

Conversations

about

Faith & Life



2017–2018 Church Year



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2017-2018 Church Year

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Forward

I have served as a deployed staff member for regional association of churches for more than a decade. The experience has taught me I am fully capable of working alone.

It has also proven I cannot do my best work alone.

In this spirit, I am grateful to Trinity Lutheran Church (Leavenworth, KS) and Word of Life Lutheran Church (Surprise, AZ). Members from these churches used the original Conversations about Faith & Life (CFL).

I am also indebted to Mark Lundgren for copy reading the updated versions of the devotions, providing theological as well as grammatical reviews of the content. I also am thankful for my daughter, McKenzie Wilson, for the final copy reading.

None of the versions of CFL would be possible without my wife, Dorinda Wilson. She has made it her mission to ensure I could devote my career to God's mission. The am deeply grateful.

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

Rev. Kevin Wilson, D. Min.

Introduction

Conversations about Faith & Life (CFL) are weekly interactive devotions about Jesus that equip Christians to live out their faith in daily life.

CFL creates an environment where God can nurture faith through His Word. At the same time, CFL creates a safe space for Christ-followers to learn through experience. Repeatedly reciting God's Word, articulating our faith or praying aloud prepares us to do the same with family, friends or acquaintances.

The key to CFL is the devotions are participative.

In groups, a different person should read the passage out loud each week. Those who do these devotions alone are asked to read the passages aloud.

Each devotion has three questions about the Bible passage. In groups, each person is encouraged to respond to the questions. Individuals should consider journaling answers.

The devotions close with prayer. In groups, each person is asked to share a petition. When the group starts praying, each person offers another participant's petition. Solo participants should pray aloud in response to the devotion.

How to Use CFL

There are two ways of accessing the weekly devotions.

Anyone with a smart phone, tablet or computer can access the devotions starting Sunday morning each week on KevinWilson360.org. The devotions are found on the home page as a featured blog post all week.

You also can download all the devotions for the 2017-2018 Church Year as a PDF document on the Resources page on KevinWilson360.org. The document is free. There is a bonus if you worship in a Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod congregation, since the Scripture passages mirror the three-year cycle of the LCMS lectionary.

Thank You

I appreciate your using CFL. If you have any suggestions or feedback about the devotions, please let me know by emailing me at coachkw360@gmail.com. The Lord bless and guide,

Symbols of Jesus

The Week of December 3, 2017 + The 1st Sunday in Advent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below passage describes Jesus entering the holy city of Jerusalem. There is a certain irony to the praise and honor Jesus receives, since Jesus has already predicted his death and resurrection.

Reading *from the* Gospel

Mark 11: 1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples **2** and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. **3** If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" **4** And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. **5** And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" **6** And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. **7** And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. **8** And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. **9** And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! **10** Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How is Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem ironic? For background, read Luke 9:22 and 18:31-33.

Throwing cloaks on the ground before Jesus was a symbol that Jesus is royalty. What symbols of Jesus are found in your church building? What are found in your home?

Share about an especially memorable experience of praising God.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Preparing the Way

The Week of December 10, 2017 + The 2nd Sunday in Advent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below passage is the start of the account of Jesus life and ministry from the Gospel of Mark.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 1: 1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, **3** the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What kind of baptism was John the Baptizer performing?

Who are some of the people who prepared the way for you to know Jesus?

Share about a time you got to share Jesus, whether to a fellow Christian or non-Christian.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Identity

The Week of December 17, 2017 + The 3rd Sunday in Advent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below passage provides insight into John the Baptizer, a prophet called by God to prepare people for Jesus.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

John 1:19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" **20** He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." **21** And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." **22** So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" **23** He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Why were the religious leaders interested in John the Baptizer's identity?

In what ways has God defined your identity? For insights, consider Romans 6:3-4, 2 Corinthians 5:7 or 1 Peter 2:9.

Share three words that help describe your relationship with God.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Comfort from God

The Week of December 24, 2017 + The 4th Sunday in Advent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below passage tells one of the stories within the narrative of Jesus' birth.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How did the angel reassure Mary?

What strikes you the most about the description of who Jesus will be?

