



Ridge Point Community Church

JOURNEY

March 8 – April 9, 2010

WEEK 1: March 13 and 14

TITLE: Healing

TEXT: John 5:1-15

MONDAY, March 8, 2010

Getting Well

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" - John 5:1-5*

What do you get when you put a middle aged body on 10 year old skis and add five years of inactivity? One spectacular face-plant. I went skiing for the first time in five years last year. I thought I was still 16, that I could land any jump I tried, forgetting of course that when I was 16 that crashing was a little less, well, painful. Four doctor's office visits later I was on my way to rehab for a rotator cuff injury and hours of painful stretching, lifting and electrode shocks. And let's not forget the "homework" of weight lifting, pushups and a ban on running. Don't get me wrong, it was totally worth it. But if you had told me what I was in for before walking in that door, I would have turned around and resorted to using my right arm for everything.

The same can be true of our spiritual lives. When Jesus asked the crippled man if he wanted to get well, the man must have thought, "duh!" But Jesus' question went deeper than just restoring a malfunctioning limb (or limbs). He was offering a brand new way of life, and whole new way of looking at the world. The man's life of dependence would end and he would have to learn what it meant to work and interact with people in a world that used to pass him by. He wanted to know if that man was ready for that -- to be changed in a way that would open a whole new world of opportunity and responsibility. And it's the same question Jesus offers to each of us, "do we want to be changed?" It takes work and getting used to, but the new life Jesus offers is manifestly better than what we are living right here right now.

QUESTIONS

1. Have you fully accepted the life that Jesus has to offer you?
2. What fears, concerns, habits, or desires keep you from accepting it?

PRAYER

Lord, we want so much to be living full, meaningful, healthy lives, but we allow ourselves to get in the way of accepting what you are offering us. Please help us identify the things that are holding us back from fully following You, and lay them aside so that we can more fully experience the life You have for us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 5:1-5. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

TUESDAY, March 9, 2010

Rocket Science

It does not take a rocket scientist to see that my life is less than perfect. I'm carrying a few extra pounds, driving a car that was made two decades ago and am hopelessly single. I've tried dozens of ways to "fix" that. I read Dave Ramsey's books. I've used Jillian Michael's books, DVD's *and* online support. I've even signed up for eHarmony. I've done savings plans, exercise plans and "life plans." Nothing worked, not until I was really ready to look at what was really wrong.

What was I really trying to fix? It was not my savings plan or my boredom on a Friday night. It took me awhile to see that it was my relationships with money and myself - and ultimately with God, that needed work. I was trying to fix the externals, when it was the internals that were all messed up.

The crippled man that Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda was struggling with the same thing. When Jesus asked him if he wanted to get well, he replied, "**Sir, "...I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.**" - John 5:7* He "knew" what could heal him and just wanted Jesus to help him get there. But Jesus was offering something the man couldn't work to get on his own. He was offering true transformation.

QUESTIONS

1. How are you currently trying to fix yourself (or someone else)?
2. How much (or how little) have you involved God in those solutions?

PRAYER

Make a list of the things you want to fix and then spend time talking to God about each of them, ask Him to help you see the hope and healing He has to offer in each of those areas.

REFERENCE

*John 5:7. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEDNESDAY, March 10, 2010

Taking the Step

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. - John 5:8-9*

When Jesus came to the crippled man, the man was called to move. He was asked to step out and do what he had never done before: pick himself up and the mat he'd been living on and walk. It's part of a larger pattern we see in the scriptures, whether it is God calling Abram to leave his home and head to the promised land, the children of Israel being led between the divided waters of the Red Sea or newly healed individuals told by Jesus to "go and sin no more."

And when we are following Jesus those moments will happen for us as well. There will be moments when God calls us to act and we have a choice whether or not to respond. It may be listening when the Spirit tells us to reach out to someone, give up an unhealthy habit that "helps" us through the tough moments, or trust God enough to take on a new job, friendship or way to serve.

QUESTIONS

1. How as God asked you to move lately?
2. How did you respond?

PRAYER

Lord, You know what is best for us. Please help us to listen to You when You call, to move when You ask us to and give us the courage to follow through. In Your name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 5:8-9. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

THURSDAY, March 11, 2010

Resistance

One of the challenges of change is that the people around you sometimes have a vested interest in assuring that you don't change all that much. It's a law of physics actually, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. If you suddenly become an exercising fiend, your friends and fellow couch potatoes face a new reality. Their buddy in front of the TV is gone. And they are forced to see how their choices are shaping their lives, bellies and stamina. They may not like it. You may have to find new friends or at least different ways of interacting with them.

