

# **GPS**

**God's  
Positioning  
System**



## **Northminster Daily Devotions**

**December 30, 2007  
to  
January 26, 2008**

**Volume 35**

**Number 1**

## ***Northminster Devotionals***

You have in your hand a tool that has been shaped and fashioned over time and by many people. These devotionals have been crafted by a diverse team of writers who each bring different perspectives, but whose one goal is to help provide a place of contact with the daily bible readings from *The One Year Bible*. This resource has come to you because people from NPC have offered their gifts, to be a blessing to the entire Northminster community, to Tucson and beyond.

Make it a New Year's commitment to daily renew your walk with God, finding a window in your day, each day, to encounter the living Word.

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.

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.

Don't forget...this entire resource is on our website - [www.godmorning.org](http://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!

## Sunday, December 30 Scripture Readings

Malachi 1:1—2:17

Psalms 149:1-9

Revelation 21:1-27

Proverbs 31:10-24

### **Small Group Study Guide**

*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 in week one.

Ice-Breaker - What is your favorite dessert to have with a glass of milk?

#### **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: Hebrews 5:11—6:3**

#### **Bible Application**

- e Why are people slow to learn?
- e How does “solid food” help one mature in Christ?
- e What foundational truths are essential for a Christian to understand so that they can grow towards maturity? Who determines growth towards maturity (v. 3)?
- e What is wrong with prolonged immaturity (6:4-6)?
- e What is the meaning of the agricultural analogy in 6:7-8?
- e How are we encouraged to do better?
- e How would you describe your spiritual appetite now? “I’ll just nibble”, “a good meal now and then is nice”, “I’m famished for all I can get.”

#### **Going As Ambassadors For Christ**

Missional Focus: How can talking about your spiritual life be a natural part of who you are, especially as you listen to other people, their questions, concerns, and doubt?

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

Close with Prayer

## Monday, December 31 Scripture Readings

Malachi 3:1—4:6

Psalms 150:1-6

Revelation 22:1-21

Proverbs 31:25-31

# ***This Is Just The Beginning***

by Jennifer Monroe

*“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire will come,” says the Lord Almighty.*

*-Malachi 3:1*

*Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. -Revelation 22:12-13*

Isn't it interesting that both the Old and the New Testaments end in very similar ways?

The prophet Malachi ends his book with a promise: the Lord is coming, and when he does, he will bring justice and cleansing in his wake: “He [the Lord] will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver” (*Malachi 3:2b-3a*). Those who are righteous will be rewarded and those who are corrupt will be punished.

The apostle John ends his Revelation with a similar promise: Jesus is coming again, bringing with him life for those who follow him and punishment for those who ignore his call. “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever” (*Revelation 22:3-5*).

Even though Malachi is the end of the Old Testament, it is far from the end of Israel's story and God's plans for her redemption. God was true to his word and sent Jesus as Israel's Messiah. The Book of Revelation is the end of the New Testament, but it is really only the beginning. Just as God was faithful to send Jesus once, we can trust he will be faithful to send him again, to come back and claim his own.

At the end of this year and the beginning of the next, let us join with John and make this our prayer: “Amen. Come Lord Jesus.”

**Youth:** What are you waiting for in the year to come?

**Adults:** Do you long for Jesus to return? Why or why not?

**Prayer:** Thank you, Jesus, for your life, death, and resurrection on earth. Come back quickly! Amen.

## Tuesday, January 1 Scripture Readings

Genesis 1:1—2:25

Psalms 1:1-6

Matthew 1:1—2:12

Proverbs 1:1-6

# *He Started It!*

by Andy Ross

*In the beginning God ... -Genesis 1:1*

I remember vividly the one great line every child resorts to when impugned with guilt, accusation or arrest-for-time-out: "But he started it!"

Right. And it usually didn't work for me either. But every now and then it was helpful to point out who the instigator was, you know, to deflect attention from ... well, me.

And maybe that's exactly what we should all do on this first day of a brand new 2008 - deflect focus from ourselves, and stop and ponder our glorious God who started it all. Before we get all fidgety about our proclamations and resolutions, before we all start the football and snack food glut, maybe even before we get out of bed (!) - we should think deeply about the first words of the entire Bible: God started it.

Just think: the delicate segments of a Christmas cactus; the jagged cholla outside your drive; the air you breathed in while fetching the paper ... God started it all!

From the glistening stars over our heads, to the red blood cells carrying oxygen luggage through your body on a second-by-second itinerary ... God starts life!

So as you start this New Year, relax. And give God a big "thank you" for starting all of life as we know it, and for how the God who started it will one day finish it - with a guaranteed offer of love and hope that was born for us in that manger long ago.

Happy new year!

**Youth:** What do you think about God, and how he creates life, as well as time (like new calendars)?

**Adults:** What are you thinking about starting this year, in light of how God starts things?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for this new year, and for this day. Please start something new of your Spirit in me. Amen.

## Wednesday, January 2 Scripture Readings

Genesis 3:1—4:26

Matthew 2:13—3:6

Psalms 2:12

Proverbs 1:7-9

# ***Do You Fear The Lord?***

by Frank Shallenberger

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. -Proverbs 1:7.*

Since God is our Father and we are to call him Abba (*Daddy*) how can we possibly “fear” him? Remember, God is our Heavenly Father not our earthly father. “Fear” means to revere him, to worship him and above all to trust, obey and serve him. If we are to gain knowledge of spiritual things we better begin the right way. Fear of the Lord is the beginning, the start line. We can’t gain a knowledge of spiritual things without first making contact with the Creator of all things. We need to learn about our Heavenly Father and his plans for us.

