

THE COMPASSION



OF THE CROSS

NORTHMINSTER DAILY DEVOTIONS

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Sunday, January 27 Scripture Readings

Exodus 4:1—5:21

Psalms 22:19-31

Matthew 18:1-20

Proverbs 5:15-21

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 - How do you feel when someone gives you a hug? What kind of hugger are you: a bear hugger, a "three light pats on the back hugger," or a non-hugger?

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: Psalm 91:1-16

Bible Application

- e What does the word shelter bring to mind? What or who has been a shelter for you?
- e What four names for God are used in verses 1-2?
- e What types of disasters and terrors are mentioned here?
- e If such protection are promises, why does evil still come?
- e What does it mean to make God your refuge?
- e Where have you seen God's protection?
- e What does this Psalm say about taking risks for God?

Going As Ambassadors For Christ

Missional Focus: How can God use you to provide encouragement or hope to someone who feels abandoned by God?

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

Close with Prayer

Monday, January 28 Scripture Readings

Exodus 5:22—7:25

Psalm 23:1-6

Matthew 18:21—19:12

Proverbs 5:22-23

Know Any Good Yokes?

by Andy Ross

Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. -Exodus 16:7

A yoke is a kind of leash for an animal. Only bigger - like a wooden bar that goes across the shoulders of oxen. But they function like a leash, in that a yoke's purpose is to guide, steer, or control animals for serving people, as on a farm.

God doesn't think people should wear leashes. Long ago the people of God's special covenant were living in cruel slavery under the mighty rule of Pharaoh, the Emperor of Egypt - they were forced to make bricks, and were treated like animals. Exodus is the story of how God delivered this people from Pharaoh, so they could live in a land of their own, with dignity and hope, joyfully worshipping God in freedom.

Now that we have small dogs living in our home (*mini-Dachshunds*), we have been careful to take them on walks with a harness rather than regular leash and collar, because their necks are so small and delicate. We use the harnesses to protect them, guide them, so they can enjoy their walks without getting hurt. But still, a good question to consider:

Are there any leashes on you these days? Things that are controlling you that you resent? Have you put a leash of limitation on yourself that God would like removed so you can experience his love in its fullness?

Jesus came to be for us a very good Shepherd for our lives. Jesus once said, "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 11:29*).

Youth and Adults: Talk together about the leashes that we put on other people, or ourselves. Are there good leashes that we need to wear? Bad ones? What does it mean to be a "sheep" of God's good leading and care? How does that change us? Free us?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you offering us a yoke of health and goodness. Help us remove any yokes that are not of you. Amen.

Tuesday, January 29 Scripture Readings

Exodus 8:1—9:35

Psalms 24:1-10

Matthew 10:13-30

Proverbs 6:1-5

It's Not Fair!

by Jennifer Monroe

So the last will be first, and the first will be last. -Matthew 20:16

Anyone who has been around young children for any significant amount of time has probably heard the heart-wrenching wail, “But it’s not faaaaaair!” Children seem to come equipped with an in-born sense of fairness: what he gets, I should get. If she gets a cookie, I should get a cookie. If I am not allowed to jump on the bed, then they shouldn’t be allowed to jump on the bed either. Children are really good at noticing adults’ inconsistencies and pointing them out, making sure that everyone gets “what he deserves.”

Jesus’ parable in Matthew 20:1-16 makes it clear that adults have just as finely-tuned a sense of fairness. It seems obvious that the workers hired at the beginning of the day, who toil long hours in the hot sun, should make more money than those hired at the end of the day, who only work a little while. Not surprisingly, those men who were hired earlier (*even though they got exactly what they were promised by the vineyard’s owner*) feel a bit disgruntled at being paid the same amount as men who hardly worked at all. Frankly, most of us can’t blame them. It just doesn’t seem fair.

And we’re right: it isn’t fair. None of us gets “what we deserve” from God. The vineyard owner was under no obligation to hire anyone at all, and just because some of the men were privileged to do a full, honest day’s work does not entitle them to any more of the profit than they were promised. Similarly, God has given some of us the incredible gift of being able to know and follow him for most of our lives. Rather than being proud of this, or begrudging others’ “deathbed conversions,” we should be endlessly thankful for the unbounded generosity of our Savior.

Youth: Have you ever said to your parents, “But that’s not fair?!” How did they respond?

Adults: Does God’s “economy” seem strange to you? Why?

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for not treating us as we deserve, but with love, generosity, and grace. Continue to give us grateful hearts. Amen.

Wednesday, January 30 Scripture Readings

Exodus 10:1—12:13

Psalms 25:1-15

Matthew 20:1-28

Proverbs 6:6-11

Servant-Power

by Dick Leon

... You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, whoever wants to be first must be your slave ... -Matthew 20:25-26

Who are your “heroes?” Are they the famous people of politics or business or sport or the arts? Ask yourself if they are heroes to you because they are well-known or because they have really achieved something “great.” This world is filled with a lot of people who are “famous” ... and many of them are also “infamous!” There are many sport stars and movie stars and TV stars who are well-known, but that is not the same as being “great” in Jesus’ eyes.

Greatness in the world is a matter of power and fame. Greatness in the eyes of our Lord is a matter of service and humility. One of my heroes is Nelson Mandela. He spent 27 years in prison unjustly, mostly under forced labor on Robben Island. When finally released he did not extract vengeance for the cruelties of apartheid but rather moved his whole nation toward a bloodless transition of power from the small white minority to an authentic democratically elected government of blacks and whites. All of South Africa is radically different because of this one man!

