

Phone Devotional Group – Mondays, 7pm

Hello, Friend!

For the “Fall-Winter 2026” Season of LifeConnect, this group will be meeting on Mondays during the months of October and November. I’ve prepared some devotional/study material for you. Let me know what you like – or don’t like! – and I’ll take that into consideration for the “Winter-Spring 2027” Season.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Macy Weir

The Content is as follows:

- Oct 5 – “Whose Leaven” Devotional Reading
 - From *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* by Geore Knight
 - Discussion questions by Macy
- Oct 12 – “Bioluminescence” Devotional Reading
 - From *God of Wonders* by David Steen
 - Discussion questions by Macy
- Oct 19 – “Teach Us to Pray” Devotional Reading & Workbook pages
 - From *Hi God, It’s Me* by Georgia Brown
- Oct 26 – “Prayer is Priority” Devotional Reading & Workbook pages
 - From *Hi God, It’s Me* by Georgia Brown
- Nov 2 – Mark 4:1-34 Bible Reading & “Kingdom Parables” chapter
 - Chapter/Questions are from *Mark; Follow Me* by James Hoover
- Nov 9 – Mark 4:35-6:6 Bible Reading & “Fear & Faith” chapter
 - Chapter/Questions are from *Mark; Follow Me* by James Hoover
- Nov 16 – Matthew 6:1-6 & 6:16-18 & “A Christian’s Religion” chapter
 - Chapter/Questions are from *Sermon on the Mount* by John Stott
- Nov 23 – Matthew 6:7-15 & “A Christian’s Prayer” chapter
 - Chapter/Questions are from *Sermon on the Mount* by John Stott
- Nov 30 – “How to Destroy Your Enemies” story
 - From *Parables of Fenton Forest* by Gordon Bietz
 - Discussion questions by Macy

"Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" Daily Devotional
by George Knight (2013)

Oct 5

Whose Leaven?

When His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." Matt. 16:5, 6, NKJV.

Somebody is always messing up. This time no one had brought any bread. That worried the disciples greatly, and Jesus knew it. So while they had their minds on bread, He told them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, referring to their false ideas about true religion, including their erroneous ideas of the mission of the Messiah. After all, all of them were looking for a powerful earthly king rather than a suffering servant. That teaching, as we saw at the feeding of the 5,000, posed a genuine temptation to the disciples. Such thought could easily continue to permeate their minds, much as yeast spreads through dough.

Yet that view of Messiah's function would soon be shattered as Jesus became the Lamb of God. He needed to implant the true leaven in their minds to prepare them for that event and their own future work.

Jesus had a message for them, but all they could think about was their stomachs. That brought forth what may be Jesus' harshest comment on their dullness: "O men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? . . . How is it that you fail to perceive that I did not speak about bread?" (Matt. 16:8-11, RSV). At that point, they finally realized that He had in mind the leaven of the false teachings that they had grown up with and with which they had filled their minds.

One significant fact to note is that Jesus links the Pharisees and Sadducees together. They were opponents in Jewish religious and political life, standing for radically different ideas. But in Jesus they had found a common enemy who threatened the status quo. A powerful enemy makes strange bedfellows. Their unity will last up to the Crucifixion.

As we meditate today, we need to remember the lesson of the leaven and how powerful extra-biblical philosophies are in distorting our beliefs. Above all, we need to keep our eyes turned to Jesus and His Word.

Oct 5 – Discussion Questions

Goes with “Whose Leaven” Devotional Reading

1. The disciples were distracted by bread. What is something that is distracting you right now?
2. What distorted beliefs or extra-biblical philosophies are infiltrating your life?
3. How can you keep your eyes upon Jesus and His Word?
4. What is Jesus saying to you today?

Prayer: *God – help me to keep my eyes on You. Draw my attention to you – and don't let me be distracted by things that, ultimately, don't matter. Give me the desire and motivation to be in Your Word.*

"God of Wonders" by David Steen (2012)

Oct 12

Bioluminescence

What is the way to the abode of light?
And where does darkness reside? Job 38:19, NIV.

“Ouch! That lightbulb is still hot!” Lighted bulbs are hot because little of the energy they use actually results in light. Most of it gets wasted as heat that can burn fingers. When living cells make light, however, the process is nearly 100 percent efficient. With no wasted heat, not surprisingly we call it cold light. Fireflies (and many hundreds of other life-forms) make cold light. Heat will destroy living cells, so if they make light, it just has to be of the cold kind. We call the light that living cells produce bioluminescence. So how do fireflies make their light? What is the way to the abode of their light?

Bioluminescence in fireflies requires a chemical reaction in a relatively simple biological pigment called luciferin. Luciferin has two forms, a tensed up energetic form labeled oxyluciferin or a relaxed form, the simple luciferin. The enzyme luciferase uses the cell's chemical energy to cram oxygen into the luciferin, making the energetic oxyluciferin. Then oxyluciferin settles back to its relaxed state, giving up the stored energy as a photon of light. Actually luciferin is the name given to any member of a family of light-producing biological pigments. Different forms of the pigment occur in various light-producing life-forms ranging from bacteria to fish to fungi. Some scientists believe that all cells produce some bioluminescence of one sort or another. Though luciferins have been under intense study for about seven decades, we know very little about how critters make the magical stuff. We still have so much to learn.