Share about a time God provided you with God, much like Gabriel comforted Mary.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Presentation of Jesus

The Week of December 31, 2017 + The 1st Sunday after Christmas

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below event occurs when Jesus, soon after birth, was presented to God at the temple in Jerusalem.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Luke 2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. **27** And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, **29** "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; **30** for my eyes have seen your salvation **31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What can you glean about Simeon from this passage?

Who would be considered "Gentiles" today by Christians?

Share a religious custom or practice you find especially important or meaningful.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

The Prophet

The Week of January 7, 2017 + The Baptism of Our Lord

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account describes how John the Baptizer prepared the way for Jesus.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

Mark 1:4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What about John gave him credibility as a prophet?

Discuss the distinctions between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism.

Considering verse 7, share about someone you know of who lives with humility similar to John the Baptizer.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Meeting Jesus

The Week of January 14 + The 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account provides a picture of how Jesus called disciples.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 1: 43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." **44** Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." **46** Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." **47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" **48** Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." **49** Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" **50** Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." **51** And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What obstacles did Phillip overcome in persuading Nathanael to meet Jesus?

List some of the people who introduced you to Jesus.

Share about a time you invited someone to learn about Jesus or to meet Jesus.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Fishers of Men

The Week of January 21 + The 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs soon after Jesus announced his teaching and preaching ministry.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 1:16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. **17** And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." **18** And immediately they left their nets and followed him. **19** And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What do you find interesting about the men Jesus called as disciples?

Fishermen used large nets for fishing in Jesus' day. How does the image of casting a large net impact your understanding of verse 17?

Share about a time you "followed" Jesus by emulating Jesus.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Amazed at Jesus

The Week of January 28 + The 4th Sunday after the Epiphany

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The city named in this passage, Capernaum, became a center for Jesus' ministry.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 1:21 And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. **22** And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. **23** And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, **24** "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." **25** But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" **26** And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. **27** And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." **28** And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How did Jesus' teaching and healing ministry benefit Jesus?

In what way is Jesus teaching still authoritative today?

How does Jesus amaze you?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Demons

The Week of February 4 + The 5th Sunday after the Epiphany

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The men listed in this passage were close followers of Jesus. As such, their families would welcome Jesus into their homes.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 1: 29 And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. **31** And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. **33** And the whole city was gathered together at the door. **34** And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How could the demons know Jesus?

What do you think of exorcisms performed today?

Brainstorm different ways we can bring comfort from God to people who are suffering.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Transfiguration

The Week of February 11 + The Transfiguration of Our Lord

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs near the end of Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry and close to his final entrance into Jerusalem.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 9:2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, **3** and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. **4** And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. **5** And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." **6** For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. **7** And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." **8** And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Compare Jesus' "transfiguration" and our "transformation." See Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18 for background information.

Why do you listen to Jesus (verse 7)?

Share about a time you were afraid or terrified, yet were ultimately comforted by God.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Temptation

The Week of February 18 + The 1st Sunday in Lent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs right after Jesus' baptism and just before Jesus starts his public teaching ministry.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." **4** But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple **6** and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." **10** Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What are the commonalities between Jesus' responses to the three temptations?

Which of Satan's temptations do you find the most challenging?

Who ministers to you when you've faced difficult, even exhausting times?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Christ

The Week of February 25 + The 2nd Sunday in Lent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below exchange occurs when Jesus is facing escalating opposition as a religious teacher and prophet.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

Mark 8:27 And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" **28** And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." **29** And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." **30** And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

Sharing *your* Faith

Why were people confusing Jesus with "John the Baptist" or "Elijah"?

Who do people say Jesus is today?

Jesus instructs the disciples, at least for the moment, not to reveal his identity to others. How can we discern when to talk with people about Jesus and when to hold off?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Righteous Anger

The Week of March 4 + The 3rd Sunday in Lent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

John records this story early in his Gospel to demonstrate that Jesus was sent by God the Father. The proof is found in Jesus fulfilling Old Testament prophecies.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. **15** And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. **16** And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Sharing *your* Faith

What captures your imagination about this account?

Jesus exhibited righteous "indignation" or "anger" without sinning. Discuss how you deal with emotionally charged situations as Christians.