Even as the newly-elected President, Mandela was a servant of the people rather than an imposing and oppressive figure of power and authority. He sparked a remarkable revolution on a whole nation. Our world needs more leaders who rise above partisan politics and personal gain to serve the needs of a nation. Sadly, these kinds of leader are rare in our day.

We, too, need to find ways to rise about the use of any form of “power” we may have over others and rather take the role of a servant under others. If the Son of God could come not to “be served but to serve” don’t you think we could (*and should!*) manage to do the same?

Youth: Think about your “heroes” in light of this passage.

Adults: How does Jesus’ call and example shape your use of power?

Prayer: Forgive us, Lord, for using power for our benefit. Give us a better outlook so we see greatness in humbly serving those around us in our lives. We pray in the name of our Servant-Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday, January 31 Scripture Readings

Exodus 12:14—13:16

Psalm 25:16-22

Matthew 20:29—21:22

Proverbs 6:12-15

Keep Telling The Story!

by Frank Shallenberger

On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' -Exodus 13:8

The firstborn male children of the Israelites who had sprinkled the blood of the lamb on their lintels were spared when God sent his angel through Egypt. Moses instructed the men to tell their sons why they were celebrating in such a manner - eating unleavened bread.

What broad implications this message has for each one of us today. Think of the many things we do because Jesus shed his blood on the cross for us. Read the Bible, conduct daily devotionals, pray, attend Sunday School, church services, minister to the needy, the sick and the poor to name just a few. Just as the blood of the lamb spared the Israelites those millennia ago, the Blood of the Lamb, Jesus, spares us today. Because of the blood of the lamb the Jews escaped from slavery to the Egyptians; by the Blood of the Lamb, Jesus, you and I have escaped from slavery to sin. We remain sinners but we are no longer in bondage to sin. Jesus paid the price, he redeemed us, he bought us with his blood. A resolute plea to the Father through the Son wipes our souls clean.

Every time we share in the Eucharist we celebrate this escape through the last blood sacrifice of the lamb that God will ever demand. Jesus did it once and for all! We moms and dads need to tell our sons and daughters about this miracle that occurred two thousand years ago and which we commemorate the first Sunday of each month. We must explain to them why we eat the bread and drink of the cup. A reminder of God's greatest gift!

Youth: Do you think of the cross when you receive communion?

Adults: Did you explain to your children the true meaning of the Eucharistic Feast?

Prayer: Burn in our hearts the memory of the cross and burden us with the duty to share the message with the children entrusted into our care. Amen.

Friday, February 1 Scripture Readings

Exodus 13:17—15:18

Psalms 26:1-12

Matthew 21:23-46

Proverbs 6:16-19

Sure, Glad To

by Marshall Worden

What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go and work today in the vineyard." "I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, "I will, sir," but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered.

-Matthew 21:28-31

I think Jesus puts us on the spot in this passage when he asks, "What do you think?" It's pretty clear that the eventual positive response and performance by the first son is what the father wanted. We don't know from the story, however, what actually caused that first son's change of mind. And we don't know if the son's time in the vineyard was spent grudgingly or out a sense of obligation tinged with resentment or because the son had a heartfelt desire to be obedient to and honoring of his father.

The second son says the right thing, but it's an empty and meaningless promise that yields to disobedience. I'm uncomfortable as I think about this son's response because it's easy to identify with personally. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* puts the son's response as "Sure, glad to." I can hear myself saying the same snappy thing. Probably too often I give a similar casual, offhand and quick answer just to get some request behind me - an answer given with no real, considered intention to necessarily follow through.

But the story is really about our relationship with Jesus and how we live a life of repentance. Maybe you are like me. Sometimes my response to Jesus and his word is fast, decisive and motivated by love and obedience. Embarrassingly, sometimes my response is slow, halfhearted and even evasive, not really wanting to face up to what is required of me as a disciple.

Youth: Have you ever made a promise to a friend or parent that you did not follow through on? How did you feel afterwards?

Adults: Jesus has called us to a life of repentance and a new life with him. What are some areas in your life where you are not sincerely trying to change? How can you do better?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for asking us hard questions. Thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit to prick our conscience and show us better ways. Amen.

Saturday, February 2 Scripture Readings

Exodus 15:19—17:7

Psalms 27:1-6

Matthew 22:1-33

Proverbs 6:20-26

Whatchamacallit

by John Charles Cheek

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions." -Exodus 16:4

My New Testament professor in seminary was Peter Gosnell. Dr. Gosnell was and is a godly and pastoral man, who also happens to be a brilliant teacher. Although his primary area of expertise is in Greek and the New Testament, his discussion of the story of the manna is one that I remember with crystal clarity.

The word "manna" (*he taught us*) is a two-word Hebrew expression, and in fact a Hebrew question. It literally means, "What is it?" Dr. Gosnell felt that "whatchamacallit" is a fair English translation.

"What is it?" There is much about God, and our relationship with him, that can't be reduced to a formula. Our God is a God of truth, and also a God of mystery. We need to make room in this relationship for that which we don't understand, but receive in faith and love.

Youth: What are some of the questions you would ask God if you knew you could get an answer right now?

Adults: How comfortable are you with the mysteries of God? How much of your faith is tied to tangible knowledge?

Prayer: Lord, please make us more at peace with that which we see as mystery, and make clear to us that which is best for us. Amen.

Sunday, February 3 Scripture Readings

Exodus 17:8—19:15

Psalms 27:7-14

Matthew 22:34—23:12

Proverbs 6:27-35

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 - As a child, who did you know as a troublemaker? Who was a peacemaker?