But not knowing how organisms produce it has not stopped us from artificially making luciferin and employing it in many creative ways. For example, we can use it to detect the presence of blood at a crime scene, cancer in an organ, or pathogenic bacteria in foods. In each case a positive test glows in the dark.

Come to think of it, shining the light of truth is our job in this dark world. When we let our light shine, it brings glory to God, whose face is the ultimate source of bioluminescence in the universe. My greatest hope is to see the light shining from His face.

Lord, make Your face shine upon me and be gracious to me today. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Oct 12 – Discussion Questions

Goes with “Bioluminescence” Devotional Reading

1. God made our world with so many amazing things – what is something you are looking forward to understanding better? (either now, or when we get to heaven and can ask God!)
2. Where is your energy going right now? Do you feel it's being used well? Or wasted?
3. How can we shine God's truth?
4. What message is Jesus encouraging you to hear today?

Prayer: *Father – Thank-you for the beauty that is all around us. When I encounter darkness, help me to be your light. Put me in the path of people who need You – and give me the words to say too. I put my hope in You. Come soon!*

Oct 19



TEACH US TO PRAY

(Our Prayers are Seeds)

As our hands joined together to make a circle around the kitchen island, and the smells of the holiday season made my stomach growl louder, I focused my eyes on the ground. If my eyes were to make contact with theirs, surely, the family would nominate me to pray over the food. And that was too much pressure! I just wanted to eat! In all honesty, I never felt like I was going to say the right thing. What if I messed up or said something that was totally laughable? I've heard people say that prayer was supposed to naturally flow from your heart, but I was totally stuck in my head.

Over the years, our family gathering prayers have evolved from my dad or grandpa taking the lead, to now, one by one, with a gentle hand squeeze, we make our way around the circle thanking God in our own special way. Again, this totally used to intimidate me; but through spending time to intentionally get to know the kind heart of God, I can more confidently pray out loud as prayer is not just a plea for something—it's a friendship with Him.

And I can only imagine what it must have been like to be one of Jesus' friends. It's crazy to even think about how they all met. For Peter it was just another day doing what he knew best—fishing. And

at the time, Matthew was not the town's favorite person since he was collecting people's taxes. Then all of a sudden, a man they'd never seen before said, "Follow Me." And what did these guys do? Yup. They left everything and FOLLOWED Him! Wild.

We get a glimpse of all the adventures these guys witnessed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But out of all the things the twelve disciples saw—from religious leaders being confronted, blind eyes seeing, deaf ears hearing, even the dead coming back to life—can you guess the ONE THING these men asked Jesus to teach them? I'm going to be honest: it shocked me. If it were me, I'd probably want to learn to raise the dead. That seems pretty helpful. But to my surprise (and delight) they said, "Lord, teach us [how] to pray" (Luke 11:1 NASB). I think this put a smile on Jesus' face. His response: "When you pray, say" (Luke 11:2 NASB).

FROM: "H: God, It's Me"
by Georgia Brown (2023)



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Looking back on all those family dinners where I stood staring at the ground—hoping not to have to pray out loud—it makes me feel a lot better to know even the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

1. *Does the disciples' request to Jesus surprise you—that out of all the things they witnessed and could have requested—they asked Him to teach them to PRAY?*

2. *Why do you think the twelve disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray? Don't you think they already knew how?*

3. *How would you describe prayer?*

4. *What does prayer look like for you?*

*Our prayers are seeds. . . . we can plant flowers
or we can grow weeds.*

This may come as a total shock, but my "green thumb" isn't all that green. This fancy way of saying, "You're a natural when it comes to growing things" does not apply to me. Does it apply to you? In my flower beds, the weeds sure keep me busy. After plucking one out, before I know it, another quickly sprouts in its place! If I don't make my garden a priority, it quickly becomes overgrown with countless weeds and wilted flowers as they need watered and loved on. But there's good news! Weeds don't totally ruin a garden. They may cover up the garden's beauty and steal nutrients from flowers, but weeds can be removed through a little effort.

When I picture prayer, I envision a garden.

Our prayers are conversations with God that are planting seeds of trust and faith in Him.

In this life, whatever you tend to will flourish. And the things you don't tend to will result in weeds taking root. When I think of weeds in my heart, I think of my doubt, fear, unforgiveness, bitterness, and pain. The longer I ignore these things, the stronger their roots become and the harder they are to pull up. But through prayer and telling God about our lives—the good, the bad, and the in-between—we can uproot these weeds through taking in Scripture and surrendering to Him.

