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GRATITUDE AND SERMON JOURNAL

Extreme Ownership

June 25 – July 29, 2018

Life's Biggest Questions: Where Do I Belong?

July 30 – September 9, 2018

Life's Biggest Questions: What Do I Believe?

September 10 - October 21, 2018

Life's Biggest Questions: Who Will I Become?

October 22 – November 25, 2018

Dear church,

Methodists believe God has revealed Himself to us through the Living Word. John Wesley, Methodism's founder, said he was "*a man of one book.*" He meant the Bible was the governing authority in his life. Our intent at Asbury is to help others follow Jesus. That's why we preach and teach the Bible. We use a daily scripture text tied to our weekly sermon. This is a DAILY journal, not something just for Sundays. Monday has our preaching text for the upcoming Sunday. All readings during the week relate to this text and the sermon theme.

Since gratitude is an essential component of a godly life, I encourage you to use this sermon journal as a "GRATITUDE JOURNAL," too. Write down (at least) one person or thing you are grateful for every day. If we do this for the next five months, I am convinced we will become habitually grateful people. We begin with thankfulness for life and for eternal life. We are to be grateful "for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health." Anyone can be grateful for the good and easy things; but we are to give thanks in all things.

This journal covers four distinct sermon series: *Extreme Ownership* and a three-part series addressing *Life's Biggest Questions*. As I was preparing our series on leadership from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, I was introduced to a book written by two Navy Seals telling of their experiences in Iraq. With each story, they shared a principle and a practical application. *Extreme Ownership* demonstrates that for a mission to succeed, each person on the team or in the organization must buy into the mission and apply it. The timing of the book was fitting. I thought, "*This is a perfect title for our series!*" A major emphasis is: "*There are no bad teams, only bad leadership.*" This is true. Jesus is THE best leader EVER. We, the church, are on His team. We have different personalities, gifts and skills but we all have a role to play. We see this in the Book of Nehemiah. His "extreme ownership" in rebuilding Jerusalem's walls led to an extraordinary feat. July's sermon series looks at why he led, how he led and who helped him. We'll see how this applies to our own leadership in life and in our calling to help others follow Jesus.

The concept of the first series, *Extreme Ownership*, lays excellent groundwork for the next three-part series as we look at Life's *Biggest Questions: Where Do I Belong? What Do I Believe? Who Will I Become?* Discovering the biblical response to these three life-shaping questions provides us with distinct purpose. This applies to us as individuals, but also to us as the body of Christ. We will never be the people or the church that Jesus (our leader) calls us to be without these three "Bs" of belonging to the family of God, believing in foundational biblical truths and becoming servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a great year for us. Thank you for your "extreme ownership" in your faith as we help others follow Jesus. To God be the glory.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the first letter "T".

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 being a disciple who makes disciples. 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.

Weekly Sermon Reflection Questions:

- 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?
- How has the Lord spoken to you through this sermon?
- What are you going to do as a result?

Scripture Readings

EXTREME OWNERSHIP

I LEAD WITH COMPASSION

- 6/25 Nehemiah 1
- 6/26 Nehemiah 9:16-38
- 6/27 2 Chronicles 7:11-22
- 6/28 Psalm 103
- 6/29 Luke 15:11-32
- 6/30 Colossians 3:12-17
- 7/1 Nehemiah 1

I LEAD WITH RESOLVE

- 7/2 Nehemiah 2
- 7/3 Genesis 2:2-18
- 7/4 Proverbs 14:23; 18:9;
Proverbs 21:25
- 7/5 Proverbs 22:29; 31:17
- 7/6 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12;
2 Thessalonians 3:6-12
- 7/7 3 John 2-11
- 7/8 Nehemiah 2

I LEAD WITH NEIGHBORS

- 7/9 Nehemiah 3:22-32
- 7/10 Genesis 4:1-16
- 7/11 Leviticus 19:9-18
- 7/12 Matthew 5:43-48
- 7/13 Luke 10:25-37
- 7/14 Romans 13:8-10
- 7/15 Nehemiah 3:22-32

I LEAD WITH JUSTICE

- 7/16 Nehemiah 5
- 7/17 Leviticus 25:35-55
- 7/18 Deuteronomy 15:1-18
- 7/19 Psalm 15
- 7/20 Ezekiel 22:6-12, 29-30;
Micah 6:6-8
- 7/21 Acts 6:1-7
- 7/22 Nehemiah 5

I LEAD WITH CONVICTION

- 7/23 Nehemiah 8:1-12
- 7/24 Nehemiah 8:13-18
- 7/25 Ezra 7:1-10
- 7/26 2 Corinthians 8:1-7
- 7/27 1 Thessalonians 1
- 7/28 Ephesians 5:1-21
- 7/29 Nehemiah 8:1-12

Scripture Readings

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHERE DO I BELONG?

