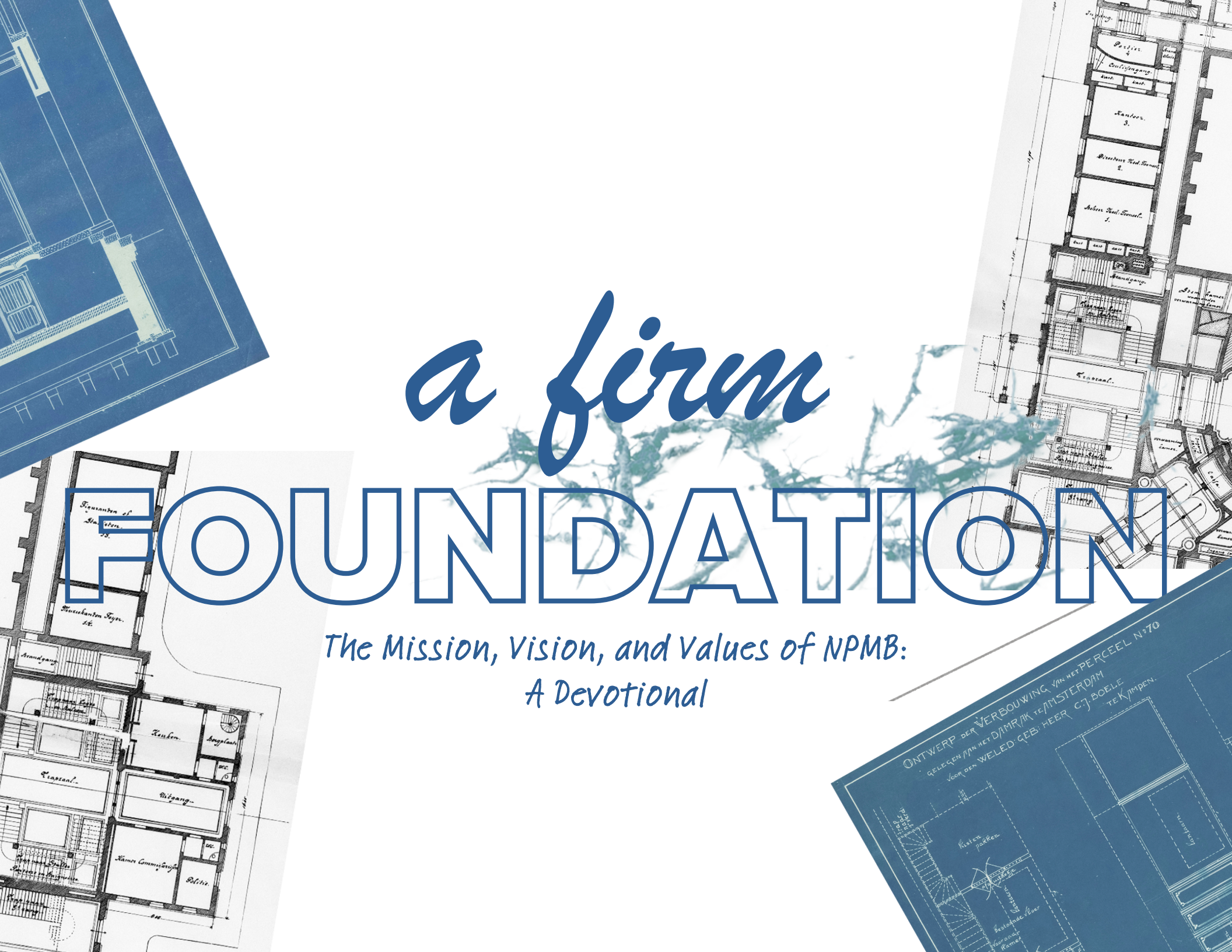


The background features a collage of architectural drawings. In the top left, a blue-tinted plan shows a building's footprint. In the top right, a detailed floor plan of a multi-story building is shown, with rooms labeled in Dutch such as 'Kantoor 3', 'Kantoor 2', and 'Kantoor 1'. In the bottom left, another floor plan shows rooms like 'Kantoor' and 'Bijgang'. In the bottom right, a blue-tinted plan is titled 'ONTWERP DER VERBOUWING VAN HET PERCEEL N°70' and 'GELEGEN AAN HET DAM/RK TE AMSTERDAM'. A faint, light blue image of a tree is visible behind the central text.

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FOUNDATION

*The Mission, Vision, and Values of NPMB:
A Devotional*

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Week One - September 14 - 19

Why does the church exist?

Day One

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:17-22 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Have you ever heard the saying: "A stranger is just a friend you haven't met yet"? I know it's cheesy but there is some truth to it. I believe in our very individualistic culture it can be hard for us to think in terms of a community. Too often I only think about my wants and needs as an individual. In our reading today we see Paul calling the church a family. He says we were strangers but now we've been brought near to one another. He calls us fellow citizens and members of God's household, the goal being that we would grow together and be a dwelling place for God's Spirit. Do you view your church as family? Do you see us being joined and built together?

Questions for Reflection:

- In what ways can I contribute to the 'family feel' of North Peace MB Church? Am I hindering it in any way?
- Who in the church can I reach out to this week to encourage and build up?

Prayer:

God thank you for bringing me near when I was so far off. Thank you that not only have you saved me, but you've brought me into a family of believers. Help me to encourage and build up my brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12-17 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

What was your view of 'going to church' growing up? Was it something you were forced to do? Family tradition? Boring? Paul's description of the church in this passage is far from what your experience may have been. He describes a people who bear with one another, forgive each other, love each other and live in harmony. He describes what happens when we gather: teaching, admonishing (or encouraging), singing and all done in a spirit of thankfulness. When you come to the gathering is this what you are expecting? Perhaps to get in that frame of mind we need to do what Paul says in verse 12: "Put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience."

Questions for Reflection:

- How is my attitude when it comes to the 'church gathering'? Do I primarily come to serve or be served?
- What are practical ways I can 'put-on' humility, kindness, meekness and patience?

Prayer:

God thank you for the gift of your church. Thank you that I can be a part of a family that bears with one another, forgives each other and lives in harmony. Help me to put on humility, kindness, meekness and patience. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:3-7 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Have you ever thought about what your spiritual gifts are? I can remember the first time I preached a sermon (it was on Psalm 1) and realizing that God had gifted me to teach the bible. In our reading this morning Paul talks about the church being made up of many different 'members' (or people) which are meant to all work together. He then gives a list of gifts that if you have, you should use: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, and acts of mercy (these aren't all the spiritual gifts, just some of them). The gifts of the Spirit are meant to edify and build the church. I love Paul's straightforward encouragement: you have different gifts - so use them! What are your spiritual gifts? Are you using them to build up North Peace MB Church?

Questions for Reflection:

- Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? Have you found your sweet spot? (the place you serve in the church that makes you feel alive?)
- How do you prevent yourself from 'thinking more highly than you ought' when it comes to the gifts you have? What does 'sober judgment' look like?

Prayer:

God thank you that you not only saved me but you have filled me with your Holy Spirit and given me gifts. Help me to use my gifts you've given me to build your church.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:11-16 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

On our sabbatical a few years ago we spent a lot of time at the beach in Oceanside, California. One of our favourite activities as a family was boogie-boarding. You go into the ocean and try to catch a wave lying on your stomach on a small surfboard. One thing became very clear doing this: the waves of the ocean can toss you around quite violently. In our reading today, Paul says the goal of Christian maturity is that we would no longer be tossed to and fro by the wind and waves of human cunning. God gave leaders to the church to equip believers; to help them grow in maturity and reach stability in their walk with Christ. This is a huge reason why we meet together as the church: to grow in our understanding of the truth and to apply it to our lives. Rather than being knocked around (like I was at the beach in Oceanside) we would be rooted firm in what we believe.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do you feel rooted and established in what you believe? Are there areas you feel tossed around?
- How often do you pray for the church leaders God has put in your life?

