship with your spouse or with God is ridiculous, impossible, and even medieval. From the outside looking in, it does seem to be counter to modern "me first" notions. But to make anything work well don't we have to commit to it wholly? One problem is that to give yourself, myself, ourselves, to another you, I, we, must trust them and believe in them. I trust my wife and I believe in her. But we, humans are fallible, we make mistakes. I trust God and I believe in God. He doesn't make mistakes. I trust that he exists and I believe that he will be there always even though I don't deserve it or can ever earn it. I trust that he will use me in the right place at the right time, that he will give me the words and the ideas to pass on.

It is a leap of faith to get married, to have babies, and to give your body, your actions your life over to another, to Christ, but *with* that trust, that faith then maybe I, you, we, can begin to give our selves over completely to something far greater than we could ever be alone.

For young people: How do married couples rely on each other?

For adults: Can you think of any specific examples of how our bodies can or have served Christ?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I trust you with my body and my life. Please help me to be gentle yet strong for those closest to me. Thank you God for the gifts, the trust, and the people you place in our life. Amen.

Why the Old and the New Testaments? 17

Sunday Study Guide

Sunday, August 12

Nehemiah 3:15—5:13

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Psalms 32:1-11

Proverbs 21:5-7

But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

-Numbers 11:29

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?)*

S Do you remember your first Bible? Where did you get it, and what do you remember about it?

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

1. Pray for God's guidance and read **Numbers 11:23-30**.
2. What is your first reaction to this passage?
3. How does God speak in this passage?
4. How does the Spirit revealed?
5. We believe that the Bible is inspired by God's Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments. How is the writing and interpretation of Scripture foreshadowed in 11:29?
6. What have been your major struggles or pitfalls in studying Scripture?

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

S How can you encourage or be a part of the ministry of discipleship and Christian formation in the church? How can you together provide support to or be a part of the teaching of God's Word?

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

S How can you share your interest, struggles, passion and calling for Bible study with those who maybe don't understand the discipline of studying God's Word?

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

S How can this group support you and pray for you this week?

The Limitations of Right

by Scott Coverdale

Monday
August 13

Nehemiah 5:14—7:73
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Psalm 33:1-11
Proverbs 21:8-10

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. -1 Corinthians 8:1b-2

Who likes to be right? I do. We all do. We like to win an argument. We like to have our view of things vindicated by the experts. I, for instance, happen to know what causes global warming and how to resolve it. I know what we should do about the situation in Iraq; I know the correct interpretation of Genesis chapter one; I have the answers for the immigration question, the drug problem and Tucson's traffic.

People have a natural tendency to stake a claim to a piece of knowledge and then fight to defend it. Our arguments escalate into conflicts that destroy relationships, split churches, alienate people, start wars. We want to outdo each other with our knowledge, with the legitimacy of our information.

In today's passage from Corinthians, Paul points out something that we need to hear. The context is a discussion about whether it is okay to eat meat from animals that were sacrificed at pagan temples. Paul says: "We know that an idol is nothing, and that there is no god but God. But this truth does not mean that we hold onto 'being right' at the expense of our relationships to others." Paul tells us that love is more important than correct doctrine, correct politics and correct culinary etiquette.

If people were as enthusiastic about promoting love as we are about promoting our point of view, what a different place the world would be. God desires that we love one another. As Paul says later in Corinthians, if we fail to love someone, then being right is just noise and claptrap and doesn't bring any honor at all to God. This is not to say that truth doesn't matter. But let love be our defining characteristic, not our insistence at being proven right.

Young People: Has a disagreement ever wrecked one of your friendships? How could kindness help resolve that issue?

Adults: Which differences of perspective or opinion tend to separate you from other people? Is love greater than those differences? What can you do to reach across the divide?

Prayer: God, please teach our hearts rightful humility as we navigate among all of the information and opinions in the world. Please let your love permeate our words, our thoughts and our belief. Amen.

My Kingdom for a Horse!