This is doubly true when it comes to spiritual things, when God begins reshaping your life through the work of the Holy Spirit, all of your old life patterns begin to shift. People around you will react. Consider the crippled man Jesus healed who faced opposition right from the start:

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." - John 5:8-10*

It can be hard to receive that kind of response to true healthy change, but it shouldn't slow us down. If we are doing what God is directing us to do and experiencing the life He intends for us, the best thing we can do is to keep living and let the transformation in our lives speak against any criticism we might get.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways has God been changing your life?
2. How have you experienced resistance to that (from others, and from yourself)?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for making change a reality in our lives. Please help us to keep following You with everything we have, even when the opposition gets strong. Help us find health in You and by doing so, encourage others to seek what we have found. In Your name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 5:8-10. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

FRIDAY, March 12, 2010
Sharing the Good Times

People tell me stories all the time. But what I've begun to notice is that they rarely focus on the good stuff. It's how their car broke down, what their boss did that drove them nuts, or how their significant other has completely left them hanging. I'm not sure why this is, but it might just be human nature. It seems to be our first impulse. We like to explain why we are hurt, show off how overworked we are and in general, complain about things. It seems to be a common ground we can all gather around. It seems like it brings us closer together.

The crippled man Jesus healed seemed to cling to that train of thought as well. When asked if he wanted to be healed he says, "look at all the reasons I have for not being healed." When asked who healed him, he originally says, "some guy told me to carry my mat." It's not until he bumps into Jesus again that the Bible tells us, "**...the man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.**"- John 5:15* He needed a reminder to share the good things, to tell people what God had done in and through his life. Ironically, sociology teaches us it's these things that bring us together. It is the good times that create real, lasting connections – not the bad ones. In sharing his transformation, the crippled man was probably able to really connect with people for the very first time. It was through his sharing of his experience that he actually began to experience full life.

QUESTIONS

1. What things has God done in your life lately?
2. How can you share those experiences with someone?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for touching our lives in all the ways that You do. Thank You for hope, for healing and for second chances. Help us to celebrate and share the ways we see You working in our lives, help us to point others to You in the good times and when we struggle. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 5:15. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEEK 2: March 20 & 21

TITLE: Rest

TEXT: John 5:16-17

MONDAY, March 15, 2010

Rules, etc.

I didn't get it. We should have won.

My friends and I worked really hard on our 8th grade history project. We did a piece on the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk. My friend and I were Orville and Wilber and our other friend was a reporter who was chronicling our amazing first flight. It was a one act play, with no sets, in keeping with the historical time period. We followed every single rule of the competition to a tee and we did it all without any help from our parents.

Unfortunately, our main competition at the state level chose the same topic and they cheated (at least as far as we were concerned). They had a massive set which their parents helped them make: a life-size collapsible replica of the Wright Flyer 1. They had three acts and were completely inaccurate in their costuming. But they still won. They won because they understood what the judges were looking for: an engaging presentation that reflected the historical significance of the moment. They understood that the history fair was about making history interesting and relevant, in addition to being accurate and correct.

Sometimes I think we struggle with what God wants from us in the same way. People in the Bible definitely did. The Jewish leaders in Jesus' time were doing everything "right." They wanted to make sure no one violated the Sabbath by working. But they kept missing some vital things: **"... because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."**- John 5:16-17*

All the Jewish leaders saw was the violation. They didn't understand who God was; they didn't understand what God was really looking for. God wanted true rest for the people Jesus healed, relief from their suffering, not just one more day of inactivity.

ACTION

Think about the ways you have been trying to earn your way to God, by being or doing things right. Ask God to give you a sense of His grace today in those areas, ask Him to help you experience His rest.

REFERENCE

*John 5:16-17. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

TUESDAY, March 16, 2010

Sabbath

“Don’t stick your finger in the light socket.” This is a phrase that we generally don’t have to repeat with kids once they reach a certain age (or get a shock from sticking something in there). The reason is they understand *why* and then stop. Rules like that are meant to protect us from ourselves, at least until we can figure out how to use things like sockets properly.