“Fools” can be men and women who chose their own way and reject or have contempt for biblical morals. Men and women who don’t draw a line between right and wrong, who make fun of people with moral guidelines. Our children notice everything about us. As long as we live the moral lives God wants us to live, our children will see the way they should go as well. Moral lives are Christian lives. Even though we might tell our children “Do as we say and not as we do” they watch our every action. Moral values begin in family values.

You and I are given choices. Either we respect, revere, trust, worship and obey Our Heavenly Father or we can go along with the culture. If we trust, worship and obey God, we will gain spiritual wisdom and insight into the ways of our Creator.

**Youth:** Which will it be for you? Follow the gang or follow Christ?

**Adults:** Life is full of choices. How can you avoid being “the fool” and instead live life with spiritual disciplines, discernment and wisdom?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we your children seek wisdom that we may have a closer knowledge of your desires and the paths we need to take as we walk through life. Send the Holy Spirit to light our way. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

## Thursday, January 3 Scripture Readings

Genesis 5:1—7:24

Psalms 3:1-8

Matthew 3:7—4:11

Proverbs 1:10-19

# Together In The Ark

by Ralph Comey

*I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter the ark- you and your sons and your wife and your son's wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.*

-Genesis 6:18

After visiting the San Diego Zoo a few years ago, I remember feeling sad. So many wonderful animals and birds were of species which were either endangered or facing extinction (*the biggest problem being loss of habitat*).

Conservation of nature in our time has become a critical issue, and for a long while I was troubled because the Bible hardly mentioned it. This lack of attention is understandable, because in the Biblical era, the concern was more with surviving in a difficult world and developing a moral basis for living. Some of these concerns are still with us, but since then, nature has become seriously threatened.

In the story of Noah and the Flood, we find God reluctantly deciding to destroy mankind because of the deep-seated corruption which had developed. Only the righteous Noah and his family would be saved on the ark. God ordered Noah to bring a pair of all other living creatures with him to insure their survival. Thus, in this vivid metaphor, God is teaching us today a great lesson in conservation.

**Youth:** Do you pay attention to the animals and plants in the world around you? Do you notice how interesting and beautiful most of them are? Are you learning about them so that someday you can help with their protection and survival?

**Adults:** Enjoying the natural world is one of life's great blessings. But much of nature today is threatened and needs protection. Are we informed about conservation issues? Are we doing all we can to help? Problems often seem hopeless, but when working together with others, even modest steps can make a difference.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help me to see opportunities to conserve nature in my daily life- by making wise choices, by supporting good causes, and by taking appropriate action. Amen.

## Friday, January 4 Scripture Readings

Genesis 8:1—10:32

Psalms 4:1-8

Matthew 4:12-25

Proverbs 1:20-23

# Going Downtown

by Marshall Worden

*Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali - to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." ... Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. -Matthew 4:13-17,23*

Last semester, my students were asked to identify ways that downtown Tucson could become a more vibrant and exciting locale for residence, business and tourism - a place where people would want to go or live.

Their strategies were superficial: get rid of the homeless because they cause crime, put more police on the streets, and create more bars and nightclubs. "There needs to be more youth culture because there are too many old and poor people." And the winner: build a casino because "Everyone loves a good time and throwing away their money."

In reality, these young people don't like downtown and the mix of people who live and work there. Most saw the downtown as a place to avoid. They had trivial ideas for addressing the real needs of that community. Not surprisingly, none mentioned that the church could be part of transforming downtown.

If you're like me, you have all sorts of places you avoid. I like to be where it's pleasant and comfortable. In today's Scripture we see Jesus going to Capernaum to be with a great mix of people, including, to the shock of the Jews, Gentiles. He goes where there is darkness and not to a place where there is light. He goes to a place where there needs to be preaching, teaching and healing. He talks about repentance and not judgment. He goes to a place where we might not be comfortable - where there is real need.

**Youth:** What are some places you don't like? Would you go on a mission trip to a place where people are really different than you?

**Adults:** Where are some places that are in real darkness or great need? Do you want to be part of changing those places? What can you do?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for meeting me in my need. Help me see where I can serve you better and lead me to that place. Amen.

## Saturday, January 5 Scripture Readings

Genesis 11:1—13:4

Psalms 5:1-12

Matthew 5:1-26

Proverbs 1:24-28

# Let Your Light Shine

by Judy Williams

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven. -Matthew 5:14-16*

Matthew tells us in this 5th chapter that, upon seeing a crowd of people, Jesus sat down and began teaching his disciples about future rewards that would be given various types of people including those who mourn, meek persons, those who are poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted because of righteousness. He emphasized that those who were persecuted and falsely accused and insulted because of him would receive great reward in Heaven.

Jesus is teaching and encouraging his followers, urging them not to be ashamed, but rather to be bold in standing up for what is right. He exhorts them with a simple illustration: “**You are the light of the world!**”

Because Jesus had the foreknowledge that he would not be with the disciples to lead them in the years ahead, he was instilling in them their responsibility to become leaders themselves. They were to become the teachers in the future. Other followers who heard Jesus’ teachings were to be examples to lead more and more to the truth.