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: Psalm 91:1-16

Bible Application

- e How do you define love, and what must it contain?
- e What command from this passage do you find most helpful to you right now?
- e How does love act within the community of the church?
- e How does love act towards those outside the community of the church?
- e Which two commands are easiest and hardest for you to live out?
- e How does God teach us how to love through our experiences?
- e What stories can you recall of loving the unlovely?

Going As Ambassadors For Christ

Missional Focus: How can you love others sincerely this week, both those who are lovely and unlovely?

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

Close with Prayer

Monday, February 4 Scripture Readings

Exodus 19:16—21:21

Psalms 28:1-9

Matthew 23:13-39

Proverbs 7:1-5

Commandments, Not Suggestions

by Judy Williams

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol ... You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God ... Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and mother ... You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony ... You shall not covet ... -Exodus 19:3-4,7-8,12-17

I am God ... the only God ... so don't worship anyone or anything except me. You command me to obey. You tell me how to live each day. I want to live my life for you, to do the things you want me to.

Don't make idols to worship. Just love me and obey me. I'll worship the One True God always. No false idol gets my praise.

Don't misuse my name. My tongue will not profane your name. I never want to bring you shame.

Remember that Sunday is a holy day. Sunday is a special day, to honor you in every way.

Bring honor to your parents. I honor those who gave me life; a peaceful family without strife.

Don't kill anyone. You made everything on earth. All life is precious and has worth.

Be faithful to your spouse. My marriage vows are dear to me. Faithful I'll forever be.

Don't steal. I'll never take what isn't mine. Honesty is your design.

Don't lie. I'll speak no word that isn't true. My vow for truth will honor you.

Don't want something that belongs to another. Wanting more would feed my pride. With what I have I'm satisfied.

Youth: God gives us guidelines and expects us to obey. Honoring your parents is just one way God wants you to be obedient. So when you obey your mother and father, you are obeying God!

Adults: Each of us falls short of obedience to God. But re-reading his commands helps us know how he wants us to live. Remember: A command is not a suggestion!

Prayer: Dear Father, as we strive to obey you, give us strength to do the right thing in every circumstance, worshipping you in spirit and in truth. Forgive us when we fail to do your will, and guide our walk with you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, February 5 Scripture Readings

Exodus 21:22—23:13

Psalms 29:1-11

Matthew 24:1-28

Proverbs 7:6-23

Enjoy The View

by Karen Foss

Give unto the Lord the glory unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. —Psalms 29:2

My husband and I have been fortunate to have traveled a good part of the United States and each state has a beauty of its own. When I reflect on this passage from Psalms, I can't help but think of some of the places that stand out in my mind.

Five years ago, we planned to drive our RV to Alaska. The trip started with a stop at the Grand Canyon. Who can stand on the rim and not have your breath taken away by the sheer vastness of the canyons with colors that change with the shadows falling on them? Thank you Lord for this beauty!

Next was Yellowstone National Park in the middle of May, there was still snow on the ground in the higher elevations. Watching steam rising from the geysers and the bison with their new calves wading into the warm waters was a truly awesome experience. Thank you, Lord, for all creatures!

The Canadian Rockies are a breathtaking sight, so steep and formidable. It was misting when we arrived at Lake Louise, near Banff, Canada. Looking across the frozen lake, we could see a glacier between two snow covered mountains. Thank you, Lord, for creating such majesty!

Alaska is, indeed, the last frontier. We watched a glacier calve. The sound was like a clap of thunder. There was wildlife everywhere. We saw a mother grizzly bear and her cub feasting on dandelions in the middle of a field. Moose grazed beside the road. In Haines, we were fishing at a stream and there in the middle was a seal doing his own fishing. Overhead eagles circled and called to one another. Thank you, Lord, for the peace in nature!

Youth: Do you take the time to watch a beautiful sunset and think about our Creator?

Adults: Have you ever just stood near the ocean and watched waves rolling in? Does it make you think of God's power and glory?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I am so blessed to live in this country of so many beautiful sights. Remind me daily to take the time to thank you and enjoy the view. Amen.

Wednesday, February 6 Scripture Readings

Exodus 23:14—25:40

Psalms 30:1-12

Matthew 24:29-51

Proverbs 7:24-27

Ready To Meet Him

by Scott Coverdale

So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. -Matthew 24:44

In Matthew 24, Jesus is speaking about when he will come back, and how important it is for his followers to be ready to meet him. Being unsure of when the Second Coming might be, I turned to the Internet Almighty. I was not disappointed. I perused a few of the two point six million sites that Google found, and came away with the remarkable information that this month is likely to be the appointed time. I also discovered who the Antichrist is, read the biblical prediction of 9-11 and learned that Jimmy Carter and George Bush both have pivotal roles to play in the End Times (*on opposite sides, by the way.*)

I have an objection to fancy interpretations of Scripture. Many of the 2.6 million articles and websites on the internet dealing with the Second Coming of Christ are so speculative and use such overwrought and under-disciplined logic as to become ridiculous. I don't know whether Jesus will come back next Thursday evening or a million years from next Thursday. What I do see in the Bible is Jesus telling us that we can meet him today. Sometimes he is disguised as a child having trouble in school, sometimes as a prisoner. Sometimes he is a thirsty man in the desert, a lonely old woman in a mobile home; somebody that gets overlooked in society's rushed "pursuit of happiness."

The Second Coming? That would be great. But let's not miss the fact that he already came and, in ways that matter very much, he is still here. Maybe we should log off the Internet and go meet him - not in the clouds just yet, but here on the ground where we already live.

Youth: How does loving another person show our love for Jesus?

Adults: Have you ever had the feeling that you had met Jesus in another person?