Share about a time you were especially zealous for God.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Popular Bible Passages

The Week of March 11 + The 4th Sunday in Lent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below teaching of Jesus is part of an exchange with a Jewish leader named Nicodemus.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

Sharing *your* Faith

What is revealed about God the Father in this passage?

Why do you think John 3:18 isn't nearly as universally known as John 3:16?

Share other well-known Bible passages or stories and why those passages are so popular.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Servant and Slave

The Week of March 18 + The 5th Sunday in Lent

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below teaching occurs after two disciples, James and John, asked for special places of honor among Jesus' followers.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 10:41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. **42** And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **43** But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Sharing *your* Faith

What words does Jesus use to describe his followers?

How did Jesus model this teaching?

Share about an experience where someone was gracious or humble towards you.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Triumphant Entry

The Week of March 25 + Palm Sunday

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs as Jesus is entering Jerusalem for the final time.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 12:12 The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. **13** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" **14** And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,
15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

Sharing *your* Faith

What is the implication of the crowd crying out, "...even the King of Israel"?

The palm branches were brought as symbols of Jesus' royalty. How do we demonstrate Jesus is our Lord and King today?

Share about an experience where you were especially in awe of God.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Resurrection!

The Week of April 1 + The Resurrection of our Lord

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The following occurs after Jesus' horrific death and subsequent burial.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

John 20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. **2** So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." **3** So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. **4** Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, **7** and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. **8** Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; **9** for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. **10** Then the disciples went back to their homes.

Sharing *your* Faith

What strikes you about the above account?

Who are you most like when it comes to matters of faith? Peter, who bursts into the tomb? Or "the other disciple," who hesitates before entering the tomb.

What are you looking forward to the most when Jesus returns to raise the living and the dead?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Jesus and Thomas

The Week of April 8 + The 2nd Sunday of Easter

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs soon after Jesus was raised from the dead, but there was still a good deal of confusion about what had happened to Jesus.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

John 20:24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." **26** Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Sharing *your* Faith

What did Thomas say it would take for him to trust Jesus was resurrected? How did Jesus exceed these requirements?

What do you find as affirming or encouraging about this passage?

Share about a time God sustained you through a season of doubt.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Witnesses

The Week of April 15 + The 3rd Sunday of Easter

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs after Jesus' resurrection. He is addressing his disciples after miraculously appearing to them.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." **45** Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, **46** and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, **47** and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things. **49** And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Sharing *your* Faith

What did the disciples witness? (verse 48)

In what ways did Jesus fulfill what was written in the "Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms"? (Verse 44) Examples are found in Isaiah 9:1-7 and Isaiah chapter 53.

Share about a time when you had an "aha" moment in understanding a Scripture passage.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

The Good Shepherd

The Week of April 22 + The 4th Sunday of Easter

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below teaching occurs after Jesus started to face opposition to his public ministry from religious leaders.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

John 10:11 (Jesus said,) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. **17** For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

According to this passage, who all will listen to the "Good Shepherd"?

What does this passage reveal about Jesus' death and resurrection?

What forces or influences "scatter the sheep" today?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Abide in Me

The Week of April 29 + The 5th Sunday of Easter

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus provides the below teaching after he has entered Jerusalem the final time before his death and resurrection.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 15:1 (Jesus said,) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **2** Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **3** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **4** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. **6** If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Sharing *your* Faith

What warnings are found in this passage? (Consider verses 1 and 6.)

How do Christians "abide" in Jesus?

What "fruit" has God brought forth in your life?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Love One Another

The Week of May 6 + The 6th Sunday of Easter

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus provides the below teaching after he has entered Jerusalem the final time before his death and resurrection.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. **17** These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

Sharing *your* Faith

What do you find most surprising about this passage?

How is the description of love in this passage different than how love is understood in society?

Share about a time a fellow Christian loved you as Christ loved us.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Jesus Prays

The Week of May 13 + The 7th Sunday of Easter

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below passage contains part of a prayer by Jesus, offered not long before Jesus' passion.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

John 17:11 “And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. **12** While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. **13** But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. **14** I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **15** I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. **16** They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. **19** And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Sharing *your* Faith

What three things had Jesus done for his disciples? (See verses 12, 14 and 18).