He was telling them that because they had heard the truth, their light should be shared with others, not hidden or kept to themselves.

“... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven.”

**Youth:** How can you share your truth about Jesus with your friends? Think of ways to **show** as well as **tell** them.

**Adults:** How do you react when you are insulted or persecuted because of your beliefs? Do you continue to let your light shine?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, continue to remind us of the blessings awaiting us in Heaven when we remain true to your teachings and live righteous lives. Give us courage to face the temptation to hide our light under a bowl when we should be letting it shine in the world’s darkness. Amen.

## Sunday, January 6 Scripture Readings

Genesis 13:5—15:21

Psalms 6:1-10

Matthew 5:27-48

Proverbs 1:29-33

### **Small Group Study Guide**

*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 in week one.

Ice-Breaker - What's the best or worst thing about the new year? Did you make any resolutions? Why or why not?

#### **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: Job 42:7-17**

#### **Bible Application**

- e After God allowed Job's health, wealth and children to be destroyed, Job was visited by three friends, who thought Job must have been guilty of some sin. Though Job complained and questioned God, he never cursed the Lord. How does God address these three friends here?
- e How would you characterize Job from these verses? Why was he restored?
- e What is the irony of Job's prayer for his friends?
- e Does this epilogue reinforce the understanding of the friends, that the righteous are blessed and the wicked suffer?
- e Does God always promise happy endings to the stories of his people?
- e What is the primary theme of Job: Suffering? Patience? Justice? Sovereignty? Faith? Other?

#### **Going As Ambassadors For Christ**

Missional Focus: How has God shown you restoration from suffering?

How can you have compassion for those who suffer?

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

**10** Close with Prayer

## Monday, January 7 Scripture Readings

Genesis 16:1—18:1

Psalm 7:1-17

Matthew 6:1-24

Proverbs 2:1-5

### *Treasure In Heaven*

by Jennifer Monroe

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

*-Matthew 6:19-21*

What do you treasure? What is so important to you that you guard it with your life? For some of us, it's what we do. We find our identity in our jobs, our skills and abilities, our busy day-to-day lives. We find meaning in our actions. Some of us treasure the good opinion of others. We want to be liked and admired, and when we do something righteous, we want people to know and appreciate it! Still others of us treasure money and possessions. Not only do we crave the safety and security of having material things, but we associate who we are with what we have.

The danger is not in being busy, or being liked, or having possessions, the danger is finding your identity in anything other than your relationship with Christ and the good opinion of your Father in Heaven. "Earthly treasures" are fragile, and can be destroyed or taken away at a moment's notice. You might lose your job or poor health might make it impossible for you to do everything you once did. You might have people's attention and good opinion one day, but they might be gone the next. Material things fall apart, economies crash, and money loses its value. But treasures stored up in heaven are strong and secure. They cannot be blown away on a whim, and they are 100% moth and rust proof. Our truest treasure is the fact that when God looks at us, he sees his sons and daughters, in whom he is greatly pleased. Everything else pales in comparison.

**Youth:** When you hear the word "treasure" what do you think of?

**Adults:** Are you tempted to find your identity in what you do? What you have? What other people think of you?

**Prayer:** Thank you, Father, for loving and treasuring us. Forgive us when we find our identity in anything other than that one glorious fact. Amen.

## Tuesday, January 8 Scripture Readings

Genesis 18:16—19:38

Psalms 8:1-9

Matthew 6:25—7:14

Proverbs 2:6-15

# *The Human Distinctive*

by Dick Leon

*What is man that you are mindful of him ... You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. -Psalm 8:4a,5*

*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. -Matthew 7:12*

I recently read a remarkable book that harmonizes science and faith. It was written by Michael Collins and is called *The Language of God*. Collins was the Director of the US Human Genome Project that mapped the human DNA! He also tells how he moved from being an atheist to being a Christian through his scientific research.

One of the main questions he poses has to do with the distinctiveness of the human species from all the rest of nature. Like the Psalmist, he asks, "What is man (*as a scientist*) that you (*God*) are mindful of him? (*as a believer*)." He names the human distinctives by which God has made us a "little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned us with glory and honor."

Collins shows that of all God's creatures we alone have the capacity for moral action and for knowing God! Our "glory and honor" are found in those unique distinctives. When Jesus sums up all the Law and Prophets with the Golden Rule he is naming our "glory and honor."

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." Other religions have a similar principle but it always appears in the negative ... "do not to others." It is radically different when this is put in the positive!

We betray our glory and we betray our honor when we fail to live by this noble rule! And we discover the glory and honor that God gives us when we live by this noble rule!

**Youth:** Here is a great rule of behavior: ask yourself what you would like your family and friends to do for you ... and then do it for them!

**Adults:** Have you found out how well the Golden Rule works in our social and economic lives? Follow it and you'll find your honor and glory.

Prayer: Lord, we do at times wonder how it is that you care for us so much! Help us to trust your Word and to follow your Law so your honor and your glory may shine! We pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.

