

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# GRATITUDE AND SERMON JOURNAL

## **THE BEST EVER**

November 23 – December 27, 2020

## **EFFECTIVE**

December 28, 2020 – February 14, 2021



Dear Church,

The purpose of this Gratitude and Sermon Journal is to help us connect with the Lord through daily prayer and study. Furthermore, we want to help connect others to the church. The reading on Monday is the sermon text for the following Sunday. The daily readings support the Sunday sermon. I'm pleased some of our groups, including Discipleship Communities and prayer groups, use this journal to talk about the texts and the preaching on Sunday morning. In this journal we have added a daily prayer section to unite us in scripture-based prayer for one another.

Asbury is deeply rooted in our "ancient" traditions (scripture and the church) while also being focused upon what is happening today and will happen in the future. If we lose touch with our past, we have no guidance. If we fail to have an application, then we become "rear view mirror" people. This Gratitude and Sermon Journal looks back at scripture and the teaching of the church while looking forward to the Lord to discern His will for us.

*Tom*



## Small Group Discussion Questions

Consider using this journal not only for yourself, but also as an opportunity to meet with others in a small group. The Christian faith is about helping others follow Jesus. This journal provides a mutually blessed way for you to do precisely that. Below are some questions your small group may use for discussion each week:

- Review the key scripture(s).
- Review the key point(s) from the sermon.
  - How were you encouraged?
  - How were you challenged?
  - What questions did it create?
  - What convictions did it bring?
- What was the pastor asking of you, even expecting you to do in response?

# But First, Pray...

For this journal we are including scripture-based prayers to help the congregation pray for one another. We have one prayer per week, which can be prayed daily. As you lift up your brothers and sisters in Christ, know that you are also being lifted up in a spirit of unity.

**Week of November 23:** Lord, we do not cease to give thanks for every Asbury believer, remembering each one in our prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give each one the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. (Ephesians 1:16-17)

**Week of November 30:** Lord, we pray for every Asbury believer, that the eyes of their hearts will be enlightened, that they will know the hope to which You have called them, the riches of their inheritance in the saints and the immeasurable greatness of Your power toward those who believe. (Ephesians 1:18-19)

**Week of December 7:** Lord, according to the riches of Your glory, grant that we may be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, being rooted and grounded in love. (Ephesians 3:16-17)

**Week of December 14:** Lord, strengthen each believer at Asbury to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, length, height and depth of Your love and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, filling all of us to the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:18-19)

**Week of December 21:** Lord, help Asbury believers be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as in Christ, You forgave us. (Ephesians 4:32)

**Week of December 28:** Lord, as beloved children, help us be imitators of Christ, walking in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

**Week of January 4:** Lord, awaken all who sleep among us and fill us with the Spirit, helping us to give thanks always for all things, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:14, 18,20, 21)

**Week of January 11:** Lord, we pray for every Asbury believer to abound in Your love more and more with all knowledge and discernment, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. (Philippians 1:9-10)

**Week of January 18:** Lord, help Asbury believers press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14)

**Week of January 25:** Lord, help Asbury believers to continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. (Colossians 4:2)

**Week of February 1:** God of peace, equip every Asbury believer with everything good that each one may do Your will, working in us that which is pleasing in Your sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. (Hebrews 13:21)

**Week of February 8:** God of hope, fill every Asbury believer with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)

# Scripture Readings

## THE BEST EVER

### THE BEST BIRTHDAY EVER

- 11/23 John 3:1-8
- 11/24 John 1:1-8
- 11/25 John 1:9-18
- 11/26 Luke 15:11-32
- 11/27 1 Peter 1:1-12
- 11/28 1 Peter 1:13-25
- 11/29 John 3:1-8

### THE BEST LIFE EVER

- 11/30 John 3:9-15
- 12/1 Numbers 21:1-9
- 12/2 2 Kings 18:1-8
- 12/3 Luke 18:18-34
- 12/4 John 12:27-36
- 12/5 Acts 2:22-36
- 12/6 John 3:9-15