Prayer: Lord, please give us the eyes to see you wherever you show up in our lives, and the heart to respond to you, however you are disguised. And oh yes - please come back soon. Amen.

Thursday, February 7 Scripture Readings

Exodus 26:1—27:21

Psalm 31:1-8

Matthew 25:1-30

Proverbs 8:1-11

More Precious Than Rubies!

by Frank Shallenberger

... for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. -Proverbs 8:11

“Wisdom” is mentioned 218 times in the New International Version of the Bible so it must be pretty important. Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines wisdom as accumulated philosophic or scientific learning, the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships, good sense (*my favorite*).

Solomon says wisdom is more precious than rubies; in fact, there is nothing in this entire universe that we could possibly desire that can compare with it. What is its relationship to us as Christians, to our faith and to our devotion to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Luke reports Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (*Luke 2:52*). Certainly if we as Christians want to imitate Christ, we too must grow in wisdom.

Before we can love anyone we must first get to know them. That is where wisdom comes in. The more we learn, the closer we are going to find ourselves to Jesus. Learning leads us to a greater understanding of the God who loves us so much that he sent his only-begotten Son that those of us who believe upon him may never die but have eternal life. There can’t be a better reward for acquiring wisdom than that!

Since wisdom is ‘accumulated learning,’ how can we acquire it? We are offered many ways here at NPC. To name a few: Bible reading and devotional prayer, hearing expository messages, Sunday School, in depth discussion with Christian friends, the sermons of great pastors shared on both radio and television, Christian magazines and newsletters just to name a few. There really isn’t much excuse for not accumulating learning and acquiring wisdom.

Youth: Do you limit your studies to schoolwork only or are you also applying yourself to learning and acquiring wisdom of the God who made us and the Son who saved us?

Adults: Do you think Sunday School is only for kids? Have you learned all there is to learn?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, send us your Holy Spirit that he may kindle in our hearts a burning fire of desire for wisdom, for knowledge of you and your divine son which will enable our love for you to encompass our entire lives. Amen.

Friday, February 8 Scripture Readings

Exodus 28:1-43

Psalms 31:9-18

Matthew 25:31—26:13

Proverbs 8:12-13

A Good Place To Train Sheep

by Jerry Smith

When the Son of man comes in all his glory ... all nations will be gathered before him ... He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

-Matthew 25:31a,32a,33

This Scripture foretells of Jesus return and his judgment of all people. It continues to detail the criteria for sheep and goats and the rewards for each. A blinding flash of the obvious is that we want to be counted with the sheep. Lets examine the six criteria and see if my title holds up:

1. I was hungry and thirsty and you fed me:
 - a. We have established the Deacons Closet to feed the hungry in the neighborhood.
 - b. We support the Gospel Rescue Mission and the House of Neighborly Service. Both feed the hungry.
2. A stranger and you invited me in:
 - a. I think we do a good job of welcoming strangers and getting them involved in support groups.
 - b. This is a good place to put our support of AMOR in Mexico, our Katrina support trips and our High School/College young adult yearly mission trips.
 - c. Our support of Habitat for Humanity.
3. Clothed me:
 - a. There are many opportunities to give clothes in this area one of them is The Gospel Rescue Mission.
4. Sick and you visited me:
 - a. The Pastoral Partners visit our congregation's shut-ins.
 - b. John Cheek is our designated Pastor for Hospital Visitation.
5. Visited me in prison.
 - a. I'm not aware of a prison ministry in this area. A good opportunity for some one to start one.

There is always a danger of doing this and leaving good works out which I'm sure I have. One that comes to mind is our support of Cragin Elementary. If you know of others and are supporting them, good for you.

Youth: The object here is to help people in need the best way you can.

Adults: "When did I do this Lord," is not going to cut it.

Prayer: Lord give us eyes to see and ears to hear the cries of our neighbor in need and hearts of compassion to respond to those needs. Amen.

Saturday, February 9 Scripture Readings

Exodus 29:1—30:10

Psalms 31:19-24

Matthew 26:14-46

Proverbs 8:14-26

The Spirit Is Willing

by Anne Price

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. -Matthew 26:41

Over my lifetime I have heard this statement over and over. Now it becomes more valuable because I can picture the scene as Jesus warns his disciples of their difficulties ahead. Let us see Jesus and his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Did you know that we have our own Garden of Gethsemane on the west side of Tucson?

Like Peter, I have gone through several stages, as I fall prey to my own weaknesses. I say to myself I will not do a certain thing. Then I find myself doing what I promised I would not do. I may feel that I have failed miserably. There are two options. I can pray for the willingness to overcome my weakness and learn from the experience, as Peter did, or I can wallow in my sin and never grow spiritually, as did Judas.

During times of discouragement we can go to Jesus for encouragement and express our deepest emotions about our struggles. May God grant us an increase in our trust in him, even as Jesus displayed. May he build in us precious Christian character, refined in the furnace of his discipline and love.

Youth: Do you go to Jesus when you want to be a better person?

Adults: When you fall short in doing what you know is right, do you stop and talk to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to go to you even when I fall short of the perfection of your Son. Amen.

Sunday, February 10 Scripture Readings

Exodus 30:11—31:18

Psalms 32:1-11

Matthew 26:47-68

Proverbs 8:27-32

The Suffering of Jesus

by John McKee

Little is written
Of the suffering at Golgotha
The day that our Savior died.

But you can imagine
The violence and noise;
The condemned men's cries if you tried.

Imagine the Centurion
Roughly throw Jesus down
Backward onto the beam,

As another drove nails
Into his hands and feet;
The Lord Jesus stifled a scream.

With much cursing and struggle
The soldiers raised him
So the cross was upright in its hole.