I can’t help but wonder if God’s rules are aimed at some of the same things. The Ten Commandments say “**remember the Sabbath and keep it holy**” (Exodus 20:8*). So how do we keep the Sabbath holy? We can set up protective rules that remind us that we need to take time off from things. We can set aside specific days of our week. We can even earmark those days for continuous Bible study and family time. Those methods are God honoring. Those things can also force us to take some much needed rest. But they don’t necessarily help us use the Sabbath well. For that we need to look more closely at why God created Sabbath:

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” – Genesis 2:2-3*

God rested to enjoy His creation, to celebrate what was good. He created space to simply enjoy the work that He had done – and spent it with His creation.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you need to set aside some time for a Sabbath?
2. How can you truly make your Sabbath a restful celebration instead of merely a requirement?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for reminding us to take time to breathe, and to take time to spend with You. Help us take some Sabbath time this week and honor You by the work we don’t do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*Exodus 20:8 and Genesis 2:2-3. **Today’s New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEDNESDAY, March 17, 2010

Who's it for?

God really liked King David, which is odd by most standards. David stole another man's wife. He had the guy killed. He was even rather ineffective as a father and a leader. His ability to break God's laws while remaining on God's good side was legendary:

"The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" [Jesus] answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." – Mark 2:24-28*

Jesus uses David as an example for a good reason. The Bible calls David "***a man after God's own heart***" (Acts 13:22*). He loved God with everything he had and understood that his relationship with God was more than just rules. When things were bad he cried out to God. When things were good he praised God. When he needed help he relied on God. By using David as an example Jesus was driving home the point that how we think of Sabbath (time set aside to rest each week) should be more related to our relationship with God than what we should and should not do.

QUESTIONS

1. How have you made Sabbath (taking Sunday off or a weekly day off) about rules?
2. What can you do to refocus your Sabbath on God and the rest He provides?

PRAYER

Lord, please help us use our Sabbath in a way that results in a deeper, more restful relationship with You. Amen.

REFERENCE

*Mark 2:24-28 and Acts 13:22. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

THURSDAY, March 18, 2010

What's It For?

When I was kid I remember rushing out to church with barely any time to eat and my parents arguing as we got in the car. This wasn't a weekly thing, but it happened enough to make a dent in how I thought about church. For me, church was an obligation. It was something we *had* to do. Not something we actually enjoyed. It wasn't something that really gave me life – even as a discipline. I learned to think of Sunday that same way. I hated it. It meant extra time in Sunday school, less time outside and no time at all for friends.

I am thankful now that my parents made me go church. It's a habit that has actually served me well as I've gotten older. But I wish I understood what Sabbath was about at a younger age. For me it seemed like a day of not doing. My understanding reflected the thoughts of the synagogue leader in Galilee:

"Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?"- Luke 13:14-15*

But that is not how Jesus understood it. He knew that we needed to get to a place of healing before we could actually accept the rest Sabbath offers. He wanted the people to come to Him and *be* healed on the Sabbath, for them to come and rest through Him. Sabbath is a day to seek Him, and the healing we need.

QUESTIONS

1. What healing do you need this week?
2. How can you set aside time this week to seek out that healing?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for giving us time each week to rest and rejuvenate. Help us take advantage of that time to find the healing and rest we need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*Luke 13:14-15. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

FRIDAY, March 19, 2010

Rhythm

Not much moves me as much as a good piece of music. Whether is a flawless melodic lift, a soulful guitar riff, or driving orchestral rhythm, something stirs deeply when the music is “right.” I think that is probably why music has always been associated with worship. It helps us dig deeper and listen more intently. It opens us to thoughts, feelings and hopes that we don’t otherwise express. Sabbath works that way too.

It changes the rhythm of our lives when we pause and spend time with God. It allows the busyness of the week to fade and for God’s voice to be heard more clearly. It gives us time to breath, think, and feel – to take in everything that has happened and to look forward to what is coming. In those moments it is easy to sing with the psalmist:

***“It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name, O Most High,
to proclaim your love in the morning
and your faithfulness at night,”*** – Psalm 92:1-2*

David wrote those words when approaching a Sabbath, a holy day set apart for God. He reveled in the opportunity to take time out to be with God, because he trusted who God was even when he felt far from Him.