19

by Jennifer Monroe

Tuesday
August 14

Nehemiah 7:73—9:9:21
1 Corinthians 9:1-18
Psalm 33:12-22
Proverbs 21:11-12

No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. -Psalm 33:16-17

England's King Richard III has a really bad reputation. He is known as one of the worst kings that that country ever had, a conniving, manipulative murderer who had a heart of pure evil. His reputation isn't helped at all by William Shakespeare's play Richard III, in which he is portrayed as a hunchback who ruthlessly eliminates anyone who stands between himself and the throne of England, including his two young nephews. At the end of the play, a weakened and waning Richard is about to lose a major battle (*and consequently his crown*) and cries out, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" He is willing to give up his entire kingdom, everything he has schemed and murdered and manipulated to get, just for a horse, a chance at deliverance.

Even if you don't know Richard's story, you can probably guess how it ends. It seems like the psalmist would agree that, because Richard places his trust and hope in his own strength, the size of his army, and the power of his horses, he is ultimately doomed to fail. Verse 20 of Psalm 33 says "We wait in hope for our Lord; he is our help and our shield." It is often very tempting to allow ourselves to rely on our own strength, to place our hope in our own power or resources. We may not place our hope for deliverance in a horse, but we certainly put a lot of stock in our talents, abilities, jobs, reputations, possessions, and relationships, just to name a few. We need to be reminded that "the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love" (*Psalm 33:18*).

Young People: Can you think of a problem you faced recently? Where did you go for help?

Adults: In what are you tempted to place your hope?

Prayer: Lord, forgive us when we place our hope in anything but your unfailing love. Teach us to never rely on anything except You. Be our help and our shield. Amen.

Praise God Constantly

by Frank Shallenberger

Wednesday
August 15

Nehemiah 9:22—10:39
1 Corinthians 9:19—10:13
Psalm 34:1-10
Proverbs 21:13

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

-Proverbs 21:1

David penned these words after he had just escaped with his life from the hands of Abimelech by pretending that he was crazy. It is not necessary that we experience trying times that threaten our very well being and that of our family in order to feel the way David felt. We need to take a moment each day to think of what the Lord has done for us this day and each and every day of our lives.

Immediately after my wife left the house I heard this terrible noise accompanied by a whirlwind it seemed. Looking out the study window I saw roofing material in our small courtyard. I called out to my wife and the joyous sound of her voice stating she was “alright” was the best music I have ever heard. Those heavy aluminum slabs could have seriously injured or even killed her. After assuring myself of her well-being I could only think of praising God! I remind myself many times each day of the multiple blessings God bestows upon us. I cannot contain myself. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow!”

One of the wonderful benefits of having Christian friends is that one can constantly praise the Lord and speak freely of all that he does in our lives each day. See the morning sunrise, get a good nights sleep, a refreshing shower, clean garments, a nourishing breakfast. Each one of us takes these things for granted yet millions of people have lived and died and never enjoyed such things.

Do you realize that each and every breath, each and every heartbeat, each and every step you take is a gift from God? Without Him no one could function. Nonbelievers, you say, live just as we. Remember the rain falls on everyone equally, both good and evil. We know from whence these good things come and unless we tell them they may never know.

Young People: Do you ever take time to thank God for the blessings in your life?

Adults: Do you share with others what God has done in your life? Do you praise him for your blessings?

Prayer: Loving Father, fill my heart with gratitude and love so that I might share your wondrous blessings and your awesome might. Amen.

New Ethical Tests

21

by Dick Leon

Thursday
August 16

Nehemiah 11:1—12:26
1 Corinthians 10:14-33
Psalm 34:11-22
Proverbs 21:14-16

Everything is permissible - but not everything is beneficial.

-1 Corinthians 10:23a

I love this new principle for ethical behavior. It is not just doing what we have a “right” to do ... it is doing what we discern is “beneficial.” The Greek word for “beneficial” comes from the building trades: it means to “build well.” And the “beneficial” applies not just to ourselves or those directly involved in any action but to others who may be watching and who will be influenced by what we do!