I BELONG WHERE I HELP OTHERS

FOLLOW JESUS

- 7/30 Luke 5:1-11
- 7/31 John 8:1-11
- 8/1 John 9:1-27
- 8/2 John 9:28-41
- 8/3 1 Corinthians 12:12-31
- 8/4 Hebrews 5:11-14
- 8/5 Luke 5:1-11

I BELONG WHERE I HELP OTHERS BELONG

- 8/20 Romans 12:9-13
- 8/21 Leviticus 19:33-34;
Isaiah 58:6-12
- 8/22 Matthew 25:31-46
- 8/23 Hebrews 13:1-3
- 8/24 Acts 16:25-34
- 8/25 1 Peter 4:7-11
- 8/26 Romans 12:9-13

I BELONG WHERE I GIVE AND RECEIVE LOVE

- 8/6 John 13:31-35
- 8/7 John 15:12-17
- 8/8 1 Corinthians 13:8-13
- 8/9 1 John 3:11-18
- 8/10 1 John 3:19-24
- 8/11 1 John 4:7-21
- 8/12 John 13:31-35

I BELONG IN COMMUNITY

- 8/27 Acts 2:42-47
- 8/28 Ecclesiastes 4:9-12;
Proverbs 27:17
- 8/29 1 Corinthians 1:10-18
- 8/30 Hebrews 10:19-24
- 8/31 James 5:13-20
- 9/1 1 John 1:7
- 9/2 Acts 2:42-47

I BELONG TO TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP

- 8/13 Acts 2:42-47
- 8/14 Acts 2:1-21
- 8/15 Acts 2:22-41
- 8/16 Acts 3
- 8/17 Acts 4
- 8/18 Acts 5
- 8/19 Acts 2:42-47

I BELONG TO THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL

- 9/3 1 Corinthians 13:1-7
- 9/4 Psalm 31:21-24; 33:1-5
- 9/5 Psalm 136
- 9/6 John 14:15-24
- 9/7 John 15:1-11
- 9/8 John 21:15-23
- 9/9 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

Scripture Readings

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

I BELIEVE IN THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

- 9/10 2 Timothy 3:10-17
- 9/11 Psalm 19:7-14;
Psalm 119:105-112
- 9/12 Proverbs 4:20-27;
Isaiah 55:6-11
- 9/13 Romans 10:14-17
- 9/14 Hebrews 4:1-16
- 9/15 2 Peter 1:16-21
- 9/16 2 Timothy 3:10-17

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER

- 9/17 1 Corinthians 8:4-6
- 9/18 Matthew 6:1-18
- 9/19 Matthew 11:25-30
- 9/20 John 14:1-14
- 9/21 Romans 8:12-17
- 9/22 Hebrews 12:1-11
- 9/23 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 9/24 Acts 1:1-5
- 9/25 Psalm 51:7-12
- 9/26 Matthew 3:11-17
- 9/27 Luke 11:5-13
- 9/28 John 16:4b-15
- 9/29 2 Timothy 1:8-14
- 9/30 Acts 1:1-5

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST AS LORD

- 10/1 Romans 10:5-13
- 10/2 Luke 2:8-21
- 10/3 2 Corinthians 4:1-5
- 10/4 Philippians 2:1-11
- 10/5 Ephesians 4:1-24
- 10/6 1 Peter 3:13-17
- 10/7 Romans 10:5-13

I BELIEVE IN ETERNAL LIFE

- 10/8 John 6:27-34
- 10/9 John 3:1-20
- 10/10 1 John 5:11-15
- 10/11 John 10:22-30
- 10/12 John 17:1-5
- 10/13 1 Timothy 6:11-16
- 10/14 John 6:27-34

I BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF THE CROSS

- 10/15 Isaiah 53:2-6, 10-12
- 10/16 Luke 23:26-56
- 10/17 Galatians 5:7-15
- 10/18 Galatians 6:11-18
- 10/19 Ephesians 2:11-22
- 10/20 Hebrews 12:1-2
- 10/21 Isaiah 53:2-6, 10-12

Scripture Readings

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHO WILL I BECOME?