ACTION

Take a minute to listen to (or just think about) your favorite song. Think about how it makes you pause and breathe a little differently. Ask God to help you find that same sort of feeling when you take some Sabbath time.

REFERENCE

*Psalm 92:1-2. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEEK 3: March 27 & 28

TITLE: A Real Life

TEXT: John 5:18-30 and John 10:10

MONDAY, March 22, 2010

Recognizing the Source

I hate taking antibiotics. But because of several health concerns, they are a fact of life for me when I go to the dentist, travel abroad or engage in contact sports. I didn't really think anything of it until I read a recent article on antibiotics that said if you take them too often you begin to become immune to their affects. The study also said that antibiotics kill the good bacteria in your digestive tract. Nothing like taking medicine that makes you sick. Ironic, huh? Drugs that are helping you can actually make you sicker down the road.

But that paradox serves as a good parable for the ways we sometimes engage in our spiritual lives. We get so protective of the stuff that we use to connect to God that we lose sight of Him in the process. The Jews in Jesus' day struggled with this. The Jewish religious teachers saw that He was breaking Sabbath and became angry that He was interfering with their relationship with God:

For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

- John 5:18*

They were trying to kill the Source of Life in an effort to preserve their method of reaching Him. And it's easy for us to do that too. It can be as simple as sticking with a version of the Bible you can't read, listening to a favorite praise song to the exclusion of others in hopes of getting the same "feeling" you got when you first listened to it or simply going through the motions of serving in an area you are not passionate about – in short, letting the trappings of faith get in the way of a real relationship with God.

QUESTIONS

1. How have you been going through the motions when it comes to connecting with God?
2. What can you do to change or refresh how you connect with Him?

ACTION

Look up a list of the Christian spiritual disciplines (prayer, serving, meditation, fasting etc.) and choose one you have never done – and practice it this week.

REFERENCE

*John 5:18. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

TUESDAY, March 23, 2010

Patterns of Life

What does life look like when you are living out God's will for you? The Jews tried to answer the question by displaying a successful religious life. They strove to follow God's laws and pattern every part of their lives after God's word. That is part of the reason they were so angry at Jesus for healing on the Sabbath: they believed that if they were perfect the Messiah would come and end their suffering as a people. They believed that if they worked hard enough, God would be good to them and make their lives easier.

But Jesus points out a different way. He points to the ways God works in the world: God's continual work of creation, God's continual care for the world. And then He told them that those patterns of life are the one's that were going to bring *them* life. That what He was doing was just the beginning of the way God would renew things:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. – John 5:19-21*

The Jews were amazed at the miracles Jesus did, but what He was offering them was a glimpse at an ever greater reality. He was pointing them to His own resurrection and the resulting gift of eternal life a relationship with God would provide, not just a better life here on earth.

QUESTION

1. Re-read the Bible passage above. What does it mean to you that Jesus gives you life?

PRAYER

Spend some time talking to God about His gift of life to you, why you are thankful or questions you have about what that looks like. If you have not decided to follow Jesus and accepted that gift, talk to God about what doubts or questions you have.

REFERENCE

*John 5:19-21. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEDNESDAY, March 24, 2010

An Offer of Life

I love zombie movies, especially the old ones. There is actually something about the walking dead that serves as a fairly good metaphor for life outside of Christ. Zombies only focus on their most basic needs, their (literally) unconscious desires to possess and to fill themselves. They wander continuously trying to find a source of life that will sustain them.

Look for a minute at your own life. Look at the culture around us. How much time and energy is poured into selling products that will bring us health, fill us up and satisfy our “needs?” How many shows, songs and stories do you hear every day that tell you that you can have or should want MORE. This brings us to the beauty of the gospel message that Jesus lived out. As Jesus was being criticized for healing on the Sabbath, bringing people true and lasting life outside of conventional means, He made this statement...

I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” - John 5:25 *

He promised to meet our needs, to offer life to those who are walking around dead inside: Life for those who are still looking for more. We don't need to be zombies anymore.

QUESTIONS

1. What things are you hoping will give you a better life?
2. Are you willing to explore the life that Jesus is offering?