How do you feel about not being “of the world,” yet Jesus sending you “into the world”? (Verses 15 and 18).

How does the Father keep us “from the evil one”?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

The Holy Spirit

The Week of May 20 + The Day of Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus shares the below insights just after his "Last Supper," just hours before his arrest and trial. Historically, this passage is part of the Gospel reading for the Day of Pentecost worship services.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. **27** And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."

Sharing *your* Faith

How does the Holy Spirit serve as our "Helper"? (For examples consider John 14:26, Romans 8:26-27, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.)

How does this passage inform us about the Trinity?

Share about a time you got to witness about Jesus, whether with a fellow Christian or non-Christian.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Provocative Teaching

The Week of May 27 + The Holy Trinity

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below exchange occurs early in Jesus' public ministry, so religious leaders were trying to understand Jesus.

Excerpt *from the Gospel*

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." **3** Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." **4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Sharing *your* Faith

When does Nicodemus visit Jesus? What does this imply about how Nicodemus and other religious leaders viewed Jesus?

Jesus asks a provocative question of Nicodemus in verse 3. What are some other provocative questions or statements made by Jesus? (For examples, consider John 8:56-59 or John 2:13-19.)

What two analogies does Jesus use to teach that salvation is solely from God the Father? (See verses 3-4 and 8).

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Lord of the Sabbath

The Week of June 3 + The 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account happens early in Jesus' public ministry, as people were starting to get a handle on this new teacher.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 2:23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. **24** And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" **25** And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: **26** how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" **27** And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. **28** So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What do you find most interesting about this passage?

Jesus properly interprets the law concerning the Sabbath for the religious leaders. What else did religious leaders misunderstand in Jesus' day?

Share about a memorable Sabbath in your life.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Family Ties

The Week of June 10 + The 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs early in Jesus' public ministry. Jesus' own family was not yet clear about who Jesus was.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel Reading

Mark 3:31 And (Jesus') mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. **32** And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." **33** And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" **34** And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! **35** For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Judging from this passage, what is one of Jesus' highest priorities?

What do you find most challenging about this passage?

Share about a time Christians treated you as if you were part of their family.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Kingdom of God

The Week of June 17 + The 4th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus started public ministry by announcing, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1:15)
The below passage is an example of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel Reading

Matthew 4:26 And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. **27** He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. **28** The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. **29** But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What do you find striking about this passage?

What does this passage say about your own growth toward maturity in the faith?

What evidence do you see of God growing His Kingdom in your congregation?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Awe of God

The Week of June 24 + The 5th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs as Jesus' disciples are still learning about their teacher.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel Reading

Mark 4:36 And leaving the crowd, they took him (Jesus) with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. **37** And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. **38** But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" **39** And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. **40** He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" **41** And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What do you find most surprising in this account?

Brainstorm some of the reasons Jesus did miracles.

Share about a time when you were in awe of God.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Following Instructions

The Week of July 1 + The 6th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus was asked to come to the house of a religious leader because the leader's daughter was very ill. The below passage tells the story of what happened when Jesus arrived.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel Reading

Mark 5:39 And when he (Jesus) had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." **40** And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. **41** Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." **42** And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. **43** And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Why would Jesus "strictly charge" those present not to talk about the miracle?

What are different ways you learned God's commands?

Share about a time when you found it challenging to follow one of Jesus' commands or teachings.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Sent!

The Week of July 8 + The 7th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Initially, Jesus invited disciples to watch and listen to him. Then he invited them to serve with him. The below passage demonstrates the next stage of discipleship.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel Reading

Mark 6:7 And he (Jesus) called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. **8** He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— **9** but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. **10** And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. **11** And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” **12** So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. **13** And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Why did Jesus send the disciples without bread or bags or money?

Compare God sending you into your vocation with Jesus sending out the disciples.

Share about a time when God's people provided comfort to you.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Difficult Choices

The Week of July 15 + The 8th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The prophet in the below account, John the Baptizer, was called by God to prepare people for Jesus. He also was Jesus' cousin.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel Reading

Mark 6:22 For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." **23** And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." **24** And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." **25** And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." **26** And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. **27** And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison **28** and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Why was John the Baptist imprisoned? (You can find this in Mark 6:14-21.)