## Wednesday, January 9 Scripture Readings

Genesis 20:1—22:24

Psalm 9:1-12

Matthew 7:15-29

Proverbs 2:16-22

# *Trusting Yields Praise*

by Marie Ruiz

*I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High. -*

*Psalm 9:1-2*

David is known throughout Christendom as the Psalmist who never ceased to praise God. He learned what it meant to trust in God and although his life had many ups and downs, he was never far from God and always had praise on his lips. This is a marvelous testimony of what the Lord meant to David, but also how treasured David was in the eyes of the Lord.

It is easy for us to praise God in the good times. And yet when obstacles come and difficulty looms in front of us that is when we are **really** supposed to praise God. You see God has already worked through the difficulty for us and is calling us from the other side of trouble to trust in him and keep focused on the One who has sheltered us under his wing time and again. We are short-sighted and forgetful people. We fail to remember how God brought us through the difficult times in the past. And, as a result, we worry and complain as if God were not in the picture. Instead he's right there asking. Do you know me well enough to trust me? If you know him well, praising him will exude from your lips without hesitation.

Later in verse 10 David says, *“Those who know your name will trust in you, for you Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.”* David is a wonderful example of one who put his trust in the Lord. In the Bible, the word “wonderful” was reserved for miraculous or supernatural events. David had not only the intellect for understanding God's righteousness but also was personally able to testify of the wonderful events that marked his life and resulted in praise.

**Youth:** David learned as a very young boy how to trust in God for everything. God loves you and desires that you trust him for everything.

**Adults:** We can learn from David's example what it means to trust and praise God.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord it is with a humble spirit that I come to you asking for your help in learning to trust and praise you in all things. Amen.

## Thursday, January 10 Scripture Readings

Genesis 23:1—24:51

Psalms 9:13-20

Matthew 8:1-17

Proverbs 3:1-6

# *The Covenant Of Love*

by Jerry Smith

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. -Proverbs 3:3*

Jesus at the Last Supper proclaimed, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (*Luke 22:20*). To me, this means that he was fulfilling the old covenant of laws and ushering in a new covenant of love by his death on the cross. He also said, "If you obey my commands you will remain in my love" (*John 14:15, 15:10*).

In Mark 12:30-31 Jesus said, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. And the second is this: love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." This is what the new covenant is all about, To Love and Obey.

To love and obey with our fallen nature is impossible. We must live in the Spirit of God to accomplish God's will for our lives. For in the Spirit of God we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against this fruit there is no law. In a practical sense, this means that we should faithfully test all our actions to ascertain that their purpose is love. If we are uncertain of our motive, pray until we are certain. It is far better to act in love the first time than to have to ask forgiveness for acting in haste.

**Youth:** It's hard to expect you to do something we adults are struggling with, but if you establish the habit of acting in love early in life, think how much easier your life will be when you get to adulthood.

**Adults:** Are your thoughts and actions based upon a cultural norm or do you pray for the Spirit's guidance in your daily life?

**Prayer:** Father, you have again shown through your Son that love is your gift to us and your desire for us. Help us to walk in your Spirit that we might fulfill your desires. Amen.

## Friday, January 11 Scripture Readings

Genesis 24:52—26:16

Psalms 10:1-15

Matthew 8:18-34

Proverbs 3:7-8

# A Recipe for Health

by Dick Leon

*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. -Proverbs 3:7-8*

The book of Proverbs is an amazing collection of wisdom sayings that are timeless and true. We would all be better off if we read these pithy sayings regularly ... and much better off if we did them!

Today's proverbial text lifts up **humility** (*do not be wise in your own eyes*) and **goodness** (*fear the Lord and shun evil*).

Our problem is that 'evil' seems to always lie close at hand. I love a quote that comes from a Los Angeles Sports Writer: "Every temptation from hell comes disguised as ecstasy!"

We intend good and yet find ourselves hurting others, neglecting others, even abusing others. Paul talks about this in Romans 7:15, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (*I've often thought of this as proof that Paul played golf!*).

The answer to our weakness in shunning evil is found in the gift of the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in us when we name Jesus as our Lord! On our own we cannot make good on all our desires to be good!

Our proverb adds a wonderful incentive to humility and goodness: our health! Modern psychology has finally caught up with the wisdom of the Scriptures by recognizing that our physical and mental health are deeply connected with our spiritual life. The Gospel is healing! Trusting in the Lord and shunning evil are good for our bones! And the reverse is equally true – evil deeds can make us sick!

**Youth:** What do you think about the quote from the LA Sports Writer?

**Adults:** How many of your illnesses can you trace to this proverb's message?

**Prayer:** Good Lord, help us to trust you more and more each day and to enjoy the fruits of shunning evil in our bones! We pray as we seek to live in the name and power of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Saturday, January 12 Scripture Readings

Genesis 26:17—27:46

Psalms 10:16-18

Matthew 9:1-17

Proverbs 3:9-10

# ***The Greatest Miracle***

by Frank Shallenberger

*Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." - Matthew 9:2*

Jesus had just left the region of the Gadarenes and sailed back to Capernaum, being rejected by the people who dwelled there. This is a good reminder for us that when people reject us a quick departure is a Christ-like decision. We know from the Gospel of Mark that there were four men carrying this paralytic and that they lowered him through the roof in order to get Jesus' attention. Their actions manifested the faith that all five of them had in Jesus. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that any of them said a word. Jesus knew of course why they were there and he reassured the man laying on the mat. "Take heart, son" he said. Then he performed his greatest miracle - he cleansed that man's soul of every sin he had ever committed in his whole life.