I Will Become Open-hearted

- 10/22 Matthew 5:1-6
- 10/23 Exodus 7:1-13
- 10/24 Deuteronomy 6:4-9
- 10/25 Luke 6:43-45
- 10/26 Philemon
- 10/27 Ephesians 6:5-9
- 10/28 Matthew 5:1-6

I Will Become Blessed

- 10/29 Matthew 5:7-12
- 10/30 Matthew 4:1-11
- 10/31 Matthew 7:24-29
- 11/1 Mark 10:35-45
- 11/2 Luke 16:1-13
- 11/3 Revelation 7:13-17
- 11/4 Matthew 5:7-12

I Will Become Shaped by What I Treasure

- 11/5 Matthew 6:19-24
- 11/6 2 Kings 20:12-21
- 11/7 Psalm 49:16-17
- 11/8 Matthew 12:33-37
- 11/9 Matthew 13:44-52
- 11/10 John 12:1-8
- 11/11 Matthew 6:19-24

I Will Become Generous

- 11/12 2 Corinthians 9:6-9
- 11/13 Psalm 37:21;
Proverbs 11:24
- 11/14 John 4:31-38
- 11/15 Acts 17:20-34
- 11/16 Galatians 6:6-10
- 11/17 1 Timothy 6:3-10
- 11/18 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

I Will Become Grateful

- 11/19 2 Corinthians 9:10-15
- 11/20 Psalm 100
- 11/21 Jonah 2
- 11/22 1 Corinthians 1:4-9
- 11/23 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
- 11/24 Ephesians 1:15-23
- 11/25 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

EXTREME OWNERSHIP

Lead Like a Nehemiah

June 25 - July 29, 2018

EXTREME OWNERSHIP

A theological and biblical perspective of the Book of Nehemiah:

Our July sermon series looks at the life of an unlikely leader. Nehemiah (“Yahweh comforts” - his name is a longer version of “Nahum” which means “comforter”) was the “*cupbearer to the king*” (King Artaxerxes, the Persian). A cupbearer tasted the king’s wine. If someone laced the drink with poison, it was “long live the king” and a “help wanted” advertisement for a new cupbearer. Nehemiah left a comfortable position when he learned of the devastation that had occurred “back home” in Jerusalem. A city without walls was dangerous. Wild animals could enter. Enemies could attack. A city without walls was an oxymoron back then – that city could not exist. Jerusalem had been depopulated, too. When Nehemiah learned of the situation, he responded with action (Chapter 1). He took EXTREME OWNERSHIP and risked his life for his convictions. Without a restoration of Jerusalem, the Jewish people could have been amalgamated by their neighbors and lost their identity. Had Nehemiah not acted, we may never have had the Bible and the Judeo-Christian heritage. His role in Israel’s history must not be minimized. If a cupbearer can lead, so can we. I WANT YOU TO LEAD! This series is intended for each of us to take responsibility in leadership.

I LEAD WITH COMPASSION

Monday, June 25, 2018

Nehemiah 1

Nehemiah had a comfortable life in King Artaxerxes' palace in Susa (modern Iranian town of Shush). He was devastated to learn of the tragedy in Jerusalem. He wept for days. He mourned, fasted and prayed. He recalled God's compassion and faithfulness and confessed Israel's sin ("we" included himself). He did not blame others. His was not an "us" vs. "them" mentality. He took personal responsibility. He understood God's covenant had been violated. His prayer led him to plan. Nehemiah is a great example of "extreme ownership." He did not pass the buck. He engaged. He was willing to sacrifice everything, including his life, for the sake of the mission. He was willing to "Go!" when God called. He prayed like it all depended on God. He worked like it all depended on him. Nehemiah was a man of the greatest character.

APPLICATION: On Patriotic Sunday, we emphasize a patriot's compassionate response to the terrible crisis in the place of his cultural, political and spiritual identity—Jerusalem. Note Nehemiah's emotion, prayer and determination to respond. Prayer aligns our hearts with the kingdom of God to help us be people of compassion. In our readings this week, note the Lord speaking to King Solomon and the willingness of people throughout the Bible to exercise "extreme ownership" in service to God. Why is prayer an important trait for a godly leader? How does compassion help a person lead?