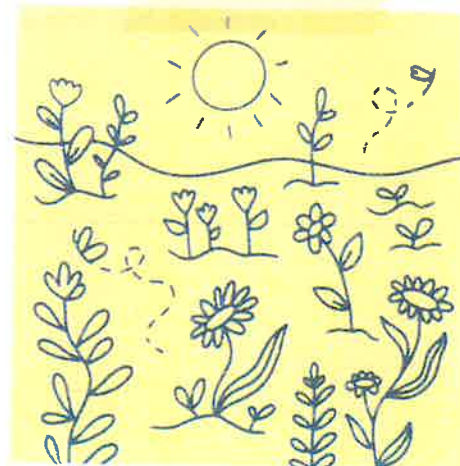
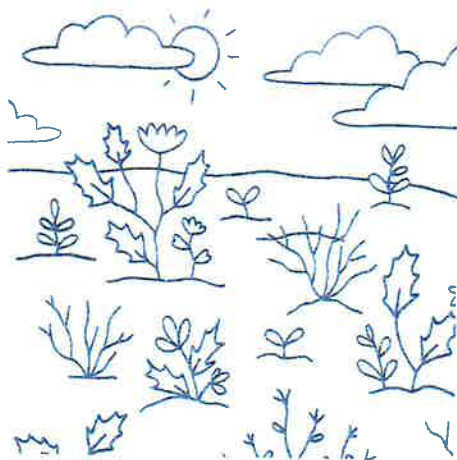
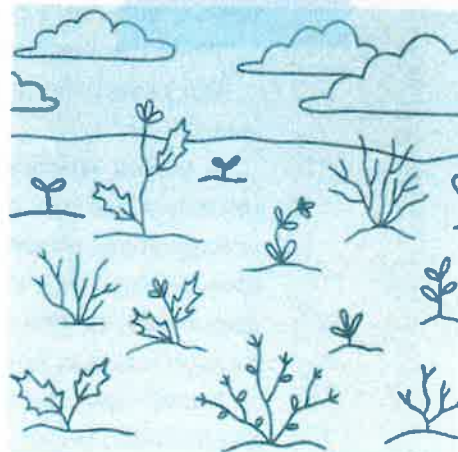
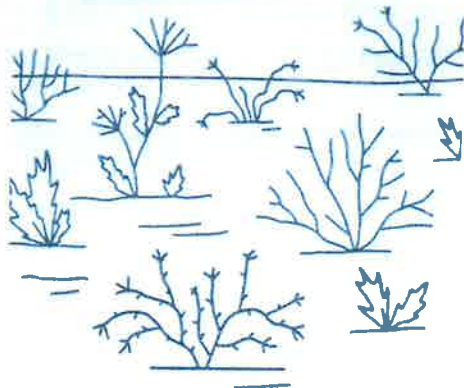
Friend, how's the garden of your prayer life? Is the soil hardened? Are there weeds of bitterness, doubt, or fear? Is your garden flourishing? Do you come to God only when things are hard? (I call these "911 prayers.") Do you come to God just wanting to pick the flowers? (Thanking Him when things are good.) Do you long to have a friendship with Him? (Tending to the soil, continuously protecting your friendship from weeds of doubt, fear, and unbelief?)

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Faith & Friends with
Georgia Brown.



YOU GROW WITH GOD WHEN YOU GO WITH GOD

Below you'll find a few different gardens. Circle which best describes your current prayer life.
(Be honest and don't worry. By the end of our journey together, your garden will be beautiful!)



PAUSE, PRAY, + PRAISE

"Hi God, it's me. Will You teach me how to pray?"

Have you ever been distracted when trying to pray? Me. Too. So, like writing a letter to God, I began to write my prayers down in a journal. This has helped me so much to stay focused while praying. I love prayer journaling because it's a space I can come back to weeks, months, even years later, and reflect on the Lord's faithfulness through the prayers I've prayed. So for the next twenty days, friend, welcome to YOUR prayer page! Each day you can use the space to simply talk to God, just as I am chatting with you! But I will also give ya a little guidance if you're feeling stuck about what to pray for.

Today, tell God where you are in this season. Maybe acknowledge that you've been distant and you want to grow, but you didn't know where to start. Just share your heart with Him, sister. I'm so proud of your journey with Him . . . and it's just the beginning!

An illustration at the top of the page shows several brown coffee beans scattered on a light blue background. A wooden spoon is visible on the left side, with some beans resting on it. The background also features some darker blue and brown shapes, possibly representing a cup or a surface.

Oct 26

PRAYER IS PRIORITY

(Matthew 6:33)

As my phone's obnoxious alarm begins to sing loudly at me, it's time to say goodbye to the cozy sheets—another day is here. With the silly excuse of, "I just need a moment to wake up," I used to start off my day lying in bed scrolling. Before the day even began, I felt empty as I stared at picture after picture of what looked like perfect lives. I didn't realize it at the time, but scrolling on social media was distracting me from God because my first moments of the day were focused on comparing myself to others instead of on Him.