I have heard people say and articles state that "The age of miracles is passed." You and I know that that is not true. When we ask Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Savior he performs this great miracle for us. He wipes the slate clean. He remembers our sins no more. St. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8, "By our faith we are saved." Not only did Jesus do this once but he does this every time we come to him in a repentant manner and confess our sins and ask for his forgiveness. God loved us so much that he sent his only son and if we believe upon him we will live forever in heaven with him. Jesus redeemed us! He paid our penalty! He is our savior!

**Youth:** Have you asked Jesus into your heart? Has that miracle of forgiveness, redemption and salvation occurred in your life? If not, why not?

**Adults:** Have you experienced this miracle? Is Jesus Lord of your life? When you die do you have the blessed assurance of eternal salvation?

**Prayer:** Father, we your children come to you with the faith of those five men in Capernaum as we seek forgiveness of all those transgressions in our hearts. We are truly sorry Lord for ever having offended you. Look down with favor upon us sinners and wipe the red stain from our souls. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

## Sunday, January 13 Scripture Readings

Genesis 28:1—29:35

Psalm 11:1-7

Matthew 9:18-38

Proverbs 3:11-12

### **Small Group Study Guide**

*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 in week one.

Ice-Breaker - Growing up, what kind of contact did you have with other ethnic groups? Were cross cultural experience encouraged or discouraged?

#### **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: Acts 10:23-48**

##### **Bible Application**

- e Who is Cornelius? (go to the beginning of chapter 10)
- e Jews regarded people like Cornelius as pagans, unless they submitted to Jewish practices. What would verse 28 have meant to Cornelius?
- e Why is this story so important (vv. 28, 34-35, 43)?
- e What is the main point of Peter's sermon?
- e What is the reaction of the Jewish believers witnessing gifts of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Gentiles?
- e Does God ever surprise you by surpassing your own expectations?

#### **Going As Ambassadors For Christ**

Missional Focus: Are there people who would assume that your church is just not for them? What are these barriers? What might need to be done to remove these barriers?

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

Close with Prayer

## Monday, January 14 Scripture Readings

Genesis 30:1—31:16

Psalms 12:1-8

Matthew 10:1-23

Proverbs 3:13-15

# Thank You, Mr. Rogers

by Karen Foss

*Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.*

-Proverbs 3:13-15

I have always admired the late Fred Rogers. A kinder or wiser man would be hard to find. I don't know where his wisdom came from. Maybe a little from his military experience, some from his schooling of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School and some from studying to become a Presbyterian minister. A lot of it probably came from just listening to parents and children.

His personality really came through on his television show. Thousands of children learned so much from him (*and maybe a few grownups too*). One of my favorite quotes by him is found in *The World According to Mister Rogers*. He writes, "When I was a boy I used to think that strong meant having big muscles, great physical power; but the longer I live, the more I realize that real strength has much to do with what is not seen. Real strength has to do with helping others." We can all learn from really listening to others and helping them.

**Youth:** Did you ever watch Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood? What did you learn from him? How do you apply what you learned to your daily life?

**Adults:** There's all kinds of listening. Sometimes it is the things that aren't said that's the most important. It's the wise person that can listen with their hearts.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, please help me to be a blessing to someone today. Amen.

## Tuesday, January 15 Scripture Readings

Genesis 31:17—32:12

Psalms 13:1-6

Matthew 10:24—11:6

Proverbs 3:16-18

# *Sing To The Lord*

by Anne Price

*I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me. -Psalm 13:6*

Psalms 13 in its entirety has King David feeling spiritually barren. He then turned away from his problems and allowed God to dominate his vision. He then sings his praise to the Lord.

When I turn my thoughts to God, I see that he is already at work in my life. I will sing as I drive through the traffic, just glad to be a part of the universe. Dancing has always brought me joy. I remember being at Presbyterian church service overlooking the Pacific Ocean with not only a lovely choir, but dancers moving in worship to Our Father.

There is an old song that came to my mind that was written in 1934. The title of the song is *The Object Of My Affection*. Although it is a love song, Jesus awaits our affection and never abandons us.

**Youth:** When you sing know that God is listening.

**Adults:** As we raise our voices, we know that God hears each and every one of us.

**Prayer:** Lord, you are the object of my songs. Thank you for smiling and not laughing at my voice. Amen.

## Wednesday, January 16 Scripture Readings

Genesis 32:13—34:31

Psalm 14:1-7

Matthew 11:7-30

Proverbs 3:19-20

# Lean On Me

by Jennifer Hager

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

*-Matthew 11:28-30*

Throughout the Gospels, our Lord Jesus used every opportunity to assure the disciples and his new followers of his desire to be in relationship with them. He instructed them in his role in their lives and how he wanted to walk daily with them.

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus invites the people to lean on him. He tells his followers then and now that nothing is too great for him to bear. He is waiting to help us. We just need to ask.

The key is for us to RSVP to the invitation with eager and glad hearts. If we do not recognize and admit our weariness, it is difficult to ask the Lord to take it from us. We must ask God to open our hearts in understanding of our helplessness in easing our burdens ourselves.

No matter is too great or too small for Jesus to help us with. If we practice turning to the Lord for help with our “small” problems, we will be prepared to lean on him when all seems impossible.

