

Northminster Daily Devotions



Getting in Shape

Vol. 34 No. 8
August 26 – September 29, 2007

Northminster Devotionals

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 copy of *The 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 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" Small Group 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. **New small groups are being formed, and beginning the week of September 16, they will begin meeting, utilizing this resource. To join a small group, call Pastor Pete Seiferth at 327-7121, ext. 241.**

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 520-327-7121 and talk to Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, September 30, 2007.

Sunday
August 26

Job 20:1—22:30
2 Corinthians 1:1-11
Psalm 40:11-17
Proverbs 22:2-4

Small Groups Study Guide

Gathering as God's Family

Greet others and check in briefly on your week.

Ice-Breaker: Would you rather live and raise a family in a pagan society where you have to fight for what you believe, or in a religious society where everyone believes as you do?

Growing in God's Word

Bible Study: **Read Romans 9:30-10:21**

What was the primary way the Jews sought to be right with God?

What is Paul's great hope in 10:1?

How is salvation "obtained" according to these verses?

What's the difference between righteousness "by the law" vs "by faith"?

Bible Application

What has been the primary way you have learned about the Christian faith?

When was it that you realized it isn't so much what you do for God, it's what God has done for you?

How would you explain the difference between Christianity and Judaism, or other religions based on 9:30-31?

The central theme of this passage is "Jesus is Lord," yet what other things in our world seek lordship over our lives?

How essential is evangelism - telling the good news - so that people can hear and believe?

Going as Ambassadors for Christ

Missional Focus: How can we be challenged to share our faith this week, claiming Christ's Lordship over our lives, and proclaiming it to others?

Prayer Requests: "How can we help you in prayer this week?"

Close with Prayer

4 Daily Scripture Readings

Monday
August 27

Job 23:1—27:23
2 Corinthians 1:12—2:11
Psalm 41:1-3
Proverbs 22:5-6

Right And Wrong

by Norm Spindler

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.
-Proverbs 22:6

I remember having a court hearing for a young juvenile offender to determine if he knew right from wrong. After hearing from a number of witnesses, including past and present teachers, and the Court Psychologists, the Court determined that the 8 year old did not know right from wrong. Therefore, he could not be charged with committing a delinquent act.

What went wrong with this and numerous other children in their growing up? One may question what kind of home did he grow up in? However, how could he get past the second grade in school without this knowledge? What are we as a community doing or not doing in bringing up our children?

Try and bring God back into the schools to teach biblical truths and actions by all persons, giving a background of right and wrong behaviors as models. Don't they try and teach how each child should get along with their classmates, and show respect for others. Or are they afraid of someone causing some court action against the school for bringing God into the classroom, or teaching against the child's rights. So the school district just lets the child advance, without learning basic living skills I know right away most would think that the child was from a foreign country or was of color, but you would be wrong, this was a white child and living in the main stream of the community.

Parents it is your responsibility, not to the community, but to the child to believe the writings of the wise people who wrote Proverbs to teach your children right from wrong, don't believe he or she will learn from teachers or others they come in contact with.

Youth: How do you feel about some unruly kid in your class? Could you talk to them in Christian love about their behavior?

Adults: Help your children early, and watch them blossom.

Prayer: Our Father, show us the way to bring up the children to develop into good citizens. Help us all to not fear those who may want to cause us harm, and provide the words to help them to see the light you provide to lead us all down the proper way. Amen.

Tuesday
August 28

Job 28:1—30:31
2 Corinthians 2:12-17
Psalm 42:1-11
Proverbs 22:7

Neither A Borrower Nor A Lender Be

by Norm Spindler

The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

-Proverbs 22:7

In Luke 6:20, we are told that the poor will inherit the Kingdom of God. How could the wise writers of Proverbs write as they did?

Those wise men were writing to the people of that time, like it is, and that was the truth, and those people could depend on it. In Luke, we are hearing the words of Jesus, and he is calling the people to him, and when they turn from their old ways, and believe in him, their life will change for the better. We still have people that depend on the lenders, and the slaves to them.

They hear the words of Jesus, but do not listen. They believe that the lenders are trying to help them, while their primary interest is to make as much money from those borrowers as they can. State governments and also the Federal government are passing legislation to limit the hold those lenders have on those borrowers.

Those poor souls need to go to Jesus in prayer, for a way to get out of debt and live a free life from this slavery. We need to spread the word that for those that come to Jesus in prayer will find the peace and blessings, as we are told in Luke 6:27: Ask and you shall receive.

The wicked will have their day to answer for their misdeeds. Love those that don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, tell them he will help them.

Youth: Can you lead your friends to Jesus, and see how they are changed when they accept him?

Adults: Help your children and friends to learn the truths of the Bible, so they may pass the word to their friends.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we love you and ask your blessings not only for ourselves, but for those who have not heard about you. Open their ears, eyes, and hearts to accept you and receive the blessing you have for them. Amen.

Wednesday
August 29

Job 31:1—33:33
2 Corinthians 3:1-18
Psalm 43:1-5
Proverbs 22:8-9

A Can Of Beans Or Soup

by Norm Spindler

A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.
-Proverbs 22:9

What more could a person ask than the blessings of God for so little as giving food to the poor? Some wonder how come we have poor people? Jesus in his instructions to his disciples said “We will always have poor people.” In his beatitudes, Jesus spoke of the things the poor will receive and that there is hope for them to escape this. What is it, an unknown relationship, some type of justice relationship or a necessary class of citizens to make people desire to advance, through prayer and determination. Nothing is easy, and some may want to give up, but Jesus is always with them to give them strength to carry them to the next level. We find that the strength that Jesus gives is not a muscle thing but an attitude builder to reach upward. All things are possible to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

What we learn here is that food is a necessity for ones well being. Some say you are what you eat, this is a thing that people can measure by sight. Your doctor may have a different perspective as to your health that he can measure with his tests and instruments.

The lack of or proper levels of some foods can be an enemy, think of what you eat and how much.

Youth: Do you think of how much your parents love you in their preparing your meals. Can you help in that preparation?

Adults: A normal saying now days is “READ THE LABEL.”

Prayer: Please Lord help us to provide for those unfortunate persons who for some reason are a population who are unable to provide for themselves or their families. Give them the strength to endure their hardships. While your blessings may be on those that provide, we pray your blessings on those that receive. Amen.

Thursday
August 30

Job 34:1—36:33
2 Corinthians 4:1-12
Psalm 44:1-8
Proverbs 22:10-12

A Great God In Jars Of Clay

by Jennifer Monroe

How great is God - beyond our understanding! -Job 36:26a

In God we will make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. -Psalm 44:8

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. -2 Corinthians 4:7

There seems to be a common thread running through three of today's readings. Job's friend Elihu is in the middle of a long series of speeches describing the character and nature of God (*At one point he says "I am full of words," and he's not kidding!*). Elihu confirms that God is indeed a God of righteousness and justice and is greater than any human being can fathom. Job's very life is in the hands of this mighty God who created and sustains the universe and yet is "wooing [Job] from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction" (*Job 36:16a*).

The Psalmist picks up the theme of God's unsurpassed greatness, remembering his faithfulness in the past and rejoicing in his help in present battles. If the Psalmist is successful at all, it will only be because of the faithfulness of God. If there is any boasting to be done, it is only to be done about the works of the Lord on the Psalmist's behalf.