### THE BEST LOVE EVER

- 12/7 John 3:16-21
- 12/8 Luke 2:8-20
- 12/9 Romans 5:6-11
- 12/10 Ephesians 2:1-10
- 12/11 Titus 3:1-7
- 12/12 1 John 4:7-12
- 12/13 John 3:16-21

### THE BEST MAN EVER

- 12/14 John 3:22-30
- 12/15 Luke 1:5-24; 39-45; 57-80
- 12/16 Matthew 3
- 12/17 Matthew 11:1-19
- 12/18 Matthew 14:1-20
- 12/19 John 1:29-42
- 12/20 John 3:22-30

### THE BEST EVER

- 12/21 John 3:31-36
- 12/22 John 6:27-40
- 12/23 Ephesians 1:15-23
- 12/24 John 3:31-33

### THE BEST PLAN EVER

- 12/25 John 14:15-31
- 12/26 1 Timothy 6:11-16
- 12/27 John 3:34-36



# Scripture Readings

## EFFECTIVE

### LET'S GET IT STARTED

- 12/28 Philippians 3:12-16
- 12/29 Ruth 1
- 12/30 Esther 4
- 12/31 Isaiah 6
- 1/1 Luke 18:1-8
- 1/2 Luke 19:1-10
- 1/3 Philippians 3:12-16

### LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING

- 1/4 Ecclesiastes 7:8-13
- 1/5 Psalm 126
- 1/6 Matthew 7:24-27
- 1/7 Luke 12:13-21
- 1/8 Luke 12:22-34
- 1/9 Hebrews 12:1-2
- 1/10 Ecclesiastes 7:8-13

### TYRANNY OF THE URGENT

- 1/11 Luke 14:15-24
- 1/12 Deuteronomy 6:4-9
- 1/13 Haggai 1
- 1/14 Matthew 10:34-39
- 1/15 Matthew 13:44-46
- 1/16 Colossians 3:12-17
- 1/17 Luke 14:15-24

### THE THIRD WAY

- 1/18 Matthew 7:12
- 1/19 Matthew 22:32-40
- 1/20 John 10:10-20

- 1/21 Galatians 5:13-15
- 1/22 1Thessalonians 3:11-13
- 1/23 1 Timothy 1:12-17
- 1/24 Matthew 7:12

### TWO EARS – ONE MOUTH

- 1/25 James 1:19-20
- 1/26 Matthew 13:10-17
- 1/27 1 Kings 3:16-28
- 1/28 Acts 15:1-21
- 1/29 Romans 10:14-21
- 1/30 James 3:1-12
- 1/31 James 1:19-20

### TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

- 2/1 1 Corinthians 12:27-31
- 2/2 Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
- 2/3 John 17:20-26
- 2/4 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
- 2/5 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
- 2/6 1 Corinthians 12:12-26
- 2/7 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

### COMPOUND INTEREST

- 2/8 Ecclesiastes 10:10
- 2/9 Luke 22:39-46
- 2/10 Acts 17:10-15
- 2/11 Galatians 6:6-10
- 2/12 2 Corinthians 9:6-15
- 2/13 1 Timothy 4:11-16
- 2/14 Ecclesiastes 10:10



# **THE BEST EVER**

November 23 – December 27

## THE BEST EVER

The Gospel of John has a unique perspective of Jesus, the most phenomenal person who ever walked the planet. John does not begin his narrative of Jesus in Bethlehem or Israel, or with Joseph and Mary, but with the cosmic Christ. He traces Jesus' story back to the first three words of Genesis 1:1, *"In the beginning."* Jesus is not just another religious leader, teacher, miracle worker or philosopher—John states Jesus Christ is God. Jesus is the second part of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Being second is not a diminished role. Jesus, in the very image of God, came as the second Adam to redeem us from the curse of the first Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). He transferred us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His glorious light. He brought us out of the grip of death into the grasp of eternal life.