**Youth:** Whom do you count on to help you when things are not going well?

**Adults:** Do you wait for the big problems before you turn to the Lord? Why not try him for those little things also?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your unconditional offer of help in all things in our life. Please open our hearts to your loving assistance. Amen.

## Thursday, January 17 Scripture Readings

Genesis 35:1—36:43

Psalm 15:1-5

Matthew 12:1-21

Proverbs 3:21-26

# ***Do You Make Decisions Prayerfully?***

by Frank Shallenberger

*My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble. -Proverbs 3:21-23*

The Lord wants us to look very carefully at every situation in which we find ourselves. Remember the old adage “Look before you leap?” This is precisely what God is talking about. Weigh things carefully. Don’t get carried away by emotions. If something looks too good to be true, it probably is. God wants us to be discerning. He wants us to examine everything, looking for the weaknesses, the untruths, the dangers, the pitfalls.

Once you have established in your life the habit of carefully discerning right from wrong, good from bad, evil from truth, and making decisions based on prayerful consideration, don’t ever for one moment lose it. I learned something years ago and I wish I had remembered it every time I made a decision: “We should never begin a new venture in our lives without prayer.”

How many of us wear a cross on a chain around our neck and forget it’s even there? I do myself. That doesn’t do a thing for me really. But letting everyone know that you are discerning and judgmental about decisions in your life will be an ornament of wisdom. When these ways become ingrained in our lives as a habit we will not stumble as we walk along the path of life; we will not fall but will go on our way looking forward to eternal life in heaven with Jesus, fearing no evil and doing no evil to others.

**Youth:** Have you learned to look carefully before you leap?

**Adults:** Do you have a reputation of making decisions prayerfully and with sound judgment? Do your children and your spouse seek your guidance?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, many times we face major decisions in our lives the same way our children do, recklessly, spontaneously. Give us the wisdom Lord to use sound judgment facing difficulties and help us to be discerning always as we come across each new situation in our lives. We ask this in the name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

## Friday, January 18 Scripture Readings

Genesis 37:1—38:30

Psalms 16:1-11

Matthew 12:22-45

Proverbs 3:27-32

# *The Power Of Words*

by Anne Price

*For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. -Matthew 12:37*

These words were spoken by Jesus, himself. There can be no higher source for the importance of how we speak. Careless words can come back to haunt us.

For many years I was an active member of Toastmaster in Texas and Arizona. I would spend countless hours writing and giving speeches. With all the experience that I had with words, in my personal life I have spoken without thinking, only to be sorry afterwards. An apology did not always completely erase the harm that my words may have done to another.

Words are powerful. We must take them seriously. Even words that we say to ourselves can be our salvation or damnation. How many times have we called ourselves names that we would not even think of calling another?

Each Sunday we are blessed by our pastors in our services. They take many hours to prepare the sermons that reflect God's Words for his people. We are lifted by their Spirit-filled teaching. They take the responsibility seriously.

As we go into this day may we ask Our Father to give us the words that will bring others to Jesus Christ.

**Youth:** Have you ever said something to a friend that was not kind? Did you go back to them and apologize?

**Adults:** Do we have more problems with our words to our families than with strangers?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, please help me to speak only with kindness to myself and to others. Amen.

## Saturday, January 19 Scripture Readings

Genesis 39:1—41:16

Psalms 17:1-15

Matthew 12:46—13:23

Proverbs 3:33-35

# *Name Today's Soil*

by Dick Leon

*Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed." -Matthew 13:3*

Parables are so much fun! One reason is that they are so memorable. The first words of this familiar story stick like Velcro to our brain cells. We all can recite, almost verbatim, the rest of the parable that names four kinds of soil in which the seed of God's Word is sown and how each soil produces a different kind of crop.

I've often thought of these four soils not just as different kinds of people but as different stages of our own lives.

- e Can you think of a time the Word of the Lord rolled off your soil like seed off a path that was too well trafficked with the ways of the world?
- e I'll bet we all have had times when we've responded quickly to the good news and neglected to study and pray and apply the Word to our lives and the fruit withered.
- e Being too busy is the name of the world we live in and Jesus nails it with his third soil that choked the Word with too much other "stuff" ... and the other stuff is not all 'bad' ... it is just not the best for us, only God's Word is best!
- e But to give the Word time and depth and serious attention has always led to seasons of much fruit-bearing!!

The best part of the story is the deep joy that comes to our lives when we let God's Word bear fruit.

**Youth:** What "stage" is the soil of your heart in today?

**Adults:** Looking back at your life, can you name times your heart was like all four kinds of soil in this parable?

**Prayer:** Gracious Lord, you have come to us all like seed scattered over our lives. Forgive our times of hard-heartedness ... of shallowness ... of busyness ... for we have wasted your Word in such times. Soften our hearts, open them to your gracious Word and help us give deep attention to your Lordship in our lives so that we may be joyful, fruit-bearing, faithful disciples. Amen.

## Sunday, January 20 Scripture Readings

Genesis 41:17—42:17

Psalms 18:1-15

Matthew 13:24-46

Proverbs 4:1-6

### **Small Group Study Guide**

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#### **Gathering As God's Family**

Welcome - Especially new people.

Ground Rules - Remind people what you discussed in week one.

Ice-Breaker - What do you do to keep in shape? How physically fit are you?