PRAYER

Lord, we are constantly looking for “more” out of life. Help us understand the life You are offering and find true satisfaction in what you so readily give. In Your name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 5:25. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

THURSDAY, March 25, 2010

Getting It Right

Our old selves die hard. I've been working really hard at eating better and making healthy food choices. So, when I took a "food personality" test on-line this week I was shocked at the results. Apparently, I am living like either a Champagne Diva or a Take-Out Food Queen. At first I dismissed the results, until I began looking more closely at my eating habits. I was shocked to realize that my law school eating patterns still dominated my food intake: barely anything for breakfast, lunch on the go and then restaurant or takeout food for dinner. I was eating like a Diva. Despite all the dieting, exercising and healthy choices I was trying to make, the essential patterns were still there.

Which brings me back to our spiritual lives: The sinful patterns of our lives can equally surprise us. For instance, we can trade one addiction for another: Memorizing scripture in place of drinking; a whirlwind of church activities instead of a non-stop partying lifestyle; continual service in the place of a continual focus on work. As first steps these things in themselves are not bad, but if we continue those patterns we won't fully experience the life God desires for us. We won't experience the rest, hope and peace Jesus offers. Jesus says that He came that we "**may have life, and have it to the full**" (John 10:10b*). And we won't get to a place of full health until we let go of those patterns and really let Jesus transform our lives.

QUESTIONS

1. What old patterns are you hanging onto?
2. What would a fully transformed life look like?
3. Do you want that transformed life enough to let God help you identify those bad patterns?

PRAYER

Lord, we get so tangled up in trying to work things out on our own. We are so used to doing things our own way. Please help us see the patterns we are living in and the ways they shape our lives. Give us a deep desire to live a different life dominated by Your Spirit; lives with purpose, marked by Your peace, love, joy and hope that we can share with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 10:10. **Today's New International Version**. International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

FRIDAY, March 26, 2010

Full Life Right Now

Here is the good news: full life is possible right here and right now. That is a fact that is easy to miss. For most of us, turning our lives over to Jesus didn't change a whole lot, at least not externally. We kept the same job. We had the same family. We even dealt with some of the same family issues. But internally God worked an amazing change. Jesus tried to explain this reality to the crowds that pressured Him to give them more signs:

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” - John 5:24*

The miracle they were searching for was not something they would see, but rather something they would feel. The possibility of a new life welling up inside them as the Spirit began to direct their thoughts, choices and dreams. That is the same miracle we experience as we begin to follow Him. We begin seeing the wrong choices we are making. We begin to see ways to extend love and hope to others that we missed before. It's immediate and real, and leads us to the full life Jesus promises.

ACTION

One of the best ways to improve our ability to hear God is to spend some time in His word, and then apply it to our lives. Take some time today to read through part (or all) of John 5:1-30. If you don't understand all of it, ask a friend or pastor what it means. It may be a great way to start a larger conversation.

REFERENCE

*John 5:24. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEEK 4: April 3 & 4
TITLE: A Witness
TEXT: John 5:31-40

MONDAY, March 29, 2010
Being John

As a child, I was blessed with parents who loved the Lord. They raised me in a Christian family and taught me Bible stories at home. When I look at my faith journey, I see the way God used my parents to lead me to Him.

Before Jesus started His ministry, John the Baptist came and preached a message of repentance. God used John to prepare the hearts of the Jewish people to understand Jesus and his message. Jesus showed the people how John's message pointed to Him:

“John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy that light.”- John 5:35*

Like John, God places people in our lives who point the way to Jesus. Our parents, neighbors, siblings, friends, coworkers, pastors and even complete strangers point us to God and help us to know Jesus. God gives us the opportunity to be “John the Baptists” for others and point the way to Jesus.

QUESTIONS

1. Who has helped you see Jesus in your life?
2. To whom can you be “John the Baptist?”

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for putting others in our lives who help us know You better. Help us point the way to You for others. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 5:35. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

TUESDAY, March 30, 2010

The Happiest City

Holland, Michigan, was recently named the second happiest city in the United States of America, between Boulder, Colorado, and Honolulu, Hawaii. In an ABC News story about this report, the number one reason given for Holland's happiness was *religion*.^{*} Churches are making a difference in people's lives and providing a support network for those who are hurting. The church is a body of people who live their lives and love each other differently than those around them.