We will spend this Advent season focused on only one chapter of the Bible—John 3. While John uses a lot of metaphors, I want to highlight two: light and life. John told us from the outset what to expect: *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4). The light was given to direct us to the most important and desired gift we could receive—life. Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

Having wrestled with darkness and death for most of 2020, during this Advent season we want to let His light lead us to the gift of abundant life here, now and forever (John 10:10). John tells us the light came, *"So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"* (John 20:31). Many things are good. We may even call a few things the best. But Jesus is The Best Ever.

THE BEST BIRTHDAY EVER

Monday, November 23, 2020

John 3:1-8

The Pharisees were conservative and traditional men who tried to live out how the scribes interpreted the Torah. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish council. They were deadly serious about their piety. That could be a good thing, or not. Jesus told Nicodemus his accomplishments didn't matter. To know God, he would have to start over. He would have to be born again.

It seems we usually go the way of the prodigal son (outward sin, Romans 1:18-32) or the way of the elder brother (Romans 2:1ff). We sin with the flesh or with the spirit (actually, both). Many Pharisees became Jesus' enemies. They didn't like Him breaking the Sabbath and all the rules they strived to keep. They tended to be tough, judgmental, intolerant and proud of their own righteousness. But Jesus did not label people. He called individuals by name. This man was more than just a Pharisee; he was Nicodemus. Jesus was always searching for people to give them light and new life.

Followers of Jesus get to have two birthdays: First, we are born of the flesh. Second, we are born of the Spirit. To enter the kingdom of God, we need birth (flesh) and rebirth (the Spirit). To be born of the Spirit is to say "yes" to Jesus and to His gift of life.

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**APPLICATION:** Advent is the Church's way of remembering Jesus' story of origin. During Advent we recall the past, celebrate in the present and hope in the future (His return). What were the circumstances surrounding your birth? If you have kids, have you told them theirs? Have you experienced a second "birth" day? What is that story? How does it affect your past, present and future? Invite one or two others to tell you their birth stories by Sunday night.

Tuesday, November 24, 2020

John 1:1-8

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST BIRTHDAY EVER

Wednesday, November 25, 2020

John 1:9-18

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST EVER

Thursday, November 26, 2020  
Luke 15:11-32

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST BIRTHDAY EVER

Friday, November 27, 2020

1 Peter 1:1-12

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST EVER

Saturday, November 28, 2020

1 Peter 1:13-25

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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Monday, November 30, 2020

John 3:9-15

*“How can these things be?”* Being “born again” was a hard concept for Nicodemus because the Pharisees believed salvation came by keeping the rules. As the quote goes, *“I get my religion the old-fashioned way—I earn it.”* The term for this is “works-righteousness.” Many believe God will judge us favorably if our good deeds outweigh our bad ones and that we don’t have to be the best, but we just need a passing grade and God will love us. We believe we must establish our own righteousness. Like the Pharisees, our problem is we often think we must save ourselves. It is easy for us to become self-righteous. If we cannot earn salvation, how is it possible? Jesus said what is impossible with people is not impossible with God (Mark 10:27).

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of Moses’ plan with the bronze serpent, Nehushtan, in the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites. Poisonous snakes began to bite the Israelites when they bitterly complained about their mistreatment. They had to look upon the bronze serpent to be healed (saved) of a snakebite. They dragged Nehushtan around for nearly 1,000 years and worshipped it as an idol. King Hezekiah finally destroyed it. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that He will be lifted up on the cross like Nehushtan. All who look upon Him (trust Him) will be saved. Like Nehushtan in the wilderness, Jesus will remove the sting of death from all who will look upon Him. He offers the best life ever—here, now and forever.

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**APPLICATION:** Salvation has two parts. First, we need a Savior. We cannot save ourselves. Since all are bitten by sin, we die without intervention. Our good news is God acted. Jesus is our Savior. Second, we need to respond. Not everyone who hears the good news will look to the One who has been lifted up. The Savior has come. An offer is extended. We must respond. A gift is not a gift until it is received and used. Are you still trying to save yourself? In what ways are you trying to win God’s favor? Today is the day to look to Him to do what is impossible for you.