The young Christian church was made up largely of men and women who had grown up in Judaism. In their religion everything was governed by the Law. The Ten Commandments were the primary laws but in order to understand them the Mishnah was written containing hundreds of laws that interpreted what the ten big ones were all about.

Christ abolished the law as a requirement for salvation. No one can be saved by keeping the law because no one can do it! It is not by law we are saved but by grace! (*Thank God!!*) But this created a new problem for believers who were accustomed to having some clear boundaries to behavior. They were now free from those restrictions and could say “all things are lawful!” [line deleted] Paul now adds another test for our behavior by getting us to ask: “lawful, yes, but is it beneficial?” Will this behavior make my life better?

It may now be our “right” in this new freedom to spit and chew and smoke and drink and swear and carouse ... but are any of these beneficial? Are they healthy, up-building for us, and a positive witness to others? So, here are *two new tests* for us: is it “beneficial” to us and is it “a good witness to help others live well also!”

Young People: If you apply the “beneficial” test to your habits, what would change?

Adults: Think of the people who have had the best influence on your life. How can your life be a similar inspiration and positive influence on others?

Prayer: Lord, you have set us free from rigid rules in life, let us not use that freedom to our own harm or the harm of others. Teach us to measure our lives by these new tests: is it beneficial to us and to others? Amen.

22 *The Battle Belongs To The Lord*

by Marie Ruiz

Friday
August 17

Nehemiah 12:27—13:31
1 Corinthians 11:1-16
Psalm 35:1-16
Proverbs 21:17-18

Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me, fight against those who fight against me. -Psalm 35:1

It is remarkable how we can easily forget that in this life the battle belongs to the Lord. Our trials and adversities are sometimes there to make us not weak, but strong! We have a supernatural power available to us through the Godhead - our Father in Heaven, his son Jesus, who sits at the right hand of God making intercession for us, and the Holy Spirit who is our Comforter and Guide. In today's Psalm, David clearly recognizes his need to call on God as his intercessor - as the one who will triumph over the evil one. We are not powerless against our foes but powerful through divine help and guidance to overcome evil with good.

When my son Zach left for his first deployment in Iraq, I felt powerless to protect him as a mother always wants for her children, but I had deep down within me assurance that God was with him. His power to overcome the evil and destruction that my son would face was far more secure than my ability to protect him at that moment. That doesn't free me up from the responsibility to pray, however. As in this Psalm, David even grieved and wept for his enemies, fasted and prayed for them even though they continued to mock him. We don't think of praying for our enemies and yet that is the lesson that David teaches us in this Psalm. God is supremely powerful to change the hearts of evildoers in this day as he did in days of old. Let us avail ourselves of the joy and delight that come from praying for those we hold dear, but also for those who rise up against us.

Before trying to defeat your foes on your own strength, be mindful that the very God who watches over us day and night earnestly is waiting for you to invite his help. He will surround you with his angels and protect you going and coming.

Young people: If someone you know has hurt your feelings or called you a bad name, forgive them and pray that God will change their heart.

Adults: The Bible is filled with a great many examples of how God defeated the foes of his people. May we never forget to call upon the name of the Lord.

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind us of your daily presence. Give us the assurance that you are there in any circumstance. Amen.

Proclamation of Hope

23

by Kurt Monroe

Saturday
August 18

Esther 1:1—3:15
1 Corinthians 11:17-34
Psalm 35:17-28
Proverbs 21:19-20

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. -1 Corinthians 11:26

It isn't often that we make formal proclamations, or that we have the need. Death is one of the times we do. When my grandfathers passed away, my family put obituaries, public proclamations, in the paper to announce their deaths, to remember important points of their lives, and inform others about their memorial services.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, likens the Lord's Supper to an obituary. When we eat the bread and drink the cup we announce, or proclaim, Jesus' death to the world. But Paul doesn't leave it at that, and neither should we. One of the other times we make public proclamations is at the time of pregnancy and birth. When my wife became pregnant with our children we expended some energy figuring out when and how we should proclaim the good news of the pregnancy. Likewise, when our children were born, my wife and I sent out announcements of the occasion to friends and family. The Lord's Supper is an obituary, a proclamation of death, that also functions as a birth announcement. We proclaim Jesus' death, but we always do so in light of his resurrection - "until he comes" - and in hope of resurrection for the entirety of creation, including us. Out of Jesus' death comes the birth of resurrection life.