In the New Testament, Paul knew that having a relationship with Christ would make a difference in the lives of those who follow Jesus. He writes,

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”- Romans 12:2^{*}

When we are transformed into the likeness of Christ, we better understand God and His will for our lives. This gives us a desire to be different from those around us, to reach out and help when others focus on themselves. When we do this, we experience the joy that comes from living our lives for God.

QUESTIONS

1. How can you be transformed today?
2. What have you learned about God from the transformation He has brought in your life?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the transforming power of Your Spirit. We pray that we would live our lives as a changed people, set apart for You. Help us to love and care for those around us in a way that reflects the gift of Your grace. Amen.

REFERENCE

^{*} <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/michigan-town-happiest-places-america/story?id=9865005>

^{*}Romans 12:2. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEDNESDAY, March 31, 2010

Dream Job?

John was a schoolteacher at a small private school. One day, he came home to fabulous news from his wife: after months of trying, she was finally pregnant! Elated, John returned to work the next day to share the news. Midway through the day, John was called to the office for a private meeting with the principal. Due to budget cuts and falling enrollment, John's position was being cut. John and his wife were heartbroken. John began looking for a new job and eventually received an offer from a school a few hours away. As much as he needed the job, his heart told him God had something else in mind. So, he trusted God's leading and turned down not one but two job offers before God directed him to his dream job. John had trusted in faith, following the leading of the Holy Spirit in his heart.

God often works in mysterious ways in our lives. Sometimes, we feel like He has given up on us and isn't keeping the promises He has made us. Yet, God is faithful and always keeps His promises. Paul gives us the example of Abraham:

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations... He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”- Romans 4:18, 20*

God sometimes asks us to simply trust Him and follow His will. He leads us down unexpected paths and brings us to places we never expected, but He guides us all along the way.

QUESTIONS

1. How has the Spirit moved in your heart to show you who God is?
2. Where might the Spirit be leading you in your life?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the work of Your Spirit in our lives and the way You have directed our paths. Give us the wisdom to see where You are leading us, the strength to accept Your leading, and the courage to follow You into the unknown. Amen.

REFERENCE

*Romans 4:18, 20. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

THURSDAY, April 1, 2010

A Book with Power

Books have tremendous power. They can take us to worlds far away and through time. They can inspire us, teach us, and open our eyes to things we have never even thought of before. Books make us laugh, make us cry and often both. They captivate our minds and our hearts. They often teach us important lessons about ourselves and our world.

As Christians, the Bible is a book with special power. Not only does the Bible tell great stories and teach us important moral lessons, but it also teaches us about who God is. Paul tells us that the Bible has authority for our lives:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”- 2 Timothy 3:16*

The Bible comes to us by God’s inspiration. This means that we treat it not like any other book but as The Book for our life. The Bible is God’s story and tells us His Story – how He sent His son to die for us so that we might be saved and have eternal life. We learn that God loves His children and wants us to see His promised gift of life. The more we read the Word, the better we understand God and His plan for our lives. What a tremendous gift from God!

QUESTIONS

1. How has God revealed Himself to you through Scripture?
2. What does it mean to you that Scripture is God-breathed?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word. We pray that we would have hearts that desire to know You and to know more about You. Help us to shape our lives according to Your Word. Amen.

REFERENCE

*2 Timothy 3:16. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

FRIDAY, April 2, 2010

Fridays

We spend most of our Fridays thinking ahead. We think about our weekend plans, where we are going to go, the housework that needs to happen and how we are going to relax and get away. We can't wait for the end of the day to come around so we can enjoy our weekend. Friday starts the celebration.

Today, on Good Friday, we have every reason to look forward to the weekend. Good Friday is a day of sadness, a day of mourning, a day of death, when Jesus hangs on a cross, dies and is buried. Today, we say with the disciples on the road to Emmaus,

“The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”-
Luke 24:20-21 *

On Friday, we recognize that our sin and rebellion caused Jesus to be handed over. Today, on Good Friday, we recognize that Jesus died for us. Today, we say, “We had hoped...”

But Friday is just the beginning. Friday starts the celebration as we look ahead to Sunday. Good Friday is not the end, for the death and crucifixion of Jesus is just the beginning of the weekend. On Sunday we say with the church throughout the ages, “He is risen. Hallelujah!”

