

Northminster Daily Devotions

August 1-31, 2008

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Northminster Devotionals

May these devotionals be a blessing to you as we are guided through the daily bible readings from *The One Year Bible*.

Discover the “Sunday” Small Group Study Guides that have been provided here for small group, family or individual use (*anytime during the week!*). This material, based upon the Serendipity Bible for Groups (*1989 edition*), complements Sunday morning worship at NPC, and is a launching point for going more in-depth.

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. Don't forget... this entire resource is on our website at www.godmorning.com. So tell your friends!

If you would like to use your God-given talent to become a part of the devotional writing team, call the church at 520-327-7121 and talk to Publications Editor, Jim Peck. This is a very flexible ministry and can be done from anywhere!

The next issue of the Northminster Daily Devotions will be available on Sunday, August 31, 2008.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 1 SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Chronicles 30:1—31:21

Romans 15:1-22

Psalms 25:1-15

Proverbs 20:13-15

Are You Under-Bearing?

by Andy Ross

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. -Romans 15:1

So I've just finished watching a video of what our Yucatan Mission Team did this summer: lead Vacation Bible School and build a concrete roof (*among other things*) for a church in a remote village in Central America. I was impressed with how our young people and youth leaders would line up in a row, to jointly carry a 550 pound cement beam to go up onto the church building, to serve as a rafter for the rest of the roof itself. Walking single file, carrying that heavy beam, was an inspiring picture to me of what we are in the Church of Jesus Christ! Together, and in Christ, we can carry the heaviest loads! Together, and in Christ, we can make up for each other's weaknesses. And what else does Paul tell us in Romans? Yes, we can even help others bear up under their "failings"—a word which relates to us feeling like failures at times.

Sometimes we can be overbearing in the way we come across to people. Sometimes we can be underwhelming in the way we fail to step up when we are needed. But above all, the Bible tells us here that we are to strive to be "under-bearing" for those who have weights which we can help lift.

Together, through Jesus' love, we can lift the world to a new place! I hope you see today the beam you can get under, to help carry the love of Jesus and build his church of hope where you are.

Youth: Who might be the person, and what might be the situation this week, in which you could help carry a burden of need? Who have been those individuals who have carried burdens in your life?

Adults: What have been some stories of your failings or weaknesses, that your children should hear, in which others carried you through difficult times?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for under-bearing us, in our failings, on the cross. Show us how to show your kind of love to others in ways that count. Amen.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 2 SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Chronicles 32:1—33:13

Romans 15:23—16:9

Psalms 25:16-22

Proverbs 20:16-18

To Dream The Impossible Dream

by Jennifer Monroe

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while... I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

-Romans 15:23-24, 29

Paul is a man who knows how to dream big dreams. Not simply content to risk life and limb traveling in the sometimes dangerous and hostile region of the eastern Mediterranean, not comfortable with just riling up Jewish and Gentile leaders alike with his revolutionary message, not satisfied with having preached the gospel to thousands of people who may otherwise have never heard the Good News, he has bigger fish to fry. He wants to go to Rome, the center of the world in his day, and from there, to Spain. He remarks in Romans 15:20, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation," and Spain would certainly have offered him that opportunity.

However, many modern scholars agree that Paul's dream of going on a missionary trip to Spain probably remained exactly that: a beautiful, yet ultimately impossible, dream. When he finally does travel to Rome, it is not as a free man, but as a prisoner. This makes his comment about coming to Rome in the "full measure of the blessing of Christ" particularly poignant. Any details about his life after this remain mostly a matter of tradition and conjecture, based on his stated intentions elsewhere. What we do know, however, is that out of Paul's big dream of going to Spain came the book of Romans, what many consider Paul's most profound description of the Gospel and its implications for the present and future. Maybe sometimes God gives us big dreams and encourages us to pursue them, not necessarily because we will get to see them come true, but for what we will accomplish for his glory along the way. So go ahead, dream big!

Youth: What are some of your "big, impossible dreams?"

Adults: Can you see how any of your big dreams have been used to accomplish God's purposes, even if they didn't turn out as you planned?

Prayer: God, please give us big dreams and the courage to follow them wherever they lead. Amen.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 3 SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Chronicles 33:14—34:33

Romans 16:10-27

Psalm 26:1-12

Proverbs 20:19

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

- † Ice-Breaker: What crazy stunt in high school are you remembered for? What creative science project do you remember from those days?

Growing In God's Word

Bible Study

- † **Read Ecclesiastes 2**

† What paradox does the teacher find in hedonism?

† What do these key phrases tell you about the perspective of this passage?

- “during the few days of their lives”
- “under the sun”
- “in days to come”

† What “great projects” does he undertake? What desires where such projects meant to satisfy?

† In verses 12-16, to what does wisdom refer: Spiritual insight? Street smarts? Survival skills? Upright behavior?

† Why is there so much to be upset about amidst so much of what others would call success?

Bible Application

† What was your most important “project” this year and how did you measure its success?

† Do you tend to follow your heart or your head? How is that wise or unwise?

† Do you regard death as the final triumph or the final tragedy? Is the death of the fool different than the death of the wise? How can you prepare yourself for death?

† How does this passage help you to focus on the truly important things in life? What are they?

Going As Ambassadors For Christ

† Missional Focus: What might “living wisdom” look like for you this week for others?