Consider King Herod's situation. As a Christian, how do you choose when caught between a "rock and a hard place"?

Share about a time you paid a price for your Christian faith.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Rest for Awhile

The Week of July 22 + The 9th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus was known to go by himself to desolate places to pray. In the below passage, he shares this practice with his disciples.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel Reading

Mark 6:30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. **31** And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. **32** And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Why do you think apostles were so exhausted?

God has created each of us uniquely. How do you "recharge your batteries" when you are stressed or tired?

Share about a favorite place where you go to recharge your batteries.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Jesus Calms Fears

The Week of July 29 + The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Previously, Jesus had gone to a quiet place by himself to pray.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 6:47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he (Jesus) was alone on the land. **48** And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, **49** but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, **50** for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." **51** And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, **52** for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Brainstorm reasons Jesus chose to walk on water.

What Bible passage(s) do you turn to when you are anxious or afraid?

Share about a time when God calmed your fears.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

The Works of God

The Week of August 5 + The 11th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below exchange happens a little while after Jesus performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 people.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 6:26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. **27** Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." **28** Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" **29** Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How does Jesus demonstrate "good works" start with God?

In what ways do people misunderstand Jesus today?

Share about a time when you think you witnessed God work through His people.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Reassurance from Jesus

The Week of August 12 + The 12th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus explains the following not long as the miracle of feeding 5,000 people.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. **38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. **40** For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What are different ways Jesus reassures his followers in this passage?

Who are some of the people Jesus comforted in the Scriptures?

Share about a time when you needed such reassurance from Jesus.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Struggle of Faith

The Week of August 19 + The 13th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs as Jesus has started to lose followers, largely due to his teachings.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 6:66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. **67** So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" **68** Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, **69** and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What caused many of Jesus' disciples to turn "back and no longer" follow Jesus? (Read John 6:22-65 for a full explanation.)

What causes people to walk away from following Jesus today?

Share about a time when you were tempted to walk away from Christ, only to see God keep you in the faith.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Freedom in Christ

The Week of August 26 + The 14th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

In the following passage Jesus is addressing leaders of the religious establishment.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 7:9 And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! **10** For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ **11** But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— **12** then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, **13** thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.” (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Summarize Jesus' main point in this passage.

Give examples of man-made religious rules that go beyond what the Bible teaches.

Share about a time how to live as a Christian was clarified in your life.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Clean Versus Unclean

The Week of September 2 + The 15th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

In the following passage Jesus is addressing a crowd of people, correcting a teaching from other religious leaders.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 7:18 (Jesus) said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, **19** since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) **20** And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. **21** For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, **22** adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. **23** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How does Mark 7:1-5 help clarify this passage?

Brainstorm examples from the Bible of sin that comes "out of the heart of man."

Discuss the implications of this passage in daily life.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Caring Enough to Act

The Week of September 9 + The 16th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below account occurs as Jesus' disciples are still discovering new things about their teacher.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 7:31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. **32** And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. **33** And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. **34** And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." **35** And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. **36** And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

In what ways did Jesus try to deflect attention from himself in this passage?

Share about a time someone demonstrated care for you in a time of need.

What are some of the ways we care for the spiritual needs of friends and family?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Help our Unbelief!

The Week of September 16 + The 17th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

In the below passage, a man whose son suffered from possession has asked Jesus for help.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 9:21 And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. **22** And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." **23** And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." **24** Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" **25** And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." (ESV)

Sharing your Faith

Why does the father of the child cry out, "I believe; help my unbelief?"

What causes doubt in God among Christians?

Share about a time when God assured you when you struggled with faith.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Selflessness and Greatness

The Week of September 23 + The 18th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below exchange occurs after Jesus has committed to going to Jerusalem, even though he knows what awaits him there.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 9:33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" **34** But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. **35** And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." **36** And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, **37** "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Compare Mark 9:30-31 with Mark 9:33-37.

How does society push against this teaching of Jesus?