QUESTIONS

1. What is your reason for celebrating this weekend?
2. Christ is risen. Do you believe?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for dying on the cross. Thank You for Good Friday. But most importantly, thank You that Friday is not the end of the story, but that Sunday came and we can celebrate Your resurrection. Help us to live our lives secure in the knowledge that You have defeated sin and death by Your death and resurrection. Amen.

REFERENCE

*Luke 24:20-21. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEEK 5: April 10 & 11

TITLE: A Favor

TEXT: John 5:41-47

MONDAY, April 5, 2010

I See You

“I see you.” In the recent movie hit Avatar, the fictional alien creatures called the Na’vi often greeted each other by using those three words. As the movie develops it is explained that this is their way of saying, “I know you, I know who you are and know what you are like inside and out. I see your soul.” It was an expression of love, acceptance and made a bond between one Na’vi to another. They were not an isolated community but rather creatures that were known to each other on a deeply relational and emotional level.

One day, Jesus was having a very difficult conversation with the Jews who were secretly trying to kill him. They would not accept that Jesus was from God and were doing everything they could to discredit Him. They refused to humble themselves enough to see their need for the Messiah, Jesus, and were more concerned for maintaining their status. But Jesus said to them: **“I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. You do not have the love of God in your hearts.”** - John 5:41-42*

There are four words in Jesus’ statement to the Jews that we need to remember. The words are: “but I know you.” Jesus knows us. He knows exactly what we need to be in right relationship with God. He knows specifically the details necessary for our salvation and spiritual vitality, because He understands us. This phrase from Jesus was a loving plea in the midst of a difficult conversation to help us see that He knows us and He is motivated by His love for us to bring us into the truth.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you know God personally? If you are a Christ follower is there anything standing in the way of your relationship with God?
2. Is it hard for you to humble yourself before God and admit your need for Him? If you answer yes, why is it hard?
3. What does the truth that He knows you mean to you today? Why?

PRAYER

If you haven’t received the gift of God’s salvation and want to now, simply pray the following: *Father, I know I need You. I know I need to accept the gift of Jesus’ death on my behalf and I want to follow Him as my Lord and Savior because I want to be in a right relationship with You. Please forgive my sins and walk with me all the days of my life. Amen.*

(If this is a new prayer for you, please tell someone, a Christian friend, someone you know at church or a pastor. It’s important that you have others around that can encourage you to grow).

If you have been following Jesus for awhile, there is a prayer for you as well: *Father, I need You every day. Help me to lay aside my pride and be humble enough to address my sin and my need for You. I want to know You more and know more of Your love for me. Amen.*

REFERENCE

*John 5:41-42. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

TUESDAY, April 6, 2010

Who Is Your Boss?

A number of years ago I met some people who really impressed me. Each spring they would take time off of work using vacation time to make a days' long journey up into the woods of the Upper Peninsula. They were from varied backgrounds; tradesmen and women, doctors, business professionals and more. Without any fanfare or attention to themselves they would spend a week working at a Christian Camp for children. It was not glamorous at all.

Being in the north woods of the U.P. this camp was in regular need of repair and renovation after the long harsh winters every year. There were no funds available for hired hands so quietly and humbly these men and women would volunteer their time doing whatever they could to prepare the camp for the start of the summer season. There was no running water, no electricity and no heat. This didn't bother anyone because they weren't going to earn any awards or receive praise from anyone, except One, God. It was their intention to seek to honor God and be blessed by His praise alone for the work they were doing.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” - Colossians 3:23-24*

QUESTIONS

1. When you read the passage from Colossians, what stands out to you right away?
2. Reflecting on all of your responsibilities during the day, do you seek God's praise in how you do what you do? Do you work for the Lord as opposed to man?
3. We all struggle with this for sure, but what is one thing you can do today that will help you remember to work for God's glory?

PRAYER

Father in Heaven, I want to live only for Your praises. But I will admit that I am hungry for the praise of men or the earthly rewards that comes from being noticed. Help me to listen to Your Holy Spirit today so that I can walk with You and desire to do all that I do for Your glory and not my own. Amen.

REFERENCE

*Colossians 3:23-24. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

WEDNESDAY, April 7, 2010

What Will Save You?

In Exodus the story of Israel's departure from Egypt begins. The Israelite people were slaves in Egypt and the Pharaoh was the ruthless ruler at that time. He was extremely wealthy and well protected. He was feared by his people and the Israelites. He was considered the son of the gods. He was arrogantly secure with his position both on earth and in the afterlife.