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

† Close with Prayer

MONDAY, AUGUST 4 SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Chronicles 35:1—36:23

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Psalm 27:1-6

Proverbs 20:20-21

Gifted To Be United

by Dick Leon

God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. -1 Corinthians 1:9

The church in Corinth was troubled and the letters from Paul reveal those troubles almost too boldly at times!

The first trouble he names is divisiveness. The church had fallen into factions with people declaring loyalty to one leader or another... Paul or Apollos or Cephas... and thereby destroying their witness to the world (*There is nothing as ugly as a "church fight!"*).

When I lived in India for two years and traveled into remote villages, I would often come across small groups of Christians. What made me sad was how some of them would say: "I'm a Baptist"... or "I'm a Methodist." It was laughable that these converts to the faith had denominational loyalties in places where it made no sense at all! The consequence of those narrow loyalties meant they drew the circle of their "family" too small and excluded many brothers and sisters in the faith!

Gladly this age we live in today is moving away from those funny divisions and we are more able now to see our faith family is big enough to include Catholics, Orthodox and even Baptist or Methodist Christians!

Paul's recipe for coping with this is simple, true and adequate: you are "called into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord..." All who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ are in the circle of our spiritual family. Nothing is added to the boundaries of that circle... it is large enough to include us all!

This is why, later in this same letter, Paul can say, "If one member suffers, all suffer together... if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

Youth: Do you have good friends from other Christian churches? Does it matter that they are Catholic or Baptist or Methodist?

Adults: Think back to your growing up years. What has changed in your thinking to remove the distrust that people used to have toward "other" Christians?

Prayer: Mighty Lord, keep us from having narrow ideas of who your true followers really are. Keep us all deeply united in Jesus Christ. Amen.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 5 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezra 1:1—2:70

1 Corinthians 1:15—2:5

Psalm 27:7-14

Proverbs 20:22-23

Is God Too Slow For You?

by Frank Shallenberger

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. -Psalm 27:14

When David wrote this psalm, he was besieged on all sides by his enemies. Yet he remained steadfast in his faith. He knew that the Lord would hear him and “eventually” would answer his pleas.

Have you ever thought God was never going to answer your prayers? Did you ever have a schedule or a timetable which you wanted God to meet? I know I have. I can recall the times I prayed to the Lord and he didn't respond quickly enough. After awhile, I began to wonder if he heard me, if he did hear me but was not going to come to my aid, or had he decided against assistance in my case.

I can remember praying aloud to him and letting him know how displeased I was that he hadn't answered me. I can remember praying aloud and telling God that he needed to hurry things along. “Time's a wasting!” Sometimes I got results that way and sometimes I didn't.

And then his answer came. And the answer was given in God's own time and proved to be exactly what was needed at the exact time it was needed.

It isn't always easy to “wait for the Lord.” I guess the best word for what is needed is patience. We need to have patience and remember that God's timing is the best timing.

Youth: When you ask something of your parents are you impatient for the answer?

Adults: Have you noticed that God's timing turns out to be the perfect timing?

Prayer: There are times in our lives, Lord, when we become impatient waiting for your answers to prayer. Help us to be strong as David said, to keep our confidence up, have patience as we “wait for the Lord.” In Jesus's name. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezra 3:1—4:23

1 Corinthians 2:6—3:4

Psalms 28:1-9

Proverbs 20:24-25

In The Presence Of God

by John McKee

There is a realm in the sky
We'll go to by and by
At the completion of our earthly story.

Sitting upon his White Throne
Ruling there all alone
We'll see Jesus in all of his glory.

He rules with power and might
In his robes shining bright
The epitome of justice and love.

As the Angels all sing
Praises unto this King
He'll judge those below and above.

The "*Book of Life*" shall contain
The names of all who remain
After He culls the goats from his sheep.

The sheep with Jesus shall dwell
But goats he'll cast into hell
Gnashing their teeth as they weep.

This is the future for sinners
Who chose not to be winners
By refusing to accept him as Savior.

For only Christ can forgive
The sinful lives we all live
He absolves us of evil behavior.

His command to you and to me
Is to help others see
That he alone is the key to salvation.

This means we'd best realize
We must evangelize
To others in spiritual desperation.

For just as quick as a wink
Sooner than we might think
We'll go home to meet with our King.

At Final Judgment we'll learn
If we are saved or shall burn
Accepting Jesus Christ means everything.

You Are God's Temple

by Judy Williams

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. -1 Corinthians 3:16-17

In today's passage from Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth, he was reminding them that they, in fact, were Christ's church. Because God's Spirit lives in each of us, we, too, are Christ's church.

God knows everything about me. He knows all my peculiarities and bad habits. Because the Holy Spirit lives in me I know how much he loves me. He expects me to take care of my health.

Yet sometimes I grow careless in the upkeep of my "temple." I read recently that self-care is NOT self-centeredness. Rather, as Parker Palmer wrote in *Let Your Life Speak*, "Self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others."

When I pay attention to my body, it tells me the truth about myself. Exercise, rest and proper nourishment are necessary "temple upkeep."

Youth: Will you thank God today for making you—"you?" What things will you do to take good care of his gift of your body?

