

Volume 2

Scripture Readings & Devotions

BE
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Fishers United Methodist Church

Introduction

Over the first three years of these studies, we have taken a sweeping overview of the entire Bible with studies on the four Gospels (“Be with Jesus”), the rest of the New Testament (“Be on Mission”), the Old Testament (“Be God’s Light”). In 2025 we followed that overview by exploring New Testament books written for Jews who saw Jesus as the Messiah (“Be God’s Family”).

Our study in 2026 will be on the New Testament books that focus on books related to the Apostle John. We begin with the Gospel of John and end with the Epistles of John. In between we will explore John’s adopted home of Ephesus by looking at some sections of Acts, the book of Ephesians, and 1 & 2 Timothy which were letters written by Paul to the pastor of the Ephesian Church. As the Gospel was expanding, it was important for John, Paul, Timothy and others to remain connected to the Lord and each other. So, this year’s study is called, “Be Connected.”

Think about it. This theme of “Be Connected” is timeless. Modern believers need to know how to be connected to our God, our church community, our families, our neighborhoods, and our world. Particularly in this technological age, we are longing for deeper real-life connections.

Again this year several people from our church are joining me in writing the devotionals for this study. They will bring fresh insights and perspectives to our devotion time. Each of them is engaged in training by me, a small cohort with one another, and personal prayer as they produce what you will read and reflect on. Make sure to thank them throughout the year as you are impacted by their words.

There are several components to this year-long exploration:

1. **Daily Scripture Readings** – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
2. **Daily Devotions** – These are written by others and me, and correlate with the daily Scripture to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
3. **Weekly Studies** – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum, are great tools for small groups and classes.
4. **Weekly Sermons** – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, visit fishersumc.org/beconnected for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
5. **Weekly Podcasts** – Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week’s readings, catch these at fishersumc.org/beconnected, in the church app, or access on your favorite podcast platform.

The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to embrace the fact that you are a child of God, called by Him to “Be Connected” with Him and others.

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor

Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church

BE CONNECTED

4/13/2026 - WEEK 15 DAY 1

A Beautiful Encounter: Acts 3:1-5

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

The gate called Beautiful was on the east side of the temple. It was one of the most used gates. Many people went through it every day, passing from the secular outside world into the sacred temple courts.

Think about the man who was there.

Lame from birth.

Carried by friends.

Put there every day.

Begged for money.

Busy time of prayer.

Glanced at Peter and John.

Heard, "Look at us!"

Locked eyes.

Expected to get something.

Pretend that you have never read the rest of this passage. Make up your own story of how this encounter would go from there. Go ahead, do this now....

When you have finished your make-believe story, ask yourself how many encounters like this you have every year.

What did you learn?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

4/14/2026 - WEEK 15 DAY 2

Better than Gold: Acts 3:6-10

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

As I read Acts 3:6-10 and I understand when the disciples healed the lame man at the temple gate, they had asked him what he wanted from them. He was expecting money, but they told him they had something much better than gold and they healed him. He was able to get up and walk.

My family has been exposed to the same understanding: there are gifts that are much more valuable than gold. With Ellen's disability what we've learned, from her, is that she doesn't know prejudice, ethnicity, or politics. All she knows is that she loves people for who they are. That's a lesson for all of us. That agape love is better than any material worth we might have.

We see how she has encouraged other people. How she can help make their lives better and in turn, it helps us understand how we should behave. We see God working through her and God working through us.

The prayer that I would offer is this: Dear Lord, we know that your love is much better than any gold in our lives, any material assets that we might have. We thank you, Lord Jesus, for your love and we thank you for your caring and we ask that you might help us that we might reflect your love and caring to other people. We pray these things in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen

Notes

4/15/2026 - WEEK 15 DAY 3

It's All About Jesus: Acts 3:11-16

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

In the previous verses from Acts 3:1-10, we read that Peter and John allowed Jesus to work through them to heal a well-known local beggar who was crippled from birth. The beggar asked for money as usual. Peter and John demanded eye contact (which is unusual because eye-contact is often avoided when we spot a disabled panhandler), then Peter grabbed his right hand and commanded him to get up and walk in the name Jesus. The man began to walk, jump and praise God as they led him to Solomon's Colonnade. This caused quite a stir and people gathered around staring at Peter and John as if they were magicians. He quickly reminded them that this miracle was done by the power of Jesus and NOT themselves. Then he gave a brief history of the events (and the role the onlookers played in this awful history) leading up to Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation, including the dreadful zinger: "but YOU killed the author of Life."

They knew the beggar. They saw him at Gate Beautiful every time they went through. There was no denying who he was or what had just happened. The question was WHO DID IT? Since Peter had the man by the hand, it seemed an obvious conclusion that he might have been responsible for the miraculous transformation. But Peter quickly used the whole event as an opportunity to share a brief history lesson and then the Gospel. The onlookers would be stunned by Peter's accusations that THEY were responsible for killing Jesus, but also by the fact that he was denying that his own power had performed this miracle and proclaiming that it is faith in Jesus' name that made this beggar whole, walking and jumping for the first time in his whole life!

What an odd guy Peter is! Here's his chance to claim power and healing abilities, gather a large following, fame, add some silver and gold to his portfolio and start the "BEAUTIFUL GATE APOSTLE PETER MINISTRIES," but he deflects all glory to Jesus. There is no struggle in Peter's heart to make sure he doesn't claim any credit for this man's healing. All he sees is an opportunity to facilitate the Lord's compassion and share the Gospel.

Silver and gold Peter doesn't have. He has the Gospel and the Holy Spirit and so do we.

Notes

4/16/2026 - WEEK 15 DAY 4

Repent and Turn to God: Acts 3:17-23

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

It all depends on which way your feet are pointing.

Most of us, most of the time, move our lives in the direction we want to take them. We see something we want, and we seize the day. Want a career? Pursue it. Need a degree? Earn it. See something bigger and better? Buy it.

Sadly, this holds true for the worldly temptations too. 1 John 2:16 says, “For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” The lure is too great. All too often we find ourselves going where we never thought we would go.

Too often, our feet are pointed in the wrong direction. We even have catchphrases that encourage self-driven living:

You do you.

Live your truth.

Follow your own path.

These sound eerily similar to the very first sin committed by Adam and Eve. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (Genesis 3:6).

God told Adam and Eve to stay away from that tree. But their feet were pointed in the wrong direction. They followed their own path. Then they paid the price.

In today’s passage, Peter is talking to people who had committed the ultimate sin. They had clamored for Christ to be crucified. But Peter gives even them hope: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus” (Acts 3:19-20).

The word repent means to do a 180. It means to turn your life around. It means to point your feet in another direction. Away from the selfish desires of the world, and toward selfless submission to Jesus.

In what areas do you need to point your feet in another direction?

Notes

4/17/2026 - WEEK 15 DAY 5

Heirs of the Covenant: Acts 3:24-26

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In Genesis 12:3, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising him that he would have descendants who would bless the entire world. At that time Abraham was seventy-five years old and childless. Twenty-five years later, Abraham had a son, Isaac. A thousand years later, Isaac's descendant would be King David. A thousand years after that, David's descendant would be Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Two thousand years later, we are still receiving the blessings of Jesus.

We are heirs of the covenant.

I've always wondered what it would be like to be notified that some long-forgotten relative had named me in their will. I would suddenly be extravagantly rich, with more money to spend than time to spend it. I would now be named among the elite. I would be somebody important. I would be significant.

That is exactly what Jesus has done for us. He has fulfilled God's promise to bless us beyond imagination. Because of Him, I now possess the "riches of His glory" (Philippians 4:19) and the "immeasurable riches of His grace" (Ephesians 2:7). I have unlimited blessings and unlimited time to enjoy them.

I am an heir of the covenant.

Here's the great news. You can get in on this too. Because the blessings of Jesus are immeasurable and infinite, there is no limit to the number of people who can be named an heir. Faith in Jesus makes us children of God. And as Romans 8:17 promises, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

Hallelujah. We are heirs of the covenant!

Notes

4/20/2026 - WEEK 16 DAY 1

Church Growth Despite Persecution: Acts 4:1-4

Devotional By: Dan Henke

The religious leaders at the founding of Christianity were consistent: if you delivered a message they didn't like you would get arrested, usually at night. The arrest of John and Peter was in many ways like the arrest of Jesus. They had been speaking to the people in the temple. They spoke of the Kingdom of God. The religious leaders sent out the temple guard to arrest them. At night.

But there the paths diverge. Jesus was mocked, beaten, given a sham trial and the crowd (incited by the religious leaders) demanded His crucifixion. John and Peter were put in jail but not otherwise mistreated. There was no mob to rile up against them. The times had changed and the winds shifted. Instead of a crowd demanding the crucifixion of John and Peter, the number of believers had grown. Acts 4:4 lists the number as five thousand men, the same as the miracle of feeding the multitude in Mark 6:44. The total number of people was far greater.

Although it was not yet known as Christianity, belief in the resurrection was growing. People heard the message and they believed. Despite the disapproval of the authorities and despite the arrest of leaders like Peter and John, the number of believers and followers grew. The message of Christ's resurrection has resiliency because it is truth. In today's world the message is under attack in Africa, even though there are many places where the ground is fertile. The message continues to grow even in Europe, where many had turned their backs on their faith. It is even growing in China where the authorities arrest those who don't preach the "approved" message.

We don't face the persecution of Peter and John and our brethren around the world. Considering that, what have you done to spread the word of Jesus?

Notes

4/21/2026 - WEEK 16 DAY 2

Peter and John Interrogated: Acts 4:5-12

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

If the Book of Acts were a TV show, I can imagine this episode might look like a scene from Law & Order. Two ordinary, humble men, standing before a serious looking group of well-dressed religious leaders, being sternly questioned. *"Where were you yesterday at 3:00?"* And then, *"By what right and what authority did you perform this action?"* But with God as their defense attorney and the Holy Spirit giving testimony, their verdict is never in question.

The *"rulers, the elders, and the teachers of the law"* became angry that Peter and John were still teaching about Jesus and resurrection of the dead. They thought they had rid themselves of Jesus once and for all when he was crucified. But now his followers were back and proving to be just as problematic. So, they arrested the men and brought them before the council for questioning.

How must Peter and John have been feeling? They were being brought before the same men who had arrested and questioned their Master not long ago. And they were standing in the same place Jesus stood as he was being accused. This group of wealthy and powerful men had a reputation for abusing their position and authority. How could they expect a fair trial? Would they suffer in the same way Jesus did? I wonder if they were recalling Jesus' words to them during the last week of his earthly life. *"They will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name."* (Luke 21:12)

Just as at Pentecost, Peter took his authority, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke boldly to the Council. Recall Jesus' words to his disciples. *"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."* (Luke 12:11-12) This is exactly what was happening for Peter - the Holy Spirit provided him the words he was to speak at just the right time.