THE BEST LIFE EVER

Tuesday, December 1, 2020

Numbers 21:1-9

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST EVER

Wednesday, December 2, 2020  
2 Kings 18:1-8

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST LIFE EVER  
Thursday, December 3, 2020  
Luke 18:18-34

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST EVER

Friday, December 4, 2020

John 12:27-36

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST LIFE EVER  
Saturday, December 5, 2020  
Acts 2:22-36

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST LOVE EVER

Monday, December 7, 2020

John 3:16-21

Love is proactive. Love takes initiative. Love always gives. John 3:16 is at the top of favorite Bible verses. It shows that God initiates. God loves and so He came to us Himself. As Eugene Peterson famously interpreted John 1:14, *“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.”*

God does not want anyone to perish. The word “*whoever*” plainly expresses God’s intent. However, God has given us freedom. He gives us the ability to choose. A drowning swimmer can refuse to take the hand of one who tries to save. Unless it is accepted, the offer of life will be lost. Why would anyone refuse God’s gracious offer? Ignorance? Some have never heard or understood the message. This is why Christians need to share our faith. Self-righteousness? Some are like the Pharisees and try to save themselves. Unworthiness? Some feel ashamed of their sin and believe God does not love them. Procrastination? Some wait until later to trust the Lord but never get around to it. Jesus described another reason. He said some prefer the darkness to the light. He said there are “evil” and “wicked” people. They reject God’s offer of salvation and are on their own.

*“Greater love has no one than this that someone lays down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:13-14) This is the love of God toward us.

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**APPLICATION:** Memorize John 3:16. Every Christian can share this good news with others. We are not the message but we have the best message. Our message is about the best love ever. The love of God is freely given. Who can you share your faith with this week? We don’t need to scold or preach. People respond to love and kindness. We begin by asking good questions and listening.

THE BEST EVER

Tuesday, December 8, 2020

Luke 2:8-20

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST LOVE EVER

Wednesday, December 9, 2020  
Romans 5:6-11

- 1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
- 2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
- 3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST EVER

Thursday, December 10, 2020  
Ephesians 2:1-10

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST EVER

Saturday, December 12, 2020

1 John 4:7-12

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST EVER

Monday, December 14, 2020

John 3:22-30

Our daily readings this week tell about Jesus' cousin, John the Baptizer. Both have dramatic birth narratives. John lived a godly and influential life. Jesus claimed nobody had ever been greater than John (Matthew 11:11). John stirred things up before the Messiah arrived. Several images of John describe his rugged appearance and his effective preaching. He had his own disciples, but he insisted he was the best man at the wedding. He prepared the way for the groom. John knew his identity. He played his role well. He was the epitome of Asbury's first staff core behavior "Confident Humility." While John had doubts when thrown into prison, and though he lost his life, he lived in obedience to the Lord.

Our memory verse is, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (verse 30). It is simple to quote but hard to apply. Leonard Bernstein, a phenomenal orchestra conductor, was asked what he thought was the most difficult instrument to play. He answered, "*The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm—that's a problem...*" John was not only the best man for Jesus; Jesus said John was THE best man. Yet, Jesus also said the one who is the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John (Matthew 11:11).

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**APPLICATION:** Pride is probably the biggest barrier we must overcome in life. Pride keeps us from admitting our sin and our need for a Savior. Pride insists on "me first." It can be hard to humble ourselves before the Lord and others. How difficult is it for you to trust the Lord? To put Him first? How difficult is it for you to celebrate others? Why do you think that is? Use this week to sincerely build up another.

THE BEST MAN EVER

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

Luke 1:5-24; 39-45; 57-80

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST MAN EVER  
Thursday, December 17, 2020  
Matthew 11:1-19

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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Monday, December 21, 2020  
John 3:31-36

Jesus' words emphasize two points. First, Jesus brings a testimony. A good witness knows the subject in a personal way. They have knowledge and experience. They have credibility as a witness, too. Finally, they are willing to testify. A knowledgeable and credible person is not a witness until they speak up, act, and get involved. That is what Christmas is all about—the credible source, God Himself, came to speak into our lives so we might find the best gift ever offered—life, abundant and eternal, in Jesus Christ.