Adults: Do you remember to get enough rest, eat sensible foods, and have regular check-ups? How is this a way to take care of the gift God has given you?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to value myself as you value me. Help me remember that I am your temple and that you are in me. Give me the good sense to take care of myself. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Chief Magistrates

by Scott Coverdale

Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. -1 Corinthians 4:5

It is a great challenge to live in our modern, complicated, pluralistic, globally connected, over-informed, internetted, society. People are really going nuts out there. All sorts of strange ideas are being promoted that might make us pretty darned uncomfortable. The John Templeton Foundation is asking prominent scientists and philosophers whether modern science makes belief in God obsolete. Some of them are saying, "yes." People are getting theologically eclectic, taking a dab of this and a dab of that and not really minding that it doesn't hang together very neatly. People are mixing politics and religion in strange ways. It is politically incorrect to be a Bible-believing Christian, and politically necessary to be one if you think of running for president. Some of the best and worst people in the world identify themselves as Christian. Some of the best and worst people in the world don't identify themselves as Christian.

I have known a lot of people who have set themselves up as Chief Magistrate, passing judgment on pretty much the whole world. The odd thing is that these self-appointed judges tend to pass negative judgment on those who act or speak or think differently than them, and pass positive judgments on those most like them. Funny coincidence, huh?

I think that the point of Paul's instruction here is that there is only one Judge and that it is not you. We must, by all means, try to live in faith and faithfulness to God and the truth that he has brought into our lives. It is not our job, however, to judge or condemn others. Our primary job is to love people. Our secondary job is to speak freely what truth we understand God to have given us. If these two jobs seem overwhelming, just stick to the first one.

Youth: What type of people do you tend to judge negatively? Positively?

Adults: What is the difference between judgment and discernment? How do we speak truth without passing judgment?

Prayer: God, please remind us of your great love for us, and for all of the other people who you have created in the world. Please teach us to love more and judge less. Amen.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 9 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezra 8:21—9:15

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Psalms 31:1-8

Proverbs 21:1-2

Walk In Faith

by Karen Foss

In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. -Psalm 31:1-4

When David wrote this Psalm, the “they” he was talking about in the last sentence was the enemies he was fighting. Recently, for my husband LeRoy, the “they” turned out to be his lung doctor and the results of a recent biopsy. The report was not what we had hoped for. His pulmonary fibrosis was progressing and any treatment had a 30% success rate. Like LeRoy said, “It’s like a kick in the lungs.”

Whenever you hear news like this, I think your first reaction is fear and helplessness. So we sat down and talked and talked some more. We knew we were not in control of this situation and that help could only come from one place and that is our faith. The Lord **is** our rock and strength and we know that whatever happens, he is in charge and will see us through this difficult time. The interpretation from *The Message* is “you’ll never let me down.” As I was formulating this devotion, God sent me his own message via a marquee in front of a south side church that read “God: One who walks with us.”

We have such wonderful support from our family and our friends right here at Northminster. It’s such a blessing to know that so many people are praying for us. Our small Bible study group has been wonderful, so supportive and loving.

Youth: Do you realize that you can trust in our Lord to get you through anything you face in life?

Adults: Do you carry all your troubles to the Lord?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guide us, comfort us, and console us as we find our way in this world. Help us through the tough times and be with us during the triumphs. Amen.

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

- † Ice-Breaker: What was the most physically exhausting job you ever did? What affect does your work have on you: Invigoration? Frustration? Exhaustion? Boredom? What pleasure in life do you not get enough time for?

Growing In God's Word

Bible Study

† **Read Ecclesiastes 5**

- † What is the "fool's" error?
- † What is meant by, "listen", "keep silent", and "not delay"? What happens with "quick" mouths?
- † How does verse seven sum up the first part of chapter five?
- † Why is oppression not surprising?
- † What about money and stuff being the problem?
- † What is the conclusion?

Bible Application

- † How much "gladness of heart" do you presently experience in your "labor under the sun?" What would enable you to enjoy your work more?

Going As Ambassadors For Christ

- † Missional Focus: How might God help you encourage and give recognition to someone this week in the meaningfulness of their work?
- † Prayer Requests: How can we help you in prayer this week?
- † Close with Prayer

A Purpose-Driven Life

by Jerry Smith

They said unto me, "Those who have survived the exile and back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and it's gates have been burned with fire. When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. -Nehemiah 1:3-4

What a great read! If you have never read Nehemiah, you owe it to yourself to do so. Nehemiah was cup bearer and adviser to King Artaxerxes, a very rewarding and honorable position. But Nehemiah prayed for three months until God had prepared the King's heart to release him to return to Jerusalem to repair the wall and restore God's authority in the land.

This was accomplished with a great deal of thought, planning and prayer. First he got letters from the king for safe passage to Judah and for material to rebuild the gates, walls and living quarters. When he got there he planned carefully before enlisting the help of the people. And help they did. Each section of the wall and gates was restored by small groups depending on their location in the city, and in all, about 40 different groups completed the work in 52 days.

What does this have to do with Northminster? When we were studying Rick Warren's, *Purpose Driven Church*, he said the techniques for success were in the book but each church had to find its own "wave," or purpose. I don't believe we have found our wave. I do believe we will find it in the neighborhood of Northminster. And I do believe we have to enlist our younger generations to help us as we "grey hairs" don't speak or understand the needs and desires of most of those in the neighborhood. Finding the "wave" is a project for the entire congregation. It will take prayer, planning and working together to find God's plan for Northminster and the neighborhood.

Youth: How do you think we can reach our Northminster neighbors?

Adults: Are you satisfied with the status quo or are you willing to pray for change?

Prayer: Father, we ask for your help in reaching our neighbors for you. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Diligence During Rough Times

by Anne Price

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

-Proverbs 21:5

The wisdom of Solomon is as practical in this verse today as when it was written centuries ago. Another word for diligence is prudence. As I pay the high gas prices I say to myself, "What can I do to live with this?" My mind flashes back to the 70s when we faced a gas shortage and could only buy our fuel on certain days. I was the sole support of four children and was in the real estate business driving a big Cadillac that slurped up gas. I would take my thermos of coffee and the morning paper for the long wait in the line on my gas day.