Prayer:

God thank you that in your wisdom you gave leaders to the church to help believers grow in maturity. Help me to not be tossed to and fro but to be mature in what I believe.

Notes

Week Two - September 21 - 26

Gather (Why the people of God must do life together.)

Day One

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:42-47 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

During my first year in university, I lived in a guys dorm with 20 other young men. Needless to say it was loud and smelly but we spent an insane amount of time together. We were what I would call a 'community'. Maybe you have had a similar experience where you shared life with a small group of people who knew you intimately. In our reading today we see the early church being this kind of community. They were learning together, eating together and were involved in each other's lives. They took care of each other's needs and God blessed them and added to their number daily. What could this look like in our day and age? I think we are so individualistic in the West that it is hard for us to imagine living like this but as you read the story of the early church this seems to be the consistent pattern for the people of God.

Questions for Reflection:

- What about the description in Acts 2 is most appealing to you? What makes you most uncomfortable?
- Do you have a community like this in your own life? (ie. a small group, life group, bible study) What small steps could you take to place importance on gathering?

Prayer:

God thank you that you designed me to need other people. I pray I would not isolate myself or be individualistic at the expense of deep relationships. Help me to take steps towards deep community with other believers.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 10:19-25 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Covid-19 was an interesting time to live through. Despite all the arguing and differences of opinion, one thing was certain: human beings are designed to meet together. There was something in us that mourned the loss of going to church, having people over in our homes or meeting with a small group. The reason it hit us so hard is because human beings were created by God as communal creatures. The first time something is called "not good" in the bible is when Adam is all alone. In our reading today the author of Hebrews is stressing the importance of Christians meeting together. The purpose is to stir up one another to love and good works. Even in the early church, there were some who were neglecting the gathering. Hebrews tells us we need to meet together, and all the more as the return of Jesus draws near.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do you sometimes neglect meeting with other believers? Why?
- How could you stir up another believer towards love and good works?

Prayer:

God thank you for my church family. I pray I would not neglect meeting with other believers but would earnestly desire fellowship. Help me this week to stir someone on to love and good works. For your glory and honour. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

When I was a teenager I went to a city-wide youth event where there was to be games, music and a speaker. Needless to say, the service was wild; people screaming, barking like dogs, and running into walls were a few of the things I saw. I can remember thinking: does this church service honour God? What we do when we gather as Christians matters a lot. In our reading today, Paul tells the church to do things orderly and for the purpose of building up. Not to try and gain attention or create a spectacle because God is not a God of confusion. When we gather together the goal is always our edification; through the prayers, singing, communion, baptism, or preaching of the word, we want to grow in our likeness of Jesus. Is this your goal when you gather with other believers?

Questions for Reflection:

- When I come to the gathering, is my goal edification? Is my goal to build others up?
- Are there ways that I am causing distractions for other believers when we gather?

Prayer:

God thank you that you edify us by the power of your Spirit when we gather as your church. I pray that I would come to our gatherings with the goal of being built up and building others up. Help me not to be a distraction when we gather.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

When we first moved to Fort St. John, the long daylight hours in the summer really shocked us. It blew me away that the sun didn't go down until late in the night and then a few short hours later it was rising again! One of the best investments we made that first year was blackout blinds in all of our bedrooms. It reminds me of Paul's words in our reading this morning about darkness and light. He calls followers of Jesus, children of light who belong to the day. We no longer participate in the deeds of darkness because we live in the light now. This passage ends with Paul telling us to encourage one another and build each other up. Sometimes we need reminders from other believers about who we are in Christ Jesus. This is why we gather together: to remind ourselves who we are as children of light and to encourage each other that we aren't alone in the battle!

Questions for Reflection:

- Are there areas of your life that feel "dark"? What does it mean to live as children of the light?
- Who can I encourage and build up this week to be a child of the light?

Prayer:

God I thank you that you have saved me from darkness and brought me into the light. Help me to live as a child of the light, putting on the armour of God and walking with integrity. Help me to know who I can encourage and build up this week. Amen.

Notes

Week Three - September 28 - October 3

Grow (What does it mean to follow Jesus?)

Day One

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 3:17-18 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

When you think of spiritual growth what comes to mind? Do you think of the person who spends hours each morning in bible reading and quiet prayer? Do you think of an elderly person you know that has followed Jesus for decades and dispenses wisdom so easily? This whole week of devotionals is about following Jesus and growing in our faith. In our reading today, Peter describes spiritual growth this way: 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' The word for knowledge here goes beyond mere intellectual knowing (although it includes that) but a deeper knowing. It is describing a certain level of intimacy and knowing. The reason we are compelled to know Jesus this way is so that we are not carried away by error and lose stability. So are you growing in the grace of the Lord Jesus? Are you increasing in your knowledge of him and growing in intimacy?

Questions for Reflection:

- Where would you say you are in your spiritual growth? Do you feel stagnant or stuck? Are you growing in grace and knowledge? Take a moment to ponder and really assess where you are at.
- What are some things you can do to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus? Be practical and realistic.

Prayer:

God thank you that you gave your Son to save us. God, I pray that I will grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Give me a desire to spend time with you in the word and in prayer. Would your Holy Spirit do a work in my heart in the weeks to come.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:1-6 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Over the years of pastoring I have had many interesting conversations about obedience. Some Christians grew up thinking obedience was how they earned salvation. As long as they were good and didn't do anything bad, God was pleased with him and they were saved. Others grew up where any talk of obedience was immediately labeled "legalism"! In our reading this morning the apostle John strikes a perfect balance. We have an advocate in Christ Jesus who is our sacrifice. His death paid for our sins. He earned our salvation; we don't. However, John says an evidence of your salvation is that you will obey Jesus. God changes our hearts so we long to obey Christ and submit to his ways. This is a lifelong process called sanctification where the Holy Spirit slowly transforms us. So do you obey Jesus? Do you keep his word and delight in his commands? Do you walk in his ways?

Questions for Reflection:

- Do you struggle in your understanding of what it means to obey Jesus? (for example, do you view it as legalism or earning salvation?)
- Is God convicting you of an area of disobedience in your life? Is there something you need to confess and bring under the authority of Jesus?

Prayer:

God, I thank you that I have an advocate in Jesus Christ. Thank you Jesus for being my propitiation; the sacrifice for my sins. I pray that I will learn to obey you and delight in keeping your commands. Help me to be like you Jesus. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:16-25 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

If you've ever been hiking you will know that sometimes you come to a fork in the path. What was one path has now become two and you have a choice to make: which path will I go on? Hopefully, before going on the hike you know the area and won't get terribly lost, but sometimes one path is easier and smooth and leads to a beautiful lookout and the other path is more rough and could get you lost. In our reading today Paul uses the idea of walking in two different ways: the flesh or the Spirit. Paul says these two things are opposed to each other and lead down very different paths. The flesh leads to all manner of sin and unrighteousness whereas the Spirit leads to love, joy, peace, etc. Paul is encouraging followers of Jesus to live by the Spirit. To walk with Him and not give in to the desires of their flesh. This is what growth in a disciples life looks like. Saying no to sin and yes to Jesus. Paul's whole encouragement in this passage is that you can do this! You belong to Jesus and the Spirit of God lives within you. So walk with him.