How would I hold up under cross-examination for defending my faith? There will be times we need to be bold for the Lord. And, like Peter, we will be given the words we need at just the right time.

"You will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict." (Luke 21:13-15)

Amen and Amen!

Notes

4/22/2026 - WEEK 16 DAY 3

Ordinary People Speaking of Jesus: Acts 4:13-22

Devotional By: Nancy Foust

The first thought that comes to mind after reading these verses was Anne Frank. She lived most of her life in seclusion to protect her religious beliefs. She was found and arrested and lived a miserable life due to the Nazi's. In today's world, I personally could not imagine needing to hide away to protect my belief in Jesus and all the amazing work He does. Would I do so if I needed to? I would like to say absolutely, but would I?

In these verses, we read of Peter and John speaking about Jesus to the people of Jerusalem, causing them to be arrested by the Sanhedrin telling them "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." Peter and John had successfully converted several thousand people to the belief of Jesus' work with the healing of the ill man. They were happy to talk of Jesus and all he could do for each and every one of them. The High Priest and his family did not like the ways of the apostles and were very concerned how his people were accepting their words.

In today's world, being around people that are bothered by "I'll pray for you" or "God bless you" is very difficult for me. Asking for Jesus to guide them is part of my daily life. I had a friend who I couldn't show my faith in anyway. She believed in Christ (she said she did) but to offer any prayers of concern just wasn't something she accepted. Until one day she needed help and prayers and guess what—I was the first person she called for guidance. Her situation wasn't unique, her prayers took a long time to be answered, and it was not the answer she wanted. Therefore, she went back to not wanting any Jesus in her life. Today, she realized what He did for her was the right thing and she is getting better about letting spirituality into her life.

Anne Frank did her best to keep her Jewish beliefs strong and she died for those beliefs along with her family. Peter and John were arrested for their beliefs but after meeting with the Sanhedrin, they asked the high priests, "which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you or to Him? You be the judges." How do you plan to live your life?

Notes

4/23/2026 - WEEK 16 DAY 4

Stretch Our Your Hand: Acts 4:23-31

Devotional By: Lynette Hart

To begin analyzing this passage, we need to look at why Peter and John were arrested and then returned. This is told to us in the previous section. They were arrested for being bold and preaching the Word of Jesus. But the Sanhedrin could not decide how to punish them, for the crowds were praising God for what they were doing.

Peter and John were then released, went back to their own people, and reported what they said. This caused more crowds and praises.

Peter and John continued and asked the Lord what we should also be asking of the Lord to do.

“Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” (Acts 4:30) This verse reminds us that we do have the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to be bold and speak God’s truth. We must be bold as Peter and John were. We will be protected by the Holy Spirit. Our enemies’ plans are known by the Lord before they know them. It is up to us to be brave enough to speak. In these verses, they do not pray a defensive prayer for protection from their enemy. Instead, they pray to be bold, to speak the truth and to show God’s wonders to their enemies.

There are times when I leave a conversation with someone and I think, “I missed my window.” I have an opportunity to share a testimony, ask someone to church, etc. But I don’t. Am I afraid of how I might sound? Am I afraid of their reaction?

So often my prayers ask for protection from things of which I am fearful. Mostly fears of the unknown. This passage reminds me that I need to pray for the power to share the Holy Spirit and the news of Jesus with others boldly! When that opportunity arises, I can be brave with the Holy Spirit guiding me. Be bold and stretch out your hand!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

4/24/2026 - WEEK 16 DAY 5

United in Every Way: Acts 4:32-37

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

When I was a college student, I participated in my church's college-age Sunday School group. We would gather after church on Sunday evenings at one of our homes; and sitting on the floor strumming our guitars, we would join together singing. One of our favorites was "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

*We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord;
And we pray that all unity may one day be
restored,
And they'll know we are Christians by our love...**

I thought about this song when reading the passage for today where Apostle Luke admonishes us to be "one in heart and mind" as we serve the Lord together. The early Jerusalem church expressed their love for each other by their generosity and unity as they voluntarily shared their possessions, so no one was needy in service for the Lord. Theologian C. H. Spurgeon wrote that being "one in heart and mind" (v. 32) was foundational for serving God. He taught that true unity isn't forced but flows from being united in Christ.

In this text, Apostle Luke teaches on the necessity of a Spirit-filled, unified community that acts as a contrast to the world. But how can such unity be achieved in this world and now? After all, the early church was persecuted and out of necessity believers needed to be unified and "be connected." I have a few suggestions to consider:

- PRAY for the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us be unified in Christ
- REPENT of pettiness, grudges, gossip, etc. that grieves the Holy Spirit
- FOCUS on the work that God has called each of us to do
- SHARE with others our love, time, talents, life stories
- STAND beside each other with outstretched, helping hands

As Christians, we should make every effort to love one another and be in the unity of the Spirit. It's not always easy, but it is a testament of how we have been transformed by the Holy Spirit to be one in Him.

Rummaging through my grandmother's prayer books, I found this prayer written by Rev. B. Jenks in 1646. He, too, was praying for the unity of the Church. Part of it reads:

Lord God...make Thy people one. Whatever be our differences, ...may we ever realize that we are all one in Christ Jesus. Let not Satan break the blessed bond of union between believers, but may it be strengthened in our own experience... for the sake of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Notes

4/27/2026 - WEEK 17 DAY 1

Persecuted and Scattered Beyond Jerusalem: Acts 8:1-3

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

I read of Saul's severe persecution of Christ followers and understand that nothing like that is happening here in our community.

What I have seen, however, is changes that scatter worshipers. I have seen how God can make great things happen with changes that scatter us.

In 2002 my family left Fishers UMC to help start The Promise Church just 2 miles down the road. We felt called to stay and help them grow both spiritually and with programs and studies that we learned to facilitate at Fishers UMC. From Fishers UMC we brought Disciple studies, Men's and Women's groups, Intergenerational groups and lots of programs to this new church.

Their target audience was unchurched and de-churched in Fishers. We watched God grow the church but we also saw that church come to a close in 2021. Many of that congregation left the United Methodist Church, but many also came to Fishers UMC.

What we did see, however, was that the congregation did scatter. We saw them take their spiritual growth studies, programs and experiences with them. God used that scattering to help spiritual growth in other congregations and communities. We also saw God use their assets for many other churches.

Most recently our church has gone from three worship services to two. The timing has caused, or allowed, members to explore many other small study groups. I see our congregation alive and excited with new and different opportunities. By the way, my family is so thankful and grateful to be welcomed back into Fishers UMC to worship, study and grow with each of you.

My prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for helping us thrive and discover new insights, new ideas, and new friends. Guide us Lord, that these changes will guide our Spiritual Growth and in turn, glorify your Name. Amen

Notes

4/28/2026 - WEEK 17 DAY 2

Philip's Ministry in Samaria: Acts 8:4-8

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The first seven chapters of the book of Acts are about being witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, the epicenter of the Jewish people and faith. Now, in the eighth chapter of Acts, the ministry moves to Samaria.

This region of Samaria was the "other side of the tracks." It was filled with undesirables, people who were not worthy of the God of Israel. Yet Philip remembered how Jesus treated the woman at the well in Samaria. He showed her respect. He revealed his identity as the Messiah to her. He welcomed her and her fellow residents to the faith.

So, Philip proclaimed Jesus the Messiah to more residents of Samaria. They leaned in. They stood tall. They lifted their hands and hearts in praise.

I wonder, are there people around us that we consider too far from God to have any hope? Maybe somebody in the neighborhood, or at work, or at school is so godless that we can never imagine them as Godly.

What would it take to inspire you to take a risk with those folks? If the Lord showed you that they might be receptive to Jesus, would you be bold enough to share your faith?

Take time right now to ask God how he sees those people. Listen for His response. Ask Him what part He wants you to play.

Maybe, just maybe, you are the Philip to those Samaritans....

Notes

4/29/2026 - WEEK 17 DAY 3

A Sorcerer Becomes a Christ Follower: Acts 8:9-13

Devotional By: Sunni Waterman

Do you believe in magic? What about miracles? What is the difference between the two? Magic tricks can be determined and decided and specifically planned. But a miracle is divinely appointed by God, a surprising and inexplicable event. As we journey through life, we will encounter forces at work. Believers are called to be sharp, and ready to know our Jesus and His true work. If we flip over to Matthew 24:24, it states "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

Where is your heart turned today? Are you praying, tuned in, and listening for Jesus? Philip, in Acts 8, knows Jesus. Philip is proclaiming the good news of Jesus. His focus, his heart, and his life are in tune with Jesus. This world is full of distractions! Have you noticed it? The daily struggle to get it all done, to be everything we think we should be - it is a lot.

Do not let your heart be turned to magic, to false gods, to all of the distractions. Even in the busyness of everyday chaos, listen for the still, soft voice that is true. Jesus, who loves you so deeply. Jesus, whose good news and true miracles are still active and working today. Listen for Jesus who knows you intimately. Watch for him, know him as Philip did, and continue to shine his love in this world that needs Jesus more than ever.

Notes

4/30/2026 - WEEK 17 DAY 4

Peter and John Minister in Samaria: Acts 8:14-17

Devotional By: Susan Pressler

One of the most important lessons of Acts 8:14-17 is that it was one of the first times that Gentiles were baptized and received the Holy Spirit. They were baptized by Philip and later received the Holy Spirit from Peter and John through the laying on of hands. These acts were the beginning of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and Jesus' call to the Disciples to witness to both Jewish and Gentile people. In the Old Testament, Joel prophesied that the Lord would say, "28I will pour out my Spirit on all people...32and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:28, 32). Jesus told his Disciples, "8but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We do not know why the conversions occurred as written in Acts. Why did Peter and John go to Samaria since Philip had already baptized the people? How did Peter and John know the people had not yet received the Holy Spirit? Aren't people baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit at the same time? Why did Peter and John use the laying on of hands to give the Holy Spirit?

One possible reason for this first conversion of Gentiles taking place in Samaria is that Jesus and His Disciples had traveled through it and prepared the way (e.g., "sowed the seeds") for Philip, Peter, and John ("to reap the harvest") (Guzak, Enduring Word; John 4:38). In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus talked with groups of Samaritans "41And because of His words many more became believers" (John 4:41). In fact, they said, "43We know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (John 4:43).

Although the Samaritans were baptized and converted by Philip, it is possible that "God had more to give them" (Guzak, Enduring Word) through Peter and John. The laying on of hands is used in the Bible as a blessing, a prayer, a commission, and a way to receive the Holy Spirit.

Does God want to give you more? Are you listening?

A Simple Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,
-Thank you for sending your son Jesus to save us.
-Help us to be obedient to your Word.
-Help us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
-In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

5/1/2026 - WEEK 17 DAY 5

Jesus AND Simon: Acts 8:18-25

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

I am often astonished at how quickly I judge the "bad guy" in Scripture, even though I know I will inevitably find a piece of him in my own heart. Today, our "bad guy" is Simon.