Today, as I fill up the tank, I can be grateful for the availability of gas and be more prudent in my driving habits.

I must say that this Proverb hits home right now to most of us in a variety of ways. May we stay close to our Father and conserve our resources to the best of our abilities. Some day we will look back and see how much we learned during these tough times.

Youth: Do you see ways that you can cut back on some wasteful habits?

Adults: Can you remember how in times of struggle you got closer to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please guide me toward living with attentive care of all that you loan to us. Amen.

Are You Filled With Song?

by Frank Shallenberger

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. - Psalm 33:3

Although I have read this Psalm quite a few times before, I had never taken the time to think what David meant by the words “a new song.”

Psalm 33 opens up with David calling everyone of us who have a right relationship with the Lord to rejoice in him and give him the praise and honor due. Praising God and giving him honor is the response you and I should always have, especially when God reaches down and does something special for us. We shouldn't try to use the same old words and the same old formula over and over again. Use a little imagination. Try varying your words. It's so easy to get in the habit of repeating the same phrases and the same word groupings over and over again. Praise then becomes a matter of rote without any spontaneity; more habit than meaning.

Imagine what kind of a relationship you would have with your spouse if, when you sat down together at the table, you said the same words with the same feeling and the same emotions over and over and over again. I would wager that your spouse would most likely feel that you had lost interest in him/her. Your spouse wouldn't feel you appreciate what he/she has been doing for you. And so it is with God. Praise is the natural response of God's people for receiving his benefits. Our praise should be spontaneous and fresh. The very best talent that a person has should be offered in praising him. We should offer God nothing less.

Youth: Have you learned to pray yet? Do you rush through your prayers and say the same thing over and over again every day?

Adults: Do you remember that God is your father? Do you speak to him just like you would your earthly father with confidence and love?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember that you truly are our father when we turn our lives over to Jesus. Remind us that Jesus told us to call you Abba, “Daddy.” Reassure us that we have an intimate relationship with you that nothing natural or supernatural can destroy. In Jesus name. Amen.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nehemiah 7:73—9:21

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

Psalms 33:12-22

Proverbs 21:11-12

Abounding In Love

by Jennifer Hager

... But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them ... -Nehemiah 9:17

In this beautiful prayer in Nehemiah, a long history of Israel's history is given as the people of God recall the amazing mercy that he has shown them. This verse reminds the people that in spite of their shortcomings and sins, the God of Israel is already ready to forgive.

Twice in the past week, I have had an occasion to discuss the Almighty God with some new friends. Two people said that until recently, they viewed God as judgmental, harsh and even cruel. I thank God that Christ is my Savior and the Holy Spirit instructs me every day that God is loving, just and compassionate.

Why do some view God as harsh and judgmental? Why do we believe that he would put us on this earth, only to be mean and make us suffer? Our human condition and all of the doubts and fears that it brings make it hard to believe that God's plan for our lives is one of love. When bad things happen to good people, we have an acute feeling of injustice. We forget that God gave us the Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sins. Christ took on the punishment for our sins so that we can rest in the loving arms of the Almighty God. God's plan is ultimate love—we learn and grow in relationship with him through all worldly situations. Our assignment is to trust in his love.

Youth: When in your life, have you seen and experienced God's love?

Adults: Do you trust in the Lord that he loves you and in all things is bringing you closer to him?

Prayer: Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, help us this day to see your love and live it through you. Amen.

Tested And Rescued

by Dick Leon

God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. -1 Corinthians 10:13b-c

“Tested and Tried!” Those are words often found in advertising a product to help us believe it works. And if you read up on products in Consumer Reports, you’ll see how different products rank after “independent testing.”

So, not all tests are bad. Some tests actually are given to prove the reliability of a product not to harm the product. When engineers complete a bridge they put a heavy load over it, not to try to destroy it, but to prove that it is able to carry heavy weights.

Life is like that for us, too. We are being tested all the time. Our text does not mean God brings nasty things into our life. The actual source of our testing is not revealed. The text says “God will not let you be tested” which means God does not cause but may “permit” our illnesses or our accidents or our moral dilemmas at work or at play. God does not author our troubles, rather God is profoundly present with us when they appear.

So, God’s role in this text is twofold. He is “permissive” about the testing, and he is “providential” in providing a way out. According to this text, we can never say “we had no choice” about giving in to temptations in life. God will always provide a way out.

So, instead of “tested and tried” as a label on our foreheads, we could more appropriately write: “Tested and Rescued!”

Youth: Think of a recent temptation in your life and then ask yourself this question: did God not also provide a way out?

Adults: How many times in the last month have you found God’s way out of a testing of your life and faith?

Prayer: Mighty Lord, you are so good to us. Thank you for always being close to us when we are tempted and for always giving us a way out. Help us to always take it! Amen.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nehemiah 11:1—12:26

1 Corinthians 10:14-33

Psalms 34:11-22

Proverbs 21:14-16

Listening Before Speaking

by Marie Ruiz

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. -Psalm 34:17

We live in a sinful and fallen world and because of this we as Christians will have troubles. We will be tempted to speak evil especially when troubles beset us. But look at what our Scripture tells us in the Psalmist passage: keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies (v.13). The face of the Lord is against those who do evil (v.16). We are going to face many trials in this world but God assures us of this: When the righteous cry out, the Lord hears them; he delivers them from *all* their troubles (v.17). The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in Spirit (v.18).