It may sound silly, but something was missing from my morning that a warm cup of coffee or a social media scroll couldn't satisfy. I just couldn't figure out what that was. Then one day, a light bulb turned on in my heart when God showed me Matthew 6:33. No, it didn't literally say, "GIRL! Stop staring at your screen!" But it did tell me where my first moments should be focused.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV) says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Now, instead of fixing my eyes on a screen as soon as I wake up, I focus my first moments toward my Savior. Praying instead of posting. Choosing the Word before the world. I can't tell you how much sweeter my days have been since

making this little change!

You don't have to just go through the motions of waking up and quickly getting on with the busyness of a new day all by yourself. Friend, you have permission to start your day differently! By posturing the first minutes of your day in prayer, you can invite Jesus into the new moments you're about to step into.

It may not be scrolling that has your attention first each morning. Maybe it's thoughts of school, friend drama, work, the kiddos needing you, being rushed out the door, or struggling with a hard decision or situation that pops into your mind as you wake up. But there is freedom, friend. With Jesus, you don't have to walk through your days alone. You can choose to seek Him first by simply starting a conversation. It's like picking up the phone to call your best friend when you wake up and continuing to constantly chat until you say, "Goodnight." Instead of worrying or distracting yourself by putting an app between you and God, Philipians 4:6 tells us to lift it all up to Him in prayer.

Friend, whatever has your attention has your heart, and whatever has your heart has your time. I needed to stop the scrolling and start seeking Him. What do you need to stop so you can seek Him?

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

MATTHEW 6:31-33 ESV

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the first things you think about or do each morning?

2. Matthew 6:33 says to seek God's kingdom first. For the specific season that you're currently in, what would it look like for you to seek Him first each morning? Maybe you already do this! If so, tell me about when you started giving Him the first moments of your day and how your relationship with God has grown.

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3. We focused on the first part of this verse, but the end says, "and all these things will be added to you." What do you think this means? (Hint: Read a few verses before Matthew 6:33.)

4. Sometimes we think once we have everything in order and under control, then we can go seek God. But this verse is telling us the exact opposite: First, go seek God. Then, everything else will fall into place. How does this make you feel?

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Georgia Brown.





Hi God, it's r

Write a pray
your first go
also thank H

When I started my sophomore year of college, I began to set my alarm at 6:33 a.m. as a reminder of Matthew 6:33! During the first few weeks, it was difficult trying to create a new habit when hitting snooze was my automatic response. But as the weeks and months passed, it got easier. Now, I can't imagine my mornings without that 6:33 a.m. wake-up call! Seeking first His kingdom is the most important time in my day!

The Bible is the only book that "reads us" as we read it (Hebrews 4:12)! So, today, we're not going to just read Matthew 6:33 and move on like it's simply a good idea; we're going to apply it!

Friend, it's not a matter of fitting God into your schedule; it's about building your schedule *with* God! We all have the same twenty-four hours in a day, but it's up to each of us how we spend them.

Here are a few of the routine things I do each morning in the order in which I do them: turn off my alarm, open my curtains, start the coffee pot, make my bed, pick out my mug and pour my coffee, go into my prayer closet, read a few verses/devo/Bible study, journal out my prayers, and pray for a friend. After all that, I eat breakfast and begin the day!

Your routine may not always be the same for you, but write out your typical morning routine below:

Is seeking God's kingdom first somehow included into your morning? Is there anything you could rearrange? If so, make those changes here:

PAUSE, PRAY, + PRAISE

Hi God, it's me. Show me how to seek You first.

Write a prayer inviting God into your firsts: the first moments of your day, your first thoughts, your first goals, your first ideas, your first words, and any troubles in between. In this space, also thank Him for waking you up today! If you have breath in your lungs, you have purpose!

Mark 4:1-34 New King James Version

The Parable of the Sower

4 And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat *in it* on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. **2** Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching:

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. **4** And it happened, as he sowed, *that* some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds [a]of the air came and devoured it. **5** Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. **6** But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. **7** And some *seed* fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no [b]crop. **8** But other *seed* fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

9 And He said [c]to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Purpose of Parables

10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. **11** And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the [d]mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, **12** so that

'Seeing they may see and not perceive,
And hearing they may hear and not understand;
Lest they should turn,
And *their* sins be forgiven them.'

The Parable of the Sower Explained

13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? **14** The sower sows the word. **15** And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. **16** These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; **17** and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. **18** Now these are the ones sown among thorns; *they are* the ones who hear the word, **19** and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. **20** But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, [a]accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

Light Under a Basket

21 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? **22** For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. **23** If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

24 Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. **25** For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

The Parable of the Growing Seed

26 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should [b]scatter seed on the ground, **27** and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. **28** For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. **29** But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? **31** *It is* like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; **32** but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."