Questions for Reflection:

- Look at the 2 lists of what the flesh and the Spirit produce. What evidences do you see in your life of the flesh or the Spirit?
- What are 2-3 ways you can walk with the Spirit this week? (be practical: bible reading, prayer, etc.)

Prayer:

God thank you for not only saving me but giving me the Holy Spirit. I pray that I would walk with Him every day. Help me to not give in to the works of my flesh but to desire the fruit of the Spirit. Help me to grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:17-24 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

For the past number of years we have been slowly renovating our house. We bought an older fixer-upper that needs a lot of work. It has been fun slowly renovating room by room and seeing the transformation. There was a lot of excitement in our home when our whole first floor was finished! There was a sense of accomplishment that the old house had been transformed into this new house. In our reading today Paul compares the old person to the new person. The old person (who we all once were) was defined by darkness, callousness, sensuality, greed and impurity. But Paul says "that's not the way you learned Christ!" Anyone who surrenders to Jesus is a new creation. And Paul calls us to put off our old self and to be renewed and put on the new self. We aren't to walk in our old manner of life because that's not who we are anymore. We walk in the Spirit because God has given us a new identity. We now walk in righteousness and holiness, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Reflection:

- What are ways we "put off" our old self? Is there something this week (a new habit, an action) that you can do to walk in your new life?
- What lie are you believing about your identity that is causing you to walk in your former manner of life?

Prayer:

God thank you that I am not the person I used to be. Because of Jesus, you have made me a new creation. God please help me to walk with your Spirit in this newness of life.

Notes

Week Four - October 5 - 10

Go (The call for the church to multiply.)

Day One

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:18-20 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

When I was interning at a church in Maple Ridge I also worked part-time at a plant nursery. Most days the boss would give me my marching orders for the day. "Dig a ditch from this greenhouse to that greenhouse." "Dig up 12 trees from the back of the property and get them wrapped in burlap to be delivered." Each day began with instructions on what my day would look like and what needed to be accomplished. In our reading today we see Jesus giving his followers their marching orders. I love that Jesus does not leave us wondering what we should do. He is very clear: make disciples, baptize them and teach them. Notice that Jesus is the one who has all authority; Jesus is the one who will be with us till the end. He hasn't left us alone. Every follower of Jesus should be disciplined by someone more mature than them and should be discipling someone less mature than them. This is what it looks like to multiply disciples. Rather than trying to build the biggest church and adding more and more people, we are all commissioned to go and make disciples by multiplying the gospel.

Questions for Reflection:

- Who am I being disciplined by? Is there a more mature follower of Jesus who you could learn from?
- Who am I discipling? Is there someone that I can come alongside and help in their walk with Jesus?

Prayer:

Jesus I thank you that you have all authority in heaven and on earth. Thank you that you are with us always. I pray that I would participate in making disciples for your honour and glory.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:6-11 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

This whole week we are reading passages that deal with the mission of God in multiplying and making disciples. In our reading today we see the last moments Jesus has with his disciples before ascending to heaven. It is similar to the Great Commission given in Matthew 28 but with a few different details. First, Jesus tells his disciples they will receive power when the Holy Spirit is given to them. (we see this promise being fulfilled in Acts 2) Second, Jesus tells them to be his witnesses (the word literally means martyr) in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Jesus gave his disciples a layed out plan - start near home, with what you know and then move out into different parts of the world until the whole world knows. When you read the book of Acts, this is exactly what happened. The disciples shared the gospel in Jerusalem; persecution came and they went to Judea and Samaria. That spread of the gospel and multiplication has continued to our day as the good news spreads to the ends of the earth. The spread of the gospel is because faithful people, filled with the Holy Spirit, have left comfort and security and went to unknown places with the good news of freedom found in Jesus.

Questions for Reflection:

- What part of "to the ends of the earth" can you play a part in?
- Does it seem overwhelming to think about being a part of the mission of God?

Prayer:

God thank you that you have not left us alone to fulfill your mission. Thank you that you have given us the Holy Spirit to empower us. Help me this week to share the good news with someone in my life. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 2:1-7 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Growing up I played a lot of baseball. I loved the sport and looked forward to every game we played. There were a few tournaments we played in where we actually won the trophy because we came in first place! We wouldn't have won the trophy if we didn't show up to the tournament; also we wouldn't have won if we had cheated or not played according to the rules. In our reading today, Paul uses three examples: a soldier, an athlete and a farmer. Paul's encouragement to Timothy is to be engaged and involved in the mission of God. If we want to share in the rewards of the kingdom we need to participate in that kingdom. He says to Timothy to be strengthened, to entrust to faithful men the teaching of the word, and to share in suffering. The calling of making disciples, teaching people and sharing in Christ's suffering is extended to us as well. We want to be like a soldier who pleases the one who enlists him; we want to be like an athlete running for the crown; we want to be like the farmer sharing in the crops. All this because we love Jesus and want people to hear the good news.

Questions for Reflection:

- Which one of Paul's metaphors (soldier, athlete, farmer) most resonate with you?
- What are some things that can distract us from the goal of going with the gospel?

Prayer:

Thank you God that I am strengthened by the grace in Christ Jesus. Help me to be like a focused athlete striving after the prize. Help me to be like a faithful farmer waiting for the harvest. In all things would I keep the mission of God in the front of my mind. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:13-16 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

There are some Christians who think in order to multiply, go with the gospel and make disciples you need to be a full-time missionary. They will say things like "I can't go on a mission trip; I can't afford to go to Africa to share the gospel; I've got kids a job; I am not doing enough for the kingdom." In our reading today, Jesus tells the crowds listening that they are the light of the world. He encourages them to let their light shine before others so that people see and give glory to God. Notice the simplicity in the command Jesus gives. In everything we do, we are meant to shine the light of Christ so people see. This could be at work; at school; on your sports team; in your neighbourhood; at family dinner; getting groceries; talking with a friend. In the everyday stuff of life, are you shining the love of Jesus? Are you doing 'good works' to that people are curious about the gospel? Once we stop believing the lie that in order to participate in the mission of God we have to go on some elaborate missions trip, we begin to see every day as a missional opportunity.

Questions for Reflection:

- Have you ever believed you weren't doing enough for Jesus? Where did that thinking come from?
- What are 2 ways this week you could shine the light of Jesus in your everyday life?

Prayer:

Thank you God for shining the light of the gospel in my own life. I pray that every day I would look for ways to shine the truth of the gospel in small ways. Help people in my life to notice the gospel change taken place in me and that they would give glory to you. Amen.

Notes

Week Five - October 12 - 17

What We Believe About Masculinity

Day One

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:25-33 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Growing up we had a game called "I'm the Boss!". I don't remember all the details of how the game was played, but there was one card (the Boss card) that if you played it you had to yell: "I'm the Boss!!" and certain elements of the game completely changed. I think sometimes, people unfamiliar with the Bible, assume a reading like ours today is simply a man saying "I'm the Boss!". When in reality, God calls men (specifically husbands) to literally lay down their lives for the sake of the wives. How did Jesus love his wife (aka the church)? He died for her. Men are called to be people who lead by dying; who lead by serving. Who willingly die to their wants and needs and put the wants and needs of others first. Being a husband is a high calling as you are called to reflect the love and care that Jesus has for his people.

Questions for Reflection:

- Why do you think the calling of men to lead and serve is often misunderstood?
- If you are a man, what are ways you can serve and sacrifice for people in your life? If you are a woman, how can you help encourage and honour the men in your life?