We know from earlier verses that Simon practiced sorcery and boasted of his feats. Whether his motivation was pride, self-promotion, or both, we can't be certain. What we *do* know is that when Simon sees Philip performing "great signs and miracles," he can't help but want a piece of the action. He offers the apostles money in exchange for the power to do the same.

Before we are too hard on Simon, we should consider his background. It is likely he had previously "bought" his magic tricks that he used to amaze the people of Samaria through money or apprenticeship. He was simply using the old tools he knew. However, we also know that Simon had believed and been baptized—and notably, his first two acts upon being rebuked by Peter were to repent and ask for prayer. Those are two steps in the right direction.

I think Simon genuinely believed, but he fell into the same trap that trips up so many of us today: the "Jesus And" gospel.

The "Jesus And" gospel is a false teaching that adds conditions to salvation. It's "Jesus plus my good behavior," "Jesus plus my political leanings," or "Jesus plus my reputation." It subtly shifts the focus away from the finished work of Christ and back onto ourselves.

Many of us, if we are honest, live like this. We say: "I'll follow Jesus and let Him be a big influence, but I reserve veto power for my personal life."
"I believe the Bible, except for these few socially inconvenient truths that I'll just ignore."

Simon was a man used to the spotlight, and he was envious. He wanted Jesus only if Jesus would amplify *Simon*, rather than the other way around. How many of us prefer the spotlight of our positions—at work, in our social circles, or even in our families—rather than using that influence to point others toward Christ?

I know my hand is going up. How about yours?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

5/4/2026 - WEEK 18 DAY 1

Paul Meets Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth: Acts 18:1-4

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

When Paul left for his missionary journeys, he didn't know exactly where he would go, how long he would stay there, and who he would meet along the way. When he was in Corinth (in modern-day Greece), Paul met a ministry couple named Priscilla and Aquila. Later they would minister together in Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey). This couple had a church that met in their home and were considered co-workers in Christ with Paul. We will learn more about them in the upcoming readings.

Have you every pondered all the people you have met along your own spiritual journey? Take a moment and recall some of these brothers and sisters in Christ, then pause to give thanks for them in prayer. Here are a few categories to get you started.

Evangelistic Influencers - those who invited you to church and introduced you to Christ.

Ministry Partners - other believers who have served alongside you.

Spiritual Mentors - people who helped you grow in the faith.

Eager Learners - folks that you have been a spiritual mentor to.

New Believers - those you have invited to church or introduced to Christ.

Others...

Notes

5/5/2026 - WEEK 18 DAY 2

Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus: Acts 18:18-19

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

Sonny and Cher, Antony and Cleopatra, Taylor and Travis. Some of the most famous couples in history. One of the most famous couples in the Bible is Priscilla and Aquila. Sometimes we focus so much on the apostle Paul in the Book of Acts that we pass right by this very important duo.

Priscilla and Aquila were married and living in Rome. They were among the Jews expelled from the city by Emperor Claudius in 19 AD. After settling in Corinth, they met Paul during his 2nd missionary journey, becoming close friends and partners in ministry. Interestingly, Priscilla's name is always mentioned before Aquila's. That may indicate her more prominent role or higher social status, which was unusual for a woman of the time. Some have indicated that she was the first female preacher or teacher in church history. And there are some who have suggested that Priscilla was the author of the Book of Hebrews, one of the few books written anonymously. Aquila is traditionally listed as one of the Seventy Disciples, early messengers of Jesus mentioned in the Gospel of Luke.

Paul lived with the couple in Corinth for about 18 months, after which they began to travel with him on his journeys. In addition to beginning several house churches in Rome, Corinth and Ephesus, they are probably best known for offering hospitality and instruction to fellow believer Apollos which we will read about in coming days. Together, they travelled throughout the Roman world, sometimes accompanying Paul, as they evangelized and spread the Gospel. We are told they risked their lives for their faith and tradition suggests they were martyred together.

What can we learn from the lives of Priscilla and Aquila? First, the importance of **TEAMWORK**. They are always mentioned together - partners in life and in ministry. They work frequently with Paul to spread Jesus' message. Second, the importance of **HOSPITALITY**. They welcomed Apollos into their home, teaching him about Jesus. Their establishment of house churches shows how valuable hospitality is in bringing people to Christ. Third, the importance of **MENTORING**. They mentored others and brought them to faith in Jesus. This highlights their deep knowledge of Jesus and their ability to teach others about him. And last, the importance of **SERVICE**. In their travels, they were in service for God wherever they went, even risking their lives for the cause showing loyalty and sacrifice.

What ways can you find to **work with others** to spread the Gospel?

How can you show **hospitality** to those you meet?

To whom can you be a Christian **mentor**?

When can you be in **service** for the Kingdom?

Notes

5/6/2026 - WEEK 18 DAY 3

Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk: Acts 18:20-23

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

Our family took a 2-week family vacation camping trip across the USA every summer. My mother was a schoolteacher, so she was off every summer. My Dad's factory would shut down for 2 weeks in the summer. Mom packed the camper and off we would go! Our church gave attendance pins every year. To receive one when we went to church on vacation we had to bring back the bulletin to show proof we had attended elsewhere. We visited many churches. Paul too visited many churches on his third missionary journey. He was based out of Ephesus. Paul visited more than just the churches he had already founded. His primary focus was aimed at strengthening existing congregations and planting new ones.

How does one strengthen believers in Christ? You walk the walk and talk the talk. What does that mean? Let me explain. To walk the walk, you cultivate your spiritual disciplines by studying the scriptures, prayer, and meditating on God's word. Live out your faith by obeying His teachings, focusing on repentance, serving others, and walking humbly. Build a supportive environment by engaging with community, curate your content and share your story.

God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you where you are. Spiritual growth is living more like Jesus. Many Christians believe that spiritual growth is mostly learning more information. The truth is that spiritual growth is not just knowing more about Jesus. Spiritual growth is not just doing more for Jesus. Spiritual growth is living more like Jesus. God wants you to look and act like Jesus. 1 John 2:6 says, "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." That is God's goal for you. Is that your goal?

Notes

5/7/2026 - WEEK 18 DAY 4

Gentle Correction: Acts 18:24-26

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

Our reading today marks the beginning of Christianity's entry into Ephesus—the same city and church that would later receive Paul's famous letter, the Book of Ephesians.

Paul arrived in Ephesus with his friends, Priscilla and Aquila. Soon after, they encountered a fascinating man named Apollos. The Bible describes him as eloquent and "mighty in the Scriptures" (v. 25 KJV).

Based on his name, we can deduce that Apollos was named after the Greek god Apollo and was likely raised in a Greek cultural environment. Despite this background, he had encountered the message of Jesus and became a believer. He began preaching with great passion, but there was one problem: he didn't know the full story.

As Aquila and Priscilla listened to him, they realized his message was incomplete. Pastor J.D. Greear humorously likens this to hearing a Muslim convert to Christianity preach that, "Jesus is the Son of God and He's coming back one day in a sleigh with eight tiny reindeer!"

Imagine if you heard your children or grandchildren say that? You wouldn't mock them, but you certainly would correct them!

That is precisely what Aquila and Priscilla did. They didn't embarrass Apollos publicly; instead, they invited him into their home and explained "the way of God to him more accurately" (v. 26).

The results were spectacular. Because of their investment, Apollos' ministry flourished. He became a pillar of the early church, mentioned in Acts, 1 Corinthians, and Titus. You may recognize him from Paul's famous reminder to keep God at the center of your ministry when he states that, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." (1 Corinthians 3:6)

It is telling that Aquila and Priscilla were gentle enough to welcome Apollos into their home, yet faithful enough to ensure the Gospel wasn't misrepresented. Neither Aquila nor Priscilla were "famous" preachers, and neither wrote a book of the Bible. However, they used their hearth and home to magnify the name of Jesus. They saw a gap in someone's understanding and filled it with love and truth.

Today, consider: Who are you investing in to "water the seeds" of their faith? Could a similar "gentle correction" guide them to see Jesus more clearly?

Notes

BE CONNECTED

5/8/2026 - WEEK 18 DAY 5

Apostles from Ephesus: Acts 18:27-28

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

I couldn't read this passage and not also think of our Multiplication focus at Fishers UMC.

The Disciples helped and encouraged believers - They helped grow and clarify the Scriptures, the Word of God, and the outreach of Christianity.

Our Multiplication direction is exactly doing that. From our visits, teaching, preaching and tutoring in Africa, to our intergenerational mission trips, our NEXT group's local focus and our small study group's local focus, we are doing exactly that: helping people to grow in the ministry and the lessons of Jesus Christ. We are disciples of Christ. We are following the encouragement of Apollos to both his brothers and sisters then, and our brothers and sisters now.

I love that I see our church accept the challenge to magnify the Word of God. I love seeing the excitement of our adult groups and youth groups reaching out to make a difference in both God's local community and God's world. I love that God is using Fishers United Methodist Church as an instrument to spread His Word and grow his truth throughout the world.

Thank you, Lord, for helping us become more passionate in showing and sharing your love. Give us discernment, in our daily lives, so that we can help bring those around us closer to you. Help us Lord, that we can continue to use our Multiplication assets to spread your Word. Thank you, Lord, for the tools you are putting at our disposal. We pray that we can use them to your glory, most Holy God. Amen

Notes

5/11/2026 - WEEK 19 DAY 1

Baptism in the Name of Jesus: Acts 19:1-7

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

For centuries, people believed the earth was the center of the universe. This has since been disproven. But people faithfully believed it was true when they didn't have all the facts. In our passage for today, Paul encounters a similar situation.

Arriving in Ephesus, he met a group of disciples and inquired whether they had received the Spirit when they believed. He was met with an unexpected answer. They said they had "***not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.***" Paul had assumed that one always received the Holy Spirit when they first believed. But news did not travel as fast in the first century as it does today. These believers in Ephesus had not heard about what happened at Pentecost and how the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon many.

When Paul asked about their baptism, he learned that they had only received John's baptism. They had only heard the message John the Baptist taught and hadn't heard about the Holy Spirit. They didn't have all the facts. Some who followed John mistakenly believed that he was the Christ, even though John never professed this. As Paul explained to them, the baptism they received from John was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin and preparation for one yet to come.

(John) went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins....."I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Luke 3:3,16)

All they knew was they had been forgiven of their sins and were to await the Messiah. They had not heard about Jesus, his crucifixion, that he had risen from the dead and ascended to his Father. They didn't have all the facts. Paul taught them Jesus' message about love, redemption and eternal life. After they learned this truth, Paul was able to lay hands upon them as he baptized them in the name of Jesus - a sign of new life in Christ - which then allowed them to receive the Holy Spirit. They spoke in tongues and prophesied just as the Twelve did at Pentecost.