His blood streamed freely
As the nails and the thorns
Caused pain that he felt to his soul.

Many of his friends
And his family were there ...
As this evil unfolded they cried.

He saw Mary, his mother,
As she quietly sobbed
With his Disciple, John, at her side.

His pain was severe
When he struggled to stand,
For the nails dug deep into flesh.

The crown of sharp thorns
That they'd jammed on his head
With matted, bloody hair enmesh.

Soon his arms begin cramping ...
He can't pull himself up ...
exhaustion begins to creep in.

He can barely exhale
For the muscle paralysis
That overcomes crucified men.

The Carbon dioxide
Builds up in His body
And as the cramping begins to subside,

He can finally breathe
Some fresh air in his lungs
To make a promise to a thief at his side.

After hours of enduring
This terrible agony
A new crushing pain he feels start;

For the pericardium has slowly
Filled up with serum
And has begun compressing his heart.

It is now almost over.
He gasps for short breaths.
His heart must work hard to pump blood.

“It is finished.” he utters
While struggling to breathe;
Painful wounds continuing to flood.

After Christ breathed his last,
A cruel Legionnaire
Drives a lance into his right side.

As blood mixed with water
Gushed out of that wound
His Father must also have cried.

He'd accomplished each task
That God had sent him to do
And completed it with holy grace.

He'll be coming back soon ...
He has promised he would.
To bring his joy and his peace to this place.

Monday, February 11 Scripture Readings

Exodus 32:1—33:23

Psalms 33:1-11

Matthew 26:69—27:14

Proverbs 8:33-36

Be Blessed

by Marie Ruiz

Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me ... -Proverbs 8:33-34

These Scriptures contain four great truths we need to consider. Never before have I felt such a common thread across all four Scripture passages. Read each one and make this connection for yourself and you may find some common links I have missed.

God makes a path for us: When God called the Israelites out of Egypt he answered their pleading for deliverance from the Egyptians. God responded in the most miraculous series of events, using Moses, a stutterer, as God's mouthpiece, plagues to convince Pharaoh, and even after the Israelites left Egypt, God continued to make a safe path for all when he parted the Red Sea to allow passage for the Israelites and peril for the Egyptians, etc (*Exodus*).

God has a purpose for us: When God's plan for his people and nation is spoken into being, no one can thwart the purposes of God's people. God foils the plans of those who try to interfere. The plans of the Lord stand firm forever (*Psalms*).

God's instruction is sure: Blessed is the man who listens to me watching daily at my doors ... If we listen to God's instruction we will be wise. I think wisdom is something we all long for (*Proverbs*).

God knows us better than we do: Jesus forewarned Peter that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. Peter said to Jesus "Even if I have to die with you, I will *never disown you*." It wasn't long after that Peter realized his folly and wept bitterly.

God knows the plans for us even before we are born. He knows everything we will do and say at every moment. He's already been there and wants to help us live the miraculous life envisioned for us - it is the safest, the most wise, and the easiest way to live.

Youth: Ask God to help you each day. When we live with God's help, we will be most happy.

Adults: Even as Christians, we can do wrong as Peter of old, but God is faithfully by our side offering forgiveness.

Prayer: Since the foundation of the world you have been with us, let us trust your ways and seek to do your perfect will. Amen.

Tuesday, February 12 Scripture Readings

Exodus 34:1—35:9

Psalms 33:12-22

Matthew 27:15-31

Proverbs 9:1-6

Store God's Word In Your Heart

by Jerry Smith

... the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. -Exodus 34:6b

I've learned through my work with small groups, Rick Warren studies and Alpha that most Christians are not avid Scripture memorizers. Although attendees of the Rick Warren studies knew they would be asked each week to quote the week's Scripture verse barely 20% could do it. If given a test at the end of 40 Days, I doubt if any one could get all six. If given a test today, I would fail it too.

I've been thinking about this and my conclusion is that to remember something it must have a personal relevance. In my early Christian life I became involved with the Navigators and their memory program. I couldn't tell you which of those verses I remember today but I'm sure there are some. What I have found as I journey through God's Word, I come across verses that have a particular significance it has been my habit to stop and commit them to memory.

The Scripture verse at the top of the page is one. Moses was on top of Mount Sinai all alone for the second time to get the Ten Commandments which he broke in a fit of rage the first time. God told him to hide his face in a rock cleft so he wouldn't see God's face and die. As God strolled by Moses he quoted this verse. I could feel Moses start to relax and realize that God had forgiven him and that it was going to be all right. He spent 40 days and 40 nights getting all the directives for the next three books of the Bible. God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and those words of God are for you and for you and for you and for me. Praise God for evermore.

The next time the word of God hits you as this verse hit me reward yourself by stopping and committing it to memory. It will be a treasure you will enjoy the rest of your life.

Youth: You are much more adept in memory work than we adults. Learn a few verses to help you through the rough times that are sure to come.

Adults: You would be surprised how a memorized Scripture comes to mind when most needed.

Prayer: Father let us burn with fervor as we read your Word and give us the desire to hide it in our hearts. In Jesus name. Amen.

Wednesday, February 13 Scripture Readings

Exodus 35:10—36:38

Psalms 34:1-10

Matthew 27:32-66

Proverbs 9:7-8

Snowcaps And Sealing Wax

by Scott Coverdale

“Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. -Matthew 27:65-66

Some years back, I traveled with two fellow adventurers to Mount Saint Helens, which had recently erupted as a volcano. The mountain was closed to the public, so we posed as university researchers to get past the checkpoint. It was an amazing sight - a mountain that had blasted 540 million tons of ash and rock twelve miles into the air. We were determined to climb down into the two thousand foot deep crater and check out the lava dome for ourselves. As we climbed up the mountain, the crater emitted a cloud of sulfuric gas, and we regretfully decided to skip the lava dome.