Jesus' Use of Parables

33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. **34** But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

Footnotes

- a. Mark 4:4 NU, M omit *of the air*
- b. Mark 4:7 Lit. *fruit*
- c. Mark 4:9 NU, M omit *to them*
- d. Mark 4:11 *secret or hidden truths*
- e. Mark 4:20 *receive*
- f. Mark 4:26 *sow*

< Mark 3

Mark 5 >

New King James Version (NKJV)

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From Mark: Follow Me" by James Hoover (1999)

Nov 2

5

Kingdom Parables

Mark 4:1-34

Some stories wear their points on their sleeves, as it were. Others, to borrow from P. G. Wodehouse's definition of a parable, keep something up their sleeves "which suddenly pops up and knocks you flat."

GROUP DISCUSSION. Mark Twain once said, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me, but the parts I do understand!" Which parts of the Bible bother you more—the parts you understand or the parts you don't? Why?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What barriers in your life make it difficult for you to hear the voice of Jesus? Ask him to help you face and overcome them.

Among Jesus' stories we find a variety—from those that are easy to understand to those that are so difficult they invite our thought and reflection again and again. The stories in this passage contain vital information about God's kingdom and its subjects—for those who have ears to hear! Read Mark 4:1-20, watching especially for words and phrases that are repeated.

Kingdom Parables _____ 25

1. What idea or ideas seem to dominate verses 1-20?

2. Jesus explains the parable of the sower (vv. 3-8) in verses 14-20. Put this explanation into your own words, describing from your experience examples of each kind of soil-seed combination.

3. Verses 11-12 have long bothered many readers. The problem is that it looks like Jesus is saying that he tells parables to keep people from seeking forgiveness. From the context, which seems more likely—that verse 12 expresses the reason that Jesus speaks in parables or simply what happens when he does? Explain your answer.

4. Notice that Jesus explains the parable of the soils to the disciples (vv. 10-12). What did they do to get an explanation that others did not?

5. What does a willingness to ask indicate about a willingness to hear?

6. On what grounds then are people included or excluded from the secret of the kingdom?

7. What is the secret of the kingdom? Be sure to make your case from

evidence in the passage.

8. How does the response Jesus gets from telling the parable of the sower illustrate the point he is making?

9. What kind of soil are you?

What can you do to become the kind of soil Jesus is looking for?

10. The farmer was not being foolish in sowing the seed where he did. He was following the standard practice of the day—sowing then plowing. Only as time passed did each kind of soil reveal itself for what it was. What encouragement does this give you to “sow widely” as you share the good news of the kingdom with others?

11. What opportunities for sowing will you have this week?

Ask God to make you the kind of soil that serves his kingdom.

Now or Later

12. Read Mark 4:21-34. How do verses 21-25 help explain verses 11-12?

13. What insights into kingdom growth do the parables of the growing seed and the mustard seed give us (vv. 26-34)?

14. In this passage we see Jesus both spreading the message of the kingdom and teaching about how the kingdom grows. What lessons can we learn about evangelism both from his example and from his teaching?

Make plans to do some “sowing” activity with your small group or other Christian friends.

Mark 4:35-6:6 New King James Version

Wind and Wave Obey Jesus

35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." **36** Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. **37** And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. **38** But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, ^[a] be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. **40** But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How ^[b] is it that you have no faith?" **41** And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

A Demon-Possessed Man Healed

5 Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the ^[c]Gadarenes. **2** And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, **3** who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind ^[d]him, not even with chains, **4** because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. **5** And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. **7** And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore^[e] You by God that You do not torment me."

8 For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" **9** Then He asked him, "What is your name?"

And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many." **10** Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

11 Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains. **12** So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them." **13** And [1]at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.

14 So those who fed the swine fled, and they told *it* in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. **15** Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one *who had been* demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. **16** And those who saw it told them how it happened to him *who had been* demon-possessed, and about the swine. **17** Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. **19** However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." **20** And he departed and began to proclaim in [9]Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

21 Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. **22** And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet **23** and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live." **24** So *Jesus* went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.

25 Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, **26** and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. **27** When she heard about Jesus, she came behind *Him* in the crowd and touched His garment. **28** For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."

29 Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of the [1]affliction. **30** And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"

31 But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "

32 And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. **33** But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. **34** And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."

35 While He was still speaking, *some* came from the ruler of the synagogue's *house* who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"

36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe." **37** And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. **38** Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw [1] a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. **39** When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping."

40 And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those *who were* with Him, and entered where the child was lying. **41** Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." **42** Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years *of age*. And they were overcome with great amazement. **43** But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that *something* should be given her to eat.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

6 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. **2** And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing *Him* were astonished, saying, "Where *did* this Man *get* these things? And what wisdom *is* this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! **3** Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" So they were offended at Him.

4 But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." **5** Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed *them*. **6** And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

Footnotes

a. Mark 4:39 Lit. *Be quiet*

Nov 9

6

Fear & Faith

Mark 4:35—6:6

“Don’t be afraid; just believe.” These words may ring rather hollow when we, and not someone else, face a fearful or life-threatening situation. Yet in the face of real danger we discover just how much faith we have.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Think of a time fear kept you from doing or saying something you thought you should. Explain how it felt and what you think you were really afraid of.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What fears inhibit you from sharing the gospel more readily with others? (Fear of rejection? fear you don’t really know the gospel? something else?) Ask God to help you identify your fears and learn to overcome them with faith.