Baptism is a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ and signifies acceptance into the family of God. If you have not been formally baptized, consider making your declaration before God that you love, believe in and pledge to follow Jesus.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Notes

5/12/2026 - WEEK 19 DAY 2

The Gospel for Jews and Gentiles Alike: Acts 19:8-10

Devotional By: Dave Rizk

Before dinner tonight, our son came to us overwhelmed and tearful, struggling with his math homework. As a father, my first instinct was to hug him and say, "Don't worry about it. We don't have to do this right now." Like many parents, I wanted to take away the pressure and protect him from feeling upset. But Emily, his mother, had another take on the situation; she encouraged him to try a new approach, believing that working through the challenge would teach him something more profound than just getting the correct answer. She wanted him to learn resilience.

That experience reminds me of a pattern we see in Scripture. God does not leave us alone in hard times, and He does not give us more than we can handle. Instead, He uses challenges to help us grow, building our endurance, wisdom, and faith as we persevere.

We see this clearly in Paul's ministry. For three months, he spoke boldly and shared the Gospel without holding back. He did not avoid tough conversations or change his message to please others. Paul trusted God instead of worrying about what people thought. When resistance grew and the synagogue closed its doors, he did not give up. He improvised by moving his teaching to a school hall, which was used in the morning for philosophy teaching, and continued sharing the gospel there after hours.

What looked like rejection led to growth. The gospel spread throughout the whole province of Asia. One closed door did not stop God's work; it simply changed its direction. God was not limited by place, opposition, or situation, and He still isn't.

Call to Action

Let's learn from Paul and trust God even when things are hard, especially when we are doing God's work and sharing the gospel. When you face resistance, try not to pull back or lose faith.

Notes

5/13/2026 - WEEK 19 DAY 3

The Power of the Kingdom of God: Acts 19:11-12

Devotional By: Nancy Foust

After reading these verses “so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them,” I wanted to write a letter to God to thank Him for all the unusual ways He gifts us with items in our life. We don’t realize this until later when He has helped us live our spiritual life.

Dear God, Over the years, I have seen many different manners of help, comfort and love coming from You through many different people, at many stages of my life. Going back to baptisms, the clothes and bibs you place on me and then were passed through my family to be placed on each tiny baby, gave us all hope to be raised in a God loving family and society. I am definitely living my life that way, Thank you.

Over the years the rosaries and Bibles and religious instruction that I received enhanced my love of Jesus and all his works. Thank you for those memories. My sixteen years of education were all Catholic based and taught me to be respectful and kind in all circumstances. Once again God, thank you for filling my life.

There have been several times in my life that I have gifted someone in need, food, clothes, blankets, a visit, and a prayer that has in some way made them comforted. Thank you for those opportunities.

As I have become an adult and began to study the Bible, I have learned so very much that strengthens my beliefs in all that You can do for me. Thank you for that guidance.

I don’t believe there is a day in my life that I am not thankful that you, God, are in my life.

In your precious name, My heavenly Father,
Amen.

Take a moment today and Thank Him for just one item.

Notes

5/14/2026 - WEEK 19 DAY 4

Invoking Jesus' Name without Knowing Him: Acts 19:13-16

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Ephesus was a tough place to take the Gospel of Christ. Everywhere you looked there were shrines to Roman emperors and monuments to Greek gods and goddesses. By the time of today's reading, Paul had been in the city three years preaching, teaching, baptizing, laying on hands, imparting the Holy Spirit, healing and more.

The problem behind today's passage is something scholars call syncretism. It is an attempt to merge different religions by drawing on their otherwise conflicting elements. A little Jesus. A little Artemis. A little Christianity. A little magical arts.

These seven sons of Sceva should have known better. Their dad was a Jewish chief priest. They would have known the first two commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me" and "You shall not make for yourself an image... you shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Exodus 20:3-5).

The challenge is that Ephesus was filled with other gods and graven images and wayward worship. So, these brothers paid a heavy price for swirling together a smoothie made up of Christian truth and pagan falsehood.

Sadly, syncretism hasn't left us. Still today we attempt to merge different religions by drawing on their otherwise conflicting elements. A little Jesus. A little karma. A little Christianity. A little yoga. A little Bible. A little anything else.

Be warned about the foolishness of swirling together a smoothie made up of Christian truth and pagan falsehood. You wouldn't want to get caught running around naked and bleeding!

Notes

5/15/2026 - WEEK 19 DAY 5

Openly and Publicly Proclaiming Jesus: Acts 19:17-22

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

What a beautiful phrase: “the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.”

There is perhaps nothing more important that we can do with our lives. Holding Jesus’ name in high honor is much greater than success, health, longevity, and all the pursuits of happiness. We are called to make His name great!

When this happened in Ephesus, lives were changed. People became believers. People confessed their sins. People burned their paganism, literally. These sorcery scrolls were worth fifty thousand days wages. That’s one hundred thirty seven years’ worth of salary. All up in smoke, rising as an incense to God in heaven. And beyond that, they lost their source of income, since they were practitioners of sorcery.

No more syncretism for those new believers. No merging the demands of Christ with the allures of culture. They were all in. Financially broke, but spiritually rich.

What would cause someone to do that? Put yourself in their sandals. How might Jesus so confront your life that you would publicly declare your faith, confess your sins, and sever your binds to godlessness?

Hold on. It gets even better. When these Ephesian sorcerers did this, verse 20 says, “In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” Can you imagine a change so dramatic in the lives of you and others, that the result is a rapid growth in numbers and power for Christianity!

Here’s the kicker. Do you have any scrolls that need burned? Any habits that need destroyed? Any practices that need eliminated? Any objects that need trashed? Any binds that need severed?

What are you going to do about it?

Notes

5/18/2026 - WEEK 20 DAY 1

Jesus and the Bottom Line: Acts 19:23-27

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

According to Greek mythology, Artemis was a multi-breasted goddess of fertility. The city of Ephesus housed the massive Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. People came from all over to worship this goddess, and to hopefully enhance their own fertility with children and crops. Silversmiths made a fortune selling small replicas of Artemis to tourists.

For three years, Paul confronted this false religion, convincing them that hand-made gods are no gods at all. The silversmiths, craftsmen, shopkeepers, innkeepers, and others who got rich from this sham saw their profits evaporating like a puddle on a hot summer day.

Jesus has a way of affecting our bottom line. He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). He followed that up with, "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Matthew 16:26). The bottom line is that Jesus is the bottom line.

This man named Demetrius was correct. The name of Jesus was threatening their "good income... good name... and great goddess Artemis." As Christ Himself had said, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24).

How is Jesus affecting the bottom line of your life? Are there any non-negotiables that you are clutching onto, keeping them from the reach of Christ? What aspects of your reputation, relationships and resources are more important to you than Jesus? Put it another way. What would really rock your world if Christ called you to surrender it to His Lordship?

Notes

5/19/2026 - WEEK 20 DAY 2

Riots: Acts 19:28-31

Devotional By: Lisa Ellcessor

Riots! Nothing new in the world! Today's scripture puts Paul venturing into a religious cultural coup, a threat to the goddess Artemis.

Rage: Paul and friends are caught in an aggressive, passionate Ephesus situation of violent anger. The rich silversmith, Demetrius, is filled with fear about the idol Artemis being discredited and his business income from knickknack statues is in danger. No one is going to lead his investors astray. He convinces others to join in a fury. This is war!

Intensity: Soon the whole city is in an uproar. Demetrius even pitches the idea that all of Asia will be affected!

Outbursts: The people are collectively shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Their goddess Artemis and her fertile image from Heaven are being questioned. Outrageous.

Tribal: The scripture says, the crowd became furious and began shouting and "rushing as one man." When I took Sociology at Purdue, a professor explained crowd behavior as a group of people who form a loyalty to a strong belief or culture led by firm leadership. He shared how crowd behavior escalates in tension when a belief system is provoked. Each person of the tribe loses self-identity to take on the behavior of the crowd. The professor gave advice about riots, "If ever caught in a riot, you should look into the crowd and start calling out common names" such as John or Katie. This triggers in the human brain an "I am seen" reaction. The people in the riot become conscious of their individuality instead of being part of the anonymous crowd.

Sacred: Obviously, worshipping a stone man-made statue of Artemis is foreign to us, but it was common in the culture of Ephesus. Mark and I visited Ephesus in 2024, and it was filled with statues, trinkets for sale, tour guides teaching and even a shrine to the great Artemis. The oddity about this sacred goddess is that she was in a dark cave-like area with bars that looked like she was in jail. The most sacred idol was barred in the dark. How ironic. Her body was chipped and looked like a tombstone!

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord, today I learn about a specific idol that was fought over and worshipped as a god to replace You. I see how people lost their dignity to defend a sacred myth. I am saddened to see this behavior. As I apply this scripture to my life, I wonder what sacred idols are fertile in my life. What false gods would cause me to riot? Give me wisdom to cast away images, successes, money or independence that prevent me from glorifying You.

Notes

5/20/2026 - WEEK 20 DAY 3
Two Hours of Frenzy: Acts 19:32-34

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

I find myself reading posts on social media and often becoming emotionally caught up in the arguments and back-and-forth trading of opinions on a variety of topics - typically of a political or religious nature. People jump on an individual for a statement they made and then these quarrels turn bitter leading to lies and insults being thrown into the "conversation." Some then enter the dispute not even knowing what started the entire episode. It's all I can do to keep myself from jumping into the middle of it all with a comment or two. Back and forth, back and forth. Getting absolutely nowhere. I wonder whether this might be our 21st century version of the confusion and frenzy experienced in Ephesus that we read about today.

The theater in Ephesus was a natural place for people to gather for official meetings. It's estimated that it could hold more than 25,000 people. But this gathering was anything but official. It was spontaneous, informal and uncontrolled, leading to a confusing and chaotic situation. This chaos originated with Demetrius, a silversmith whose business producing shrines of the goddess Artemis was being threatened by Paul who was preaching that these were false gods and unnecessary. If people were to believe Paul and fail to purchase his idols, Demetrius' profit would plummet. This was truly all about money. By claiming that Paul's actions were dishonoring their goddess, Demetrius was able to provoke the people and mob mentality set in. Confusion and violent actions can be contagious. So, a two-hour shouting match took place. The people didn't care about a Jewish Messiah when their precious Artemis was being disgraced.

What can we learn today from this "frenzy" in Ephesus? Before we are tempted to get involved in an unproductive argument or try to insert our opinion into a conversation (which is usually futile anyway), maybe we should be asking ourselves some questions.

- Do I actually know what started the exchange in the first place or am I just hearing the end of the conversation?
- Am I responding to facts of a situation or am I getting emotionally excited by the energy of the argument?
- Am I making assumptions about people because of how I might label them or am I actually listening to their words?
- What "Artemis" am I defending without really gathering all the facts or understanding the debate?
- And maybe most importantly, if Jesus were reading or listening to my comments, would he see his own character in me or would he weep over my actions?