EXTREME OWNERSHIP

Monday, July 2, 2018
Nehemiah 2

As “cupbearer to the king” (he was probably a eunuch and wouldn’t be tempted by the king’s harem), Nehemiah had regular access to the throne. He prayed before this audacious request. He asked the king for time off from his royal duties to return to his home country to repair Jerusalem’s walls. He also asked the king to pay for it! This was a big risk. Nehemiah could lose his job and maybe his life. He came prepared with a strategic plan. The king had affection for Nehemiah and granted the request. Nehemiah used his influence in his vocation. “Vocation” means “a calling.” He changed jobs but stayed true to his call. When Nehemiah toured Jerusalem, he saw the disrepair. He exercised “extreme ownership.” He led. He recruited teammates. Verses 17-18 are an invitation to potential helpers: “Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we will no longer be in derision.” Meanwhile, the bad actors, with vested financial and political interests, repeatedly tried to stop him.

APPLICATION: We must align with God’s mission and principles and, with the Holy Spirit’s help, learn how to live into them. We become like who we worship. Prayer is essential. We also become like our friends. “Show me your friends, I’ll show you your future.” Some are disruptive or uncommitted. We have challenges at home, church, work and school, but we must understand and support the mission. We are to work hard and produce good results.

I LEAD WITH NEIGHBORS
Monday, July 9, 2018
Nehemiah 3:22-32

I hope you have access to a computer and will do word studies of scripture. The terms “*next to*” and “*after him*” repeatedly appear in Nehemiah 3. Who would build the wall around Jerusalem? Nehemiah planned and organized and broke tasks down into specific and manageable units. People took care of their own neighborhoods.

“Extreme ownership” means I’m not passive, or passive-aggressive (Cain is an example of passive-aggressive behavior). I get involved. I commit to the strategic mission of the leader. At Asbury, it is “Helping Others Follow Jesus.” Followers engage and get the job done. If we don’t understand our mission, our engagement is limited. The walls stay broken if we don’t take responsibility to understand the mission or if we fail to work. “Extreme ownership” means I lead in my neighborhood, home, work, school, church, etc. I take care of what is “*next to*” me and connect with those “*after him*” in time and space. Jesus had a lot to say about neighbors and home, too.

APPLICATION: Jesus could do everything without our help. Why do you think He chooses/prefers to work with us and through us? Is it harder for you to do your part of the work or to let others do theirs? What do you need to do differently?

EXTREME OWNERSHIP

Monday, July 16, 2018
Nehemiah 5

The people were committed to rebuilding. Their attention may have been diverted from their agricultural duties resulting in a food crisis. They had to pay an incredible amount in taxes to finance the Persian occupation of their country. "Usury" was charging interest to a fellow Jew and was strictly forbidden by the Jewish law (Deuteronomy 23:19-20).

Nehemiah:

- A. Heard their complaints (verses 1-5). There was a great outcry from the people directed toward their own Jewish brothers.
- B. Acted (verses 6-13). He was angry about this injustice.
- C. Shared his personal application of justice (verses 14-19).
He was generous.

Other than the complaints about the early church's "Meals on Wheels" program (Acts 6), all are Old Testament readings this week. They deal with treating others fairly.

APPLICATION: How do you think Nehemiah's compassion worked with his sense of justice in responding to the people's complaints? Why do you think the way we treat others, especially the poor and oppressed, is so important? How does this challenge you as a leader?

I LEAD WITH CONVICTION
Monday, July 23, 2018
Nehemiah 8:1-12

While Nehemiah is about a building program, it is fundamentally tied to the spiritual lives of people. The Book of Ezra runs parallel with the Book of Nehemiah. This is the first appearance of Ezra the priest (scholar and teacher = “scribe”). Because the Persians had a benevolent multi-faith policy, King Artaxerxes sent Ezra to Jerusalem to teach the law and to ensure Temple worship was happening. Nehemiah and Ezra, with different gifts, worked together for the common good and the people of God. Both did so with complete conviction.

There is always something more to our faith. The church is always on mission. Believers do not retire from the church. Apathy and inertia appear when we relax or think we’ve arrived. “I’m bored” not only echoes from kids in the backseat but is heard from complacent Christians who choose not to grow, develop or achieve.

APPLICATION: Opposition arises from secular culture. Opposition also comes from grumblers and pessimists within. Sloth has many forms. We have much work to do to reach people for Christ. Let’s pray for a spiritual awakening like the one Ezra led for the people of God. Nehemiah 8:10 says, *“The joy of the Lord is my strength.”*

**LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS:
WHERE DO I BELONG?**

July 30 - September 9, 2018

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHERE DO I BELONG?