Astoundingly, in 2 Corinthians, Paul affirms that not only is this same great God still at work in the world, but that he has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ and that he, Paul, is a "jar of clay," a rough vessel which actually contains the treasure of God's "all-surpassing power." This is the glory of the gospel, that the unfathomably great God described by Elihu and praised by the Psalmist, has made himself known as Lord of the universe in Jesus Christ and now "[makes] his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (*2 Corinthians 4:6b*). It is our privilege to give all the glory to this Lord whose great strength shines through our human weakness.

Youth: What is one of God's characteristics that you think is *great*?

Adults: Have you ever thought of yourself as a "jar of clay" that contains a treasure? What implications does this have?

Prayer: Father, we praise you for all of your mighty deeds; Jesus, we recognize and exalt you as Lord of this universe; Holy Spirit, we thank you for your indwelling presence within us. Amen.

8 Daily Scripture Readings

Friday

August 31

Job 37:1—39:30

2 Corinthians 4:13—5:10

Psalms 44:9-26

Proverbs 22:13

By Faith

by Jennifer Hager

We live by faith, not by sight. -2 Corinthians 5:7

Sometimes in life, we encounter people who want to argue Christianity with us. These people often use science and history to try to prove to us that Christianity derived from some ancient ascetic or that the existence of the earth and of man is the result of a “proven” astronomical occurrence.

It is tempting in these incidents to argue with these nay-sayers, to pull out the big guns and cite this or that to counter their points. A very wise and devout Christian woman once told me that at those moments, let the Holy Spirit speak or not speak for us.

In this passage of Corinthians, Paul tells the church that we will face times when the faith that we live by will be challenged. We do not live by sight of Jesus Christ as our Savior, but rather by faith in God’s promise.

Our “proof” is in God’s Holy word and the fulfillment of his promise to us while we are in this world and in eternal life.

A long time ago, I learned a valuable lesson in arguing with love. As long as I expressed what I felt, the other person could not argue with my sentiment. What I felt was what I felt. Period.

So it is with our lives of faith. What I believe is what I believe. My responsibility is to my God and to pray for those who do not believe.

Youth: Do you see God around you? Is he in the animals you love and in your friends?

Adults: How do you react when someone challenges your faith?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Almighty God, please strengthen my relationship with you so that my faith is honorable to you. Amen.

Saturday
September 1

40:1—42:17
2 Corinthians 5:11-21
Psalm 45:1-17
Proverbs 22:14

Shining The Light Of Christ

by Marie Ruiz

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors; as though God were making his appeal through us. -2 Corinthians 5:17,20a

When I returned home from a recent short-term mission trip to El Naranjal, Mexico, my right hand was pretty torn up from the concrete and cement that we worked with. Although I wore gloves the lime from the concrete seemed to irritate my skin that was blistered and bruised. By the time I reached home, I was experiencing a fair amount of pain as I'm right handed and it seemed to take a long time for my skin to heal.

Every time I tried to use my hand for the simplest of tasks I experienced pain. However, as I nursed my bruises with salves and bandages, slowly the creation of new skin started replacing the bruised and blistered holes. Our verse today reminds me of the healing that God provides. When God is center-most in our life we are newly created from the inside out. A kind of new skin from the inside out covers the sin and we are made whole again. And most of all we can function free of guilt and the pain of sin.

When we are created anew, something else happens that others can see - Christ, through our actions, words and deeds. God is counting on us to make his appeal through our newly created lives. We can't help but glow in the dark for him!

Youth: God wants you to be his ambassador to live for him and help others to know him.

Adults: No matter how bruised and scarred you may feel in this life, God can make you a new creation. The key is trusting in Christ and asking him to cleanse you from every sin.

Prayer: Lord God, Creator of all good things, thank you for the redemption you provide that creates in us newness of life. Help us to shine for you so others will know you too. Amen.

Sunday

Ecclesiastes 1:1—3:22

September 2

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Psalm 46:1-11

Proverbs 22:15

Small Group Study Guide

Gathering as God's Family

Ice-Breaker: What's the best gift you ever received from your parents?

Growing in God's Word

Bible Study: **Read Matthew 7:7-14**

This passage is a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount – much practical teaching. Look at the surrounding passages and notice what themes are familiar or new to you from Jesus' teaching.

What central truth is Jesus getting after in 7-12? How have you experienced this in your life?

How might verse 12 describe what Jesus describes as the "narrow gate" in verse 13? What is the road less traveled?

Bible Application

How is God like a parent?

How does asking for things from God work? How does God provide? How does God answer questions?

Going as Ambassadors for Christ

Missional Focus: God sends us out for the purpose of serving others. How can you treat others this week in the way you like to be treated?

Prayer Requests: "How can we help you in prayer this week?"

Close with Prayer

Monday
September 3

Ecclesiastes 4:1—6:12
2 Corinthians 6:14—7:7
Psalm 47:1-9
Proverbs 22:16

Living In The World

by Marshall Worden

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." -2 Corinthians 6:14-16

Living out the teaching "do not be yoked together with unbelievers" is often hard for me, particularly in the workplace. Eugene Peterson puts that phrase even more clearly in *The Message*: "Don't become partners with those who reject God." And then the Old Testament has a great aphorism that is often linked with Paul's instruction: "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together" (*Deuteronomy 22:10*). What a terrific picture of agrarian confusion to be avoided. But how are we supposed to practice Paul's teaching while here in a world and culture that often are uncomfortable for us, but where we are called to witness to Jesus Christ?

We are, of course, not told to have no contact with unbelievers or the secular world. We are not told to withdraw. I think we are told, however, that we are not to be in relationships with unbelievers that would damage, compromise or undercut our Christian values and the teachings of Jesus.

For me in the workplace this means establishing boundaries. People in my office know that I'm a Christian and that I don't tolerate blasphemy, filthy talk and deceit. I'm careful to avoid situations where unwholesome discussion or activities are likely to occur. While I engage unbelievers socially, I exercise caution and sometimes steer clear of particular folks.

Youth: In school, sports and parties, how do you feel when others make fun of church and Jesus? Do your friends know you are a Christian?

Adults: In the workplace and social settings, what in your lifestyle and talk shows that you are a believer in Jesus Christ? Do you find yourself compromising Christian values in order to get along?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we want the patterns of our lives to show that we belong to you. Thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit to make that possible. Amen.

Tuesday
September 4

Ecclesiastes 7:1 – 9:18
2 Corinthians 7:8-16
Psalm 48:1-14
Proverbs 22:17-19

Good Grief!

by Scott Coverdale

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret ... -2 Corinthians 7:10a

How does sorrow lead to salvation? Let's figure this out.

If a person is sorrowful about something that they have done or said to harm another person, or out of rebellion to God, they have some open options. One is to be cool, to shrug it off, make light. Maybe if we show that we think it was no big deal, then other people (*including God?*) will begin to see it that way, too. "Get over it! Lighten up!"

Another possibility is the thin apology. "Okay, I'm sorry already! Everybody makes mistakes! We're all human, so I messed up! It's not as bad as what that other person did, anyways!"