Prayer:

God I thank you that you designed men (husbands) to sacrificially lead their families. Thank you that your design for marriage and men and women is perfect. Help me to walk in the path that you have for me. Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:7 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

What does it look like to understand and honour someone? Perhaps you can think of a couple or individual in your life that exemplifies this kind of attitude and behaviour. When I think of that question I often think of my parents. They have been married for more than 4 decades and both of them show understanding and honour to each other. In our reading today, we are addressing husbands again. Peter tells husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way, showing honour. The word "understanding" in Greek is 'gnosis' which simply means to know - beyond just mentally knowing but experientially knowing. Think about it: husbands are called to know their wives intimately; not just knowing about them, but deeply knowing them. Not only that but they are called to show honour (value, respect) because women are fellow heirs with men in the gospel. Peter says if husbands do not know their wives and show them honour their prayers will be hindered. In this short verse we see the value God has given to wives/women and the high calling given to husbands/men to show honour and care.

Questions for Reflection:

- Why is it important to understand that both men and women are co-heirs with Christ? How does that knowledge protect against misunderstandings?
- What would it look like for a husband to honour his wife?

Prayer:

God thank you again for your design. Thank you that in your wisdom you created both men and women to complement each other. God I pray that regardless of my marital status or gender that I would be someone who shows honour. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

In our reading today, Paul lays out qualifications for those serving as elders in the church. At North Peace, we believe the office of elder has been reserved for qualified men. This is not because men are somehow better than women but it is how God designed men and women to complement each other. Notice the list of attributes in this section; it is quite astonishing! God has raised the bar on those who can lead his church. Some of the more daunting descriptions are: above reproach, respectable, manages his household well, well thought of by outsiders. God not only calls men like this to serve, but he equips men like this to serve. God is not calling only perfect men to serve in the church but those who he has equipped to lead and serve and lay down their lives. Hopefully you are noticing: God is very protective of his people. Those who want to shepherd in his church have to be qualified to do so. This is not because God is mean and only wants perfect people; but because God loves his people and wants men to step up and serve and lead in the church.

Questions for Reflection:

- What on the list of elder requirements was most surprising to you?
- What does this passage teach us about God's design and order in the church?

Prayer:

God thank you for gifting the church elders. Thank you for the elders at North Peace who shepherd your church. Give them grace and wisdom as they lead and serve. Thank you God that you are a God of order for our flourishing. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

What does it mean to act like men? Unfortunately many of us have grown up with stereotypes or caricatures of what being a man looks like. "Don't ever cry. Don't show emotion. Don't enjoy the arts like music or painting. Be tough." Maybe you resonate with some of those examples. In our reading today, Paul does tell the men in Corinth to "act like men". But notice the surrounding admonishments. Paul tells them to be watchful, to stand firm in the faith, to be strong. And he tells them to do everything in love. Paul is encouraging the men in Corinth that above all else, their spiritual lives should be what defines them as men. "Real men" so to speak are those men who are watchful over those in their care; watchful over their own spiritual lives. Are those who stand firm in the faith, not being swayed back and forth. And "real men" so to speak are those who act in love in all things. So being a man has less to do with being tough and macho and more to do with faithfully following Jesus, being watchful over yourself and others and loving people like Jesus loves.

Questions for Reflection:

- What stereotypical things come to mind when you hear "act like a man"?
- Which men in your life have been watchful and firm in the faith? How have they influenced you?

Prayer:

God thank you that men and women don't have to live up to the cultural stereotypes we see. Thank you that true "manliness" is being steadfast and firm in the faith. It is being strong and yet loving. Amen.

Notes

Week Six - October 19 - 23

What We Believe About Femininity

Day One

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 31:10-31 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Have you ever felt intimidated by a list of qualifications for a job? Maybe you've read a job description and thought, 'There is no way I could ever live up to this!' Sometimes it can be a good reality check, but other times we doubt our abilities because we are hardest on ourselves. For some women, Proverbs 31 is like an unattainable job description. I don't think it's meant to be that. I believe Proverbs 31 is a beautiful description of what God can do in a woman's life. It shows how God has designed women to care for their families, work hard and use their gifts, and display the glory of God in their everyday lives. Sometimes passages of scripture are aspirational - they describe a life we can aspire to and encourage us to live in such a way. Proverbs 31 is not a condemnation of women, saying 'Why aren't you better?!' but rather a glimpse at how God designed women: 'Look at how God has made you. Aspire to be the type of woman described here.' If you are a woman reading this, may you be inspired to step into what God has for you. If you are a man reading this, praise God that he has made women who walk after him in strength and dignity.

Questions for Reflection:

- As you consider the descriptions listed in Proverbs 31, which are the most intimidating? Which seems most 'out of reach'?
- If you are a woman, consider 1-2 of the descriptions that you can aspire to this week. If you are a man, consider how to encourage a woman in your life who is living this way.

Prayer:

God thank you that in your wisdom you created both men and women. Thank you for the women in my life be it my mother, sisters or my wife. Thank you for empowering women to live holy pleasing lives to you. Would I be mindful to pray for the women in my life this week. Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: Titus 2:3-5 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Our reading today describes a mentoring relationship. When I first began working in a church as an intern, I was mentored by a guy named Rob who was the youth pastor. He was 20 years older than me and had a lot of experience in youth ministry and church life. A large part of his mentorship was simply sharing the knowledge he had learned from all of his experience. He would allow me to teach bible studies, lead youth group nights and plan elaborate events. Afterwards he would ask me questions, telling me where things could be improved and sharing his wisdom. Paul describes older women training younger women. What he is describing is a discipleship and mentoring relationship. Older women who have experience and wisdom, sharing that wisdom with younger women. Look at some of the character traits described: love, self-control, purity, kindness, submissiveness. These are all godly traits that women are encouraged to exemplify. The reason being that the word of God would not be reviled. The idea of simple: older, godly women training and mentoring younger women so that people see their lives and conduct and realize the brilliance, beauty, simplicity and godliness of God's word. That people would look at Christian women's lives and say 'I want what they have!'

Questions for Reflection:

- Am I actively being mentored/discipled by someone? Am I being intentional to disciple/mentor someone?
- If you are an older woman, who is a younger woman you could encourage this week? If you are a younger woman, is there someone in the church that you could approach to ask to mentor and encourage you? Take that step this week.

Prayer:

God I thank you for older, wiser people in my life. Thank you that I can be discipled and mentored by those who have walked with you for many years. Help me to seek out more mature believers that I can learn from. Also help me to find someone I can mentor. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:1-6 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

My wife's grandmother was the wife of a pastor. She grew up in a time (and in a religious culture) where pastors' wives were not allowed to wear jewelry of any kind. She could not wear earrings or a necklace to church or out in public because it was considered too 'worldly'. The funny part is my wife's grandmother was a bit of a rebel and would wear her jewelry around the house anyways. Is this what our reading this morning is talking about? Is the take-away: NO JEWELRY! I think it actually goes much deeper than just the surface level. Paul is talking about women whose priorities are completely out of whack. Their emphasis is on the external: their looks, beauty, clothing, hairstyles, jewelry; where Paul is saying their emphasis should be on the internal: their character. He says the emphasis should be on the hidden person of the heart. What is actually beautiful is a gentle and quiet spirit which is very precious in God's sight. So can women wear jewelry and do their hair up? Of course! But the focus of a woman's life should be her character. What kind of woman is she becoming by the grace of God? Is she exhibiting a quiet and gentle spirit? Is she growing in the fruit of the Spirit? That is precious and beautiful in God's eyes!

Questions for Reflection:

- For women: do I place too much emphasis on the external in my life? What is 1 way I can grow this week to help produce a gentle and quiet spirit?
- For men: how can I encourage a woman in my life who displays what Paul is talking about in this reading? Think of a way to pass on encouragement to her.