Monday, July 30, 2018

Luke 5:1-11

This story is ironic because a carpenter's son tells some professional fisherman how to fish. After the miracle, Peter recognizes ("astonished") this itinerant preacher is master of the sea, so he submits to the Lordship of Jesus. He fell to his knees, confessed his sinfulness and heard the affirmation of Jesus not to be afraid. The biggest catch that day was not fish – it was Peter, James and John. Not only was Peter forgiven, he was commissioned. Peter was no longer going to catch fish, he would take people alive for the kingdom of God. Peter, James and John had a seismic shift in their priorities: *they left everything and followed him*. Our readings this week show others who followed Jesus and how we use our gifts to do the same.

APPLICATION: I was 14 ½ years old when I began to follow Jesus. My conversion didn't happen by myself. Like Peter, I was in the company of family and friends. I describe my conversion experience with one word: "FORGIVEN." I felt loved, accepted and forgiven. Furthermore, I wanted everyone to know that, too. We all have different experiences – but we share the same call – to live for the kingdom of God and to help others live there, too. Jesus gives us this purpose in life. How do you take extreme ownership of your calling as a follower of Christ?

I BELONG WHERE I GIVE AND RECEIVE LOVE

Monday, August 6, 2018

John 13:31-35

Jesus didn't come to give us more laws and rules to follow. We can't keep the ones we already have. Our greatest need is to be loved. Our music reflects this, "*What the world needs now is love, sweet love.*" The Beatles sang, "*All you need is love.*" Another song has this line, "*Looking for love in all the wrong places.*" So much of our music focuses upon "eros" (erotic, sensual or sexual love). While eros has its role, it is insufficient. We need something more than romance. Regardless of our romantic status, we all need love, acceptance and forgiveness. The Lord offers to us unmerited favor. We call it "grace." Grace is not earned. Grace is given to us when we don't deserve it. Probably the world's most meaningful song is "Amazing Grace." Grace helps us see our need. Grace tells us even though we don't deserve it, we are loved just as we are. Grace changes everything.

APPLICATION: There is a time and place for all four "loves" found in the biblical Greek language ("eros," = sensual, "philiros" = friendship, "storge" = family, "agape" = God's love). Because we have been loved, accepted and forgiven by God through Jesus Christ, we help others know this love, acceptance and forgiveness, too. Do you believe God loves you unconditionally? If so, what difference does that make in your life and how are you helping others experience it?

Monday, August 13, 2018

Acts 2:42-47

The Day of Pentecost was the birthday of the church (Acts 2). The biblical Greek word for “church” is “ecclesia” and it means “the called-out ones.” We will look at what happened after Pentecost and how the “called-out ones” lived. They experienced opposition from outside the fellowship and from within it (Ananias and Saphira). Notice the behavior of the early Christians. This was not easy. It was a major commitment. They exercised, as we saw in our study on “extreme ownership,” complete engagement with the task.

APPLICATION: What level of commitment am I making? How devoted am I to the teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers? What can I do to better praise, glorify and honor God? How can I be a person who cares for others? These should not be mutually exclusive. It is not “either/or” but “both/and.”

I BELONG WHERE I HELP OTHERS BELONG

Monday, August 20, 2018

Romans 12:9-13

In a world that didn't have motels and hotels, fast-food restaurants and convenience stores, opening your home to a traveler or a person in need was a sacred duty. This was true of ancient Israel (see Leviticus 19 and Isaiah 58). Paul was the recipient of the kindness of the Philippian jailer who washed his wounds. Peter wrote about its importance, too (1 Peter 4). Our preaching text this week is about genuine kindness, love, affection, honor, zeal, prayer, financial giving, and it ends with showing hospitality. As James 2:17 insisted, *"faith without works is dead faith."*

APPLICATION: Hospitality doesn't have to be a "big" thing. A smile, a greeting or an invitation does not cost a dime. Hospitality reveals what is in our hearts. Do we love God? Then we must learn to show it by loving people. Hospitality is an essential part of the gospel. At Asbury, it's about making first impressions last. Helping others find a place of belonging is one of the key components to helping others follow Jesus. How will you grow and improve in this area? How will you help Asbury grow and improve?

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHERE DO I BELONG?