The possibility of repentance is a little tougher, because repentance requires humility and is accompanied by sorrow. It recognizes weakness, failure, and our need for mercy. We don't repent in one breath and point out someone else's failure in the next. That's the thin apology, the one where we are at least half justified in our own mind. Real repentance also opens the door to amazing possibilities. It opens the door to the truth of our lives: that we are weak, that we do fail, that we are in need of mercy. This is the real truth, and the truth can set us free. How? Because when we live in the lie of self-righteousness, we are trapped in it. We have to hide, all the time, from the light. When we take in the truth, it opens the possibilities of love - that we can receive God's love for us, and that we may extend God's love to other people who are also weak, who also fail, who are also in need of mercy. This is the path from sorrow to salvation.

Youth: Have you ever been required to apologize? How is this different from a real apology? Which has better results?

Adults: Do you have some of this work to do in your own life? What is the first step for you? What would it take for you to venture that next step?

Prayer: God of mercy, please help us go through the sorrow that accompanies true repentance. And then please take us beyond that to live in the light of your truth. Amen.

Wednesday
September 5

Ecclesiastes 10:1—12:14
2 Corinthians 8:1-15
Psalm 49:1-20
Proverbs 22:20-21

The Grace Of Giving

by Jerry Smith

But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in this grace of giving. -2 Corinthians 8:7

In 2 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul is encouraging the Corinthian believers to share their abundance with the needy. What you return to God from the abundance he has placed in your care, is strictly between you and God, PERIOD!! However, there are some principles to consider;

1. God wants our best. Cain offered to God some of the fruits of the soil while Abel offered the fat portions of the first born of the flock. Abel's gift was acceptable because it was the very best and Cain's was not because it was only some of the fruits.
2. Put God in your budget so he gets the FIRST fruits.
3. Paul advises the Corinthians to give according to what one has and if the willingness is there the gift is acceptable. Therefore it behooves us to assess what God has given to us and give accordingly with all the grace we can muster up.
4. Our giving is a test of our faith. Do we give to receive? No, but to deny the promises concerning giving is to deny Scripture.
5. As much as we chafe at the messages on giving we need to refresh believers in the fact that giving is a spiritual exercise and fulfills God's desire for our spiritual health.

Youth: Do you willingly share your toys with your brothers, sisters and friends?

Adults: Have you seriously evaluated what God has so graciously placed at your disposal?

Prayer: Father, if we considered only salvation we could never repay you. You have given so much more and if we graciously gave back in kind all the coffers in Christendom would be pressed down shaken together and running over. Amen.

Thursday
September 6

Song of Songs 1:1—4:16
2 Corinthians 8:16-24
Psalm 50:1-23
Proverbs 22:22-23

God's Bargain

by Kurt Monroe

He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people: "Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge." -Psalm 50:4-6

In Psalm 50, we see the people of Israel herding an endless stream of bulls and goats through the temple for burnt sacrifices, reciting the Old Testament law, and speaking to one another of the special covenant they had with the one true God. But the Psalmist also tells us that they were disregarding those laws, shrinking from discipline, befriending thieves, and practicing deceit and slander. There was a disconnect between their temple worship and the manner in which they were living the rest of their lives. As it turned out, God wasn't all that interested in bulls and goats - Israel's worship couldn't cover the sins committed outside the temple. Their worship was a sham exposed by their behavior. As today's Proverb hints (*Do not rob the poor ... or crush the afflicted at the gate*), God didn't care so much about burnt sacrifices as he did the just and fair treatment of others, especially those in need. To remind the Israelites of the way he really wanted things to work, God "calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people." The Psalmist is echoing Deuteronomy 30:19, in which Yahweh essentially shakes hands with Israel to seal up his covenant with her: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses." Eventually, Israel chose death. God's judgment was simply to deliver them over to what they had already chosen. And yet, Psalm 50 is also an invitation to turn from death to life. God was willing to give Israel another chance. Today, the same choice stands before us. Not only does God desire our sacrifice of worship, but he also desires that we dedicate to him our entire lives. If we do, he is ready to keep his side of the bargain.

Youth: Have you ever made a bargain with someone? Was the bargain kept or broken?

Adults: Is there a disconnect between your Sunday worship and your rest-of-the-week life? What's one way you can work to fix this?

Prayer: Father, help us to keep our side of the bargain, to be authentic followers of you both inside the Church and out. Amen.

Friday
September 7

Song of Songs 5:1—8:14

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Psalms 51:1-19

Proverbs 22:24-25

The Gift Of Giving

by Marie Ruiz

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

-2 Corinthians 9:12-13

In 2 Corinthians, chapter nine, Paul rejoices over the generosity of the saints in giving not only financially to the ministry of the apostles but more so for the service of the saints that flourished in that first century church. The needs of each and every one were being met. This not only caused men looking on to praise God, but the service provided resulted in a thanksgiving to God of a different kind.

There is a matchless quality of praise to God, in doing the will of God by providing for the church, giving of oneself in service to the church in the creative way God has equipped each and every Christian. It is a triple blessing of sorts. Our service not only blesses the one who receives the act of service, we also thank God by using our gifts in service to others and he is blessed. Then, if that weren't enough, others around us who witness these acts of service will want to praise God as well.

We often underestimate the small acts of kindness and service we can and routinely do and think they go unnoticed. But God sees our service and is blessed by our works of service. There is much we can do for the body of believers not only in the local church, but beyond the walls of our local church. Ask God for direction on how you can be used in service for him. The blessings will far surpass our expectations.

Youth: Ask your parents today how you can be a help to them. That is obeying God and being a service to others.

Adults: As adults we are called to sow generously and give not reluctantly, but with a cheerful heart. Give of yourself to God today. His heart will be blessed.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us remember that all good and perfect gifts come from you. Help us to put those gifts to useful service for the kingdom of God. Amen.

Saturday

September 8

Isaiah 1:1—2:22

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

Psalm 52:1-9

Proverbs 22:26-27

If You Are Willing And Obedient

by Frank Shallenberger

... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool ... -Isaiah 1:18b

Each time I read these words from Isaiah they become more beautiful, more meaningful and more wonderful. Why would an all powerful, almighty God care about me at all? The Bible makes it very clear. Our God is a loving God who created us that we too might, in return, learn about him and love him above all things. In order to enable us to do this he did not create robotic creatures but he made us with a will. In the Garden of Eden he showed mankind that there were two choices available at all times, the right one and the wrong one, the good way and the evil way, God's way or Satan's way.

If we decide to obey God, he has made a promise to us. Obey him and he will forgive us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." God made a promise to the Israelites and that same promise he makes to us. "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land."

Whenever I break one of God's laws I am immediately aware of it. The moment I can, I want to rectify myself with my Lord and Savior. The heat of the moment may put that off for a while but I know no peace until it has been done. Whatever pleasure I gain from my sins is nothing compared to the comfort I receive with repentance, confession and forgiveness. God not only forgives my sins but he wipes them from his memory, he remembers them no more. If only you and I were able to do that for others and ourselves.

Youth: Do you recognize your sins? It is no different than recognizing a wrong that to you do when you disobey your mother or dad. Think about it.

Adults: How long do you wait after you realize you have sinned to repent and confess that sin? Have you gotten used to your favorite sin? Do you hesitate to break the spell of the moment by stopping what you are doing, repenting and confessing to God?