When I think of the promises that God has made to us, I'm relieved to know I can count on him. I can also take great assurance that the part I have to play is small in comparison to the work of the Holy Spirit and God in my life. We don't have to sweat—the work has already been done on the cross of Christ. We just have to submit and call out to God with fear and reverence for what he has accomplished on our behalf.

Did you know that God has our best interest at heart? His plan is perfect for us. It is our job to submit to God by praying for his direction in everything we do. And in doing this we can keep out of trouble in this troubled world.

Youth: When you get into trouble for something you have done, do you go to God and ask him to help you? He is there and will forgive your missteps.

Adults: We can so easily speak words without care, especially when faced with trouble. But God has our best interest at heart. He is close by, waiting to help us speak words of wisdom. Will you ask for his help today?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for saving us, for the assurance in your Word that even in a world filled with trouble, we can have a safe haven in you. Amen.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 17 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Nehemiah 12:27—13:31

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Psalms 35:1-16

Proverbs 21:17-18

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

- † Ice-Breaker: If you could learn any instrument, what would it be? What song would you like to play on it? When was the last time you got lost? Where were you going? Did you ever get there?

Growing In God's Word

Bible Study

- † **Read Ecclesiastes 9:13-18**

- † What are the two morals that the author derives from the story he tells?

- † How do the proverbs correspond to the story? What is similar? Why doesn't wisdom win out?

- † **Read Ecclesiastes 10:1-15**

- † Why is wisdom better than folly?

- † What hope is there for the lost fool?

Bible Application

- † In what areas of life would you like to be more wise? How can this be done? How can your small group encourage you in this?

- † How has something foolish you said affected others and yourself? How can "foolish" conversation be avoided?

Going As Ambassadors For Christ

- † Missional Focus: How can you show grace to a "fool" you know this week, for the glory of God?

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

- † Close with Prayer

MONDAY, AUGUST 18 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Esther 1:1—3:15

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Psalms 35:17-28

Proverbs 21:19-20

Communion

by Jennifer Monroe

For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. -1 Corinthians 11:29

When I was a young girl, I dreaded “communion Sundays” at my family’s church. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper meant that the service would be even longer and full of more confusing stuff than usual, and in my church, I wasn’t allowed to participate until I had made a personal profession of faith (*which typically didn’t happen until someone was in high school*). Bo-ring!

Paul’s words to the church in Corinth seem to suggest that, when it came to the Lord’s Supper, many of them were behaving more like self-centered children than grown up, mature adults. They were gorging themselves on the bread and getting drunk on the wine, some taking more than their fair share and others going hungry. They were being selfish and greedy, focusing on getting their own needs met, rather than looking out for others. Paul’s judgment on their behavior is pretty harsh. In fact, he suggests that the reason some of them are sick or have even died is because they have not taken the Lord’s Supper seriously enough (*1 Corinthians 11:30*). It is certainly not wrong to eat when you are hungry or drink when you are thirsty, but to do so without recognizing that you are, in fact, in the midst of the body of Christ, his Church, is to bring judgment on yourself. Participating in the Lord’s Supper is something we do in communion, together with other people. While it can be a powerful symbol to each individual, we must not forget that it, like everything else that happens in corporate worship, is also about our place in the larger body of Christ and our fellowship with other believers.

Youth: How do you feel about the Sunday services during which we celebrate communion? Are they boring or interesting? Why?

Adults: What is your experience of communion like? Has it simply become a routine you don’t think about? How might that change?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gift of your body and blood and the gift of the meal at which we remember your sacrifice for us. Amen.

What Is Your Gift?

by Judy Williams

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. -1 Corinthians 12:4-6

The Holy Spirit has gifted each of us in different ways. All of these gifts have been given so we can do with them what God had planned when he created us.

Each person has a special gift to use for our Lord's glory.

How we implement these gifts each tells a special story.

Since God bestowed the gift on us, have we responded gladly?

Or have the gifts remained untouched and wasted very sadly?

Unwrap your gift most gratefully; thank God for what he gave.

Decide how you will use this gift, perhaps a soul to save!

You have the choice to use this gift as God would have you do,

So choose right now to share your gift, and joy will come to you.

Youth: What special gift has God given to you? How can you use that gift today?

Adults: Have you put your gift up on a forgotten shelf? If so, will you take it down, dust it off, and put it to work for God right now?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, if I can use the gift you gave to make another person glad, help me do it, Lord. If I can use my gift from you to bring more glory to your Son, help me do it, Lord. If I can use my special gift to help another know you more, help me do it, Lord. Amen.

What Is This Stuff Called Love?

by Frank Shallenberger

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. -1 Corinthians 13:4-7

These verses are even familiar to nonbelievers as they have been used at wedding ceremonies as far back as anyone can remember. These verses were written to instruct you and me as to how we should live our lives in relationship to each other, especially our Christian brothers and sisters. Jesus told us we were to love one another. So these attributes for love apply especially to our relationship within the family of Christianity but then also to our relationship with all of God's creatures.

The love referred to here is the love that each one of us must have for our fellow man. Recently I wrote a devotional noting the difference between "liking" and "loving." St. Paul is amplifying what Jesus told us that he said we must love one another. We need to be patient, kind and thoughtful in our dealings with each other. He doesn't say we should never be angry with a fellow Christian but he does say we should not be **easily** angered. And he certainly says we must have the God-like quality of forgiveness, remembering no wrongs done to us. Our speech should be civil, and we must certainly be humble. Paul says love must always persevere. We must never, ever stop loving others.