Monday, August 27, 2018

Acts 2:42-47

We used Acts 2:42-47 two weeks ago – but it is so important I wanted to use it again. Christians were marginalized at best and persecuted at worst in the first three centuries after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus. They did not receive government support. Being a Christian could be a death sentence. (We will hear about today's persecuted church on October 13 when we host a "Voice of the Martyrs" regional event at Asbury. Invite your friends!) Early Christians exercised "extreme ownership" throughout the Church. A Church father, Tertullian, said, "*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.*" While that statement is not an ironclad truth, it is true that the sacrificial commitment to Jesus and His Church resulted in Christianity's rapid growth. People committed their time, money and very lives to following Jesus and helping others follow Him, too. Acts 2:42-47 is not about communism, as the government was not involved in redistribution of wealth, but is a voluntary association of caring for one another.

APPLICATION: Belonging to Christian community is not optional for believers. Asbury emphasizes Adult Discipleship Communities and small groups to connect people in meaningful ways. We have classes and service opportunities where relationships can also begin. It is of the highest priority for Christians to intentionally be with other believers. Where, when and how are you doing that now? If you are in a community, who can you invite to join you?

I BELONG TO THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL

Monday, September 3, 2018

1 Corinthians 13:1-7

C.S. Lewis wrote a wonderful little book, “The Four Loves”, where he described the four biblical Greek words for love: family, friendship, sexual and God’s. All four have their place. Jesus’ primary focus was on God’s “agape” love. God’s love is also referred to as “grace,” as we have done nothing to earn or deserve it. This love focuses on attitude and behavior. It emphasizes truth and responsibility. Emotions come and go, but agape is consistent, sacrificial and strong. It promotes God’s kingdom, not our own agenda. Paul describes it so well in “The Love Chapter” of 1 Corinthians 13.

APPLICATION: All of us have family and friends and some of us have the blessing of sexual intimacy between husband and wife. But the greatest of all loves is the love of God. This new identity comes to us in Jesus Christ. Agape becomes real to us when we recognize God loves us just as we are, when we repent from our self-centeredness and ask Jesus to come into our lives. Children and students can do this. People who have never been to church or read the Bible can do this. This is our invitation from Jesus.

**LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS:
WHAT DO I BELIEVE?**

September 10 - October 21, 2018

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Monday, September 10, 2018

2 Timothy 3:10-17

The Jewish people were referred to as “people of the Book.” Jewish scribes dedicated their entire lives to meticulously copying Scripture. The incredible discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 proved the Old Testament manuscripts had been transmitted accurately over a span of a thousand years. C.S. Lewis’ atheism was shaken when he heard an Oxford professor (also an atheist) state with certainty that the New Testament documents were historically accurate. That shocked Lewis and set him on a journey that eventually led him to put his faith in Jesus.

We all need a governing authority and worldview in life. My natural bias is my self. I want to run life on my terms. However, I have vast limitations. I need someone greater than myself. Christians believe that Jesus is THE Authority for life and that His will for us is revealed in the Bible.

APPLICATION: What value do you place on Scripture? How does Scripture form your worldview (how you think about money, sex and relationships, authority, work, service, spirituality, etc.). Asbury is about to begin a series of classes on the Bible. Will you prayerfully consider attending? Will you prayerfully consider inviting someone to attend with you?

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER

Monday, September 17, 2018

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

God is not male but is referred to in the Bible as “Father.” This means God is a “person” and not an impersonal force as in “*May the force be with you.*” Jesus, who is also part of the Godhead, came in human form. He had to be a male, or He would not have had the ability in that culture to redeem us.

Many of us had troubling relationships with our fathers (absent, abusive, etc.) so the concept of “God as Father” is unhelpful. This is unfortunate. The limitations of our earthly fathers must not be projected upon our heavenly Father. Jesus taught us to pray to Him. We can trust His character because God is good. Jesus said, “*If you have seen me you have seen the Father.*” He was not speaking about a physical nature but about God’s character. Jesus showed us how the Father acts. Regardless of our relationship with our earthly father, we need to shift to a biblical view of our heavenly Father. He adopts us into His family, provides for our needs, welcomes us back when we go astray (“The Prodigal Son” - Luke 15:11-32), and lovingly corrects us.

APPLICATION: When we look to another human being to fill us up emotionally or spiritually (even materially), then we are in danger of replacing God with an idol. God is all-powerful, but He is also relational. In what ways are you expecting too much from your earthly relationships to meet your deepest needs? How can you begin to depend more on God and less on your spouse, children, parents, friends, co-workers or self?