Prayer: Loving Father, only a Father such as you would care about someone such as I. Give me the spiritual strength to be "willing and obedient" so that my life will be pleasing to you. Amen.

Sunday
September 9

Isaiah 3:1—5:30
2 Corinthians 11:1-15
Psalm 53:1-6
Proverbs 22:28-29

Small Group Study Guide

Gathering as God's Family

Ice-Breaker: What is your favorite craft or thing you like to make with your hands?

What "pot" best describes you?

Kettle?

Cracked Pot?

Fraying Pan?

Cast Iron?

Flower Pot?

Fine China?

Other?

Growing in God's Word

Bible Study: **Jeremiah 18:1-11**

What does Jeremiah see at the Potter's House?

How does the nature of the clay determine the quality of the pot and what it is used for?

What is the message for Jeremiah to share with his people?

Bible Application

Are God's plans set in "concrete" or "wet clay?" How much does God mold people, and how much do people mold themselves?

What does it take to allow someone to let God shape them?

Do you seek God's shaping in your life, or are you content living on your own terms? How is repentance a part of letting God mold your life?

Going as Ambassadors for Christ

Missional Focus: People don't like to be told they are misshapen and messed up without God. How can you demonstrate the Kingdom of God and God transforming power in your own life with others this week?

Prayer Requests: "How can we help you in prayer this week?"

Close with Prayer

Monday

September 10

Isaiah 6:1—7:25

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Psalm 54:1-7

Proverbs 23:1-3

A Parent's Admonition

by Deb Van Scoyk

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this). I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again ... Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

-2 Corinthians 11:23,28-29

I recall many pleas in my childhood that, having been clearly denied by my mother, prompted my argument that she should reverse her decision based on nothing more than that my friend had been granted permission. In retrospect, I'm quite certain I never possessed the insight to consider the judgment of my friend's mother as compared with that of my own mother. I simply felt the leave granted my friend should be bestowed on me - the very short-sighted, albeit completely illogical belief that if it was alright for my friend, my behavior in following suit was completely justified.

Perhaps these ill-reasoned conclusions in our youth were the precursor to a pattern of behavior we so easily assume and follow as adults. Are we any different from the Corinthians with our quick assessments, absent diligent judgment, in complete reliance on our immediate desires and based solely on our own will? Are we not influenced today by false apostles, those who claim to be ministers of Christ but prove to clearly fall short?

Like an overly burdened and loving parent, Paul spoke of his constant concern for the churches and how he felt weak and upset every time someone was led into sin. I wonder if our parents' early admonitions were God's gentle nudge leading the child toward a continuing and ever-increasing need for judgment based on his word.

Youth: Do you think God would be OK with you doing something your parents have asked you not to do?

Adults: Can we remove ourselves from the influences of this world and truly ground our decisions in reliance on God's word?

Prayer: Oh, God, help us to step outside the temptation of self-reliance and short-sighted judgment - open our hearts to your will and our reason to the influence of your word. Amen.

Tuesday
September 11

Isaiah 8:1—9:21
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
Psalm 55:1-23
Proverbs 23:4-5

Pause And Learn From The Angry

by Amanda Place

... hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger. -Psalms 55:2-3

Six years. Yes, it has been six full years since we first saw on the TV the planes flying into the Twin Towers, Pentagon and heard about the field in Pennsylvania. The oppression of the wicked came to America in a way not felt before and without any sense of God being present to protect us from the dangers and anger of those who hate us.

But then we did begin to see God's presence in the goodness of the volunteers the strength of the professionals and the outpouring of our nation to those who had suffered unparalleled tragedy. We collectively went to our synagogues, churches and knees asking for your divine comfort. America changed that morning, and with God's help many Americans did too.

Enemies have been with us since the beginning of time. Now though we can see and read constantly about people who genuinely believe they hate us as a nation and what our nation represents. Our thoughts are unclear as to how we can respond when our teaching is to love one another and at the same time there is deep fear in the land. Help us to learn new lessons and to understand in some acceptable way those who feel such hatred towards us.

Youth: Do you remember watching this event and asking your parents why something like this could happen? And could it happen here in Tucson?

Adults: In the intervening six years how often have you truly extended yourself in God's mission for us to love one another?

Prayer: Father, help us to pray for one another today. Help us remember that many fine people stand in harms way. There is nowhere that God is not, even on the battlefields and in the cities of the Middle East where sudden death is too often waiting. Help us pray for the deep concerns that our nation faces. Thank you Father, for the strength you offer; help us seek, wait and listen for your will to be done. Amen.

Wednesday
September 12

Isaiah 10:1—11:16
2 Corinthians 12:11-21
Psalm 56:1-13
Proverbs 23:6-8

Are You Fearful Or Faithful?

by Judy Williams

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me? -Psalm 56:3-4

Fear is the absence of faith. Trusting God's word at all times will banish fear.

David's enemies were plotting against him. In his fearful moments he turned to his God and reminded himself that with God's word of promise he need not worry about harm from any person.

In new and unfamiliar situations we sometimes fear what others will think of us. We worry that opinions of people matter when we should trust in God's judgment only. "*What can mortal man do to me?*"

When we face dangerous events or enter uncharted territory we often forget God's promises and endeavor to rely on ourselves. Then fear can result in worry, indecision, inaction, frustration and even cowardice.

No matter the circumstance we need to remember God first, and have faith that takes away fear. If I truly trust God, there is no fear.

Faith replaces fear!

Youth: As a new school year has begun, have you been fearful of any new experiences? Have you remembered that God is always with you and that you are never alone?

Adults: Do you, too, remember that God is always with you and that you are never alone?

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for your promise that you are always with us. Guide our thoughts to keep your reassuring love always as a light to show us the pathway in all situations. And may we always remember that you see what is really in our hearts. Help our faith to remain strong. Amen.

Thursday
September 13

Isaiah 12:1—14:32
2 Corinthians 13:1-13
Psalm 57:1-11
Proverbs 23:9-11

Well Of Salvation

by Anne Price

With joy you will draw water from the well of salvation. -Isaiah 12:3

Today Jews around the world celebrate their High Holy Day of Rosh Hashanah. The liturgy of the day stresses the sovereignty of God and the hope that all humans will at last recognize him as Father and King. The Prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, who would establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity.

As a young girl in church where there was a lot of Latin spoken. I remember hearing, "From the Prophet Isaiah ..." I thought that he wrote most of the Old Testament. As I see now he is quoted more than any other Prophet in the New Testament.

We don't see many wells around our homes anymore. I can still remember my old Poppa's farm in East Texas. There was a well on the side of the house where they used to go for water before the city put in the pipes. It was there a reminder of how they would have to go out and pump the handle for all of the water. The well dried up by not being used anymore. We take water for granted now.

Jesus told the woman at the well that he would provide a well that would never run dry. He offers us that same promise. Here in the desert we still do not thirst. The image of buckets of water from the well of salvation brings us hope. Thank you Jesus for bringing us the Living Water.

Youth: Next time you take a drink of water - think of God.

Adults: Are we grateful that we now have the Living Water?

Prayer: Our Father, we accept your gift of salvation and drink from your well with joy. Amen.