Youth: Do you have classmates who are challenging your ability to "love" them? Do you try to "get even" or do you forgive?

Adults: Do you remember these verses when you become aggravated by a Christian brother or sister? Do you remember these verses when you become aggravated by nonbelievers?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you lived your life as the epitome of love. Give us the grace and the strengths to become imitators of the Christ and enable us to live our lives following your example. Above all, help us to be patient and kind to all. Amen.

The Lord Knows

by John Charles Cheek

The days of the blameless are known to the Lord, and their inheritance will endure forever. In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty. But the wicked will perish: the Lord's enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish—vanish like smoke. The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously; those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off. -Psalm 37:18-22

It's not fair! That's not fair! You don't understand!

These are the battle cries of our youth. And, even though we may not articulate it in the same way, I'm not sure we ever grow out of it. The issues certainly change. It's no longer about who gets the bigger piece of cake, or who gets to ride the bike first, but the sentiment remains.

It may be about who gets the bigger house or the newer car, it may be about who gets sick and who stays well, it may be about who is bereaved and who isn't. It may be seeing an evil person live to a ripe and comfortable old age, while a good and loving person dies long before his or her time.

The Psalmist says that we can trust that God knows. God knows the good and the evil. God is not deceived nor absent. God also knows the anguish in our hearts when it isn't fair. We can trust God to do what is right, even though we may never understand it in this life.

Youth: What was a time that something happened that wasn't fair? How did it make you feel?

Adults: What are the circumstances in which you have been tempted to question the fairness of God? How can you reframe that so the emphasis is on God's love and authority?

Prayer: Lord, help us to realize again that only you are God, and that you know what is best for us. Help us to accept that. Amen.

Orderliness And Godliness

by Dick Leon

But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. -1 Corinthians 14:40

I once read that teens in a “halfway house” need daily routines that provide order to their lives. Studies have shown that one common feature of their lives that led to getting in trouble was the lack of any daily pattern of order that could have given them a sense of security and peace.

The Corinthian church had a problem of how some spiritual gifts, especially the gift of tongues, were disruptive. Paul’s counsel is so wise to them and it fits us in many ways, even beyond the question of tongues.

First, he makes it clear he has the gift of tongues so his counsel is not “sour grapes.” Then he tells them, in effect, to “grow up!” Use your head not just your ego in this matter. Tongues are good gifts from the Lord but their use should be according to the principle of “up-building” in the church. If speaking in tongues becomes divisive, confusing or disruptive then the gift has been misused! His final word sums it up: “all things should be done decently and in order!”

How often have you heard people say “cleanliness is next to Godliness” as if this were a Biblical teaching. That is not found in the Bible, although cleanliness is certainly a good thing!

A better slogan that is in the Bible might be this, “Orderliness is next to Godliness.” Disorder, chaos, confusion, and their close friends are ugly and harmful to God’s work in the world. The church needs order, and we need order in our lives.

That which disrupts order disrupts life.

Youth: How do you feel when life is “disordered” ... and how do you feel when your life is “orderly?”

Adults: Do you know anyone who speaks in tongues? How do you regard them and their gift?

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank you for all your spiritual gifts; lead us to use them in a decent and orderly way that builds up your church. We pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

The Go-Between

by Scott Coverdale

If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both... -Job 9:33

Job is one of my all-time favorite guys. He has some serious complaint about God and the nature of the universe, and he is doing his best to figure it out. Even his friends have some pretty good things to say as they try to comfort Job or correct his muddled theology with their own muddled theology.

Can you see in Job's cry here, an image of what he is asking for? I see two friends who are in dispute, arguing and misunderstanding each other completely. Then an arbitrator comes along—another mutual friend—and steps between them and puts a hand on each one. The hand says that the mediator cares for both of the parties, and though they are offended at each other, they are now physically connected to one another through the mediator. Job feels like he isn't getting anywhere with God, and needs someone to help him make the connection, help him communicate with God, to give him courage to speak his mind, and make God's mind plain to him.

The story of Job carries on from there, but I can't help but think that the cry of Job is the cry of humanity, and that God must have heard that cry and said to himself, "He's right. We need a mediator. We need a go-between."

And in my view of things, that Mediator came along, eventually. In my view, he was born to a peasant girl some two thousand years after Job cried out about his need. I see that mediator as putting one hand on God and saying, "Peace, Father. I have redeemed these people. Forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And putting his other hand on us, he says, "Peace, people. Stop your crying. You can take my word for it that all things will be made well."

Youth: How does Jesus stand between God and people?

Adults: Do you ever cry out with Job, that you need a better way to understand and communicate with God? How does Jesus fill that role of mediator?

Prayer: God, thank you for your wisdom in providing the Mediator to meet our many needs. We still have many needs. Please help us trust you to meet them all. Amen.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 24 SCRIPTURE READINGS

Job 12:1—15:35

1 Corinthians 15:29-58

Psalms 39:1-13

Proverbs 21:30-31

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

- † Ice-Breaker: What is the worst investment (of time, money, etc.) you ever made? Why?

Growing In God's Word

Bible Study

- † Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

- † What does bread symbolize? What happens when you “cast your bread?” How will the giving of “portions” help in a time of disaster?
- † What do the matter-of-fact observations in verse three imply?
- † Why are those who just “watch” so unproductive and ignorant?
- † How does the conclusion in verse six summarize the previous verses and verse one?