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Monday, September 24, 2018

Acts 1:1-5

Because the word used to describe the third Person of the Godhead is sometimes called “The Holy Ghost,” it has always made me feel somewhere between anxious and afraid. I have no incentive to hang around with a “ghost.” I thought when the Holy Ghost came on someone, they would end up pregnant or doing something “weird,” like speaking in tongues (which IS a spiritual gift, BTW). “Holy Spirit” is somewhat vague but is still better. I like what Jesus called the Holy Spirit – *“comforter, counselor and guide.”* The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6). He walks with us through life and recreates the life of Jesus within us. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to us so that we might use them to build up His body, the Church.

APPLICATION: What do you think it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Have you ever thought about His (not “its”) role and presence in your life? What gifts has the Holy Spirit given you (see 1 Corinthians 12:1-11) and how are you using those gifts for the common good?

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST AS LORD
Monday, October 1, 2018
Romans 10:5-13

In the early days of Christianity, saying “Jesus is Lord” instead of Caesar is Lord, could cost you your life. Why would the disciples risk that? One word: *Resurrection*. Jesus was resurrected from the dead. His resurrection forever validated His promises for all time. Those 1st century disciples were so convinced of this truth that they gladly and boldly gave their lives for Him. While Caesar got his due, Jesus was due a LOT more than that. Their allegiance to Jesus as Lord meant everything about them belonged to Jesus. They followed Jesus to the point of death. And they helped others follow Jesus, too. “Jesus is Lord” is our great confession. No one and nothing else can or should take His pre-eminent and rightful place.

APPLICATION: “Jesus is Lord” affects everything in life. Allegiance to Jesus means one’s body and money are not his or her own – we are stewards of all God has entrusted to us. How we use our time and tongue fall under His ownership, too. “Jesus is Lord” is my core identity. Think through the most important aspects of your life. What does “Jesus Christ as Lord” mean to you?

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

Monday, October 8, 2018

John 6:27-34

At the closing of Olympic Games, the TV commentator opined that “Imagine there’s no heaven, it’s easy if you try...” is our world’s anthem. Wow! I hope not! That’s a beautiful melody, but the lyrics are hopeless. Christians are to set our minds on things above. Heaven is our destination and our ultimate reality. If there is no heaven, we, of all people, are most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19). Jesus endured the cross, despising its shame for the joy that was before Him. He was not bound to the earth. When I gave a children’s sermon in Sallisaw, I asked the kids, “How do you get to heaven?” I’ll always remember little Frankie’s direct answer: “Well, you gotta get dead first.” You can’t win an argument with a 6-year old. Is this life all there is? Jesus didn’t think so. “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (Luke 9:25) We can live eternally with God through the grace of Jesus Christ. These are comforting and inspiring words. We need to remember them and live for God’s kingdom, not our own.

APPLICATION: If you were to die today, do you know for certain you would go to heaven? We need assurance that we will live with God forever. This is a gift God wants for you—beginning today! (Be SURE TO READ 1 JOHN 5:11-15.) If you have this assurance, does it show? How are you living into it?

I BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF THE CROSS

Monday, October 15, 2018

Isaiah 53:2-6, 10-12

It is AMAZING that when we look at Isaiah 53, we can see how it describes Jesus' death upon the cross. It was written hundreds of years before Jesus. Thousands of people were crucified, so what's the deal with Jesus dying on the cross? The Old Testament sacrificial system would transfer my sin to an animal that would atone for my sin. That entire sacrificial system ended when Jesus bore our sins upon the cross. His death for our sin was one thing, but it was His Resurrection that validated the work of the cross. Furthermore, He appeared to believers for 40 days, ascended to heaven and gave the Holy Spirit to His followers. It was the One who was on the cross that made all the difference. Sometimes we ask, "Why doesn't God do something about suffering?" Isaiah 53 reveals God has taken action in Jesus.

APPLICATION: Not only does the cross of Jesus achieve the forgiveness of our sin, it also brings healing to our brokenness. Our healing and wholeness is an integral part of the process of sanctification. To be sanctified is to be made holy—this is the way God designed us to be. Have you asked Jesus for forgiveness? Have you given Him your brokenness and woundedness (spiritual, mental, physical, emotional...)? Will you bring those hurts to the cross of Christ?

**LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS:
WHO WILL I BECOME?**

October 22 - November 25, 2018

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHO WILL I BECOME?