Glimmer Of Hope

by Scott Coverdale

The oppressor will come to an end. The destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land. In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it - one from the house of David - one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness. -Isaiah 16:4b-5

This glimmer-of-hope verse is nestled into the midst of a long string of wailing, of lament and dark prophecies. Before it is the prediction of bloodshed, and after it is the grief of destruction. But here, in the middle of all that mess, is a reminder that, “the destruction will cease ... in love a throne will be established.”

I need to hear this message. I get pretty discouraged with the state of the nation, the state of the world, the state of my own dismal weakness. Every day, another fool blows up people trying to buy vegetables in Baghdad. Every day, the steamroller of greed pounds people deeper into poverty. Every day hunger kills another terrible number of children in a prosperous world. How can we not be discouraged?

But there are two truths to pull us out of this discouragement: first, we can know the heart of God, which prizes mercy, justice and righteousness. So we know that we are not crazy to carry these values in our hearts even when it sometimes feels like the whole world is hell-bent-for-leather in the opposite direction. We can work and we can speak for justice, for righteousness because we can have confidence that these are God’s desire for people.

The second truth is that there will come a day when the destruction will cease, when the world will be judged in righteousness. Things will be set right. This is a little hard to grasp. It feels like pie-in-the-sky when we are beset by the immediacy of the worlds desperation. But it is also true, and that knowledge can give us the hope that we need to carry on, to push forward with the joy of one who is on a confident mission.

Youth: What sometimes discourages you about the world? Do you have hope that God will bring about good through you and for you?

Adults: How does hope affect the way you view the world? Does hope give energy to you, or does it seem to remote to matter? Upon what is your hope based?

Prayer: God of hope, grant us a vision of your righteousness. Amen.

Saturday
September 15

Isaiah 19:1—21:17
Galatians 2:1-16
Psalm 59:1-17
Proverbs 23:13-14

Time For A Church Potluck

by Kurt Monroe

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when he arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. -Galatians 2:11-12

Sometimes we have trouble sitting down to eat with certain people. The causes of these dinnertime snubs are many and range from personal arguments and feuds among families and friends, to cultural racism and class distinctions. Peter, fearing a powerful group demanding that the Jewish Christians follow the Old Testament law, found himself unable to sit down with the Gentile Christians. Paul understood that the gospel (v.14) is as much about the ability of the followers of Jesus to sit down at a church potluck together as anything else.

If the gospel is the good news that Jesus is Lord over all creation and that justification is available by faith in Jesus for all, it means that those of us who lay claim to that gospel must be able to sit down and eat together. What an invitation Paul has sent out for a Church divided down denominational lines and even within denominations: come, sit down together, and eat. Maybe in the sharing of a meal, perhaps even the meal that is made of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, we could start working toward some common ground, toward unity.

And what an invitation the unified body of Jesus Christ would be to a world divided by race, economics, politics, divorce, and the myriad other things that divide it: come, sit down, justified by faith in Jesus Christ, restored and reconciled, and share a feast among brothers and sisters. There is, after all, something, or rather someone, powerful enough to unify us all.

Youth: Have you ever been so mad at someone that you didn't want to be around them? What helped you become friends again?

Adults: What are the things standing in the way between you and your fellow Christians? What can you do to bring about reconciliation and unity?

Prayer: Lord, being reconciled to you, may we be reconciled to one another as the body of Jesus Christ, and may that body bring reconciliation into the rest of the world. Amen.

Sunday

September 16

Isaiah 22:1—24:23

Galatians 2:17—3:9

Psalm 60:1-12

Proverbs 23:15-16

Small Group Study Guide

This week we are beginning a six week small group series for new and continuing small groups at NPC. We hope you will use this guide to get to know each other, build friendships and community with others, as well as experience encouragement and growth in your faith.

Gathering as God's Family

Welcome

Sharing Ground Rules: *So that the small group experience is positive for everyone, agree to a basic covenant, including:*

- to make it a priority not to miss meetings,*
- to participate equally so that no one hides nor dominates,*
- to respect differing viewpoints,*
- to not share things with others that are shared in the group,*
- to be open to inviting new people to join the group any time,*
- to share who will be bringing snacks,*
- to arrange childcare as needed,*
- plus any others you can think of ...*

Ice-Breaker: In one sentence, how would you describe your best friend?

Growing in God's Word

The purpose of this study is to get to know each other and to bond as a group. If you are in a group larger than 6 people, we suggest breaking into groups of 3-5 people for this section of the meeting, which gives everyone a chance to reflect and share. After reading the scripture out loud, read each question, and each person should be open to share, knowing that there are no right or wrong answers. Use these questions to broaden the discussion and share more.

Bible Study: **Read 1 Peter 4:1-11**

What is your "favorite" type of exercise?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. Running/hiking outdoors? | d. Weight lifting? |
| b. Cardio machines at the gym? | e. Yard work? |
| c. Mall walking? | f. Lifting your fork to your lips? |

If you were to rate yourself on the "love meter" from 1 (shallow) to 10 (deep), how have you been doing at showing love to others lately?

What do you think is most important in Christian community?

- a. Acceptance of one's past
- b. Showing genuine love to others
- c. Offering hospitality
- d. Actively serving using our gifts
- e. Speaking the truth
- f. Other?

What things in this passage do you have the hardest time with?

- a. Having to have an attitude of suffering like Jesus.
- b. Leaving a "pagan" lifestyle behind.
- c. That the "end of all things is near".
- d. That we should offer gifts without grumbling.
- e. That we should use our gifts to serve others.
- f. Speaking as if you were speaking the words of God.
- g. Other?

Bible Application

When was the first time you recall feeling Jesus tug on your heart?

- a. when I was very young
- b. in a church service
- c. when I was on a retreat
- d. when there was a crisis in my life
- e. just recently
- f. Other?

How does the call to live for Jesus and have an attitude of Christ-likeness sound to you?

- a. scary
- b. crazy
- c. fine if someone will join me
- d. I'm not sure what this means
- e. Just the invitation I've been waiting for

Going as Ambassadors for Christ

Missional Focus: Who would you like to bring into the group for the next session?

Prayer Requests: "How can we help you in prayer this week?"

Close with Prayer: As each is comfortable doing, give everyone a chance to finish this sentence prayer:

"Hello God, this is ... (first name), I want to thank you for ..."

Monday

September 17

Isaiah 25:1—28:13

Galatians 3:10-22

Psalm 61:1-8

Proverbs 23:17-18

Being Zealous For The Lord

by Marie Ruiz

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

-Proverbs 23:17-18

I've just returned from a visit with my family in Boston and during the course of my visit the newest member of our family was dedicated at four months of age. This was my mother's first great grandchild, so it was a very special occasion indeed. As I gazed at the pastor holding this bundle of joy, listening intently to the commission that was given to the parents and following to the congregation present to be a part of the raising of this child in the fear and admonition of the Lord, I recalled how as children grow, their inclination is to want whatever other children have. This is part of the sinful nature we all have and were born with. The verse from Proverbs makes it painfully clear that it's not just toddlers who envy their sibling's things, it's we as adults who often envy what others have, even though we may be very mindful of the fact that what we envy is sin and not for us.

Scripture reminds us of the importance of always being zealous for the fear of the Lord. To me that means following after God's principles in scripture. Only then will we be able to hope and be assured of our future. When we commit to following God's will for our life, all else will fall in place. Wisdom is knowing the right path to follow and following hard after it.