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. (James 1:19-20)

Notes

5/21/2026 - WEEK 20 DAY 4

Cooler Minds Prevail: Acts 19:35-41

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

The Pax Romana. The peace of Rome. During this period of law and order, the Roman Empire demanded peace throughout its vast provinces. Ephesus was in one of those provinces. The city clerk understood what was at stake. If this riotous frenzy continued, the emperor himself might punish the leaders and residents of Ephesus. So he calmly dismissed the crowd. They went home to lick their wounds and seethe in silence.

The peace of Christ. This is a different kind of peace. The peace of Rome was demanded from the outside. The peace of Christ emerges from within. Colossians 3:15 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." Paul was writing this to people who were being persecuted for their faith.

To another group of persecuted believers, Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). This transcendent peace only comes from one place.

Jesus told us that He is the source of that peace, when He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). There it is. The peace of Christ.

The peace of Rome is one that must be maintained to keep from being troubled.

The peace of Christ is one that comes from within because one is troubled.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Notes

5/22/2026 - WEEK 20 DAY 5
Pulling an All-Nighter: Acts 20:1-15

Devotional By: Dan Henke

Pulling an all-nighter was not uncommon for me as a college student. It came from a mixture of procrastination and a feeling that I worked best under the pressure of a time constraint. OK, that's not entirely true. It was just procrastination. Most of my papers were the result of putting down the cards at the euchre table around 11:30 p.m. and heading off with my typewriter to crank out ten pages and hand it in that morning. I wouldn't advise doing that today, but somehow it worked for me.

In this passage we see Paul conducting something of a cram session. It was common for Paul to spend months or even years teaching the Gospel in the communities throughout his journeys. He had just concluded three years teaching in Ephesus. He was headed to Greece where he would live in various cities, including Thessalonica and Corinth. He founded churches and sent them letters after he departed. Not so with Troas, a small city in what is today northwest Asia Minor. Paul only spent a week in Troas. It appears he had only had one night to preach the Gospel as he intended to continue his journey the next day. With only one night to work with, he kept on talking until midnight. My first impression is that it's a really long class session.

One night was not enough for Paul to impart the full breadth and depth of his teaching. His missionary work is documented in fifteen of the twenty-eight chapters of Acts. He wrote thirteen of the twenty-two letters found in the New Testament. Seminaries teach semester-long classes on some of these letters. Paul's letter to the Romans contains his painstakingly logical construction and proof of Jesus' life, His message and the meaning of His resurrection and our salvation. Paul's message is not the sort of thing you can cram into one night. But that was all Paul had for the believers in Troas, and he gave it his best.

Pulling an all-nighter doesn't work for everyone. Apparently it did not work so well for Eutychus. I know what it's like to fall asleep in a long and boring class, but I never fell out of a window. Fortunately Paul was able to save him. The point is that the depth of Christianity is not conducive to being consumed from a fire hose. It is a life-long journey of learning and reflection.

We don't have to cram for our final exam. Take your time to reflect on what Jesus' resurrection and our salvation means to your life.

Notes

5/25/2026 - WEEK 21 DAY 1

Recalling the Blessings & Burdens of Ministry: Acts 20:16-21

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

At this point, Paul was ending his third, and what would be his final, missionary journey. He wanted to say goodbye to Ephesus, but he didn't want to get bogged down doing it. So, he had the leaders of the Ephesian church come to him.

You can almost hear Paul's voice as he recalled the blessings and burdens of his ministry in Ephesus. The name of Jesus was exalted. People got saved. People got mad. Folks were baptized. Others were hardened. Demons were exorcised. False prophets tried their own version of magical exorcism. Sorcerers burned demonic scrolls because of Christ. Shopkeepers instigated a riot against followers of Christ. The church continued. So did false religions.

There is nothing about following Jesus that guarantees unimpeded pebble-less pathways. Sometimes we succeed. Other times we fail. At all times we are called to obedience, regardless of outcomes.

In reiterating his story through tears, Paul was encouraging the elders of the Ephesian church. When this meeting was over, they would be returning to a city which still had shrines to Roman emperors and monuments to Greek gods and goddesses. Ephesus still boasted the temple of Artemis, one and a half times larger than a modern professional football field. And silversmiths still fleeced tourists with mini statues of the goddess that promised fertility for their family and crops.

We need to hear this story. Often, we think that things are really tough. We point to modern politics, social skirmishes, philosophical differences, and religious challenges. We worry and wonder whether it makes a difference to be a Christian in such a secular society. But we are not the first. Nor will we be the last. Christ calls us to steadfast faithfulness, not guaranteed success.

Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." That's not a bad formula for faithfulness. From the living room to the public square, we are called to proclaim Christ. Indeed, at all times we are called to obedience, regardless of outcomes.

Notes

5/26/2026 - WEEK 21 DAY 2

Completing the Task: Acts 20:22-24

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

Have you ever been compelled by the Holy Spirit? I have. Sometimes it is sending a text to check on a friend, or it is taking a meal for a family. Sometimes it is going to sit with a friend to pray with them. And sometimes it is going on mission trips. There have been many times when I have been “compelled” by the Holy Spirit. I must say I have not gotten out of comfort zone enough compared to Paul.

In our scripture today, it says Paul was “bound by the Holy Spirit.” God had a vise grip on his soul, confirming his purpose and urging him in a particular direction. Paul was being called to Jerusalem where it was not physically safe for him. It was not going to be comfortable or easy. This was a place of hardship. He was reminded in city after city “that jail and suffering lie ahead.” Why would Paul put himself in harm’s way? He was rooted in Jesus Christ. The scripture tells us, “But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by Lord Jesus.” Paul was faithful to God’s calling on his life.

The Holy Spirit can also help you finish well. It is much easier to finish well when you allow yourself to be bound by the Holy Spirit. If you live compelled by the Holy Spirit, you will make it to the finish line and hear those famous words, “Well done, good faithful servant!”

Prayer: God, do whatever you want to do with my life. Send me wherever you want to send me. Use me however you want to use me. But please don’t allow me to be anchored down. I want to be available when you call me. Amen

Notes

BE CONNECTED

5/27/2026 - WEEK 21 DAY 3

Keep Watch: Acts 20:25-31

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In a matter of weeks, I will finish my fortieth year of ministry, and my sixth year as pastor of Fishers UMC. Sometimes I wonder where all the years have gone. As I reflect on four decades of ministry, I am grateful for all the people I have had the privilege of encouraging in ministry and leadership.

More than initiatives and projects, new ministries and new churches, capital campaigns and spiritual campaigns, I am most thankful for the people I have disciplined and mentored along the way.

Some were teens who became church leaders, pastors and missionaries.

Some were pastors who desired to grow in their leadership and ministry.

Some were church members, who longed to learn how to disciple others.

Some are still in development today and into the future.

I hear this sentiment in Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders. He was grateful that he had the opportunity to mentor them to go home and lead when there are challenges outside and inside the church. He reminded them that they are called to faithful obedience, even when people walked away from the church.

I must admit that not everybody I have spent time with in the past forty years became a success story.

Some were teens who abandoned the faith as a young adult.

Some were pastors who walked away from the pulpit when times got tough.

Some were church members who became leaders and later stopped going to church altogether.

In our lives as servants of Christ, we are called to this life of faithful obedience. This is true whether the results are what we had hoped for or not. Praise God for the blessings of doing what He called me to do!

Notes

5/28/2026 - WEEK 21 DAY 4

More Blessed to Give than to Receive: Acts 20:32-35

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

In today's verses, Paul is preparing to leave the church in Ephesus and is speaking to them for the final time. He reminds them of the value of not seeking earthly wealth but rather treasures in heaven. Paul also mentors them on Jesus's edict on the importance of giving rather than receiving.

The Bible makes numerous references to sacrificial giving. Some favorites of mine include:

- Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).
- But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on (Mark 12:42-44).
- For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8)
- Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17).

As a kid, I always looked forward to the "present" holidays, namely Christmas and birthdays. Making lists, dropping hints, making sure my parents saw strategically placed ads or catalogs. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. As an adult, my feelings have totally reversed. Now I look forward to the same two holidays because of the opportunities to make a loved one's day through a thoughtful gift. At this stage of my life, the joy of giving outweighs the joy of receiving.

Every gift has a giver and a receiver. God is the giver of the ultimate gift. He has offered each of us the gift of salvation through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. All we must do to receive the gift is to accept it. When a person becomes a new believer, God experiences joy. Luke 15:7 tells us that, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Have you accepted God's ultimate gift through his son, Jesus Christ? Are you sharing his gift with others?

Notes

5/29/2026 - WEEK 21 DAY 5

Final Farewell: Acts 20:36-38

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Final farewells can be hard. I remember the last time I talked to my dad, and nine months later my mom, when they were at death's door. Indeed, at my mom's funeral, all six of us siblings were together. We live in Oregon, California, Arizona, Ohio and Indiana (I'm the only remaining Hoosier). On the way to the cemetery, I had the thought that we may never all be together again. It was a sobering thought.

But a few months ago, Lisa and I flew to California to visit our daughter and her husband. They live between San Francisco and San Jose. While we were out west, we took a road trip to see my siblings and their spouses from California and Oregon. What a blessing.

In Paul's case, he was certain he would never see the Ephesian elders again. He was headed to Jerusalem, where he would be arrested and taken to Rome to be imprisoned and eventually executed. This was indeed a final farewell.

But I don't sense any regret in this departure. Paul had preached the Gospel, led people to Christ, and raised up leaders. He had finished his work in Ephesus. It would be up to others to carry it forward.

Later he would write a letter to them, now known as the book of Ephesians. He followed that up with two letters to their pastor, his protégé Timothy. In the sixteen chapters of these three letters, we see Paul's heart for the believers in Ephesus. Though they would never again be together face-to-face, he would never stop loving and praying for them.

That's a pretty good way to live. Sometimes a fork in the road causes a personal relationship to become a long-distance one. But that doesn't mean it is a severed one.

Is there somebody in your life you have lost touch with? Maybe you could text or call or, dare I say, write them a letter!

Notes

6/1/2026 - WEEK 22 DAY 1

Lavished in God's Grace: Ephesians 1:1-10

Devotional By: Susan Pressler

Ephesians is a short book in the Bible with only six chapters. It is a powerful book in which the main doctrines of Christianity are given by Paul (Guzak; Spurgeon). Paul wrote Ephesians probably around AD 60-62 while imprisoned in Rome (Bible.ref). Even in prison, Paul remained faithful to God and resolute in spreading the word of God and Jesus Christ to all people, Jews and Gentiles, across the world.

In Ephesians 1:1-2, Paul greets the people of Ephesus, bringing them grace and peace from God and Jesus. He then describes the lavish praise that God has given them and us through spiritual blessings in Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). God chose us to be His people before He created the world (Ephesians 1:4). God adopted us to "sonship" because He loves us so much (Ephesians 1:5). God gives us redemption through Jesus' blood and forgives our sins if we choose to receive Jesus (Ephesians 1:6-8). God promises to bring unity to us in heaven and earth (Ephesians 1:10).