Prayer:

God, you care far more about the internal workings of our heart than the external things we can do. Thank you that you see the heart and you find quiet, gentle spirits very precious. Help the women of North Peace Church to not let their adorning be external but rather internal; help them to pursue Christlikeness. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:22-24 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

What comes to mind when you hear the word 'submission'? If we're honest, I think for most westerners, it is a negative. We don't like submitting to anyone and harsh pictures come up in our mind of abuse or slavery perhaps. Then you read a passage like our reading for today and I think for many people (especially women) they immediately get defensive or upset. Sometimes when I have read this passage at a wedding you can feel the tension rise in the room. What exactly is Paul saying here? First, every Christian is called to submit to someone: children submit to your parents; church members submit to the elders; everyone submit to the government. Submission is an attitude of respect, love and deference; It is not blind obedience no matter what. What Paul is getting at in our passage is that God created men and women differently. God wants husbands and wives to act differently. God has called men to lead and serve in their homes; this leading and serving is detailed in the rest of Ephesians 5. God has called women to partner with their husbands and come alongside them to help them (meaning, men cannot do it alone!). The attitude of submission in a marriage means 'I will let my husband lead us spiritually. I will encourage him and support him. I will not insist on my own way or be unnecessarily difficult or combative.' When a husband is leading his wife and kids sacrificially (like Jesus) and laying down his life for them; and a wife is loving her husband and encouraging him as he leads, it displays a beautiful picture of the gospel. Both husband and wife get to show Jesus in their roles: the husband loves his wife like Jesus loves the church; and the wife submits to her husband like Jesus submitted to his Father.

Questions for Reflection:

- Does my reaction to the word "submission" reveal anything going on in my heart? Is there a rebellious streak in me?
- For wives: how can I lovingly support my husband this week? For husbands: how can I encourage and bless my wife this week?

Prayer:

God thank you that marriage is meant to display the glory of the gospel. I pray that marriages at North Peace would do just that. Help wives in our congregation to lovingly submit to their husbands; to walk alongside them and help them as they lead. Amen.

Notes

Week Seven - October 26 - 31

What We Believe About Sexuality

Day One

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:27-30 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

A belief that some people have is that Jesus came to do away with the Law of God. The idea goes like this: in the Old Testament it was all rules and regulations and God came down heavy on his people with law. But in the New Testament, Jesus came and did away with the law and it is all about love now. The problem with this line of thinking is when you actually read Jesus' teaching. What Jesus does, specifically in the Sermon on the Mount, is take the external keeping of the law and make it about your heart and motivations. One of the laws in the 10 Commandments is "You shall not commit adultery". Jesus takes that commandment and makes it about our thoughts and motives. If anyone looks at a person lustfully they have committed adultery in their hearts. Jesus then goes on to say that if a certain body part causes you to sin you should cut it off rather than ending up in hell. I think what Jesus is doing is showing the seriousness of sexual immorality. He places a high value on our sexuality as opposed to the low value our culture places on it. Jesus says rather than entertaining sexual immorality we should cut these things out of our lives. He knows the destructive nature of sexual sin and admonishes us to take it seriously. Not because Jesus is some prude who wants to ruin all of our fun; but because he wants us to flourish and enjoy our sexuality in the way God designed it to be enjoyed: in the confines of marriage between 1 man and 1 woman.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do I have the same intensity of thought about sexual immorality that Jesus does? (to put it another way, does my view of sexual immorality line up more with the culture or Jesus?)
- What is one way I can "gauge out my eye or cut off my hand"? (Meaning, is there a drastic measure I need to take this week to deal with sexual sin in my life?)

Prayer:

God I thank you that you care about the motivations of my heart. Lord forgive me when my thoughts and desires are sinful. Help me to place a high value on my sexuality and not to believe the culture's view. Keep me from stumbling for your glory and honour. Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Have you ever heard someone use the phrase: "My body is a temple"? Usually it's about taking care of their bodies through exercise and eating right. Sometimes it's about not getting tattoos or piercings. Maybe someone has said that to you to explain why they don't eat at McDonalds! In our reading today, Paul uses a similar phrase describing our bodies related to sexual immorality. The Corinthians had a philosophy that said they could do whatever they wanted with their bodies because their bodies didn't matter; what mattered was the spiritual, not the physical. Paul makes the case that what we do with our bodies matters a lot! They are the temple of the Holy Spirit; meaning, for followers of Jesus God's Spirit dwells inside of us. Just like God's Spirit dwelt inside of the temple, we are now that temple. Paul gives the negative example of joining your body to a prostitute as being outlandish because your body matters. God paid a terrible price in the death of his Son Jesus to redeem not only your soul but your body. So we are told to glorify God in our bodies. Our world today would say what we do with our bodies doesn't matter; sex is just a physical urge and we should not withhold ourselves from anything we want to do. The biblical worldview is that sex is sacred and we should seek to honour God with our bodies.

Questions for Reflection:

- Does it change the way you view your body, knowing that it is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Does it change the way you view your body knowing what price God paid to redeem it?
- Are there ways you have been dishonouring your body? How can you glorify God in your body this week?

Prayer:

God thank you that you paid an enormous price to redeem me. Thank you that you did not withhold sending your son Jesus to die for me. Help me this week to honour you with my body. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:26-28, 2:18-25 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

How many genders are there? I know in our day and age that is a loaded question. There is lots of debate in our culture about this very topic. There is discussion about sex being different from gender; about sex assigned at birth; about being a different gender in your mind than in your body. The biblical worldview on this topic is quite simple. In our reading today in Genesis 1 and 2 we see the creation of humanity. In Genesis 1 we see a broad view of humanities creation: men and women created in the image of God to have dominion over creation. In Genesis 2 we see a 'zoomed in' story of the creation of the first man and woman. Eve is made from Adam's side and is meant to be the perfect companion for him. Nothing else in all of creation is a fit for the man like a woman is! At the end of Genesis 2 we get a beautiful description of what biblical sexuality looks like. A man is meant to leave his parents house, find a wife and hold fast to her and they become one flesh. Biblical sexuality is confined to a lifelong marriage relationship because God wants us to flourish. He doesn't want us to feel the shame associated with sexual immorality. He wants us to enjoy the gift of sexual intimacy in the one relationship (husband and wife) where it can grow and flourish and be enjoyed.

Questions for Reflection:

- In what ways do both men and women reflect the image of God? Are there ways men reflect that image differently than women? How do the 2 genders complement each other?
- Does my view of sexuality align with the biblical view? In what ways has my view of sexuality been shaped by the culture?

Prayer:

God thank you for your brilliant design of both men and women. Thank you that you designed marriage as a place where our sexuality could thrive. Help me to not be swayed by our culture's view of sexuality. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 13:4 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

My wife and I just recently celebrated our 15 year anniversary. We went out for dinner and talked about our lives together and we both agreed that 15 years is a long time! (in the best way possible) The longer we have been married the more we enjoy time together and the more memories we share; you can see God's design in marriage being a lifelong covenant. In our shorter reading today, the writer of Hebrews says that marriage should be held in honour among everyone. That word in the original language means 'precious, valuable' and it denotes the idea of recognized value in the eye of the beholder. Because marriage is precious and valuable, the passage goes on to say that the marriage bed should be undefiled. What this means is sexual immorality or adultery defiling a marriage. God places such a high value on the marriage relationship that Hebrews says he will judge the adulterous. Do we have such a high view of marriage? Is it precious and valuable in our sight? Now, thanks be to God that through Jesus our sins can be forgiven. Thanks be to God that adulterers and those who dishonoured marriage can be forgiven and restored. This shows the grace of our God that even when we stumble he picks us up.