Youth: God has a perfect plan for your life. Ask God to lead you in the choices you make every day.

Adults: There is surely a hope for your future. Be zealous for it!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for reminding us that you have ordered our days and even our steps. Help us remember your ways are perfect and help us to walk in them daily. Amen.

Tuesday
September 18

Isaiah 28:14—30:11
Galatians 3:23—4:31
Psalm 62:1-12
Proverbs 23:19-21

Thinking Beyond The Box

by Ralph Comey

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus ... -Galatians 3:26

When I was a young teen-ager attending services in a little country church in Ohio, I grumbled, “Why do we have to hear about St. Paul? Why don’t we focus on Jesus instead?” Many years later, I discovered why.

Paul is an endlessly fascinating figure in the history of Christianity and his life and teachings are well-worth our study. When Paul began his service just a few years after Jesus’ death, there were stories about Jesus but no written records. There was no Christian Church.

We know that this educated and worldly Jewish merchant was completely transformed by his conversion on the road to Damascus and thereafter became a passionate and tireless follower of Jesus. When he was put to death, he had spent his life teaching about Jesus. He talked with people directly, wrote many letters, and traveled long distances throughout the eastern Mediterranean region to meet with small congregations of new converts.

Through these efforts, he tried to inspire these new Christians, to provide guidance, and to correct misunderstandings. Also, as we know, he wrote brilliantly about Jesus’ truths. Throughout his ministry, Paul sought to liberate, expand, and deepen the human spirit.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul strongly tells these new Christians that they no longer have to follow the old religious rules and customs, because they now have a new and inspired relationship with God.

Youth: Because God loves you, can you show love to someone in your life today?

Adults: We hold high the ideal of Christian love and service, but often we fall short. Most of us have busy lives and many have heavy burdens to bear. It is hard to fit in something more. Maybe we need to become better organized. Perhaps there is something we could change or eliminate, or a new viewpoint we could hold. Perhaps we then could find the time to perform that special act of service, and then another.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us examine our lives and help us find new ways of providing loving service to others. Amen.

Wednesday
September 19

Isaiah 30:12—33:9
Galatians 5:1-12
Psalm 63:1-11
Proverbs 23:22

How Thirsty Are You?

by Judy Williams

Oh God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. -Psalm 63:1

Reading these words led me to picture those in our military who today are literally dwelling in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

Their sacrifice and willingness to serve on our behalf is truly beyond the comprehension of those of us whose lives are so comfort-filled. Even though we live in a desert area, we can only guess at the longing our fellow Americans are experiencing each day.

Their comfort must come from him who said, "... *whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*" -John 4:14

David's wilderness was a physically uncomfortable place. His spiritual wilderness was even more uncomfortable. His only comfort was in his relationship with his God. He knew that if God were with him, nothing else mattered. He remembered to praise God at all times, even in his great discomfort.

Youth: Can you remember a time when you were so thirsty that you could hardly wait for a drink? How did that make you feel? Say a prayer today to thank God that you have enough clean water to drink.

Adults: Physical thirst and spiritual thirst are not the same. Pray today for those in the military experiencing both kinds of thirst.

Prayer: Dear Father, we think today of those serving in our armed forces in dry and weary lands around the world. We ask you to be with them, refresh them, and supply them with your Living Water. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thursday
September 20

Isaiah 33:10—36:22
Galatians 5:13-26
Psalm 64:1-10
Proverbs 23:23

Galatians

by Amanda Place

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

-Galatians 5:22-23

The name Galatians was given to this Celtic people because they originally lived in Gaul before moving to Central Europe and, ultimately, Turkey.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul offers both criticism and praise to the followers. The selected passage is one of great hope, for we are promised a richness of spirit when we invite the Spirit of Christ into our lives. There is a Chinese proverb that reads “He who knows patience knows peace.”

At Northminster we come to a house of “belonging.” We long for love, joy, peace and here we can find these gifts from God at our church and in our hearts as we ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Ask for what you need, ask to be taught the right questions, and ask to be answered. Ask for understanding of the divine plan for your life to unfold through joy. Ask politely and with a grateful heart and you will be heard. Ask also to be open to life’s generosity; ask to recognize the kindness of small serendipitous events that have enriched your life.

At the end of the day recount those small events of gentleness and goodness.

Youth: Have you done something kind for someone in your family this week?

Adults: Have you and the spirit been on close terms recently? Will today be any different since you have read the words that joy, love, goodness, peace are all waiting for you?

Prayer: Help us daily to come closer to you, and with the oneness of God’s full love and joyousness. We join in mutual love and desire with God who gives life for all, abundant and eternal. Help us create in our community more gifts of kindness than hurts, more joy than sorrow. Amen.

Friday

September 21

Isaiah 37:1—38:22

Galatians 6:1-18

Psalm 64:1-10

Proverbs 23:24

Living In The Spirit

by Jerry Smith

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. -Galatians 5:16

Jesus knew we didn't have a ghost of a chance of living a life pleasing to God if left to our own devices. That we would truly be orphans without the Spirit of God to give us wisdom, strength, love and guidance.

A life in the flesh is depicted in Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. In the Sacrament of Baptism we are to crucify the flesh and become new creations, living in the Spirit of God and cultivating the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22. I'm sure we all wish it was that easy. God gave us the curse of free will or freedom of choice. He wants us to have his Spirit but he will not force it on you. Like salvation and his promises, once you realize your need all you have to do is ask.

Really what choice do we Christians have? We can either live in the Spirit of God or we can flounder around in and out of the flesh in a life marginal at its best and subject to eternal damnation at its worst. If we want a life in the Spirit pleasing to God and to us, let's ask him to fill us with his Spirit and stand on the promise that, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (*Luke 11:13*).

And let us not forget that, "He did not give us the Spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and of a calm and well balanced mind and self-control" (*2 Timothy 1:7*). The power mentioned in the previous Scripture is the power that, "He exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead" (*Ephesians 1:20*).

So we are not asking for some weak-kneed spirit but, the infinite power and wisdom of God, who can surely provide all we need to live that God pleasing life and a rewarding life that just keeps getting better as we learn to trust in him.

Youth: God's promises are so much more rewarding than any you will get from your friends.

Adults: Get off the dime and let's do it.

Prayer: Father it's all there for the asking so we ask you to help us realize our need, to think large and expect miracles. For we ask it in the name who made it all possible, in Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Saturday
September 22

Isaiah 39:1—41:16
Ephesians 1:1-23
Psalm 66:1-20
Proverbs 23:25-28

Let Your Eyes Keep To My Ways

by Lorrie LeFevers

May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice! My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways. -Proverbs 23:25-26

Any parent remembers that proud moment when your child was born. We were all glad and rejoiced! Those first few months you walk around in a blissful state falling more in love with that perfect little baby. However, as Christians we have a duty to raise those children with a love for God and to learn his ways.

“My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways,” we should take that seriously. We can do all the “right” things like taking them to Sunday School, church and youth group. We can surround them with Godly friends and get them involved in service projects, but I think we have to consider the part that says “let your eyes keep to my ways.” We can go through the right motions, but if we are not living Godly lives, if they are seeing our behavior in conflict with everything they are learning, this verse has no meaning. None of us are perfect and the only reason I can write this is because I can look backwards and see all the ways I did not do this, and I know we cannot have separate rules for us and separate rules for our children. Children need the consistency of knowing their parents are following the same set of values they are expecting them to follow. No one is perfect, but with the love of Jesus we can all try and be proud for them to walk in our way.