In this study we find a number of different people in desperate straits. Their experiences with Jesus can help us to trust him with the fearful areas of our own lives. *Read Mark 4:35—5:20.*

1. In the first incident the disciples are quite naturally afraid of the storm and disturbed that Jesus seems unconcerned about their drown-

Fear & Faith _____ 29

ing. Once Jesus calms the storm, however, they are still terrified. How does their fear after the storm differ from their previous fears?

2. In 5:1-20 who is afraid and why?

3. How do these fears compare with those in the previous incident (4:35-41)?

4. Many people find it hard to understand why Jesus allowed the demons to destroy the pigs. It could have been to prevent a violent exit from the man or to show him visibly that he was now free. Even if we can’t pin down exactly why Jesus allowed this, what does the fate of the pigs show about what the demons were trying to do to the man?

5. What does this show about the value Jesus places on the man?

6. At the end of this incident Jesus seems to reverse strategy. For the first time he tells someone to go and tell others about his healing. How

is this man different from the others? (See 1:21-26; 1:40-45; 3:7-12.)

7. Read *Mark* 5:21—6:6. In 5:21-43 two stories are woven together—the stories of Jairus's daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage. What sorts of fears are involved in these two incidents?

8. The word *fear* doesn't appear in the account of Jesus' return to his hometown, yet a kind of fear is evident here as well. What are the people afraid of?

9. Which of the different kinds of fear that have been described in these incidents might we label as good fears and which as bad?

10. What are the relationships between fear and faith in each of these incidents?

11. What keeps you from turning your fears into faith?

Offer your biggest fears to God and ask him to help you turn them into faith.

Now or Later

Study two (*Mark* 1:14-39) emphasized Jesus' authority over a similar array of life's experiences. What new dimensions of Jesus' authority are shown here?

How can this authority calm your fears and strengthen your faith?

Thinking back to the parable of the sower, what kinds of soil can you find in this passage?

Passage for
Nov 16

Matthew 6:1-6 New King James Version

Do Good to Please God

6 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. **2** Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **3** But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you [a]openly.

The Model Prayer

5 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the [b]hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **6** But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you [c]openly.

Footnotes

- a. Matthew 6:4 NU omits *openly*
- b. Matthew 6:5 *pretenders*
- c. Matthew 6:6 NU omits *openly*

< Matthew 5Matthew 7 >

Matthew 6:16-18 New King James Version

Fasting to Be Seen Only by God

16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the ^[a]hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **17** But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you ^[b]openly.

Footnotes

- a. Matthew 6:16 *pretenders*
- b. Matthew 6:18 NU, M omit *openly*

< Matthew 5

Matthew 7 >

New King James Version (NKJV)

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Nov 16

8. According to Jesus, how are we to treat our enemies and why (vv. 44-45)?

9. In what ways is Jesus' command extraordinary (vv. 46-48)?

10. Does all this mean Christians are to be doormats for the world to walk on? Explain.

11. How was Jesus himself an example of the principles "Do not resist an evil person" and "Love your enemies"?

12. How might you reflect your Father's character when you are mistreated?

From "Sermon on the Mount" by John Stott (1987)

8

A Christian's Religion

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Not conforming to the world is a familiar New Testament concept. But it is not so well known that Jesus also called us not to conform to the *religious* establishment. He saw (and foresaw) the worldliness of the nominal church and commanded the Christian community to be truly distinct from it in our life and practice. In this passage Jesus shifts his focus from our moral righteousness to our "religious" righteousness.

1. Why do you think ministers and religious people are often portrayed so negatively in movies and on television?

2. Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18. In verse 1 Jesus commands us "not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them." Yet in 5:16 he said, "Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds." Is there a contradiction here? Explain.

3. Jesus illustrates the principle of verse 1 by focusing on three religious practices: giving, praying and fasting. What images come to mind when you read about the hypocrites in verse 2?

4. What does Jesus mean when he says, "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (v. 3)?

Why is this important (v. 2, 4)?

5. In what ways are we tempted to be hypocritical in our giving?

6. What was wrong with the way hypocrites prayed in Jesus' day (v. 5)?

7. In what ways do hypocrites pray today?

8. Why and how is our praying to be different (v. 6)?

9. How do you think the reward the Father will give us (v. 6) differs from the reward we receive from others (v. 5)?

10. In verse 16 Jesus assumes Christians will fast (although few of us do). Why and how should we fast (v. 16-18)?

11. In what other areas are we tempted to seek the approval of people rather than of God?

12. How can this passage help to purify our motives?

Matthew 6:7-15 New King James Version

7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
10 Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
13 And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
[a]For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Footnotes

a. Matthew 6:13 NU omits the rest of v. 13.