Questions for Reflection:

- What does it mean to hold marriage in honour? Think practically.
- How can you this week hold marriage in honour? (this will obviously look different for a married person vs. a single person)

Prayer:

God thank you that marriage is a precious thing in your eyes. Help me regardless of my marital status to hold marriage in honour. Keep me from temptation and sin this week. Amen.

Notes

Week Eight - November 2 - 7

What We Believe About Life And Death

Day One

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139:13-16 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

My wife and I have three kids: 2 girls and 1 boy. With each pregnancy I can clearly remember going to the doctor for the first ultrasound and heartbeat detection. There was something so moving and miraculous seeing a tiny outline of our child and hearing their heartbeat through the monitor. Even though they were the size of a lima bean, they were alive and being formed in their mother's womb. Our reading this morning affirms the idea that God is the one who intimately forms us in our mother's wombs. The Psalmist says that God knits us together and forms our inward parts. He sees us and all of our days are written even before we were formed. This is a very different attitude towards unborn children than our culture has. Our culture devalues unborn humans and says they are not worth protecting; says they aren't even fully human yet. Our culture would seek to kill and destroy what the Bible says God is forming and knitting together. The biblical worldview about life is that it begins at the moment of conception; at that moment a new life is created and God is knitting and forming that life together in the one place it can grow: a mother's womb. It is amazing that God cares for each life in such an intimate way.

Questions for Reflection:

- In what ways have I bought into the culture's view about life?
- In what ways this week can I show value for human life in a biblical way?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are the one who knits us and forms us in our mother's wombs. Help me not to buy into our culture's view of life and death. Help me to honour human life and treat it with awe and respect. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: Exodus 20:13 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Today's reading is quite short. The verse only has 4 words in it. In the Hebrew language (the original language it was written in) it's actually only 2 words: No murder. And yet this short verse is included in the 10 commandments; a summary of the Law of God. Why does God prohibit murder? What is it about a human being killing another human being that offends God so much? The answer lies in the worth, value and dignity given to human beings above all else in God's good creation. In Genesis 1 you will read that God created mankind (men and women) in his image, after his likeness. Nothing else in creation is created in the image of God; that dignity is given only to human beings. Being an image bearer of God means that human beings are set apart; created to image God in the world. So when one human being murders another human being it is an attack on the very image of God. That is why God prohibits murder in his law. It is an egregious thing to strike down an image bearer. As you consider that, think about our culture's view of death and killing. We murder image bearers all the time but simply devalue them as image bearers to ease our conscience. Abortion in Canada is the intentional murder of an image bearer of God cloaked in all sorts of language to try and defend the barbaric act. Now the hope of the gospel is that although abortion is murder, there is forgiveness found in Christ Jesus. No one is too far gone to be forgiven, cleansed and restored.

Questions for Reflection:

- Given that Jesus in the sermon on the mount equates murder with hatred towards your brother, have I had "murderous thoughts" about people in my life?
- How can I "image" God well this week?

Prayer:

God thank you that you have created men and women in your image. Help me to be an image bearer of Jesus this week. God I pray that our country would begin to value human life and stop the shedding of innocent blood. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 6:16-19 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

It is sometimes jarring to think about things that God hates. Most of the time we talk about God's love and the things that he loves. But there are things that God hates and in turn that we should hate as well. Things that go against his character and holiness. Things that do damage to his creation. In our reading today 7 things are listed that God hates; things he views as an abomination. That word 'abomination' simply means something that is detestable or disgusting. Each one of the 7 listed are interesting and provide good conversation on why God would hate those things. But the three in the very middle are what we want to focus on today: hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, and feet that make haste to run to evil. Heart, hands, feet. I think those things are connected: we often decide to do evil in our hearts long before our hands or feet are engaged. We make decisions in our hearts or devise evil plans and then decide to act on them with our hands or walk towards evil with our feet. This is why followers of Jesus need to learn to guard their hearts; to not allow evil, sinful motives and desires to take root in our hearts and lead us to sinful actions. One of the things God hates listed in this passage is hands that shed innocent blood. Again, the value of human life is held up in this passage. God considers the killing of an image-bearer to be an abomination. Do we value life as highly as God values life?

Questions for Reflection:

- Which of the 7 things listed in the reading do I most struggle with?
- What are ways I can guard my heart so that I don't devise evil plans?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that you are a perfect God; not only are you a God of love, but you are a God of perfect holiness. Help me to love the things you love and hate the things you hate. Help me not to devise evil plans in my heart but to walk closely with your Spirit. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 8:6-8 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Most of us don't like talking or thinking about death. I can remember early on in my ministry as a pastor, I hated going to the hospital and being around people as they passed away; it made me very uncomfortable. As time has gone on and I have matured it doesn't bother me nearly as much. Death in Canada is an interesting topic as well. In our culture we want to be in control of our death; and we want to suffer as little as possible. In Canada we kill people in the hospital and deem it 'merciful'. In our reading today the author or Ecclesiastes says there is a time and a way for everything; this would include a time to be born and a time to die (as he talked about in chapter 3). In verse 8 he says no one has the power over the day of death. What he is saying is although we would like to be the ones who determine when and how we die, ultimately God is the one who decides. Our lives are not in our hands, but in his hands. We are meant to trust in the providence of God and his timing for when our lives end. Rather than trying to play God, we are meant to trust God.

Questions for Reflection:

- Is my view of death more shaped by the culture or the word of God?
- How can I grow in trusting God's timing and plan for my life?

Prayer:

God thank you that you rule and reign over all things. You knew the day of my birth and you know the day of my death. Help me to trust your providence. Help my view of death to be shaped by your word and not the culture around me. Amen.

Notes

Week Nine - November 9 - 14

What We Believe About Heaven And Hell

Day One

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:31-46 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Have you ever thought about what is going to happen after you die or Jesus returns? For some people they picture a courtroom scene where God interrogates them about everything they did in life. For others it is a picture of standing before God's throne while he welcomes you into his kingdom. I heard one man speculate that maybe God plays a video of your whole life and you have to watch everything you ever said or did. I think some of these ideas are just people grasping at straws because there is a certain amount of mystery when it comes to the afterlife. In our reading today, Jesus gives a parable of sorts about what will happen when he returns. In the reading we see Jesus sorting people (he calls them sheep and goats). The sheep were those who fed him, gave him drink, visited in prison, etc. The goats were those who ignored him. The sheep are welcomed into his kingdom; the goats are sent away to eternal punishment. Jesus' whole point of this story is that followers of his will lead lives that reflect the gospel. You can't say you are a follower of Jesus and completely ignore the needs of people around you. And if you live a life ignoring the needs of people around you, you are denying the gospel you claim to believe in. The final judgment is described as 1 or 2 destinations: the kingdom of God or eternal punishment. The important piece of this teaching from Jesus is that our lives matter. We can say we believe all we want, but our actions should back up what we say we believe. And one day everyone will stand before God and face judgment.

Questions for Reflection:

- What part of the reading today struck me the most? Do I see myself more of a sheep or a goat?
- What are ways I can be more intentional about taking care of the needs I see around me?