Youth: Your parents are doing the very best they can. However, sometimes they slip! You can choose how to react. Think about the different choices you can make and how you can honor God in those choices instead of saying, “Well, my mom/dad did this, then it’s okay for me.”

Adults: As we go through life, we are thrown into situations where we make a choice and how we choose could effect how our children see us. Ask yourself, do I want my child to model my behavior? Would this draw my child closer to a relationship with Jesus?

Prayer: God, thanks for the blessing of parenthood. We realize this gift is not given lightly and that we have a responsibility to raise them in a manner honoring you. Give us your wisdom and insight and also forgive and guide us when we don’t do it quite right. Thank you for your mercy. Amen.

Sunday

September 23

Isaiah 41:17-43

Ephesians 2:1-22

Psalm 67:1-7

Proverbs 23:29-35

Small Group Study Guide

This week we are continuing with the second of a six week small group series at NPC. We hope you will use this guide to get to know each other, build friendships and community with others, as well as experience encouragement and growth in your faith.

Gathering as God's Family

Welcome – *Especially new people.*

Ground Rules – *Remind people what you discussed last week.*

Ice-Breaker: What is your favorite team sport to participate in? Why?

What animal are you most like? Why?

Growing in God's Word

The purpose of this study is to get to know each other and to bond as a group. If you are in a group larger than 6 people, we suggest breaking into groups of 3-5 people for this section of the meeting, which gives everyone a chance to reflect and share. After reading the scripture out loud, read each question, and each person should be open to share, knowing that there are no right or wrong answers. Use these questions to broaden the discussion and share more.

Bible Study: Read Ephesians 4:1-16

What is your favorite type of gift to receive?

- a. Birthday presents
- b. Christmas presents
- c. Surprise gifts
- d. Spiritual gifts
- e. Gifts that keep on giving
- f. Other?

What would you say is the church's primary reason for existing as a community of believers?

- a. Going to church on Sunday morning.
- b. To lay guilt on those who missed church on Sunday morning.
- c. Equipping ordinary people to do extraordinary things with supernatural gifts.
- d. Proclaiming the truth of Jesus to a sinful and unjust society.
- e. Bringing others to saving faith in Jesus.
- f. Building a unified, well structured and organized religious institution.
- g. Carrying on the traditions of the past.
- h. Other?

What is your response to knowing that God gives you special gifts for works of service so that others might be built up? **33**

- a. Who me?
- b. Yeah, I know I'm gifted.
- c. I don't understand, show me more.
- d. How do I discover my gifts?
- e. Other?

Bible Application:

What are the roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers?

- a. To earn a church paycheck.
- b. To equip God's people for works of service.
- c. To encourage the building up of the church.
- d. To be church professionals who can provide religious goods and services.
- e. To tell people the will of God
- f. Other?

Who are the ministers in your church?

- a. The ones preaching and teaching on Sundays.
- b. The ones giving their time to teach children.
- c. The ones serving in the church office.
- d. The ones who give an encouraging word to a struggling coworker.
- e. The ones serving at a rescue shelter for the homeless.
- f. The ones who don't know what to do or how.
- g. The ones who are lazy and selfish.

If the church is a body, and Christ is the head, what do you think your "part" is, and why?

- a. I'm the neck who turns the head the way I want it to go!
- b. Hands
- c. Feet
- d. Lips
- e. Heart
- f. Lungs
- g. Other?

Going as Ambassadors for Christ

Missional Focus: Think about what special gift God has given you to build up the unity of the church, and what impact that can have on others you meet during the week.

Prayer Requests: "How can we help you in prayer this week?"

Close with Prayer: Close with a short time of prayer, remembering the requests that have been shared. As you pray going around the circle, if you would like to say your prayer in silence, say the word "Amen" when you have finished your prayer so that the next person will know when to start.

Monday
September 24

Isaiah 43:14—45:10
Ephesians 3:1-21
Psalm 68:1-18
Proverbs 24:1-2

More To It

by Scott Coverdale

Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." -Isaiah44:16

This is pretty funny stuff here in the book of Isaiah. The prophet is pointing out how nonsensical it is to make an idol out of a chunk of wood, then make ourselves think that it has the power to save us. Isaiah is saying that you can't really have it both ways. Either this is a god that you can't light on fire to heat your beans over, or it is a piece of wood that you can't pray to for salvation.

Now I am no science-basher. I love every branch of science that there is. I believe that we live in a very rich and fascinating world, and I think the world gets curiouser and curiouser the more I see of it. But I have to say that the Philosophical Materialist, the one who believes that there is no reality other than the material reality, is in a funny position. He or she must say that there can be no real meaning, because material things merely are, they only signify themselves. There is not purpose, there are only physical properties that cause random interactions. Given the premise that there is only material reality, these conclusions are correct. But then notice how that man or woman behaves when faced with dishonesty or cruelty or even common rudeness. Suddenly, the universe is filled with moral codes, with rules, with appeals to decency and dignity and honor. Suddenly there are values that cannot be derived from pure physicality.

This is the truth, too. I believe that this is God's universe, and that it has been created in the atmosphere of God's character. Our world is by no means controlled by moral law, but I think that everybody knows inside of themselves that there is more to it than meets the eye.

Youth: Where does goodness come from? Do you think that everyone has a sense of it, even if they act otherwise? Why or why not?

Adults: Do you sometimes find yourself relying on something created to save or at least comfort your soul? What kind of nonsense is that?

Prayer: Almighty God, please remind us often of your great love and power and goodness. Please give us the joy of this knowledge that comes from you, and not from the things that have been created. Amen.

Tuesday
September 25

Isaiah 45:11—48:11
Ephesians 4:1-16
Psalm 68:19-35
Proverbs 24:3-4

A Prayer For The Privileged

by Deb Van Scoyk

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

-Ephesians 4:14-15

Although I believe the world should be spared the impertinence of “news” such as that recently broadcast on the outcome of Paris Hilton’s legal challenges, upon further reflection, perhaps the better reaction would be to include her with her many peers as the focus of much needed prayer.

There are many, particularly in our own country, who exist in a hedonistic and self-indulgent world of gross excess. While the population at large may be awestruck by the magnitude of their fortunes, as a Christian, I am struck by the immense deprivation of peace, purpose and direction in their lives. I wonder if, in their quest to fill an immense spiritual void, judgment can become so clouded in pursuit of personal and momentary pleasure that some are destined to spend years as “infants, tossed back and forth by the waves.”

Perhaps we can take some consolation when contrasting Ms. Hilton’s life with that of a Bill Gates. Did God intercede specifically in Mr. Gates’ life, providing direction in the form of a charitable obsession and, if so, should we not prayerfully seek a similar destiny for the Paris Hiltons in our midst?

Youth: What well-known celebrity do you admire? Why?

Adults: Are we sending a twisted message to our family and friends by getting caught up in the hype promoted by the media? Do we somehow feel more secure when misfortune strikes the super-wealthy?