When I read about Pilate’s attempt to seal Jesus in the tomb, and I think that he might as well have tried to prevent Mount Saint Helens from exploding back in 1980. I don’t think that candle wax and a few soldiers with short swords stood much of a chance at the tomb on that Sunday morning. I think that the will of the Creator was going to open that hole in the hillside no matter what Pilate tried to do about it.

As it turned out, Jesus didn’t blast out of the tomb like an explosion of hot lava. He came out quietly and comforted a grieving friend. He then spent a few weeks walking around and teaching just as he had done before the Establishment tried to put him away. Just as Pilate’s sealing wax didn’t work on the tomb and the snowcap didn’t stop the volcano, there is nothing that will thwart God’s plan for the world. There is no real escape from God’s determination to love and redeem the world.

Youth: How was Jesus’ resurrection like Mount Saint Helens? How was it different?

Adults: Do you think that God’s plan for the world might prevail in the end? What is one way in which it can prevail in your own life today?

Prayer: Give us faith, dear God, to know that you will have your way in the world. Give us the good sense to be on your side in the process. Amen.

Thursday, February 14 Scripture Readings

Exodus 37:1—38:31

Psalm 34:11-22

Matthew 28:1-10

Proverbs 9:9-10

Three Cheers For Women!

by Dick Leon

Suddenly Jesus met them (the women). "Greetings" he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. -Matthew 28:9

The status of women in the world is a great test of whether a culture is healthy or sick. Sick cultures run on issues of power and strength and size and in these cultures men rule the world. Almost all primitive cultures were dominated by men. Sadly, this is still true today!

Women did not amount to much in Jesus' day. But I believe Jesus set about to liberate women from all oppressive cultures in which they have so little stature. He does this by speaking to women in respectful ways unlike the customs of his day, healing them, forgiving them and including them in his followers. Perhaps the most dramatic act of women's liberation came at his resurrection.

In today's Scripture, we see that women are chosen to be the first witnesses to the event that turned the world upside down. Women are the first to be "ordained" by the angels to tell the good news of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The only men at the scene were the guards ... tough guys who we might say represented the muscle of male rule ... and they fainted! (*So much for macho!*)

Women are the first ones to see and hear and to touch the risen Christ! And Jesus repeats their "ordination" by sending them out as his messengers to the men who were hiding back in town!

We must confess that many cultures, even our Western traditions, and even some parts of the church yet today, could still be called "sick" and remain out of step with Jesus! As always, Jesus is ahead of us all and any efforts we make to increase the dignity and stature of women in our world is going to be blessed by the Lord!

Youth: Girls, never doubt your worth in God's eyes! Boys, never lower yourself to mistreat a girl or permit others to abuse girls!

Adults: OK guys, this is Valentines Day ... be smart and good about it!

Prayer: Lord, we are all worthy in your eyes, but we are especially thankful for your revolutionary regard for all women who have been left out all through history! The world is so much better for it, and so are we! Amen.

Friday, February 15 Scripture Readings

Exodus 39:1—40:38

Psalms 35:1-16

Mark 1:1-28

Proverbs 9:11-12

Peace Of Mind

by Jennifer Hager

... Say to my soul, "I am your salvation." -Psalm 35:3b

Long before I asked the Lord Jesus to be my personal savior, I faced a business situation that literally brought me to my knees. Some complicated business relationships existed that had been in place prior to me having responsibility for the customers that were involved.

I was struggling with trying to maintain the relationship that the president of the company had formed, yet to find a way to correct what I saw as shady and unethical. I was afraid that my input would anger the management of the company I worked for, but I knew it was not right.

As I drove home on my long commute, I recorded my thoughts on a small tape recorder in an attempt to sort things out. When I got home, I fell to my knees in my bedroom and asked the Lord to help me.

Now, all these years later, I don't remember the particulars of the business situation, either before or after the Lord helped me. All I remember is that after my prayers, the air cleared. Somehow, I knew to let him take it from me. Proof of his grace is my inability to even remember the details! The Lord promises that he is our salvation - he took the situation from me and allowed me to rest in his work.

Youth: When something is bothering you, ask Jesus to help you to work it out and to feel peaceful about it.

Adults: Is there something that lingers in our minds that comes up over and over that we cannot seem to let go of? Let us ask the Lord to take it from us and make the turmoil a distant memory.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Almighty God, thank you for taking our troubles upon yourself and giving us peace. Amen.

Saturday, February 16 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 1:1—3:17

Psalm 35:17-28

Mark 1:29—2:12

Proverbs 9:13-18

Folly Vs. Wisdom

by Anne Price

The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge.

-Proverbs 9:13

Let us picture Miss Folly instead of being on a hill inviting those who pass her way to join her in evil ways, her being on television for millions to see. Our young people see this kind of activity every day.

In contrast, where are the images of Lady Wisdom? She may not be so dramatic, so she is not on *Entertainment Tonight* or on *You Tube*.

I was raised by my grandmother who was a complete lady. She was an active Catholic, put her husband and family first in her life. She loved art, music and literature. I thought that she was old-fashioned. The movie stars of the day were chain-smoking, drinking martinis and having multiple marriages. It was inviting and seemed like a lot more fun to emulate.

Now that I am a grandmother, I see how Lady Wisdom, my grandmother was right in trying to teach me how to live a fine life.

As we look at following the invitation of wisdom or foolishness, the answer is clear. May we try to impart to our loved ones that God's wisdom leads to abundant life. Foolishness, fostered by Satan will lead to death.