#### **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: 1 Timothy 4:1-16**

##### **Bible Application**

- e What advice would you offer to an 18 year old leaving home for the first time?
- e How does Paul describe those who are stirring up trouble in the church?
- e How should Timothy combat what is false?
- e From verse 7, how would you describe to someone else, how to be godly?
- e What does age have to do with being able to have influence for the Gospel?
- e What can every believer do?
- e Do you spend more time on physical or "godly-ness" training?
- e What spiritual disciplines would you like to "exercise"?

#### **Going As Ambassadors For Christ**

Missional Focus: How can you be a winsome embodiment of the Gospel to others this week?

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

Close with Prayer

## Monday, January 21 Scripture Readings

Genesis 42:18—43:34

Psalm 18:16-36

Matthew 13:47—14:12

Proverbs 4:7-10

# ***Good In Return For Evil***

by John Charles Cheek

*As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asked, "Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there. After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, "Serve the food." -Genesis 43:29-31*

If anybody ever had the right to get even, it was Joseph. He had heard his brothers plot to kill him, had been sold into slavery by them, and had been imprisoned after a false accusation of attempted rape. In the text for today, we see that Joseph has his brothers completely at his mercy. It's his opportunity to pay them back for all they'd done.

And so, he feeds them, gives them grain necessary for survival, and weeps at being reunited with his brother Benjamin. There is no doubt that Joseph was as tempted as any of us would be to take revenge. But Joseph's love for and obedience to God outweighed his need to get even. God grant that we would place the same importance on who God wants us to be, rather than on what God wants us to do.

**Youth:** Have you ever wanted to get even with someone for something they did to you? What might you do instead?

**Adults:** The desire for revenge is a real one. What strategies might allow you to make a different, God-honoring choice instead?

**Prayer:** Merciful, forgiving God, help us to know more clearly who you desire us to be, and help us to be that, more and more every day. Amen.

## Tuesday, January 22 Scripture Readings

Genesis 44:1—45:28

Psalm 18:37-50

Matthew 14:13-36

Proverbs 4:11-13

### **Who Is Your Guide**

by Frank Shallenberger

*I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths.*

*-Proverbs 4:11*

The Bible tells us that Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. After urging us to give him his full attention, he promises to “guide us” in the way of wisdom.

Have you ever undertaken an activity of any kind with a guide? If you have, you know that you must stay close by them and follow every command they give you else you will get lost. If we will let Jesus be our guide he will lead us along the most secure trails of life. Any hiker will tell you that straight paths are much easier to walk in, they are not restricted in any way.

Just as Solomon urged his son to “listen” it is very important that we pay attention here. Jesus told us in Matthew 7:14 “... small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” The pathway of sin is crooked and devious and leads to all kinds of problems and hardships. A sinful life is destructive of all that we hold dear. We call ourselves “sinners saved by grace.” It is so much easier to sin and yield to the temptations of life than to deprive ourselves of those activities which promise a moment of pleasure but often times a lifetime of regret and sorrow.

Is there no hope for us? But for Jesus, the answer is “No!” If we reach up and take hold of the outstretched hand Jesus extends to us he will guide us over the hazards of life to reach the eternal goal of peace and joy in heaven for all eternity with him.

**Youth:** There are so many temptations out there for young people today, what do you do when tempted?

**Adults:** Sometimes we fool ourselves by thinking that as we get older temptations cease. They don't go away, they are just more subtle. Do you ask Jesus to help you through those times?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for being at our side to help us when the evil one tempts us. Help us to always keep your name upon our lips. Amen.

## Wednesday, January 23 Scripture Readings

Genesis 46:1—47:31

Psalms 19:1-14

Matthew 15:1-28

Proverbs 4:14-19

# ***How To Read Genealogies***

## ***Or, How Would You Like to Be Named “Guni?”***

by Andy Ross

*These are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt -Genesis 46:8*

Okay, let's get to the point: How do we read these lists of names when they come up in the Bible? How are you supposed to read these genealogies and make it a devotional, let alone pronounceable, experience?! And just why do these lists keep appearing in my Bible reading!? And ... who in the world would name their son, “Guni!”

I don't know about you, but every now and then I find it enjoyable fun to climb up into the family tree and look around. From both sides of my married life, I have had opportunity to read over some fascinating descriptions of who married who on my great-grandmother's side ... and how he was a minister in the Methodist Church ... and who married that one who sewed the flag ...

Every time I've sat down to ponder the Who's Who of the Ross and Devore family trees, I've always walked away with a sense of wonder, and only increased curiosity, about how who I am today is a result of those who've gone before me. I am also so grateful for those gifted folks who took the time, to painstakingly write out the names, and record the relationships.

Which brings us to all the genealogies and “begats” of the Bible. Well, maybe they don't inspire us all the time - but every time I read through these names, I think: Isn't it amazing that our God wants our names all recorded? Isn't it wonderful that God knows our names? Isn't it wonderful that God promises to give us new names as we “move” into his presence for eternity? Isn't it wonderful that God is interested in saving ALL of us ... even Guni?

**Youth & Adults:** How many names of your family tree can you name? How does it make you feel to know that God knows your name?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for the way you care about each person, not wanting any to be lost. Amen.