Share about a time when someone placed your needs above his or her own.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Backing the Church Universal

The Week of September 30 + The 19th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below teaching occurs after Jesus has committed to going to Jerusalem, even though he knows what awaits there.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 9:38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." **39** But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. **40** For the one who is not against us is for us. **41** For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What in the reading suggests the person who was "not following" the disciples also followed Christ?

What are some "mighty works" done by followers of Christ recorded in Scripture? (For examples, consider Acts 3:1-9 or 8:26-39).

Share about a time when a Christian who was not part of your church encouraged or supported you.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Like a Child

The Week of October 7 + The 20th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below passage is an example of Jesus' teaching that went against the popular religious instruction of his time.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 10:13 And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. **14** But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. **15** Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." **16** And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Why would the disciples rebuke people bringing their children to be blessed by Jesus?

What does Jesus mean by saying we need to receive the kingdom of God like a child?

Share about a time when you could do nothing but be totally reliant on God.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Treasure in Heaven

The Week of October 14 + The 21st Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

In the below account a wealthy young man had come to Jesus with a question about eternal life.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 10:21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." **22** Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What do you find most intriguing about this passage?

What do people put above "treasure in heaven" today?

Share about a time when you found it difficult to make a godly decision. How did God help you get through it?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Who Can Be Saved?

The Week of October 21 + The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Just before the below teaching, a wealthy young man came to Jesus with a question about salvation.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 10:23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" **24** And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! **25** It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." **26** And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" **27** Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Why were the disciples worried about who could be saved? (See Mark 10:17-22 for background information.)

How could Jesus state with such confidence "all things are possible with God"?

Share about a time when you questioned your salvation. Include how God reassured you about your salvation.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Set Free

The Week of October 28 + Reformation Sunday

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below teaching occurs after Jesus started to face opposition to his public ministry from religious leaders.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

John 8:31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What is the "cause and effect relationship" in this passage?

Brainstorm ways you can "abide" in Jesus through God's Word.

Share about a time when you felt "set free."

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Surprisingly Blessed

The Week of November 4 + All Saints

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

The below teaching comes from Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount."

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Matthew 5:2 And (Jesus) opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **4** Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. **5** Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. **6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. **7** Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. **8** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. **9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. **10** "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11** Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

Which "blessed" most goes against the values of society today?

Which "blessed" statement captures your attention? Why?

Share a time when you personally experienced one of the "blessed" statements.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

True Giving

The Week of November 11 + The 25th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus provides the below instruction to his disciples after he has entered Jerusalem, just before his passion.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 12:41 And (Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. **42** And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. **43** And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. **44** For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How is the story of the offerings (above) similar to Jesus' teaching in Mark 12:38-40?

Given the wealth found in America, how can Christians today still give out of "poverty" to God?

Share about a time when your family or congregation came together to sacrificially support a cause or need.

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

End Times

The Week of November 18 + The 26th Sunday after Pentecost

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

Jesus provides the below instruction to his disciples after he has entered Jerusalem, just before his passion.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 13:5 And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. **6** Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. **7** And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. **8** For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains." (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

What concerns you the most about this passage?

How can Christians avoid being led "astray" by false teachers? (Read Matthew 18:5-6 and First John 4:1-3)

Share about a time when people around you thought the world was coming to an end. How does this passage address such concerns?

Pray *for* One Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

Eternal Words

The Week of November 25 + The Last Sunday of the Church Year

The Narrative *of* Jesus' Life

In the below passage, Jesus is teaching about what will happen at the end of the world, specifically when he returns from heaven.

Excerpt *from the* Gospel

Mark 13:24 “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, **25** and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. **26** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. **27** And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. **28** From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. **29** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. **30** Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (ESV)

Sharing *your* Faith

How could Jesus say his “words will not pass away?” (See Mark 13:26, Isaiah 40:8 and Revelation 1:7-8.)

What will Jesus do for “the elect?”

Share about a time God led you through a difficult time. How do these experiences give you confidence facing what is described in the passage?

Pray *for* Each Another

Each person is invited to share a prayer request. Another participant will volunteer to offer the petition. Once everyone has chosen a prayer request, take turns offering the prayers aloud.

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