Monday, October 22, 2018

Matthew 5:1-6

It's all about the condition of the heart. Obviously, it's not about the physical organ ("cardia") that pumps the blood, but about the desires, emotions and will of an individual. When our hearts are shaped to love God, we want to serve others. When our hearts are left to just love ourselves, we rebel against God's call. Pharaoh hardened his heart (and God let him). We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Paul wrote about how masters were to treat their slaves. He had no power, other than the pen, but he was trying to open hearts to love and to change the dynamics of relationships. Our hearts can be refreshed by forgiveness and love (read the Book of Philemon).

APPLICATION: Everyone wants to be happy, but happiness can't be purchased – it's found by losing one's self. The Sermon on the Mount is counter-intuitive. It is not the way we naturally think. Closely examine these four "beatitudes." In God's hands and with our open heart, these conditions result in blessing. How is your "heart" in these matters?

I WILL BECOME BLESSED

Monday, October 29, 2018

Matthew 5:7-12

This week, we look at four more counter-intuitive character traits Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. These are the opposite of how we naturally live. It's hard to understand how we will be blessed by the attitudes and behavior Jesus emphasized. Yet, His sermon insisted God's blessing came by reversing the norm. Jesus was no pushover. He taught as someone with authority, passion and enthusiasm (not like the scribes).

APPLICATION: The world teaches us to push and shove to get our way, not to serve. Our world operates from a “kingdom of self” perspective, not according to the kingdom of God. Bob Dylan sang, “You Gotta Serve Somebody.” What does it mean, from a biblical perspective, to be blessed?

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHO WILL I BECOME?

Monday, November 5, 2018

Matthew 6:19-24

Earthly treasures are nice. There's nothing wrong with enjoying nice things. However, the greater treasures are in heaven. Jesus didn't strive for earthly things, but He earnestly sought the treasures of the kingdom of heaven. As He said, our hearts and our money are intertwined. I wonder if these two guys wish they could have "taken a mulligan:" King Hezekiah (pride got him, 2 Kings 20) and Judas Iscariot (greed devoured him). Psalm 49 tells us not to envy the wealthy because they can't take it with them.

APPLICATION: Giving is essential because it affects our hearts. If we think it's only for the rich "because they can afford it," then we've missed the point! After all, Jesus commended the woman who gave a small amount out of her poverty, not her excess (Mark 12:41-44). Giving is about trusting God for His provision. It's about faith and grace. What is your perspective on giving? Are you rationalizing or are you giving what God is asking of you? What is your greatest treasure?

I WILL BECOME GENEROUS

Monday, November 12, 2018

2 Corinthians 9:6-9

I remember as a child how my father watched us open our Christmas presents. My poor father got nothing of value. All he got were dumb things like socks and neckties. I felt so sorry for him. I just knew he had to be miserable. Now, I understand. Giving IS more important than getting. If I want something, I buy it. I'm not dependent on someone to give me something. My dad wasn't a poor, sympathetic character – he was cool and in charge. NOW I understand. I didn't get it back then (*"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:11-12)* Giving is a means of grace.

APPLICATION: Dave Ramsey's transforming class, "Financial Peace University," helps people get out of debt. It takes discipline, but it works. The purpose of being debt-free is to be able to give generously and live freely. Giving will produce more joy in our lives than anything else. *"For God so loved the world....He gave."* Love always finds a way to give. Is your giving to God representative of your love for Him? What will your response be this week?

LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS: WHO WILL I BECOME?

Monday, November 19, 2018

2 Corinthians 9:10-15

This is Thanksgiving week. It falls on November 22. I remember that date because it is a tragic day in American history – John F. Kennedy’s assassination. It was also the day Aldous Huxley and C.S. Lewis died. The reality is that in every person’s life, we will face limitations, loss, grief and death. And yet, we can still give thanks. We are reminded of the Gospels – “Good” Friday is the day Jesus was crucified. It’s “Good” only because of Resurrection Sunday. God can redeem even the most horrible things of life and work them to advantage. Joseph told his treacherous brothers, “What you meant for evil, God meant for good.” Naomi’s life was in the tank in Ruth 1, but you’ve got to read to the end of the book before the one who was “lost” gets “found.” Jonah offered thanks to God for his improbable rescue. Of all the reasons I’m grateful in life, the main one is that the story of the Bible demonstrates God’s redemption.

APPLICATION: Spend time reviewing your gratitude journal. How will you respond to God’s gracious provision in your life? What will you give in return? Who should you give to? How can you give with a Christ-like attitude?