How can we be more holy and honor the amazing spiritual blessings God has given us? One way is to remember the Great Commission, in which Jesus said, "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The thought of God's magnificent blessings brings to mind wonderful old hymns - "Come Thou Font of Every Blessing," "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," and "Blessed Assurance." And of course, the sweet song that many of us learned as children, "Count Your Blessings" (Johnson Oatman, 1897):

"Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done."

Notes

6/2/2026 - WEEK 22 DAY 2

Sealed by the Holy Spirit: Ephesians 1:11-14

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

Receiving a package in the mail, whether a gift or an Amazon order we made, is always delightful. It's fun opening the box and unwrapping its contents and then holding the gift or order we made. It's real. We can hold it in our hands. Receiving the seal of the Holy Spirit is similar: like the seal on a package, when we receive God into our hearts, He seals us, showing we belong to Him and guaranteeing our safe delivery to Heaven for eternity. Just like the seal on our package, our heavenly address is official; it is written down in The Lamb's Book of Life.

In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul writes that believers are "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory."

This seal marks us as God's own; our salvation is divinely official, secure, and unchangeable. Also, God's sealing us with His Spirit shows that we are set apart and protected from the "wiles of the devil" and other worldly spirits. Our future destination is guaranteed for God's kingdom. Other verses teach about being sealed by the Holy Spirit: "And who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (2 Corinthians 1:22). "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

Before I married my wonderful musician husband, Greg, I taught at Maranatha Baptist University. During chapel and all other services, we joyfully sang Dr. Thelma Cedarholm's song "To the Praise of His glory." The whole song admonishes us to live to the praise of God's glory. In the fourth stanza, she wrote:

Word of Truth, everlasting salvation have we,
God the Father through His Son
Provided full and free,
And, sealed by the Spirit, His promise that we
TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY,
His own shall ever be.

The Holy Spirit is our mark and guarantees that we belong to God. Because of the Holy Spirit's working in and through us, we should live confidently and joyfully, knowing that our eternal life in Heaven has been sealed, guaranteed, and soon to be delivered. One of the greatest blessings of being a Christian is knowing that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and nothing, absolutely nothing, can break this seal. Hallelujah!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

6/3/2026 - WEEK 22 DAY 3

To Know Him Better: Ephesians 1:15-23

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

I love this Scripture - I know God is excited for the spiritual growth of each of us at Fishers United Methodist Church. God sees us growing through the studies and scripture that we are charged to read each weekday in our "Be Connected" series. We cover our scripture readings and devotions with our Sunday sermons that are tied to the same scriptures. Our small group discussions also cover these same Scriptures. I love how God is growing our understanding of His Word. The studies are simple, but they do deepen our understanding of the Scriptures. When we pray for God to bless us with discernment, I see God giving us a better understanding of His Word. When we talk and share together, we learn expanded ideas and possibly different understandings or perceptions.

God is giving us wisdom through study and sharing His Word. God must be pleased that we are taking the time to be in His Word. He must love that we are growing in the wisdom that he passes on to us. He is opening our eyes to see and our ears to hear the wisdom of His Word.

I know that He glories in our hope of His inheritance. I know He is pleased when we understand His power over death. He proved it to us when He brought Christ back from death after three days in the tomb. It's the same power He holds over death to sin when He welcomes us into His eternal kingdom. It grows my understanding of the true eternity that we can opt to spend with Him. I pray that each of us can accept and welcome the choice to believe in Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of man.

I pray, Heavenly Father, that You guide us in our reading, understanding and discernment when we spend time in Your Word. Guide our seeing and hearing of Your wisdom. Amen

Notes

6/4/2026 - WEEK 22 DAY 4
Saved by Grace: Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

Ephesians 2:8-9 is one of the most clear statements of salvation that we have in scripture. We have been saved through our faith by the grace of God. It describes the change that occurs in our lives when we acknowledge our belief in Jesus Christ. And it was one of John Wesley's favorite verses.

Grace is a hard concept for me to get my head around. We may have learned about grace in Sunday School by saying God's Riches At Christ's Expense. But is it that simple? The United Methodist Book of Discipline defines it this way. *"By Grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit."* (UMBOD, P102) Undeserved. Unmerited. It's just that we're not used to receiving something with absolutely no strings attached. That's not how life works. **But with God**, life is different. God's grace is free and unconditional.

And it originates with God. It's God's initiative, God's action. We have been saved by grace, but it's through faith in Jesus Christ. Through this faith, we receive unmerited grace and the gift of eternal life. And it's undeserved. We're not perfect and we fail daily. We're told that *"There is no one righteous, not even one"* (Romans 3:10) and *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). **But God** offers us grace anyway.

Then Paul brings this idea of works into the conversation. He repeats the idea that works will not save us. Faith PLUS works will not save us. It's only by grace that we are saved. No check list or scoreboard. If we were to add works as a means of gaining God's grace, salvation is no longer granted by grace. And the death of Jesus was unnecessary. *"And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace"* (Romans 11:6). **But God** offers us grace and salvation and any works we do are a response to this grace, not a prerequisite.

I stray from God's path daily and I know I don't deserve this gift of grace, **But God**.....

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.....But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

Notes

6/5/2026 - WEEK 22 DAY 5

Without Hope and Without God: Ephesians 2:11-13

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

The contrast couldn't be clearer. Before becoming a Christian, we are:

Gentiles (not one of God's people), the uncircumcised (outside of God's covenant), separate from Christ (apart from God's anointed Messiah), excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, without God in the world, and far away from God.

But Jesus changes our identity and status. Because of Him we are declared to be one of God's people, inside God's covenant, attached to God's anointed Messiah, included in citizenship in spiritual Israel, residents of the kingdom expressed through the covenants of the promises of God, filled with hope, walking with God in the world, and ever so close to God Himself. What a contrast!

Jesus takes us from being a spiritual nobody to being a royal child of the King of Kings. Hallelujah!

When my dad died a few years ago, my brother Tim said something that will always stick with me. Tim is the son of my mom and her first husband. Dave and I are sons of my mom and her second husband, who also raised Tim. When we were talking about Dad's legacy, Tim said to me, "Dad had to love you and Dave, but he chose to love me."

It's true. Growing up I couldn't tell the difference between how Dad treated any of us boys. This held true through his entire 95 years on earth.

That's the way it is for God. Perhaps it is fair to say that God had to love Jesus His Son, but he chose to love us. He adopted us into His family. He made us His own family. He called us His sons and daughters.

Think about your life in Christ. Name the blessings. Consider the opposite. That's where you would be without Jesus. But with Him, everything is different. Why? Because "you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Notes

6/8/2026 - WEEK 23 DAY 1

Access to the Father: Ephesians 2:14-18

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

Every Thanksgiving, I like to run a 5k race with members of my family. Through the years, I think I've participated with at least 21 different family members in a race on Thanksgiving Day at five different locations. While it is safe to say I've never finished near the front, we always have a good time. In a normal 5k race, everyone starts with the gun and quickly spreads out, with the fastest leading the way and finishing first.

A few years ago, I read about a 5k race in Colorado called the Tortoise and Hare 5k that differs from a typical running event. Prior to the start, everyone is given a time handicap based on age, weight, height, and gender. The slowest projected finisher starts before everyone else. All runners are released after the first based on the time handicap they have been preassigned. The tortoises lead the way while the hares chase to catch up. Sometimes a tortoise hangs on to win, and sometimes a hare passes at the end to earn the victory. Either way, the finish is always thrilling as both tortoises and hares have a chance to win the race. This type of ending reminds me of Paul's wisdom in Acts 20:24. He shared, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

Today's scripture passage parallels the Tortoise and Hare 5k in the sense that everyone has been given the chance to "win" the race. Prior to Jesus's arrival, the Jews were God's chosen people, and others needed not apply. After Jesus, the game changed. Paul is telling the Ephesians that Jew and Gentile heritage no longer matter. Jesus's sacrifice, and our belief in it and subsequent following of Him, has removed our barrier to God. Paul reiterates this message in other epistles. In Colossians 3:11, Paul says, "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all." Everyone can now share in a united fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit perpetuated by the blood of Jesus Christ.

How is your race with Jesus going? Are you trying to run a traditional race and "earn" your way to God through works and deeds? Maybe it's time to enter God's Tortoise and Hare Race by surrendering your life to Jesus and finishing together with all the race entrants who have made the same choice.

Notes

6/9/2026 - WEEK 23 DAY 2

The Household of God: Ephesians 2:19-22

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

Today's passage is the culmination of several verses that have come before.

Last Friday's devotional looked at verses 11-13, and Pastor Mark showed us how we were once separated from God—not by our own choice, but by the circumstances of our birth. We were "outsiders" to the covenant, marked by physical rituals like circumcision that were merely, "done in the body by human hands." (vs.11). But everything changed with Jesus. Through His sacrifice, those who were once far off have been brought near by His blood.

Then, verses 14-18 expanded on this "new reality." They showed us how Jesus didn't just bridge the gap; He physically destroyed the "dividing wall of hostility" (vs.14) that stood between Jew and Gentile. God's goal was to create one new humanity out of the two, giving us all equal access to the Father through one Spirit.

Today, we finally see God's ultimate purpose in all of this: **He is building a house!**

God isn't just looking for individuals; He is looking for a family. He wants everyone who is united in their commitment to Jesus to be "members of His household." To illustrate this, Paul uses the analogy of a Great Temple—the very place where we meet and have access to the Father.

Think about the structure of this building:

- **The Cornerstone:** Jesus Himself, who holds everything together.
- **The Foundation:** Built on the self-giving legacy of the apostles and prophets.

In this "building project," Hebrew heritage and laws are set aside to make room for everyone in the dwelling place for God's Spirit.

I am personally overwhelmed when I think God's unifying love and the invitation we've been given: We aren't just guests in God's house; we are the very stones He is using to build it. What an incredible opportunity to join our Lord in His eternal building project!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

6/10/2026 - WEEK 23 DAY 3

The Promises of God: Ephesians 3:1-6

Devotional By: Nancy Foust

Paul is visiting the land of Ephesus, speaking to its people hoping to sway them away from belief in many gods, to belief in one true God, as it is linked to God's plan.

God has given Paul the task of making believers out of the Ephesians by explaining how important it is to believe and accept the promises sent to them for their life. Paul approaches the people helping them understand that although it seems to be a mystery of Christ. It is a way all of us can join together and work together as one group of God loving people. It also represents a way to pass all the promises of Jesus on to others struggling to believe. "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."

I bring these verses into my life and find ways they can enhance my life. Paul is telling the Ephesians that you must worship one God, the one who has a plan for us. We do have times when other "little g" gods enter our life. For instance, peer pressure, money, laziness, and many other lifestyles that can take us away from our one wonderful loving God. Those are the times when we need to STOP and open our Bible or devotion books and start reading about the plan and promises He has for us to get back on track. Are you in that time of life right now. If so, take time daily to read these devotions and help get you back on track believing HE, our God, has a great plan for you.