We hear many testimonies about various products, people or experiences. It is easy to have “testimony resistance.” Not everyone who had exchanges with Jesus believed His testimony, either.

Some say, *“There must be a God because the universe is so finely tuned.”* Others say, *“I see truth, beauty, and goodness, so there must be a God.”* Still others say something like, *“God was real to my mother, so He must be real.”* These responses point toward God but share something else in common—there is no personal relationship with God. Often, the thought of having a personal relationship with the Creator has never entered someone’s mind.

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**APPLICATION:** The Gospels describe different ways people responded to Jesus. That is true today, too. The bottom line is not how we came to rely on Jesus, but that we put our trust in Him. God loves us, even though we have broken His law. Jesus came to show us a new way. By trusting Him and confessing our sin, not by earning it or by trying to be good, we are given the most wonderful gift. Here is our Christmas present from Him: We are forgiven, receive the Holy Spirit, become part of His Church community, have a script to follow (the Scriptures), have a purpose in life, and are ushered into eternal life. Have you given your life to Jesus? Would you like to talk to us about it? We are here for you. Contact us at 918.492.1771.

THE BEST EVER

Tuesday, December 22, 2020

John 6:27-40

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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Thursday, December 24, 2020

John 3:31-33

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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THE BEST PLAN EVER

Friday, December 25, 2020

John 14:15-31

The Lord always gives us opportunities and choices that are meaningful. While God initiates, we have free will and get to select the course of action we desire. The Lord gave us a plan in creation for us to live in harmony with Him, with each other, with nature, and to be at peace with ourselves. When Adam and Eve made their bad choice, sin contaminated every relationship. Disharmony and brokenness invaded. Redemption became God's new initiative in three forms: Israel, Jesus, the Church. The highpoint was the coming of Jesus, God Himself in the flesh. He took our sins, He showed us a new way, He made us a new creation, He offers us new life here and through eternity. However, we must make a decision. Not to decide IS to decide. To refuse the gift is a missed opportunity for redemption. And we all need redemption.

Jesus spoke about God's judgment. I do not know anybody who likes to talk about this topic. It is not "nice," but it is important for us to discuss. Judgment comes in two forms: Permissive and active. While there are frightening examples of the latter—plagues in Egypt, the subject of Psalm 78, the death of Ananias and Sapphira— the judgment we face is usually because of sin (often our own). The judgment of God helps us to realize other things: God will not compromise His holiness because of our unbelief; God takes us back if we return to Him; at great cost to Himself, God took our ultimate punishment upon Himself. He offers us the best plan ever: To put our trust in Him and in return we receive forgiveness, His Spirit and eternal life.

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**APPLICATION:** We must refrain from condemnation. God is the sole (and soul) judge. Not me. Not you. Jesus warned us about trying to take the speck out of another's eye when we have a log in our own (Matthew 7:1-5). Sometimes we condemn others. Often we turn our condemnation within. Today we can choose a new plan. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Saturday, December 26, 2020

1 Timothy 6:11-16

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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# **EFFECTIVE**

December 28, 2020 – February 14, 2021

## EFFECTIVE

We begin the New Year of 2021 with an emphasis on living effectively. In addition to our daily scripture readings, we will reference two books that speak to this theme. “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” is one of the most profound books I have ever read. “Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results” is the other. One of my axioms is, “*Show me your friends and I’ll show you your future.*” We can substitute the word “*habits*” for “*friends*” in this sentence and be accurate, too.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, insisted on simple habits. In fact, critics ridiculed him for being so straightforward. The term, “Methodists,” was insulting and demeaning. Yet, Wesley agreed with the assessment—his followers were methodical. Wesley wanted to ingrain certain attitudes, behaviors and habits, within those who were serious about their faith. He took a name of ridicule and sarcasm and used it as a title of respect.

We often want to make enormous changes at the start of a New Year. Most New Year’s resolutions don’t last to February. As “Atomic Habits” emphasizes, it’s not making the big changes all at once, it’s about making tiny changes consistently over time. It sounds like the author, James Clear, might be a Methodist (and not even know it).