Who do we follow?

Youth: Do you look towards those who will lead you to the Christian life?

Adults: What kind of an example are we to others?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a person of wisdom and not of folly. Amen.

Sunday, February 17 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 4:1—5:19

Psalms 36:1-12

Mark 2:13—3:6

Proverbs 10:1-2

Good Friday

by John McKee

Hear the ring of the hammer
Upon the nails
Being driven into his hands.

Feel the horrific pain
Shoot through his arms ...
Burning like firebrands.

See the noisy mob
As they laugh and shout
While Jesus is lifted aloft ...

Hear his prayer to the Father
To forgive his tormentors
In a voice very weak and soft.

See Roman soldiers
Taunt him and sneer
While lots for his robe are cast.

Observe the cruel crucifixion
Of God's only Son
Whose Kingdom forever shall last.

Witness Mary, his mother,
Crying softly below ...
Standing with John in the crowd.

Hear the words of Jesus
That he spoke to God,
As he cried out to the Father aloud,

**“My God, My God,
Why have you forsaken me?”**
In a voice heard by many below ...

See the Roman Centurion
View Jesus in awe ...
With his fear beginning to grow.

“Truly this man
Was the Son of God!”
He said as the earthquakes began.

The confusion was rampant
As the multitudes scattered ...
To their homes they frantically ran.

See them lift his body ...
Now lifeless and limp ...
Down from the rough, cruel tree.

Feel the cool air of the tomb
Where he lay for three days
Before winning **THE VICTORY**.

Rejoice as God's angels
Roll back the stone
Blocking the entrance there.

Leaving only his shroud
In the darkened tomb
That by now is quite still and bare.

Monday, February 18 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 6:1—7:27

Psalms 37:1-11

Mark 3:7-30

Proverbs 10:3-4

Don't Just Do Something; Stand There!

by Andy Ross

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. -Psalm 37:7

We usually think you're not really doing something unless you're doing something. What I mean is, we view action as so important. We even celebrate how people can be busy, for we equate busy-ness with success.

The Bible tells us that one very good thing we can do is just be still. Wait ... you mean "wait"? How can we just be still - and why should we?

Maybe we can think of "being still" as like a doorstop for God. A doorstop holds a door still - but open. If you think about it, a door that is always swinging open and shut all the time is hard to walk through! But when we pause to hold the door still and open before God, we're shown ways to walk through difficult passageways, because God is leading us.

Now, I'll be honest here, being still is not always easy for me, but I try to remember to be quiet and prayerful before God on a regular basis. When I do, I find myself being renewed ... I receive new ideas and inspiration from God's Word ... and I find it easier to listen to God, when I'm not distracted by my own action-plans.

Psalm 37 is filled with great actions words: "Do not fret" ... "Trust in the Lord" ... "Commit your way to the Lord" ...

But the best way to DO many of these great habits in life, is by first making it a habit to be still before our awesome and living God!

Youth and Adults: Is it hard for you to sit still in quietness for any length of time? Why do you think that is? What are some ways you could get used to having quiet, still moments, in which you listen for God's voice?

Prayer: Dear Lord, we just want to be quiet now ... and listen to you. Speak to us from your holy Word, and guide us, even as we need to remember to be still before your holy and loving presence. Amen.

Tuesday, February 19 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 7:28—9:6

Psalms 37:12-29

Mark 3:31—4:25

Proverbs 10:5

Being Good Dirt

by Jennifer Monroe

Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop - thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown. -Mark 4:20

Trying to grow a garden in the middle of Tucson's Sonoran desert can be a frustrating experience. For two years in a row, my husband and I have done our best to cultivate a little vegetable patch in our backyard, attempting to coax a few tomato and bell pepper plants to life through the blazing hot summer. We have not been very successful. One thing we've learned is that we need to do more work to improve the dirt in our yard. The ground is rocky, hard, and dry - not the best environment for growing delicious produce. We've also learned the importance of constant weeding. A little bit of water encourages all kinds of unwelcome visitors who, given the chance, will choke out the plants we actually want to grow.

Jesus says that some of our hearts are like my dry, rocky, weed-infested back yard. Good seed is sown in us, but it doesn't send out roots, flourish and bear fruit. Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (*Mark 4:9*). The implication seems to be that some people have ears, but they don't really use them to *hear*. They are "ever-seeing but never perceiving, and ever-hearing but never understanding" (*Mark 3:12a*). They may cognitively understand the words that are being spoken, but they don't really hear them with their hearts, encourage them to take root, feed them with fertilizer and water, and then exhibit the delicious fruit that is bound to grow. It is easy to tell when someone's heart is made of "good dirt" - their lives produce a crop "thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown"!

Youth: Have you ever tried to grow a garden? What was the result?

Adults: How would you rate the dirt of your heart? Is it hard? Rocky? Weedy? Or is it rich and full of life?

Prayer: Father, keep my ears ready to really hear, my eyes ready to really see, and my heart ready to really understand. Make me good dirt. Amen.

Wednesday, February 20 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 9:7—10:20

Psalm 37:30-40

Mark 4:26—5:20

Proverbs 10:6-7

The Maker Of Right Minds

by Dick Leon

When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. -Mark 5:15

This passage teaches us that Jesus is the Maker of Right Minds.

Our heads get easily bent out of shape by the legion of demons who rattle around in our heads day after day:

I can feel the 'acquisitive demon' telling me over and over again that life is measured by how much stuff I can acquire.

I hear the 'vengeful demon' telling me that when someone insults me or disrespects me I should be sure to get back at them and harm them as much as possible.