The Lord's Supper is not a macabre ritual that announces yet another cruel, meaningless execution enacted by the Romans. It is the proclamation of a death that brings about resurrection. The Lord's Supper is, in fact, nothing less than the proclamation of the Gospel itself, the good news that Jesus is Lord of all creation and has ushered in the era of resurrection life.

Young People: Have you ever had a story that was so exciting you could hardly wait to tell it? Why were you so excited to share it?

Adults: If the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the Gospel, how might that affect the way you approach the table?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the gift of the Lord's Supper. May we proclaim your gospel through the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup. May we be strengthened and nourished through it, that we might proclaim your Gospel with the entirety of our lives. Amen.

24 **Does God Always Forgive You?**

Sunday Study Guide

Sunday, August 19

Esther 4:1—7:10
1 Corinthians 12:1-26
Psalm 36:1-12
Proverbs 21:21-22

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. -1 John 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?)*

S What is the most trouble that you got into as a child (that you can share without embarrassment, or revealing your placement in the witness relocation program)?

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

1. Read **1 John 1:8-10**.
2. What is our universal human condition?
3. In what ways are you and others deceived in realizing the truth of this condition?
4. What is God's simple promise to those who confess sin?
5. Is God's love and forgiveness conditional or unconditional?
6. How do respond to this promise? What is your attitude about confession and forgiveness?
7. How does God's attitude about forgiveness help us think about how we relate to others who have wronged or hurt us?

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

S How can you and the church help people to experience real radical forgiveness that leads to radical life change and renewal?

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

S How can you model forgiveness in a culture that thrives on bitterness and anger as motivation for revenge and victory?

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?

Sickle Tongue

25

by Brice Menaugh

Monday
August 20

Esther 8:1—10:3
1 Corinthians 12:27—13:13
Psalm 37:1-11
Proverbs 21:23-24

He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

-Proverbs 21:23

It is hard to pass up writing about the famous first letter to the Corinthians where Paul writes of what Love is but ...

In relation to the above Proverb 21:23 I am directly reminded of a Mark Twain quote: *"It is best to keep your mouth shut and be presumed ignorant than to open it and remove all doubt."* Hmm. Now I'm not saying that Mark Twain's phrase is better than the divine hands that imparted the Holy proverbial and celestial wisdom of the ages but darn my cats if the wise and dichotomous Twain didn't nail that sucker on the head. The esteemed author, Twain, not the proverbist, though I'm quite sure that ancient scribe is just as esteemed as our river boat satirist Twain is, also said that *"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."* So, I am apt to recall many a time when I wrote or said something and then two seconds later bit my tongue for shame because I knew that the amount of "calamity", for lack of a better word, that was about to ensue was eminent. I can't count the number of times, nor have I space enough, to relate all the debacled diction that I have spouted, but I'm sure you can relate ... not that you would say anything as low down or misinterpreted as I, but the one who can control their rambling and blabbering jowls will surely find themselves in a far better place than the unguarded author himself, not Twain or the proverbist, just I ... I mean me. Godspeed and good luck in all that you write, or say.

Young People: "Sticks and stones my break my bones but words can never hurt me." Do you agree with this?

Adults: "Kind words are short and easy to speak but their echoes are endless." Revealed in this quote from Mother Teresa is the profound impact a single word can have. What was the last simple kind word you heard someone else relay?

Prayer: Lord, Please help me help my foolish self. God, please, help me develop some restraint, patience, grace and love in all that spews forth from my big pie hole for I know that without you I would be cast a drift in a great dark storm. Thank you Lord Christ. Amen.