Our sermon series during the first seven weeks of 2021 will focus on being effective in our personal faith and in our response to the world. Christians are not called to be passive. We are on a mission to help others follow Jesus. We want to be as effective as we possibly can. “*For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (2 Peter 1:8)

LET'S GET IT STARTED

Monday, December 28, 2020

Philippians 3:12-16

Getting started is often the most difficult part of any journey. We procrastinate, goof off and come up with all kinds of rationales as to why we don't begin. We know we should respond, but sloth takes over and we wait. Some of us wait for perfection before beginning. Some of us won't go alone. Some of us are anxious and afraid, so we procrastinate.

A definition of "proactive" is "*creating or controlling a situation by causing something to happen rather than responding to it after it has happened.*" Proactive is the opposite of being passive and/or reactive. It does not blame others or make excuses. Proactive takes initiative and makes a valiant effort. Proactive says, "I will seize the moment."

The Bible is full of proactive people. Some were advancing their own status (Lot, King Saul, Judas Iscariot), some were evil (the devil, Jezebel, King Herod), some were hesitant (Abraham, Moses, Esther, Joseph and Mary, the disciples and Saul). Others were immediately on board (Joshua, Rahab, Ruth, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Daniel). Some started strong and lost their nerve (David, Solomon, Elijah). Being proactive doesn't mean we are perfect or have it all figured out, but it does mean we have dreams, ambition, goals, vision and a desire to make a difference. "*If you want to get something done, ask a busy person.*" Effective people start—they also keep going to completion. Effective people are proactive.

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**APPLICATION:** Our daily scriptures this week concern proactive people in the Bible. In a New Year, consider in what areas you need to start something new, where you need to continue pressing on and what things you might need to bring to completion. In all things, let's strive to "*keep your eyes on the prize.*" The "prize," is the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.









EFFECTIVE

Saturday, January 2, 2021

Luke 19:1-10

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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LET'S GET IT STARTED  
Sunday, January 3, 2021  
Philippians 3:12-16

**Sermon Notes:**

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## Monday, January 4, 2021

### Ecclesiastes 7:8-13

A pilot on a Hawaii-bound airliner was asked how the flight was going. He cheerfully replied, *“Well, the bad news is we’re lost. The good news is we’re making very good time.”* People tend to be long-term thinkers or short-term thinkers. I believe most people are short-term thinkers. These two groups think differently about money, health, relationships, raising children, business and career. In fact, they think differently about everything.

Ecclesiastes 7 is a great corrective for short-term thinkers. Read the whole chapter. Psalm 126 describes “sowing in tears” but look at the result. Jesus told a story about two different foundations for building a house and another about a successful farmer in Luke 12, but the man’s “success” needed an asterisk beside it. Jesus referred to him as a “fool,” not as a model to follow. Hebrews 12 reminds us of Jesus’ perspective. Let’s follow Him.

We are grateful to close the books on one of the most challenging years in our lifetimes. Asbury has a mission statement: Helping Others Follow Jesus. Our personal mission statement should be based off this. If we begin with the end in mind, we will truly think long-term (eternal), and not just for 2021.

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**APPLICATION:** “Atomic Habits” has some practical advice about living a more effective life. First, what are your GOALS in life? Pride blocks our vision and keeps us from changing to be more effective. Anger keeps us from patience. Sloth keeps us from moving toward a goal. What changes do you need to make? Can anyone help you with this? Who can you help, too? Second, HOW will you reach those goals? Ask God for wisdom in what you should do. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”* (James 1:5)



Wednesday, January 6, 2021

Matthew 7:24-27

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING

Thursday, January 7, 2021

Luke 12:13-21

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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EFFECTIVE

Friday, January 8, 2021

Luke 12:22-34

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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## TYRANNY OF THE URGENT

Monday, January 11, 2021

Luke 14:15-24

In his pamphlet, "Tyranny of the Urgent," Charles Hummel claims there is an ongoing tension between things that are urgent and things that are important. Hummel notes the urgent wins far too often. The urgent becomes like a tyrant in our lives. Likewise, Steven Covey's classic, "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," calls the third habit "Put First Things First." Focusing on the important, not what is urgent, is what will make us effective in the end.