I hear the 'cool demon' in my head often telling me that vulgar language will make me look mature and with it.

I hear the 'cynical demon' telling me that nothing is true for all people and all moral standards are just personal choices.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 what Jesus does for us: we will no longer be conformed to this world but we will be transformed by the renewal of our minds! It is a wonderful gift from the Lord to be set free from the ways of this world because they simply don't produce the kind of life God wants for us.

Give yourself to Jesus, he will reshape your life and you too will find yourself sitting at his feet, fully dressed and in your right mind!

Youth: Are there times you think you are going wacko because your head is filled with so many weird ideas? Try turning your mind over to Jesus and see what happens!

Adults: We all spend too much time in our head arguing with the ways of this world, don't we! Ask the Lord to make your mind clear in times of confusion and trust his leading.

Prayer: Lord, we need your help. This world plays with our heads in so many sneaky ways. Give us the gift of right thinking that fits your design for our lives. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday, February 21 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 11:1—12:8

Psalms 38:1-22

Mark 5:21-43

Proverbs 10:8-9

Have You Received The Gift?

by Frank Shallenberger

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years ... she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak ... "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped ...

-Mark 5:25-29

How marvelous is the Gift of Faith! When Jesus gave sight to the two blind men he said to them, "According to your faith will it be done to you" (*Matthew 9:29*). Paul wrote "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... the gift of God ..." (*Ephesians 2:8-9*). In this beautiful subplot we see another example of *faith*. A woman who had a condition no physician could help was in the crowds that greeted Jesus that day. As she saw his healing powers she sought and received the Gift. Was it too late? She had come to Jesus as her last resort.

The crowd surrounding him was tremendous. It was all she could manage to do to get close to him. Realization struck her. "I'll never get his attention; he will pass me by and never know of my great need. My salvation, my healing, is so close at hand but I don't have the strength to get it!" As she pushed her way forward she was roughly thrust aside. "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Desperate, with one final gesture she reached out to touch him. As she fell down her outstretched hand touched his outer garment. And then it happened! Miracle of miracles! She knew instantly her bleeding had ceased and the strength of her years had returned. She was able to rise up. Praising God and his Messiah she followed with the crowd.

We are never told what happened after that. Those of us who have received the gift of faith and "touched his garment" know. She couldn't hold it in. She told all who would listen what the Nazarene did in her life. There were doubters of course even amongst those who knew of her long time ordeal. She did not let that deter her. She repeated the story many, many times. Because of this, others too were able to receive the gift of faith and "touch the hem of his garment."

Youth and Adults: Have you experienced this miraculous healing in your life? It is never too late but it is also never too soon.

Prayer: Father, give us the gift of your Holy Spirit that we too may experience the miraculous healing power of faith. Help us to remember that it is not the garment but the gift that saves us. Amen.

Friday, February 22 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 13:1-59

Psalms 39:1-13

Mark 6:1-29

Proverbs 10:10

The Miracle Of Modern Medicine

by Ralph Comey

As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp. -Leviticus 13:46

The Tale of Genji, the great eleventh century Japanese novel by Lady Murasaki, contains descriptions of life at the imperial palace. Here, courtiers enjoyed the finest music, dance, and poetry, and lived in beautiful buildings surrounded by spectacular gardens. Yet, illness was pervasive, and many died. Prayers and nursing care alone were of little help. In spite of a high level of culture, there was no medical science.

Medicine was unknown in biblical times too, but there were rudimentary, yet sensible, health practices. In the Laws of Moses, presented in Leviticus, there was a close relationship between cleanliness and godliness. Cleanliness, and isolation of the sick, were promoted. But scientific medicine is a fairly recent development.

Youth: Have you studied the history of medicine? It is fascinating to read about research scientists like Jonas Salk, who developed the polio vaccine. Have you thought about pursuing a career in the medical field?

Adults: Today in America, we are so fortunate to live at this time and to benefit from modern medicine. Treatments and procedures once unknown are now commonplace, and they are constantly being improved. There is a tradition of creativity which we hope continues. Unfortunately, there are problems with the delivery of medical care. How can medical care be better distributed to bring benefits to more people? Can people get such broader benefits while still receiving personal attention? I once asked a wise doctor friend what I should do to get the best medical care. Find a skilled doctor who cares about you, he said.

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for the opportunity to live today in this marvelous world. Thank you for the miracle of modern medicine. And thank you for the doctors and nurses who care. Amen.

Saturday, February 23 Scripture Readings

Leviticus 14:1-57

Psalms 40:1-10

Mark 6:30-56

Proverbs 10:11-12

A New Song

by John Charles Cheek

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. -Psalm 40:1-3

“He put a new song in my mouth ...” There are so many of us who can relate to that little phrase. How many of us have had the experience of seeing grace spring up in circumstances and places we would never expect it? How many of us have had a sense of peace when the circumstances should have scared us witless?

The butterfly is a very early Christian symbol, and our spiritual forefathers, and foremothers too, were wise in selecting that symbol. The transformation from caterpillar to butterfly is a great metaphor for the way God, whose very nature is to transform, changes us from who we used to be into new creatures. And that newness leads to new songs, songs which glorify God and our relationship with him.

May we, each of us, know the transforming work of God in our own lives, and may we have a new song of thankfulness, praise, and love in our mouths.

Youth: What is your favorite song that praises God? How about singing it with someone in your family?

Adults: How long has it been since you sang a new song of praise and thankfulness to God? How might you go about discerning that song?

Prayer: Lord God, we thank you for making us new. Thank you also for the new song you give us. May we sing that song so that others may know you are God. Amen.

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, February 24, 2008.



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