Bible Application

- † How well do you manage your time? Money? Emotions?
- † In what areas of life are your “investments” too concentrated? Spread too thin?

Going As Ambassadors For Christ

- † Missional Focus: What is a wise investment in someone that you can make this week?
- † Prayer Requests: How can we help you in prayer this week?
- † Close with Prayer

Oh, For The Faith Of Job

by Jerry Smith

My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me. All my intimate friends detest me, those I love have turned against me. I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth. Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. -Job19:17-21

In one day Job, the greatest man among all the people of the East [Job1:3d], lost all his earthly possessions, his seven sons and three daughters and his relationship with God. Next, he was stricken with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. His wife told him to curse God and die. His three closest friends tried to convince him that he had sinned and that God was punishing him. In all these trials Job maintained his innocence that he had not sinned against God. He also asked, "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?"

In all his losses, pain and humiliating circumstances I was convinced Job had given up on God. Wrong! Job he declares, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—and not another. How my heart yearns within me" [Job 19:25-27].

What a faith. To suffer as he did and still know that God had not abandoned him and that he had not abandoned God!

Youth: Can you trust God to vindicate you when your friends falsely accuse you?

Adults: Is your faith sufficient to carry through the trials of aging?

Prayer: Father, teach us through the saints of old that your love is everlasting and never withdrawn from your sons and daughters. In Jesus name. Amen.

Who Is The Comforter?

by Anne Price

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. -2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Our problems prepare us to pass on the encouragement that God gives to us. Recently many of our church members went to the preparation for the opening of the Gospel Rescue Women's Shelter. Many years ago my husband and father to our four children pulled a rifle on me and threatened to use it. Somehow I had the courage to go to an attorney the next day and got a restraining order to keep him away. I was too numb to be frightened. God was certainly with me that night.

My heart goes out to the women and children who have no where to go. The women in this home have the love of Jesus demonstrated to them. The surroundings give them pride and safety. Their future will take them away from a life of fear. They will reach out to other hurting women and children telling of the love that Jesus has shown in their lives.

There is no denying that we will suffer at times. When we go to our Father on bended knees we will be comforted. Then we have the privilege of passing on hope for the future.

Youth: Who can you encourage today that is hurting?

Adults: What pain in your past took you to God and prepared you to help others?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for allowing us to help others as we recover from our pain. Amen.

Rose Of Bethlehem, My Beautiful Savior

by Marie Ruiz

In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them. -Proverbs 22:5

I really enjoy gardening, growing flowers and tasting the juicy citrus from our trees and the fresh figs from the tree my father planted from a graft of his fig tree from Boston. One of the flowers I enjoy the most is the perfectly formed rose that smells so sweet. It is a delight to my eye and I take great joy in clipping the stem at just the right spot so I can take it indoors and place it in a vase for all our family to enjoy.

Masked by the beauty of this beautiful flower are very nasty thorns which I have to confess have ripped my skin on many occasions causing me to bleed. It's not that these thorns are hidden from my eyes—they're not; but when I think I have placed my fingers on the thorn-less part of the stem another is there at an angle I hadn't anticipated and snags me. This is what Proverbs 22:5 is warning us about. A sinful pathway is never ugly at first sight—it is beautiful and enticing. That's why so many are tempted into a sinful way of living. But beware!

Our verse for today is about guarding our soul. This means to be on guard always. No matter how enticing sin is, there is pain and a price to pay. One of the best ways to guard your soul is to be connected to God's word. Read it! Digest it! Contemplate it! Learn from it by listening to pastors and teachers and share your struggles and joys with other Christians so we all can benefit. This is also a way to keep ourselves accountable to others and help strengthen our own resolve to follow hard after God.

Youth: How do you think most people feel about God when trouble comes? What are some ways to remind yourself that God is always with you?

Adults: When the thorns and snares of life overtake your will, do you recognize this and run to God?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust in your wisdom for our very lives, and never take for granted your watchful care in guiding our steps. Amen.

Do You Have Wisdom & Understanding?

by Frank Shallenberger

Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?... God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells... And he said to man, "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding." -Job 28:20-28

Job's suffering is legendary! Loss of family, possessions, friends and yet he remains able to teach the naysayers who visit him. He is a great example to us all. He firmly states to his two visitors "As long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit." He is a wonderful example for you and me for very few of us will ever suffer as he.

When we really understand what Job has been going through it is easy to be at a loss to explain how he does it. But as we read through the chapters of this time in his life it becomes obvious that he is a man possessing wisdom and understanding. Here he asks rhetorical questions. "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?" Then he clarifies the situation for each one of us. Wisdom and understanding come from God himself.

Then he defines both of these using the very words God has uttered to man: "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding." Once we digest this, it becomes clear that one can not have wisdom without a relationship to God Almighty and one cannot have understanding unless they know what this relationship truly means. One doesn't get wisdom and understanding from universities but from the Bible.

Youth: Do you realize that God isn't speaking about knowledge and skill but wisdom and understanding? We can have libraries full of knowledge stored in our brains but absolutely no wisdom. We can understand how an atom is split but not have the slightest understanding of good and evil.