An obvious thing about Jesus is His undeterred heart to do God's will. The Lord Jesus had a remarkably tender and affectionate heart. It was evident in His total commitment to His mission. Luke 9:51 puts it like this: "*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*"

The Bible is full of stories about people who let other things crowd out the kingdom of God. Their hearts were dulled and possibly on the way to becoming hardened. In the Luke 14 text, people offered excuses: They bought a field or oxen or got married and that is why they could not attend the banquet. The truth is, they did not want to go. As Bishop Mack Stokes used to say, "*An excuse is the skin of a reason wrapped around a lie.*"

Many today are serving the kingdom of self rather than the kingdom of God. They prefer creature comforts and convenience to commitment to the Creator. This is the incremental descent of effectiveness. Jesus would have none of this deception. He would not allow the urgent to usurp His affections. This resilience is why He is the most effective person who has ever lived.

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**APPLICATION:** Jesus, more than any other person, shows how to put first things first. This is essential in our spiritual lives, too. Make a list of what you consider important and a list of how you spend most your time. Reflect on this list. Does it match your priorities? What is getting in the way of following Jesus? Who or what has your affections? What is one thing you can do differently today or this week?







TYRANNY OF THE URGENT

Friday, January 15, 2021

Matthew 13:44-46

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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## EFFECTIVE

# Monday, January 18, 2021

## Matthew 7:12

The typical approach to life is “I win, you lose.” I can only win if I beat you. However, we have another option, a third way. It uses the plural personal pronoun, “we.” Life is more than just “me” or “you”—it is also “us.” As John F. Kennedy said, “*A rising tide lifts all boats.*” We can cooperate rather than compete.

This is the essence of Matthew 7:12. It is referred to as “The Golden Rule.” It is one of the most effective ways to maintain personal relationships. In Covey’s “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” he emphasizes the importance of having a “Win/Win” strategy. If we can’t get to that, it’s a “no deal.”

We see this unfolding in Jesus’ ministry. He was proactive in coming to earth. He knew His identity and was willing to maintain His integrity in every transaction. Jesus always met people where they were. He embodied abundance, not scarcity. He offered people from every facet of life a Win/Win. They could have community, be empowered, find forgiveness, and discover purpose. They could experience grace, healing, inclusion and resurrection. Jesus wants everyone to win. He was and is incredibly generous and magnanimous. His character reveals the most effective human being who has ever lived. Yet, people still resisted Him. Jesus did not force the kingdom of God on anyone. It was their choice to accept Him. If they rejected Him, the deal was off.

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**APPLICATION:** How can you incorporate “third way” or “Win/Win” thinking into your daily life? Where are you on the abundance vs. scarcity scale? How does your relationship with Jesus help you have more abundance? What proactive measures are you taking to help others succeed?



Tuesday, January 19, 2021

Matthew 22:32-40

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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EFFECTIVE

Wednesday, January 20, 2021

John 10:10-20

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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Thursday, January 21, 2021  
Galatians 5:13-15

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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EFFECTIVE

Friday, January 22, 2021

1Thessalonians 3:11-13

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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Saturday, January 23, 2021  
1 Timothy 1:12-17

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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TWO EARS – ONE MOUTH

Monday, January 25, 2021

James 1:19-20

People who have learned the ability to listen to others will always have friends. The judgments and observations of those who listen will stand a better chance of accuracy than those who speak twice and listen once. As the Psalmist said, *“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!”* King Solomon showed the ability to listen deeply and settle an interesting case with two women arguing over who was the mother of a baby. Jesus stressed repeatedly in the Gospels and in Revelation 2-3, *“He who has ears to hear...let him hear.”* In the book of Acts, the early church had to decide what to do about letting the Gentiles into the faith. James stood and said, *“Brothers, listen to me...”* Paul told the Romans there is a link between hearing and faith: *“So faith comes through hearing...”*

To be an effective person, we simply must learn to listen. It is an acquired habit.