Nov 23
9
A Christian's
Prayer
Matthew 6:7-15

The fundamental difference between various kinds of prayer is the fundamentally different images of God which lie behind them. The "Lord's Prayer" was given by Jesus as a model of what genuine Christian prayer should be like. According to Matthew he gave it as a pattern to copy ("This is how you should pray"), according to Luke as an actual prayer ("When you pray, say . . ."). We are not obliged to choose, however, for we can both use the prayer as it stands and also model our own praying upon it. Either way, Jesus not only teaches us about prayer but also gives us a greater vision of the God we call "Our Father."

1. Imagine that your prayers, like those in the Psalms, were recorded for others to read. What would people learn about your image of God?
2. Read Matthew 6:7-15. How do pagan prayers (v. 7) differ from the persistent prayers Jesus himself offered (Mt 26:44)?

3. In what ways might we be guilty of mindless, meaningless prayers today?
4. If, as Jesus says in verse 8, God already knows what we need, why should Christians pray?

5. What two natural divisions do you observe in the Lord's Prayer (vv. 9-13)?

What is the focus of each?

6. What does the phrase "Our Father in heaven" (v. 9) tell us about God?

7. What does it mean to hallow God's name (v. 9)?

8. God is already King. In what sense are his kingdom and perfect will still future (v. 10)?

9. In our self-centered culture we are often preoccupied with our own little name, empire and will rather than God's. How can we combat this tendency?

10. Some early commentators allegorized the word *bread* (v. 11), assuming that Jesus could not be referring to something as mundane as our physical needs. Why is it perfectly appropriate to pray for actual "daily bread"?

11. How is our heavenly Father's forgiveness related to our forgiving others (vv. 12, 14-15)?

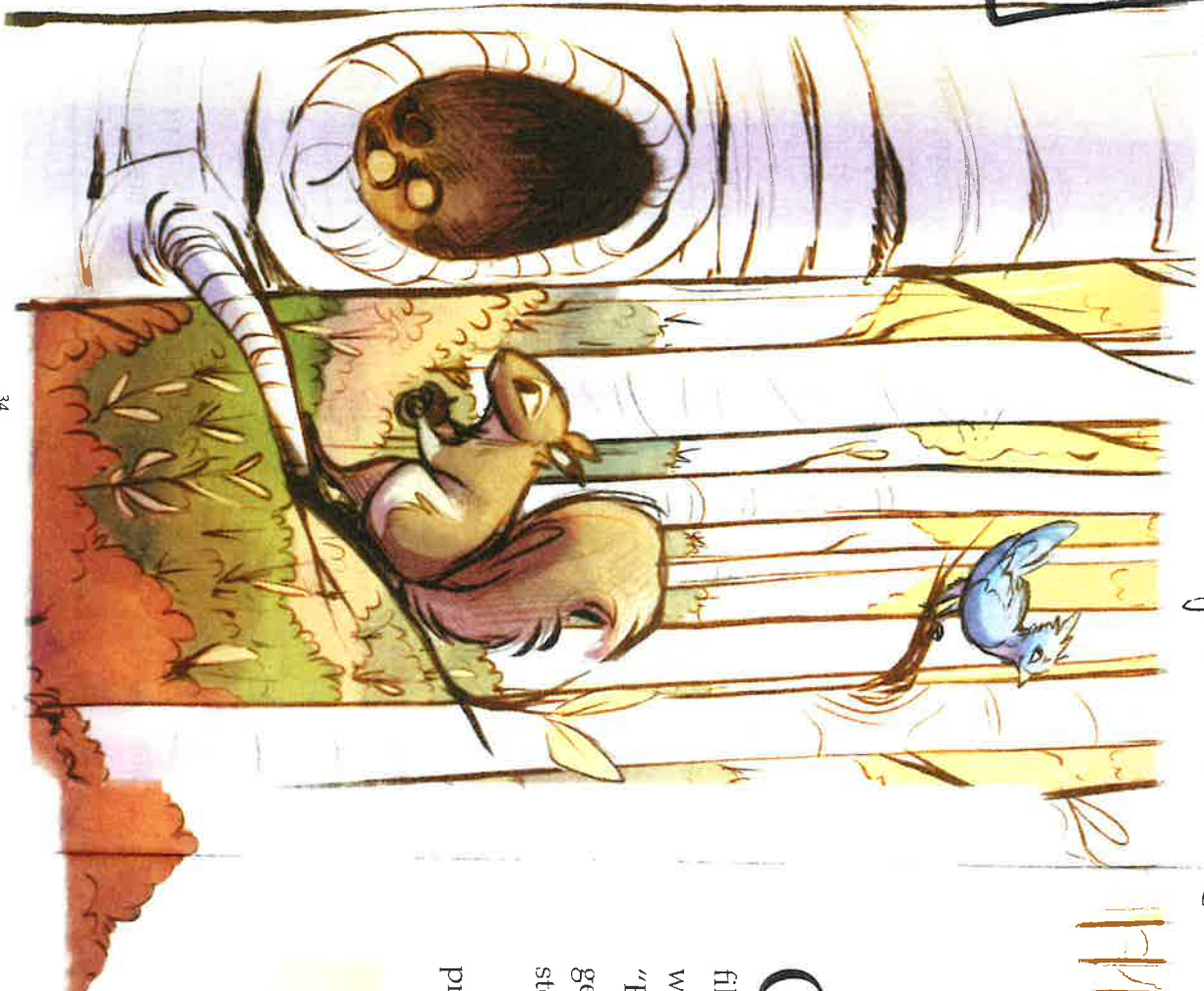
12. If God cannot tempt us and trials are beneficial (Jas 1:2, 13), then what is the meaning of Matthew 6:13?