## Thursday, January 24 Scripture Readings

Genesis 48:1—49:33

Psalms 20:1-9

Matthew 15:29—16:12

Proverbs 4:20-27

# ***Modern Horses Are Not Enough***

by Dick Leon

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. -Psalm 20:7*

Chariots and horses represent sources of obvious and superior strength and power to the Psalmist. We have our own kinds of horses and chariots, don't we? Modern Science and Technology make our lives so comfortable it is easy to think we don't need the Lord to get along.

When we lived in the Philippines it took ten days for our letters to reach home and another 10 to get a reply. Now we can send an email from any part of the world in microseconds and get reply equally quickly. Good friends of ours had two sons who died young with cystic fibrosis. Now we are on the edge of finding ways to correct this fatal illness with genetic mapping after the discovery of the gene that causes this disease! Science and Technology are wonderful!

But, can they answer our deepest needs for a good life? Can technology resolve our personal disputes and relational hurts? We can get from Tucson to London faster than ever (*if the flights are on time!*) but we still have to decide how to behave once we get there.

I love the benefits of our modern chariots and horses but I need more for my life than they can provide. I need meaning, purpose, a knowledge of right and wrong and the strength to do the right. I need comfort when death strikes close and hope to face the tragedies of this world. I also need forgiveness for my sins that science and technology know nothing of!

Some may put their trust in modern chariots and horses but we need more than that to live well. Let us trust in the name of the Lord our God!

**Youth:** Cell phones and I-Pods are great ... but you still need to put your life together with values and virtues that direct how you use them! Try the Lord, he never fails us!

**Adults:** What are the limits of science and technology for your life?

**Prayer:** Lord we thank you that we live with so many modern conveniences, but protect us from trusting in any of them to make life right! Lead us instead to your Son and help us to trust in you alone! Amen.

## Friday, January 25 Scripture Readings

Genesis 50:1—Exodus 2:10

Psalms 21:1-13

Matthew 16:13—17:9

Proverbs 5:1-6

# *The Ultimate Question For Everyone*

by Jerry Smith

*"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" -Matthew 16:15*

Peter had the right answer when he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." What is your answer to the same question?

My answer came 52 years ago. I had recently completed an eight month cruise flying jets off of the USS Lake Champlain in Korea. Preceded by two six-month cruises flying Corsairs off of the USS Oriskany and USS Coral Sea in the Mediterranean Sea. My present duty was teaching young men how to fly from their first flight to aerobatics. A duty that I still consider the best I ever had. I was a Lieutenant, Junior grade with a great career, a lovely wife, two healthy boys and seemingly everything a 25 year old man could want. And yet there was some thing missing in my life. I had no idea what it was but I could feel a void in my soul. There was a small Presbyterian church in Milton, Florida where we were living and Esther being raised in the church started going there with the boys. After a while I started going too and eventually joined the church. But it didn't fill the void.

After some time they decided to ask Ned Iverson, a classmate of our pastor at Princeton, to hold a revival. Esther and I went each night as Ned for the first time revealed the living, loving, redeeming Jesus Christ to each of us. When asked if we wanted to receive him as our Lord and Savior to come down in front and be prayed for, we stumbled over each other to get down there. If you ever worked in a Billy Graham Revival you know what I mean. You just can't wait to get the monkey off your back and to start living as children of God.

It seems like a long time ago but each day with the Lord just gets better and better as he continues to reveal himself to me as only he can.

**Youth:** There is only one guarantee in life and his name is Jesus. Don't waste another second in asking him to be the Lord of your life.

**Adults:** If you are sure of your salvation, praise the Lord. If you have never experienced that cleansing sensation of trusting Jesus, do it now. It will be the best decision you ever made and the happiest day of your life.

**Prayer:** Father, I thank you for revealing your Son to me and for giving me the faith to accept him. My prayer is that everyone reading this will be moved by your Spirit will take Jesus into their heart as their Lord and Savior. Amen.

## Saturday, January 26 Scripture Readings

Exodus 2:11—3:22

Psalms 22:1-18

Matthew 17:10-27

Proverbs 5:7-14

# The Name Of God

by Scott Coverdale

*Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" -Exodus 3:13-14*

One night I was riding through the desert in the back of a pick-up truck, watching the stars, and I had a strange and striking vision. It will sound a little outlandish in the telling, but here it is: I was carried by a strong wind up from the earth into space. I was escorted very far, through a storm of sound and light, and at last came to a place that was very beautiful. In the center of the space there was a stone floating in air, and it had axial lines engraved in its surface, and it appeared to be rotating somewhat randomly. I was given permission to touch the stone. When I touched it, it became still, and I looked around me and saw that all else, all sound and light and matter was rotating around the stone. And I saw that the stone was the center, was the only thing ever that did not turn, and that everything else was moving in relation to it. I began to ask a question, but was swept away and returned to Earth.

When Moses asks the Lord what his name is, God says, "I am who I am." God says, "I am the end and the beginning and the substance of all things." Even more incredible is that in the context of this story, God is hearing the cries of the Israelites because they are oppressed by the Egyptians. The eternal God hears, and cares, and has compassion.

**Youth:** Why do you think that God gave himself this name?

**Adults:** If God is the Center of the universe, can you guess who is not the center of the universe? How do we as mortal beings relate to the immortal, eternal, unreferenced God?

**Prayer:** Eternal God, who are that you are, we are in awe of you. Please take our mumbled words, our small gestures of faith and our deep need, and make them acceptable to you by your eternal grace. Amen.

*The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, January 27, 2008.*



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