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**APPLICATION:** How would your parent, child, spouse, friend, boss, employee, teacher, student, and fellow Christian rate you as a listener? Are you usually just waiting for your turn to talk or are you truly taking an interest in what others are saying? This week, resolve not to interrupt or finish another person’s sentences and see what a difference that makes. As you seek to understand, remember the third way.





Wednesday, January 27, 2021

1 Kings 3:16-28

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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Monday, February 1, 2021  
1 Corinthians 12:27-31

“Two are better than one” applies to marriage, but it far exceeds that. God is “One,” but God is expressed in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From its outset, the Bible illustrates God in community. In the New Testament, Christians serve as individual members of a greater whole. Each believer has a part, but the ultimate focus is on the mission of the Church – Helping Others Follow Jesus, not an individual agenda. Yet, when we fulfill the mission of the Church, individuals are helped, too. when we trust and cooperate with others it is a Win/Win. We create “synergy.”

Just as the original Adam needed a helper, so do we. Moses needed Aaron. Paul needed Silas, Barnabas, Luke, Timothy, Aquilla and Priscilla. “Iron sharpens iron.” (Proverbs 27:17) We all need coaches, counselors, classmates, encouragers, family, friends, leaders, mentors, teachers and teammates to help us. A driver with two men on the back of the garbage truck illustrates synergy. Others infuse us with energy and creativity that lead to far greater results than isolation.

Asbury’s staff core behaviors are all linked to synergy: “*Confident Humility, Committed Team Players and Genuine Kindness*” are all individual patterns expressed in relationship with others. Synergy results in effectiveness.

“Two are better than one” applies to the church. It is what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12. I write this on October 21, 2020, but as you read this, we should be ready to celebrate the completion of our student ministry facility. I love what we called it: *Better Together*. Life is better with others. Thank you for supporting Asbury by sharing your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

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**APPLICATION:** Describe how “synergy” is operating in your life. Who is part of your “two”? Who helps/has helped you to grow, improve and get better? Who are you helping today? How can you (and others) build synergy for the kingdom of God?

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE  
Tuesday, February 2, 2021  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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Wednesday, February 3, 2021

John 17:20-26

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Thursday, February 4, 2021

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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EFFECTIVE

Friday, February 5, 2021

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Saturday, February 6, 2021

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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## COMPOUND INTEREST

Monday, February 8, 2021  
Ecclesiastes 10:10

*"I'm too busy to put gas in the tank"* has consequences. I had a friend in college whose dad gave her a new car. Unfortunately, she did not know that a car needs oil as a lubricant. Because of her ignorance and inattention to a small detail, the engine was destroyed.

Inattention, ignorance or sloth results in not doing what needs to be done. *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."* To "sharpen the saw" means to pay attention to and spend time on things that matter, even small things. These are seldom urgent, but they are critically important.

"Atomic Habits" focuses on one percent. *"The quality of our lives often depends upon the quality of our habits."* Rather than focusing on doing one big thing and riding that wave, do the little things every day. *"If you can get one percent better each day for one year, you'll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you're done. Conversely, if you get one percent worse each day for one year, you'll decline nearly down to zero."* Compound interest can work for us or against us. It is said, *"Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement."*

Matthew's Gospel says Jesus "withdrew" on four different occasions. Luke uses the same term to describe Jesus in Gethsemane. The believers in Berea also sharpened the saw daily. Luke said, *"They were more noble than those in Thessalonica,"* because they were attentive to the Word of God. Their investment was effective.

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**APPLICATION:** Abraham Lincoln said, *"Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I'll spend the first four sharpening the saw."* How are you sharpening your saw? Are you neglecting things that aren't urgent but are important? Some sharpening needs to happen daily (reading Scripture and prayer), weekly (worship), monthly, or even annually (i.e. getting a physical). Sloth is our enemy. Patience and perseverance are our friends. How is God speaking to you about this? How will you respond?











EFFECTIVE

Saturday, February 13, 2021

1 Timothy 4:11-16

1. What are your thoughts, feelings and application from reading today's text?
2. How does it tie in with the upcoming sermon?
3. Write down (at least) one person/thing/situation for which you are thankful.

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