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your grace and mercy that was shown to me in Christ Jesus. Help me to be someone who lives out the faith I claim. God, make me aware of the "least of these" that I can show the love of Jesus to. Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: Revelation 20:11-15 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

I love books. Recently, on a trip to Calgary my family and I went to a used bookstore. It was 3 stories and the basement was full of shelves holding thousands of used books. It was amazing to walk through the aisles and look at the different sections of books; cooking, comic books, fiction, history, biographies and on and on. I could have spent hours simply browsing the different titles. In our reading today there are a lot of books mentioned. The Apostle John sees many books and in them are written the deeds of every single human being who will be judged. Can you imagine how many books that would have been? Then John sees another book opened: a book called 'the book of life'. And we are told that anyone whose name is not found in the book of life is thrown into the lake of fire. The book of life represents salvation; those who have put their faith in Christ have received eternal life. Their names have been written in that book. Notice that in our reading everyone, great and small, stands before the throne of God. The determining factor on where you spend eternity has everything to do with whether or not you have believed in Jesus. Is your name found in the book of life, or not?

Questions for Reflection:

- How much time do I spend thinking about eternity? Are you excited or nervous for it?
- How can you be sure your name is found in the book of life? Do you struggle with assurance of salvation?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son to accomplish my salvation. Thank you that because of faith in Jesus my name can be found in the book of life. Help me to have assurance of salvation as I follow you. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: Revelation 21:1-8 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Have you ever had the ending of a movie or book spoiled for you? I can remember when 'The Sixth Sense' came out in theaters. It was one of those movies with an unbelievable twist ending that was completely shocking. Some of my friends who hadn't seen the movie complained because other friends had completely ruined their movie experience by spoiling the ending before they went. Sometimes it is crucial to go into a movie or a book without knowing the ending! As followers of Jesus, the amazing thing is we know the end of the story. The bible gives us the ending and we aren't left to be surprised. In our reading today we see the end of the story. Christ returns and ushers in a new heavens and new earth. God himself comes down with heaven to dwell with his people in this new creation. There is no longer mourning, crying, pain or tears. The end of our reading describes who won't be there: cowardly, faithless, murderers, sexually immoral, etc. For them the end of the story is the second death. What's amazing to me about Christianity is that we aren't left to wonder what is going to happen in the end. We don't wonder: 'Does God win in the end? Will God dwell with his people again? Will God deal with sin and injustice and those who persist in it?' All of those questions are answered with certainty. This means the follower of Jesus is standing on a firm foundation. Certainty of the future brings certainty in our daily lives.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do I have certainty and confidence about eternity? How so?
- In what ways can my certainty of what's coming affect my day to day life?

Prayer:

Father thank you for your word and the certainty it gives me. Thank you that one day you will usher in the new heavens and new earth and dwell with us. Help that certainty to give me confidence in my day to day life. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:47-50 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

A lot of people in our day and age reject the idea of hell. There are even people who call themselves Christians who have decided that because hell sounds bad they don't want to believe in it. How could a good loving God send people to hell? It is actually quite popular in the West to simply reject the idea of punishment, justice or hell. Jesus talked a lot about hell. In many of his parables (stories with a deeper meaning) he explained the concept of eternal separation from God. Our reading today is one of those stories. Jesus uses the example of fishing to illustrate his point. A net is cast into the sea and a whole bunch of different types of fish are caught. Then those fish are sorted: the good ones are kept and the bad ones are thrown away. Jesus then makes the comparison: it will be the same at the end of the age. The righteous will be kept and the evil will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Now of course it can be tempting to read this and think: "I just have to try my hardest to be righteous and not evil in order to make it." But the reality of the gospel is that no one is righteous. We need righteousness from an outside source. Jesus is our righteousness. Eternal life doesn't come by trying harder. Eternal life comes by receiving the righteousness of Christ. So on that day, when the end is ushered in, those who are kept and welcomed into the kingdom of Jesus will not be the ones who are righteous on their own; they will be the ones clothed in Christ's righteousness. That is the work of a loving and just God who made a way possible for us to be made right.

Questions for Reflection:

- Am I bothered by the idea of hell? Why?
- Do I sometimes believe it is my righteousness that will save me? How can I rest this week in the righteousness of Christ?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that you have done everything to make our salvation possible. Help me to rest in the finished work of Christ this week. Amen.

Notes

Week Ten - November 16 - 21
What We Believe About Politics

Day One

Scripture Reading: Romans 13:1-7 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

What is the role of government? Now depending on who you ask you might get wildly different answers. For some people the government is meant to provide all sorts of social programs and safety nets for society; the bigger and broader reaching the government is, the better. For other people their answer would be: "Who needs government!? Just leave me alone!" Is one response better than the other? What is the bible's view of the role of government? In our reading today Paul lays out why the government exists and what our response to it should be. First, he reminds the Roman Christians that all authority comes from God. The authorities that exist only have authority because God has granted it to them. Then Paul lays out the responsibility of government: They bear the sword of God to punish wrongdoing. The central role of government, according to Paul, is to keep law and order so that a society can thrive. Paul says because God is the one who has all authority and gives authority to governments, therefore we should be in subjection to them. Because of this we pay taxes, pay revenue, give respect and honour to those whom it is due. Notice how our response to government is directly related to our response to God: do we submit to God's authority?

Questions for Reflection:

- Do I struggle with submitting to the governing authorities? Why or why not?
- In what ways can I show honour and respect to those whom God has put over me?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that all authority belongs to you. The governments that exist are under your authority to ultimately accomplish your purposes in the world. Help me to honour and respect those in positions of authority over me. Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Have you ever had to pray for someone you didn't really want to pray for? If I can be really candid, the first time Justin Trudeau won the election many years ago, I was quite upset. I can remember that morning being so angry at how he could have won and what this meant for the country. I spent a good amount of time in a weird grumpy mood. But then the Holy Spirit convicted me that instead of complaining and slandering Trudeau in my mind perhaps I should pray for him. Pray that God would save him. Pray that he would run the country well and bring blessing to Canada. Needless to say I was convicted and prayed for him that morning. Our reading today is all about this very topic. Paul tells Timothy (urges him actually) to pray, intercede and give thanks for all people; and then he specifically says for kings and those in high positions. Now we don't really have kings in our day and age (except if you live in Great Britain) but we do have people in positions of authority over us. The purpose for us praying for our leaders is that we as Christians could live peaceful and quiet lives. Rather than raging about our leaders or slandering them and complaining, Paul very wisely tells us to pray for them so that we can live quiet, godly, peaceful lives. The convicting question is: do you do this? When was the last time you prayed for someone in a position of high authority? Are you quicker to judge and condemn than to lift in prayer?

Questions for Reflection:

- What is my go to position when I think about those in leadership? Am I quick to judge and complain or quick to pray?
- What person in authority can I pray for this week?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for those in positions of authority. Would you give them wisdom and grace as they lead and make decisions. Help me to remember them often in prayer so that I can lead a peaceful and godly life. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: Matthew 22:15-22 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Nobody I know loves paying taxes. Most of the time when a discussion turns to taxes it is about how we pay too much in taxes; it's about questioning what the government does with all that money; it's about government overreach and overtaxing. Most of us feel like Robin Hood fighting against Prince John's taxation! In our reading today it is interesting that the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus in a question about taxes. At the time, Israel was under Roman occupation and had to pay taxes to Rome. This would have felt like a slap in the face; Rome, a foreign country has taken us over and now they are forcing us to pay them! They ask Jesus if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus answers them brilliantly and shows us a proper mindset when it comes to earthly things. Caesar's inscription is on the coin, so let him have it. There is a deeper meaning going on here: Jesus is not attempting to establish a political kingdom that would rival Rome. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. It is not against the kingdom of God to pay taxes to any earthly kingdom. This is important for us today: as a follower of Jesus you are a dual citizen. You are a citizen of whatever country you were born in (for most of us Canada) and you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. We pay taxes to the government because God commands us too. We are citizens of Canada. But we are also citizens of the kingdom of heaven: our allegiance is to Christ. This is not a case of either/or. Jesus perfectly answers his critics by saying "render to Caesar the things that belong to him; and render to God the things that belong to God."