Notes

6/11/2026 - WEEK 23 DAY 4

The Manifold Wisdom of God: Ephesians 3:7-13

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Earlier in this chapter, Paul spoke about “the administration of God’s grace” (v. 2), and here he mentions “the administration of this mystery” (v. 9). In other words, God’s wisdom and purposes are mysterious and eternal. Now they have been revealed through Jesus Christ. It is up to the church to administer this truth to the world.

Think about it. The church is simply the people of God. The Lord puts trust in us to reveal God’s plan of salvation to the world. Wow!

The founder of Methodism was a man named John Wesley. He lived in England in the eighteenth century. As an Anglican clergyman, he was searching for ways to motivate people beyond their tepid affiliation to Christianity. So, he instituted a disciplined approach to Bible study, prayer, and works of service.

Other religious leaders made fun of Wesley and his “Holy Club” adherents. Since his approach to living out the Christian faith was so methodical, others gave them a derogatory nickname: “Methodists.” The name stuck, and here we are today.

Wesley was on to something. It takes methodical diligence to carry out the administration of God’s grace and mystery in Christ. We must search the Scripture. We must be committed to prayer. We must join together for worship and fellowship and study. We must work together in service and mission. Together, we can better understand the “manifold wisdom of God” as revealed in the Word of God and through the Son of God.

Perhaps you are reading this today and have become a bit lackadaisical in your approach to your faith. Maybe it’s time to become a “Methodist.” Not in name only or by membership, but by reputation. Perhaps it’s time to commit yourself to a methodical, diligent approach to your faith.

Just imagine what nickname others will give you when you become a true Methodist!

Notes

6/12/2026 - WEEK 23 DAY 5

The Fullness of God: Ephesians 3:14-21

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

There is a spiritual practice that I find very helpful when reading scripture. It's called *Lectio Divina* or "divine reading". In this practice you read through the passage very slowly multiple times, each time allowing the words to speak to you in different ways. The steps for *Lectio Divina* are first read, then meditate, then pray and finally contemplate. This process allows you to read the passage in a new way and it always brings out something fresh and alive about the passage.

As I read through today's scripture using *Lectio Divina*, the phrase that kept speaking to me was "*I pray that you, being rooted and established in love.*" The word "rooted" reminds me of something that's deep, firm and unmovable. Something sturdy. And then I looked out the window and saw the many and varied trees in my backyard - firs, maples, etc. Trees - deeply rooted in the ground, standing firm and unmovable. What a wonderful metaphor for our faith and being "*rooted and established in love.*"

Our Christian life is much like a forest where many individual trees with many different characteristics come together to form a strong ecosystem. We also come together, as individuals with many stories and faith journeys, to form the church, strong and rooted in Christ, even though our individual branches may grow in different directions. Our different, unique roots, just like the forest, are interwoven together to provide strong support and strength during the storms in our lives. We are stronger together than we are separately.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

And just like a forest filled with trees began with one small seed, our life in Christ began when we first experienced that single, small spark of faith - the size of a mustard seed - when we first believed. That seed took root and grew as it was nourished by the community of believers and the grace of God.

As we find ourselves "*rooted and established in love*", may we find our strength in the life of our Savior Jesus Christ and in the strength that we find as a community - or forest - of faith.

Notes

6/15/2026 - WEEK 24 DAY 1

Worthy of the Calling: Ephesians 4:1-8

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

In Ephesians 4, Paul urges Christians to live a life worthy of their calling. You might ask, how can we do this since we are all sinners saved by God's grace, yet not one of us is really "worthy" of our calling? But God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to bear our sins on the cross; whereby, we can live with the guidance and working of the Holy Spirit in and through us. Apart from God, we can do nothing, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

When I was a young girl, I remember the flannel graph stories I learned in my Sunday school classes about the armor of God. You probably learned about them, too, and like me, you probably "dressed" a soldier in the pieces of armor. In our future readings in Ephesians, we will read about the armor of God that each of us must wear consistently to walk with God worthily. Here are the pieces: Belt of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness, Shoes of the Gospel of Peace, Shield of Faith, Helmet of Salvation, and Sword of the Spirit.

Years ago when I lived in Wisconsin, I joined the church congregation in a vow "...to resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to endeavor to live as becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ." This vow reminded me of Paul's admonition to live in full accordance with God's Word. He taught us how to walk worthy of the calling by putting on the armor of God (Ephesians 6). As we follow the teachings of the Scriptures deliberately and consistently, we will make those righteous choices that are pleasing to God. As our source for faith and practice, the Bible is our offensive "weapon" to confront the world. By putting on God's armor, we are enabled to testify to the blessings He has given us and share the good news of the Gospel with others.

Prayer: Dear Father, Thank You for equipping and protecting us with the armor of God. Help us to use it in our service to You this day. Help us to walk worthy of the Lord by sharing His love and being faithful to Him. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Notes

BE CONNECTED

6/16/2026 - WEEK 24 DAY 2

Be Connected: Ephesians 4:9-13

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

BE CONNECTED! That is our church's theme for 2026. Have you taken time to do some reflecting on how you are connecting to God, our church community, our families, our neighborhoods, and our world? You have been given spiritual gifts that help you do just that.

Have you thought that evangelism could be one of your spiritual gifts? Don't let that "e" word scare you off. Yes, an evangelist can preach and tell the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to those who have not yet believed. An evangelist is a proclaimer of salvation by grace through faith in the Son of God. This doesn't mean you have to knock on doors. It could just be a conversation with a neighbor or a coworker.

Could being a pastor or teacher be one of your spiritual gifts? Do you know what your gifts are and are you using them to the good for God's kingdom? It's been said that the church of Jesus Christ exists for three reasons:

To exalt God which is why we sing praises and offer prayers to Him.

To edify His people which is why we study His Word.

To evangelize the unsaved which is why we share our stories of salvation.

The equipping of the saints is why we do church. It's why we study God's word so we will be equipped to go out into the world. The work of ministry is where we take what we have learned, apply it to our life, and then share what we know with others. Going to church and/or attending Bible Study isn't for you to keep all to yourself. God wants you to be an ambassador for Him and tell others your story. We need to be open for what God wants us to do.

Mark 16:15-16 says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

When it comes right down to it, Jesus is our standard. We should be living a Christ-centered life. Jesus didn't spend his life hanging out at the local temple. He was always out among the people, impacting the world. Where can you make the biggest impact? Be Connected!

Notes

6/17/2026 - WEEK 24 DAY 3

Maturing in Christlikeness: Ephesians 4:14-16

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

This passage is a call to GROW UP! As children, we believed the adults around us. We trusted that if they told us that Santa flew through the air in a sleigh led by nine reindeer plus a red-nosed Rudolph, it was true. If we were told that Santa dropped down the chimney to deliver toys, THEN IT WAS TRUE!

However, as we grew and acquired critical thinking skills, we learned to ask questions. Was it possible for reindeer or a sleigh to fly and even if they could, how could a sleigh carry enough toys for all the children in the world, and if it could and it did, why didn't Santa bring food to starving children? Why are we giving HIM food and why isn't he passing out cookies and milk to those kids?

It's fun to believe these things as children; sharing a fantasy that brings sparkle and goodwill to all but as we get older, we should realize it's time to stop jumping on sleighs and bandwagons to believe the latest "wind of teaching" blown about by false teachers and their deceitful scheming, as verse 14 tells us.

In these times there are many false prophets, spiritual scammers and social media gurus to confuse and toss us around like waves on a stormy sea. A great number of these false teachings revolve around the love of money and amassing material possessions as if that Santa fantasy were true. We are tempted to think like children and believe these teachings because it sounds exciting. Yay! More toys down the chimney! But shouldn't we be asking questions?

The disciples, in the boat with Jesus, were afraid of the stormy sea (Mark 4:35-41), so they joined together to awaken him. They asked questions and Jesus immediately silenced the wind and waves. Are you accustomed to joining your brothers and sisters to ask Jesus for help? The wind and waves obey Him and He has entrusted us with His promise to never leave or forsake us. Scripture says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

The way to mature in Christ and avoid being tossed around and deceived is to study God's Word; to get so familiar with it that we can spot the scams and stick to the truth. We need each other to stay on course! Thankfully, as followers of Christ, we are all in the same boat with Jesus, and we know we can trust Him to help us silence the stormy voices if we just ask.

Notes

6/18/2026 - WEEK 24 DAY 4

Put on the New Self: Ephesians 4:17-24

Devotional By: Dave Rizk

Recently, during the volatile financial changes, I lost sleep worrying about the economic stability. I kept running numbers in my head, concerned about money, retirement, and how to provide for my family. What started as responsible planning slowly turned into anxiousness. I began to see that my trust had shifted from God's provision to my own efforts to control things. One Sunday morning, the sermon was about trusting God, and that truth became clear. Even though I had accepted Christ, I was still clinging to old habits of self-reliance rather than fully trusting His care.

Paul speaks directly to this in Ephesians 4:17-24. He reminds us that following Christ produces a life that looks different. Faith is not merely a belief; it is a life choice. As children of light, we are called to leave behind our former ways of self-reliance, pride, and autonomy and walk in the new life Christ gives. This transformation is not instant. Though we receive a new nature, our thinking and attitudes must be continually renewed as the Holy Spirit works within us. Life apart from Christ is marked by futile thinking, a tendency to reason our way away from God. The gospel may seem foolish to those who cling to independence, but we are called to live as quiet testimonies of God's grace.

Call to Action: surrender yourself fully to the Lord. Place your future and your fears in His hands. Live with a peace that stands out, so that others may see Christ through you.

Notes

6/19/2026 - WEEK 24 DAY 5

Creating Wholesome Community: Ephesians 4:25-32

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

It was 46 plus years ago when I was sitting at a bridal shower. It was my bridal shower. I remember that the guests were to write down on a piece of paper advice for this soon to be newlywed bride. Somebody, I have no idea who, wrote "Don't let the sun set on your ire." I was almost 24 years old, and I had never heard of that before. That is the only advice that I remember from that shower. I must admit I thought I knew what that meant, however, after studying today's scriptures it has a whole new meaning for my life.

Paul is concerned with making us more Christ like. He is telling us to stop bad behavior, think right and do what is right. He is not comparing but contrasting our lives as Christians. Sounds easy, right? Easier said than done.

We are to be truthful with our words and stop the deception of half-truths like omissions. If you are going to be angry, be angry at sin. Don't let your anger compel you into sin. This is where "Don't let the sun set on your ire" comes into the picture. It is really a figure of speech meaning we need to deal with our sin soon. If it is not dealt with, it leaves a door open for Satan to lead us further into sin.

The 7th commandment is don't steal. It means don't take your time and talent away for the church or God, instead work to share or give to the needy. Speak good things in order build up others. Your words can give grace, encourage others, help, and gratify. Corrupt speaking is foul and you become reckless with your words. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit with your sin but surrender and then let the Holy Spirit be in charge of your life.