13. In what ways do your prayers need to more closely resemble this model prayer?

14. Take time now to pray, using the Lord's Prayer as your model.

Nov 30

From "Fables of Fenton Forest" by Gordon Bietz (2015)



34

How to Destroy Your Enemies

Once upon a time in Fenton Forest, Scamper Squirrel was preparing for the winter by filling his storehouse with nuts. This year, as he was going about his work, he thought to himself, "Either the winters are getting harder or I am getting older, because I am not able to gather and store as many nuts as I have in years past."

Scamper soon learned why he was having problems collecting as many nuts as usual. He

Kindness



Turning a difficult relationship into a fulfilling friendship takes ingenuity, determination, and, most importantly, an understanding and compassionate heart. At Southern, student leaders develop friendships as they lead ministries and plan activities that show kindness to others on campus and in the community.

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discovered that Jackie Jay was not gathering his own nuts but was taking the nuts that Scamper had so carefully sorted and stored.

Scamper didn't know what to do. He couldn't fight with Jackie very well. He tried talking to him, but it did no good. Jackie would just squawk loudly, act innocent, and continue stealing Scamper's nuts.

Scamper decided to seek advice from Wise Old Owl, so he told him what Jackie was doing. Wise Old Owl thought about the problem and then



36



37

suggested a plan. Scamper didn't like the plan at first, but then decided he had nothing to lose. The next day as he was collecting nuts, he made a special pile for Jackie.

While he was working, he saw Jackie come sneaking around the corner of the storehouse, preparing to steal some of Scamper's nuts. Instead of chasing him away, Scamper called to Jackie, pointed to a rather large pile of good nuts, and said, "Here, Jackie. I gathered these nuts for you this morning."

"What!?" said Jackie incredulously. "You mean these are for me?"

"Yes," replied Scamper. "I know how you like them. Rather than taking them out of the storehouse, you can take these nuts I picked just for you."

Jackie eyed the pile of nuts carefully. He walked around the pile, cocking his head first at one angle and then another. "Is there a bomb in it?" he asked. "No, no," said Scamper. "I frequently pick some extra nuts for my friends. Why, just yesterday I



gave a pile almost that big to Randy Raccoon. This pile is for you."

Jackie looked at the pile some more; he was still suspicious that it was a trick. "Are these all of the worrny ones that you are throwing away?" he asked.

"No, some of those nuts are the best ones I could find," Scamper replied.



Jackie picked up a small pebble at his feet and flew over the pile of nuts, dropping the pebble in the middle of the pile. He expected an explosion, but there was none. A few nuts just rolled off of the top of the pile. "I'm not sure why you are doing this," said Jackie, "but someday I will find out. As

for now, I will take your nuts."

"No, No," cried Scamper. "They are not my nuts. They are yours. I gave them to you."

Jackie carried the nuts to a tree, and Scamper went back to work. Jackie checked each of the nuts. When he found that they were very good nuts and there was no trick, he not only stopped stealing from Scamper but also brought him some of the special nuts that Jackie found deep in the Forest, where Scamper had never traveled.

Thanks to Wise Old Owl, Scamper discovered that the best way of getting rid of an enemy is to make him your friend.

Think About It

"God tests and proves us by the common occurrences of life. It is the little things which reveal the chapters of the heart."

~Ellen G. White



Nov 30 – Discussion Questions

Goes with “How to Destroy Your Enemies” Story

1. Relationships can be hard! When you’ve had a hard time with someone in the past, what do you do?
 - a. Talk to them (like Scamper tried with Jackie Jay)
 - b. Get advice (like Scamper did with Wise Old Owl)
 - c. Make a plan
 - d. Something else (what?)
2. What problems are you facing today? This week? Could any of the above options help?
3. This story reminds me of the following passage from Romans 12 (NKJV):

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore

*“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”*

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- ➔ What does this story – and/or this passage – mean for you?
- ➔ Can you apply this to your life? Your problems?

4. The story ends with this Ellen White quote: “God tests and proves us by the common occurrences of life. It is the little things which reveal the chapters of the heart.” (from *The Adventist Home*). What does that mean?

Prayer: *Jesus – You are the One who has provided everything in my life. Help me to remember that; to be grateful, not selfish. Help me to look beyond myself and my problems and focus on You.*