Questions for Reflection:

- What does it look like for me to live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven?
- Do I struggle with paying my taxes? How could I improve my attitude on this?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that you have adopted me into your family and made me a citizen of heaven. Help me in my attitude towards the government. I pray that I would pay my taxes with a willing attitude like Christ. Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-17 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

The older I get the more I think about how my conduct (actions and words) have an impact on the people around me. When I was a teenager I generally did what I wanted without thinking about how people would view me or how it would affect my witness and credibility. Our reading today talks about just this sort of thing. Peter tells us early in the passage to keep our conduct pure so that when people speak evil of Christians they really don't have anything to go off of. Peter then continues by admonishing Christians to be subject to human institutions for the same reason. That by doing good we can point people to Christ. We are to live as free people, honouring everyone, love fellow Christians, fearing God and honouring those in leadership over us. Do you see the underlying principle? People are watching Christians; seeing how they respond in different situations. Therefore, live in such a way to bring honour to Jesus and point lost people to him. Our response as Christians to the government goes a long way in our witness in the community. Do people see us showing honour to those in positions of authority? Would someone know I am a follower of Jesus simply by how I live my day to day life?

Questions for Reflection:

- Does my conduct point people towards Jesus or away from him?
- What area of my life needs to change so I can honour people, love fellow Christians and fear God?

Prayer:

Father, help me to live in a way that honours you and points others to Jesus. Help me to honour those in authority, love my fellow Christians, and fear you. May my words and actions be a faithful witness to those around me. Amen.

Notes

Week Eleven - November 23 - 28

What We Believe About Doubt And Deconstruction

Day One

Scripture Reading: James 1:5-8 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Years ago someone came into my office really struggling with doubt. They had questions about the faith, Jesus, the Trinity, the Bible and at a previous church they had attended the pastor had told them, 'You aren't supposed to ask questions. Just believe!' This had been devastating for them as they felt guilt and shame over some of the doubts they were having. Is doubt wrong? Is it wrong to question what you believe or wrestle with long-term beliefs you have held? It can be but not necessarily. In our reading today, James encourages believers to ask God for wisdom and God will give it to him. We are told to ask in faith, not doubting because someone like that is like someone tossed back and forth by the wind; he is a double-minded person. There is a kind of doubt that is not genuinely seeking answers in good faith. It is asking God for wisdom and then thinking "God's not going to give me wisdom". That is unstable thinking. However, wrestling with belief is not necessarily wrong if it is done in a posture of genuinely seeking truth and trying to understand. So the bottom line is: where is your heart at? As you wrestle with doubts does it come from a place of sincere searching and questioning? Or have you already made your mind up? Ask God for wisdom when it comes to the things you are wrestling with and genuinely believe that God will give you what you ask for.

Questions for Reflection:

- Do I struggle with doubt and disbelief? In what specific areas of the Christian faith?
- In my questioning, am I asking from a place of disbelief or genuine inquiry?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that you are a God who gives us wisdom. Thank you that even in my wrestling with faith you are constant and gracious. Help me not to doubt but to trust in you. Amen.

Day Two

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3:5-8 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Sometimes it can be hard to take advice or counsel from someone else. Especially in our very individualistic society that we live in, we can try and figure things out on our own and refuse to ask for help. This can happen in our faith journey as well. Rather than trusting in God and his revealed Word, we think we can figure things out on our own. We don't want to listen to God or submit to his authority, but rather we will be the authority. Much disbelief and deconstruction going on in the Evangelical world is due to this fact. In our reading today we are encouraged to NOT lean on our own understanding but to trust in the Lord. To NOT be wise in our own eyes but to fear the Lord. I think that much of the whole deconstruction fad going on is because men and women are seeking to wise in their own eyes; seeking to be the god of their own lives; seeking to make their own paths regardless of what the Lord has said. However this does not mean that we can't ask questions or seek clarity when it comes to matters of the faith. We are told to trust in the Lord, to acknowledge him, to fear him and turn from evil. The promise is that he will make our paths straight. In our questioning and wrestling with matters of the faith the anchor point is Jesus. He is the one who we run too and he is the one who straightens our paths.

Questions for Reflection:

- Is there an area of my life where I am 'leaning on my own understanding'?
- How this week can I acknowledge the Lord and fear him?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that we are not meant to lean on our own understanding. Thank you that when we acknowledge you and trust in you, you make our paths straight. Help me to acknowledge you and fear you this week. Amen.

Day Three

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:14-29 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

Our reading today is one of my favourite stories of Jesus. We have so many examples in the gospels about Jesus healing people, casting out demons and performing miracles. But there is something unique about this story in the father's response to Jesus. The father of the boy who is suffering says to Jesus: 'If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' The father has come to Jesus because obviously he is hoping Jesus can heal his boy. But there is still an "if" in his request. He perhaps isn't sure if Jesus can actually do this. His boy has been sick since childhood. Perhaps he has given up hope. Jesus responds by saying that all things are possible for one who believes. The father's response to Jesus' words are fantastic: "I believe; help my unbelief!" The father believes in Jesus and yet acknowledges that he is struggling to believe. It's like there is an admission that he is not where he would like to be. He wants to have rock-solid faith and yet he is struggling. The amazing thing is Jesus honours him and heals his boy. When we think of doubt and deconstruction, our attitude should be like that of the father in this story. We may doubt and struggle with belief but we should come to Jesus saying "Help my unbelief!" Too often when we are doubting we turn to other sources and people who are not helpful in pointing us back to Jesus. Jesus is the one who helps our unbelief.

Questions for Reflection:

- Is there an area of faith that I am struggling with? Have I asked Jesus to 'help my unbelief'?
- Are there sources I am turning to in my struggles that aren't helpful?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that you are the one I can turn to when I struggle. Help me not to turn to unhelpful sources that could pull me farther away from you. Help my unbelief! Amen.

Day Four

Scripture Reading: Jude 20-23 (Read this passage 1-2 times. Don't rush.)

When my daughter Lucy was young we had to stop by the church building to grab something from my office. The lobby and auditorium was set up because a funeral was taking place later that day. Lucy asked me what all the decorations were for, so I explained that someone had died but she had been a Christian and because she trusted in Jesus during her life here, she was now in heaven with him. So the funeral was not sad but joyous because of this lady's trust in God. Lucy thought for a moment and then said "I don't trust Jesus." It took everything in me to keep my jaw from hitting the floor. I wanted to right away tell her she couldn't say things like that, and of course she could trust God. I almost panicked! Our reading today tells us we are supposed to have mercy on those who doubt. As Christians we aren't always good at this. We see people doubting or struggling and we can either ignore them because their questions are too intense or we can come down hard on them because we view their doubt as sinful and dangerous. What does it mean to show mercy to those who doubt. When my daughter Lucy said she didn't trust Jesus what I did was present the gospel to her. I told her why her mother and I trusted in Jesus; what Jesus had done for us; why we could trust him. What she needed was not condemnation but mercy and understanding. Is there someone in your life struggling with doubt or questioning? What has your response been? Has it been condemning or merciful?

Questions for Reflection:

- When I see people doubting or struggling, what has my response been?
- How can I show mercy to someone who is struggling with doubt?

Prayer:

Father, thank you that you are a God of mercy. Thank you that when I was wandering far from you, you showed my mercy. Help me to show mercy to people in my life who might be struggling with doubt. Amen.

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