Adults: Do you get it or are you confused? Wisdom and understanding are God things; do you have them?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, please be with us as we reach out to you to secure wisdom and understanding of your ways and your word. For we know that when we possess those two attributes we will become closer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Paul's Comparisons

by Deb Van Scoyk

If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! -2 Corinthians 3:9-11

The Apostle Paul possessed an amazing ability to teach, using the common knowledge of established doctrine (*Old Testament*)—a ministry of condemnation, as contrasted with the teachings of Christ (*New Testament*)—a ministry of righteousness. Imagine the spiritual journey undertaken by Paul's students as they progressed from the position of a sinner, condemned to eternal death, to embracing a God who declared all those who believed in his son to be forever free from guilt or sin.

Paul strengthened his contrast between the old and new when he reminded the Corinthians of the manifestation of God's commandments to Moses "engraved in letters on stone," as compared with the "more glorious" ministry of the Holy Spirit through whom the believer became empowered to live righteously.

And, as if this were not enough, Paul then spoke of the Old Covenant established at Mount Sinai between God and Israel as "fading away," a passing ministry, superseded by the greater glory of the New Covenant—a ministry that remains.

Youth: Does God seem different in the Old Testament than he does in the New Testament?

Adults: Can we make the same spiritual journey required of the Corinthians?

Prayer: Lord, we place our hand in yours and ask that our journey remain steadfast. In the awesome name of Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen.

Into The Light

by Deb van Scoyk

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. -2 Corinthians 4:4-6

When my husband, Paul, suddenly died, I experienced the blindness of an unbeliever as emptiness and anger consumed my soul. Life took on a senselessness; I was devoid of purpose and dreaded the future. I had been raised in the Presbyterian Church, but I had no relationship with Jesus, and even went so far as to mock anyone who expressed a need for spiritual guidance.

I equate the next year of my life with a long walk through a tunnel of darkness. While I clearly believed in the God of my youth, I fought to uphold my abhorrence of this thing called faith. Little did I know that all my attempts to avoid God only provided him one more opportunity to bring me one of those "servants for Jesus' sake." While I struggled to run from God, he spoke to me daily through the souls he placed in my path.

What these dear servants came to teach me was that Paul was exactly where he was meant to be, and that his death occurred at a time relevant to a future much larger than I could know within the bounds of my earthly world. The pain, while never leaving me, had a profoundly transformative power. My questions began to abate as I was faced with unforeseen challenges, lessons of understanding, incomparable moments of grace, and ultimately, I believe, began a journey toward comprehending and appreciating eternity.

God showed me how to let his light shine out of darkness.

Youth: Do you think God talks to you through other people?

Adults: What has been your most challenging obstacle to keeping your faith?

Prayer: Lord, do not let the darkness of our despair close the door on our faith. Amen.

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

- † Ice-Breaker: Who was the wildest classmate you knew growing up? What happened to that person? As you grow older, what do you want to hold on to the most? Youthful body? Youthful mind? Youthful heart? (*What do you imagine you'll be like at age 100?*)

Growing In God's Word

Bible Study

† **Read Ecclesiastes 11:7—12:8**

- † What are the “days of darkness” and why should we remember them?
- † What is encouraged in 11:9-10? What qualifies the joy we experience? How are youth and vigor “meaningless?”
- † What does the long sentence of 12:1-5 describe? Is it positive, negative, or neutral? Realistic or imaginary? Vain regrets or pipe dreams?
- † How is death portrayed?
- † How is the book summarized?

Bible Application

- † How much do “eternal concerns” affect your daily decisions?
- † How free do you feel to “be happy” and enjoy life?
- † How has your faith in God affected your outlook on aging, dying, and death?
- † In retrospect, how do you respond to the reflections in the book of Ecclesiastes?
- † Which discussion has had the most impact on your thinking?

Going As Ambassadors For Christ

- † Missional Focus: How can you “remember your Creator in the days of your youth,” and how can you help someone else (*perhaps a youth*) to do so?
- † Prayer Requests: How can we help you in prayer this week?
- † Close with Prayer

Our Lord and Savior

by John McKee

There's been so many pages
Written down through the ages
About Jesus Christ ... God's only Son

More than all queens and kings
Or less lofty beings
Even battles brave soldiers have won.

Greeks recorded the "*Good News*"
As did Romans and Jews
Writings of him continue this day.

Recent films have been made
In which actors portrayed
Jesus Christ ...also known as "***The Way.***"

When we read of his preaching
Concentrate on his teaching
Jesus makes his identity clear.

"I and the Father are one"
Is a direct quote from God's Son
To the Jews who had gathered round near.

Who Jesus said that he was
Is important because
Pharisees then schemed for his arrest.

These phony 'Religious Leaders'
Were all *bottom feeders*
Who were very *misguided at best.*

And when they had him arrested
Not one there protested
At the *Kangaroo Court* he was tried.

"*Are you the Christ?*" the priest said
For he wanted him *dead*
Pharisees wanted this man *crucified.*

Then without hesitation,
Jesus answered the question
Responding thusly to him ... "**I am** ..."

The high priest quickly arose
And began tearing his clothes
It was all a big act ... just a *sham!*

"... *Blasphemy* ..." said the priest
And as their anger increased
The Pharisees all agreed he should die.

Pharisees upon him spit
While by guards he was hit
In response to his truthful reply.

And from that moment on
This being just after dawn
They continued to beat and to batter

This man they'd come to hate
They dragged off to Pilate
Christ's innocence to him didn't matter.

He's touched more lives than any
His sacrifice has saved many
In fact, all who repent of their sin

By opening their hearts to him
Inviting him to come in
Life eternal in Heaven they win.



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