Prayer: Lord, focus our endeavors on seeking a personal relationship with you and in sharing the resultant joy that floods our soul. Teach us how best to speak the truth in love that we may grow up in all things into him who is the Christ. Amen.

Wednesday
September 26

Isaiah 48:12—50:11
Ephesians 4:17-32
Psalm 69:1-18
Proverbs 24:5-6

Go Ahead, Get Angry

by Jennifer Monroe

In your anger do not sin: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. -Ephesians 4:26-27

You know the feeling: your heart starts racing; you can hear the blood pumping through your ears; your face flushes hot and red; your fingers find themselves forming into fists; your tongue gets twisted into knots, trying to frame the words that are racing as feelings through your mind. Anger can be a whole-body experience.

It seems incredible that someone could experience this emotion and not sin. Yet, this is Paul's command to the Ephesians. How is this possible? This verse comes in the context of instructions on living as part of the Body of Christ. When we become Christians, we do not have to give up our emotions, but rather we need to see them in a different context, as tools for building up the Body of Christ. Undoubtedly, there are things that *ought* to make us angry: injustice, one person taking advantage of another, dishonesty, theft, malicious talkers who do nothing but use their tongues to tear down the community that is the church, bitter mockers and scorners who disdain Christ and His work. All of these things should make our blood boil. However, Paul doesn't allow us to simply get angry; he commands us not to "let the sun go down on [our] anger." We must deal with anger quickly and not allow it to fester and simmer. It must also be productive, motivating us to deal with problems in a way that builds up and strengthens the Body. If we allow ourselves to dwell on our anger, we will "give the devil a foothold". Ultimately, Paul commands the Ephesians to "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" and to "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (*Ephesians 4:31-32*). So go ahead, get angry, but let your anger be for the right reasons, and let it spur you on towards building Christ's kingdom.

Youth: What makes you angry? What happens when you get angry?

Adults: What makes *you* angry? Do you get angry at the kinds of things that would spur you on towards strengthening the Body?

Prayer: Thank you God that you made us emotional beings. Please give us the wisdom and grace to know how to deal with and use our emotions correctly. Amen.

Thursday
September 27

Isaiah 51:1—53:12
Ephesians 5:1-33
Psalm 69:19-36
Proverbs 24:7

Reach Out To Jesus

by Marie Ruiz

I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.

-Psalm 69:30

In David's Psalm we are painfully aware of the many mood swings of those who follow a leader. David is so distraught and disappointed that even his own family seems to be rejecting him (v.8) *"I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons ..."* It is grievous to David not to have the support of those he was truly trying to shepherd.

David's exasperation at his followers led him to pray this earnest and forthright prayer that shows us that despite David's circumstances, he takes delight in talking to God in the hard times as much as in the good times. David is clearly comforted as he pleads his case before God and asks God for retribution on those who hate him for no reason and for those who seek to destroy him with no cause. David's clear communion with God shows a deep love and abiding in him.

David makes some rather violent requests on his accusers, but also knows that God is the ultimate vindicator and judge. After David pours out his heart and soul before God, he makes a radical turn in his conversation with God. He is overwhelmed by praise that continually flows from his mouth. It's as if David can foresee the future and in some ways he can because he knows that God promised to take care of Zion and all those who inherit the promised land.

I'm reminded of an old song called *Reach Out To Jesus*, by Ralph Carmichael. The words are:

Is your burden heavy as you bear it all alone?

Does the road you travel harbor danger yet unknown?

Are you growing weary in the struggle of it all?

Jesus will help you when on his name you call.

The only recourse in this life is to reach out to Jesus, he's reaching out to you.

Youth: When someone hurts your feelings, go to God in prayer and tell him about it. I guarantee you God is listening.

Adults: When we go through struggles in this life, we seem to find it hard to go to God first to talk things over. Let's learn from David and run to God who truly has the answers.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for hearing and answering our prayers! Amen.

Friday

September 28

Isaiah 54:1—57:14

Ephesians 6:1-24

Psalm 70:1-5

Proverbs 24:8

Are You Ready For The Battle?

by Frank Shallenberger

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. -Ephesians 6:11-12

We as Christians are involved in a continuous war against Satan and his demonic followers. They seek to destroy Jesus Christ by depriving Him of His followers. The closer we get to Jesus, the stronger Satan tempts us to follow him. We need to be constantly aware of what is happening in our lives. Many times temptations are so subtle we don't realize that they are temptations at all. There is always a right way and a wrong way, a good way and an evil way. "What can we do?" you may ask.

The answer is in these two verses. First of all we need to ask Jesus to take charge of our lives and turn our lives over to him. If we haven't done that we are missing the very first requirement of defense - salvation! Then we must maintain a constant, steady relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit through prayer - our personal conversations with our Creator, our Savior and our Enlightener. Along with prayer we need to immerse ourselves in God's Holy Word, The Bible. These enable us to obtain righteousness through forgiveness of our sin, to easily discern truth and thereby strengthen our faith. Paul calls these items the Armor of God. With these we are always ready to defend our faith.

Youth: The first requirement to defend ourselves against the Evil One is to secure our personal salvation. Have you done that yet?

Adults: After salvation, what next? Do you expect the holy angels to fight your battles or are you putting on God's Armor yourself? This is a personal battle for each one of us.

Prayer: Dear God, give us the wisdom to recognize the need for Your Armor to protect our souls against Satan and all his Powers. In our busy lives today there never seems to be enough time to talk with You and to listen to You and to read Your word. Help us to make the changes needed so that we will be ready to fight the Tempter when he comes. In Christ's name we plead. Amen.

Saturday
September 29

Isaiah 57:15—59:21
Philippians 1:1-26
Psalm 71:1-24
Proverbs 24:9-10

Strength

by Anne Price

If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength. -Proverb 24:10

How many of us when trouble hits us see it as a time for growth? Back in 2003 my husband and I were hit by a drunk driver not far from our church. I was pried from our truck by Jaws of Life. I was unable to move due to many broken bones and injuries. As I was before this an active exerciser I had no idea what it would be like to be crippled. When I awoke hooked up to machines and casts I realized that I had to go where my strength was not enough. I prayed to Our Father as all of the nurses and doctors were bustling around me. I appreciated the work that they were doing and yet I begged God to be with us.

I had a choice: to give it my all or give up. I learned more about faith and inner strength from that experience than I could ever imagine. Our church was there from the beginning. The day after the accident was the Sunday that I would be formally joining the church. Somehow I called to let the church know why I was not there. Pastor John Cheek came to the hospital to pray with me. It gave me such relief. I needed God with skin. He brought the peace of Jesus Christ into that hospital room with him.

My strength of body was at its weakest during that time. However, it taught me that with God anything is possible. Now I walk with joy. I am grateful for each step that I can take. Next time trouble comes to us, let us remember The Great Healer.

Youth: When we are hurt remember God will help you when you go to him.

Adults: Throughout our lives we see how we gained strength when we get back up, with the help of Our Father.

Prayer: Thank you Father for being with us when we are too weak on our own. You are never too busy for your children, no matter how old we are. Amen.

Northminster Presbyterian Church

2450 East Fort Lowell Road
Tucson, Arizona 85719-2417

520-327-7121

www.northministertucson.org

520-327-1839 fax

www.godmorning.org

email: office@northministertucson.org

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