When God instructed Moses to confront the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free, Pharaoh's response was bold. He said, "**Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go**" (Exodus 5:2*). Pharaoh did not know God and thought that he was not subject to obeying Him. Pharaoh's confidence and security was in himself.

The Jews of Jesus' day were in many ways also putting their trust in themselves as well. They diligently adhered to a legalistic religion believing that would save them and bring them near God. In all of their study and discipline the message of the Messiah and God's love was somehow lost. Read what Jesus says to them in John 5:43-44*: "**I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?**"

In essence, Jesus was asking them why it is so easy for them to believe in something and someone else to save them other than God's own Son. He seems to be getting at their issue with pride; their refusal to look to Jesus as God's plan.

QUESTIONS

1. What is your definition of pride?
2. Do you think that God is relevant to your life and that His Word is applicable to you, today in 2010?
3. What do you look to "save" you, eternally, financially, relationally, socially, professionally, emotionally? Do you always go to God and His Word and recognize that He has the answers, hope and direction you need? Why or why not?

PRAYER

Lord, teach us to look to You when it comes to every part of our lives for the hope and direction we need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

REFERENCE

*John 5:43-44. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

THURSDAY, April 8, 2010

To Be A Child

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.” - Proverbs 3:5-7a*

This passage in Proverbs lays a good foundation for God’s children to build their lives upon. When a child is small they are completely dependent upon their parents to nurture, protect and provide for them. The parents are their authority in all things and a bond of trust is built on the love a parent gives and expresses to the child. Jesus once said, ***“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*** - Matthew 18:3-4*

God invites us to come to Him humbly and trust Him like children trusting their parents. He asks us to seek His ways and acknowledge Him as God and King over everything.

QUESTIONS

1. Go back and read the passage in Proverbs. What is our responsibility according to these verses? What is God’s responsibility?
2. Read the passage from Matthew. What does Jesus say needs to be changed?
3. What do you think Jesus means when He says to “humble himself like this child?”

ACTION

Both praise songs and God’s word remind us to be humble, to realize that God is powerful and in control. Take some time to contemplate that today. Choose a psalm (Psalms 100, 113, 136 are good ones to start with) or a Christian song and read or listen to the words. What do they teach you about God? What does it teach you about yourself?

REFERENCE

*Proverbs 3:5-6a and Matthew 18:3-4. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

FRIDAY, April 9, 2010
Re-Orientation

Rhonda was abused as a child in some of the worst ways imaginable. Her early decisions as a young adult were reflective of someone who had been deeply hurt. But God was relentless in pursuing her. God got her attention and as a young 20 something she accepted His gift of salvation through Jesus. Rhonda's Christian life grew quickly. She embraced her new attitudes, beliefs and actions while wrestling with the pain of the past. Early on she married a man she believed loved God. He didn't and unfortunately the pain of abuse was reopened and she was living a nightmare again. Because of her husband's unwillingness to honor God and stop hurting her, she had to leave. She was broken and confused but one major thing was different this time. She kept God's love at the forefront of her mind.

Rhonda invested herself in knowing God and knowing His word. She diligently memorized scripture and clung to its truth in the darkest of moments. She re-oriented her thinking, believing and behaving around the fact that God loved her dearly, in spite of the sin others committed against her. In humility she sought God's ways for handling her situation. She followed one step at a time. With each step she learned that God's ways were true and that gave her the confidence to trust Him more. Her life reflected the words that King David wrote so long ago:

"I have set the LORD always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure." - Psalm 16:8-9*

QUESTIONS

1. Do you desire to reorient your life around God's love?
2. If you were to remember and believe that God loves you every day, what would change for you? Would it be your attitude? Would you treat others differently, trust Him more, experience peace? What do you think?
3. How are you doing with getting to know God through His Word? Do you take time to read and study? Do you enjoy it or know how? Who can you ask to help you?

PRAYER

Oh Father, I want to know love to the core of my being. I earnestly desire to keep You on the forefront of my thinking, remembering always Your great love for me. You have invested so much in me, help me to invest back by getting to know You more. I do need You above all else. Amen.

REFERENCE

*Psalm 16:8-9. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.