An Unbeatable Combination

by Jerry Smith

Tuesday
August 21

Job 1:1—3:26
1 Corinthians 14:1-17
Psalm 37:12-29
Proverbs 21:25-26

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. -1 Corinthians 14:1

In 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14, Paul expounds upon the gifts, use and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Please note that he is addressing these comments to his Christian brothers and sisters in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 he tells us that, "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit." These are believers who have been moved by the Spirit to accept Jesus Christ as their savior and he still encourages them to, "Eagerly desire spiritual gifts." This indicates that the fullness of the Spirit and his gifts are not an adjunct to salvation.

I'm firmly convinced that God wants us to be filled with his Spirit and to receive the spiritual gifts he has selected for us. But he wants us to eagerly desire these blessings. Just as he stands at the door of our hearts and knocks we have to open that door and invite him in. He will not disappoint us but will gladly come in and sup with us. (*Rev 3:20*) Likewise if we want the fullness of the Spirit we have to hold out the cup of our life and ask him to fill it. He will not disappoint us for He has promised, "If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will our Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (*Luke 11:13*)

Why do we want the Spirit filled life? I wish I had the time and the space to list all the reasons. The main reason is because the Holy Spirit is love personified and as such he equips us with the power and love to carry out Gods Great Commission (*Luke 24:45-49*).

Youth People and Adults: The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off- for all whom the Lord our God will call (*Acts 2:39*). What do you makes you most excited about knowing that God has wonderful gifts and talents for you waiting to be discovered, developed, and put to his use and glory?

Prayer: Give us fearless confidence in proclaiming your message, as you stretch your hand to us in healings, miracles and wonders done in the name of your holy servant Jesus (*Acts 4: 29-30*).

Choose A New Way Of Thinking

27

by Amanda Place

Wednesday
August 22

Job 4:1—7:21
1 Corinthians 14:18-40
Psalm 37:30-40
Proverbs 21:27

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. -1 Corinthians 14:20

We often walk with treasured friends who have enriched our knowledge of living. Unfortunately, we all too often walk with the fools that hurt the soul and body we have been given. The abuses we suffer come from the “fools” of unkind ways or speech, mindless television or internet time. It is so difficult to stop the bad habits, but if we choose the wisest of companions, our Lord, we will reach new heights of wisdom.

We are asked in Corinthians to be mature. That often takes a new way at looking at our old habits. The French novelist, Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, *“A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile when a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral.”*

Bring into your life as many people as possible who will help you see the cathedral of your life. The closest companion you will have in this pursuit is our God. We need to realize that the creator has made someone of beauty and decency in you, and you should celebrate and honor that fact. Each time we maturely reach new good decisions based upon a strengthening relationship with God our lives become clearer and the cathedral adds another rock to its edifice.

Young People: Have you tried something on a dare that one of your friends should not have asked you to do? What will you do next time?

Adults: Who are the architects for your cathedral?

Prayer: Lord, please grant us the simple abundance of wise friends and the wisdom to know which people should be an important part of our lives. Help us to believe that with reflection and acts we turn our feet of clay into rock cornerstones for the cathedrals within us. All this is possible for we ask it in your name. Amen.

Why?

by Scott Coverdale

Thursday
August 23

Job 8:1—11:20
1 Corinthians 15:1-28
Psalm 38:1-22
Proverbs 21:28-29

How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with him? Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy. -Job 9:14-15

I like Job, and I empathize with his situation. Not because I have ever lost all my donkeys and oxen to Sabeen raiders or had my children killed by a dust devil. I have never had boils head-to-toe. I sympathize with Job because of his heartbreaking tendency to complain vehemently to God, and in the next breath confess that he is an ignorant fool and has no place from which to challenge the Creator. The Book of Job is full of loud complaints about the nature of God, the nature of the universe, the injustice of the world, and the terrible silence that meets a man who is shouting at the sky. I have my own long list of complaints for God. Shall I name a few?

1. Why so much suffering, God, in this world of yours? Why do the detonators work so well on car bombs? Why do you allow children to step on land mines?
2. If the answer to #1 has something to do with “free will” then why do earthquakes drop mountains onto school buildings; why do tsunamis tear babies from their mothers’ arms? Why are children born without arms or eyes or good brains? Why does our sun cause cancer?
3. Why is the Bible so full of stories about you hating the Philistines or the Ammonites or the Canaanites? They were just people like us, and it looks like you had it in for them.

Anyways, you see what I mean. I have lots of complaints about the world and I have questions which seem to have no answer. And then I, like Job, suddenly realize what I am doing, and have to acknowledge that it is more suitable for me to close my big mouth and recognize that my real need from God is not for answers but for mercy, God’s healing grace.

Young People: What is hard for you to understand about the world? Which is more important; getting an answer or getting God’s mercy?

Adults: Voice your own complaints to God, but when you are done, receive his mercy. Know that he is full of compassion for his children, even you.

Prayer: Thank you God, for your mercy, everlasting, and able to pick us up, even out of the holes that we dig for ourselves. Amen.

Heaven Bound!

29

by Marie Ruiz

Friday
August 24

Job 12:1—15:35
1 Corinthians 15:29-58
Psalm 39:1-13
Proverbs 21:30-31

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. -1 Corinthians 15:58

I grew up in a church that frequently had sermons on Heaven and how we would someday be in the heavenly realms with God. I can remember thinking about the rapture and thinking that I, if alive when it happened, would ascend like a bird up to Heaven. I also thought about my fear of heights and the fact that I shouldn't look down when I'm going up! My thoughts as a little girl are amusing to think about now. But I have to confess, I still think about that day when God will call us home. It is not something we should be fearful of. Instead, we can be assured that if we believe in God and have confessed him as Lord, the sounding of the trumpet and God's call to us will be the most glorious home going we can imagine. No fear of heights will be a concern, because in that moment, we will have our eyes fixed on the glory of God. And if in this life I have on earth, the rapture doesn't precede my earthly death, there is still no fear. I am assured that we are here for a clear purpose and when our earthly work is done, and we sleep in the grave for a time, we will not stay in the grave. Our Scripture today in Corinthians tells us: *"The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."*

As you give of yourself to the ministry of Godliness, never forget that your labor in this life is not in vain. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord. His reward far exceeds anything we can imagine, in this life and in heaven.

Young people: Sometimes it's hard to think you are doing things for God as a child, but just obeying your parents and learning from them is doing what is right for God.

Adults: It is hard sometimes to imagine what Heaven will be like. The glory and contentment we are afforded here on earth will be far outweighed in Heaven. Our task at hand is to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord on earth and that will prepare us for Heaven.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the assurance that our work on earth is not in vain. Amen.

God's Wonders

by Deb Van Scoyk

Saturday
August 25

Job 16:1—19:29
1 Corinthians 16:1-24
Psalm 40:1-10
Proverbs 22:1

"Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. -Psalm 40:5

Growing up as the only girl in a family of boys, I often felt isolated, misunderstood or harshly ostracized as "just a dumb girl" in the eyes of my brothers. Now, decades later, I realize to what degree my brothers prepared me for the challenges of life.

What they viewed as my aberrant nature had both the effect of strengthening the bond between them and affirming my need to seek companionship and recognition among my female peers. I'm convinced that, had I been one of several daughters, my girlfriends today would be very much under-appreciated by me as just an expected and ordinary continuum.

God had a much better idea. He sent me profoundly knowledgeable, perceptive women - year after year - women who molded my heart, challenged my intellect, hysterically laughed at my self-deprecating humor, inspired my creativity, overlooked my shortcomings, hugged me through my loneliness, nourished my growth, and loved me to the boundless depths of their souls, in spite of myself. I am blessed daily by my sisters in Christ, and I'll forever sing praises to our Lord for the things he planned - this being only one among the awesome wonders he has done!

Young People: Have you ever felt so blessed by God's love you thought you'd burst? When?

Adults: Do you find yourself laughing sometimes as you reflect on God's plan for your life and the many surprises it has included?

Prayer: Oh, Lord, we love you and praise you for your unique plan for our lives. Thank you, God, for the humor and joy you bring us daily through our surroundings, our families and friends, our work and creative pursuits - and mostly, Lord, through the assurance of your endless love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, August 26, 2007.

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