You can forgive, but can you forget to have a harmonious relationship with Christ? Will you allow Christ to radically transform you and overhaul your life in every aspect to live a Christ centered life? We are to live out this calling. With God's help we all can live up to Paul's challenge.

Notes

6/22/2026 - WEEK 25 DAY 1

The Pollution Meter of Your Mind and Mouth: Ephesians 5:1-7

Devotional By: Lisa Ellcessor

We are coming along well in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Earlier, he addressed doctrines of being alive in Christ and the power of the cross, but now Paul is getting practical into the nitty gritty of moral character. Before, he addressed faith in theory and now comes the "pow" of specifics. I can picture Paul writing in prison as he sits around a band of convicts. He is surrounded by empty words, obscenities, crude jokes and meaningless gossip of the inmates. As he pens this letter to the church, Paul replaces the stank prison smut with thanksgiving to Jesus for salvation and life. He takes joy in being a dearly loved child of God. He is not participating with the culture of his cell mates; he is partnering with the mind of Christ. I see him writing, praying and thanking God for the churches he loves so much.

Ephesians 5 encourages us to measure our thoughts and words. It calls us to reflect on our Christian character in the world. Below is a **Pollution Meter** to practically measure yourself using the standards of Ephesians 5:1-7.

The Pollution Meter of Your Mind and Mouth

Hazardous	Unhealthy	Overcast	Fair	"Son"ny
emergency for yourself and entire population	widespread effects on general population	portions of unpredictable cloudy witness	behavior, however partial cloudy	healthy "heir" quality

How would you categorize yourself on the pollution meter related to Ephesians 5?

Weigh and evaluate your mind and mouth concerning the topics and their effects.

What needs to be detoxified? What are your plans to purify the pollution areas?

- Sexual Morality?
- Greed (time, money, belongings, self-interests)?
- Obscene Talk?
- Foolish Gossip?
- Coarse Joking & Sarcasm?
- Empty Words?

Dear Lord, I want to be a dear child who walks in Your love. I don't want to be a faith wrecker with a hazardous stench. I am sorry for toxic thoughts and talk. I ask the Holy Spirit to wake me, walk me through ways of love and detoxify the impurities of my mind and mouth. Show me what is proper for God's holy people. Amen.

Notes

BE CONNECTED

6/23/2026 - WEEK 25 DAY 2

Children of Light: Ephesians 5:8-14

Devotional By: Lynette Hart

There are over 200 references to light in the Old and New Testaments. The first one was at the very beginning in Genesis 1:3-4. "God saw that the light was good."

The older I get, the more I like light. Not just a spotlight or desk lamp in one area but light filling the entire room. A dark room with one desk lamp or one side light is not enough for me. I need a large overhead ceiling light. I need a bright room! I agree with God - Light is good.

Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world twice. In John 8:12 He says "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" and in John 9:5 He shares, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Light is good.

John 3:20-21 adds that, "everyone that does evil hates the light" for the light exposes their evil deeds. Those who live in the truth come into the light so that they can see what God has done.

In Ephesians, Paul takes living in the light to the next step. In Ephesians 5:8 he writes, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Jesus' followers are now the light. We can't sit in the dark or turn away to sinful acts in the dark. We must bring the Light to everyone and let it reveal their deeds done in the dark. We must expose and illuminate everything in the light. We have the power to bring the light to others. We have the power to wake up. Christ will shine on us.

These verses remind me that I am a light in the world. I can illuminate others and bring them to the Light also. It's a powerful thought.

How can you use the power of Jesus' light to take others out of the darkness? Light is good!

Notes

6/24/2026 - WEEK 25 DAY 3

Making the Most of Every Opportunity: Ephesians 5:15-20

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

This Scripture encourages us to be careful in our daily lives. We need to live our lives for God's glory. We are tempted, every day, to stray from focus upon our Savior God. It is so easy to stray from a righteous path. One way we can stay focused is to remember our Lord with songs, hymns, and prayers.

Years ago, I was in a management position and was told, by upper management, that my profits didn't cover expenses and I was to "chop a head." My shortest-time employee had been with us for 12 years. I looked at the operating statement and decided our sales force could easily bring us up to a level that justified every employee's cost. We went to work and brought our income up to that level and I did not fire the employee.

Later, I got a call to drop everything and drive to Evanston, IL, the next day. It was our regional manager's office. I was to cancel all appointments and just drive. I was scared. I believed he was bringing me up there to fire me. On the way up I prayed and a song came into my head. It was a song the choir had been practicing and basically said in faith, God can move mountains. We must trust Him. I walked into the office with confidence that God was right with me. I delivered proof that our expenses were justified and my actions were justified. The boss looked at the figures and at me and said, "Okay, I get it. You can go, but the next time I tell you to do something, you do it."

Shortly after that, I chose to leave management and go back into sales. I missed being manager but the first year, my income doubled. I understood God's grace and protection. I understood God put that song into my head to protect me, give me confidence, and prove to me that "he could move mountains." Praise God!

Dear Lord, put your praise songs into our heads. Remind us of your power and your protection. Thank you for the blessings you give us every day. Amen

Notes

6/25/2026 - WEEK 25 DAY 4

A Word to Wives: Ephesians 5:21-24

Devotional By: Lynette Hart

In the Bible, Jesus and the church are compared to a marriage with Jesus as the bridegroom and the church is the wife. As the old song goes, "the church is not a building... The church is a people". We are all the church.

In Genesis 2:24, a man and woman are united to be one flesh. They are one. It is a covenant. In the comparison of a marriage to Jesus, the husband (Jesus) is the head of the church, and wives (the church) submit to their husband.

I feel like this can be easily taken out of context, especially in this modern world we live in. How dare the Bible tell women to submit to their husbands! What have we fought for? Equality!

"Submit" in this context does not necessarily mean "submit" as it does in modern context. Today "submit" means to accept superior force of another person. In the Bible, the meaning of "submit" is closer to aligning themselves to another.

I have been married for 21 years. Somedays that feels like forever. Other days it feels like we are just getting started. Even though in many ways we are different, I would like to think that our overall values align. Our big-ticket items agree. The main thing is the main thing for both of us. One of the things that I looked for in a spouse was a Christian with faith similar to mine. Because faith is an important part of my life, I knew it had to be a part of our life together. I know I chose well when I see that faith in our children also. Just as Jesus loves the church and takes care of the church, I know that my husband will not lead me astray, and he always has my best interests and needs in mind when making decisions.

We as the church need to align with Jesus, and He will love us as husbands love their wives. How can we work to "submit" to Jesus and align our lives with what he wants for us?

Notes

6/26/2026 - WEEK 25 DAY 5

A Word to Husbands: Ephesians 5:25-33

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

In this passage Paul weaves together two intertwined strands. One is about husbands and wives. The other is about Christ and the church.

Christian husbands are called to love their wives in a Christ-like manner. Some would say it's not fair that husbands only have to love their wives, while wives are called to submit to their husbands. But let's look at this more carefully.

Husbands are called to love their wives in the same way that Christ gave himself up for the church. What did Jesus do? He resisted temptation, lived a holy life, and sacrificed his own life for the church (that is, for Christians). So, what does it mean that a godly husband ought to sacrificially love his wife? How is a Christian husband to be willing to sacrifice himself for his wife with his life, or even his death?

Similarly, this passage calls a believing husband to love his wife just as much as he loves himself and his own body. This reflects the two great commandments Jesus gave us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'... [and] 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:30-31). This outpouring of love toward another, including one's wife, is a high calling.

Thirdly, these verses quote God's definition of marriage first given in Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31). Christian unity is one of the primary outcomes of a godly marriage.

Taken together, we see that a Christian husband is to love in such a way that sacrifice, honor, and unity are manifest in the home and community. Truly, this is how Christ loved us. It holds that it is how followers of Jesus are to love their wives.

Husbands, take a moment to evaluate the way you love your wife. Is that love marked by sacrifice, honor, and unity? How is Jesus calling you to be more like Him, in the way He modeled this by how He loved the church?

Notes

6/29/2026 - WEEK 26 DAY 1

Christian Parenting: Ephesians 6:1-4

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

Parenting is arguably the most difficult but rewarding job we can take on. In Ephesians 6:4, Paul gives us some great parenting advice.

"Fathers (parents) do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

The word "exasperate" here is the Greek word *parargizo* meaning "anger." Paul uses a similar but different word in Colossians when he's communicating the same idea.

"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." (Colossians 3:21)

Here, Paul uses the word *erethizo*, which means "provoke" or "irritate". In essence, Paul is saying that we need to be careful how we parent, that we shouldn't be so harsh that we crush the spirit of our children, making them angry or irritated. Instead, we should be raising them with love and respect. But that also doesn't mean that we are so lax that our children have no direction.

There's a story about a father trying to teach his son to make his bed. Each time the boy would forget, the father would give him a long, stern lecture about the importance of responsibility. The third day came and the boy still forgot, but now he could perfectly imitate his father's speech. That's when the father realized he was not teaching responsibility but creating discouragement - anger and irritation - for his son. So, he tried again by helping his son make his bed and encouraging him along the way. Ephesians 6:4 is a reminder that guidance bolstered by love builds children up in a much more Christ-like way than constant correction, badgering and reprimand.

As parents, we should beware of disciplining out of frustration and anger. Those emotions should never be cause for correction as the result could be frightening for the children. Our goal should not be for our kids to fear us. Fathers in Paul's day exhibited authoritarianism and unreasonable expectations. But Paul argues for restraint so that harshness does not incite anger and resentment. Rules and expectations should not be so severe (think "tough love") that it becomes difficult for the child to obey. And punishment should always fit the infraction and be age appropriate.

Our goal as parents should be to always act with love and encouragement. Praise children and let them know you are proud of them. Christian parents should teach their children to know the Lord and bring them up with Christian character. If we *"bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"* they will have a firm foundation as they mature into adults that love Jesus *"and even when they are old they will not turn from it."* (Proverbs 22:6)

Notes

6/30/2026 - WEEK 26 DAY 2

A Word to Masters and Servants: Ephesians 6:5-9

Devotional By: Dan Henke

Way back in my law school days doing research in the law library (yes, we had actual books then), I used a research tool that broke down the law by topic. I was intrigued by the topic entitled “Master and Servant.” I thought that seemed a little odd, an outdated reference. Indeed, today that section has been reclassified as “Employment Law.”

The language and terms Paul used in Ephesians sound a lot like the archaic “Master and Servant” topic, speaking of slaves and masters; but while it suits the usage and context of the times, its message regarding “Employment Law” is timeless for Christians in the workplace. Exhortations such as “serve wholeheartedly” and to obey with “sincerity of heart” are messages of duty, loyalty and selflessness.

The message to Christians transcends time between then and now, so do the challenges to live out a Christian life while at work. The challenges may have changed; we don’t have to worry about being legally treated as property. Employment law has expanded the rights of workers through many statutes and agencies we know by their acronyms: NLRA, FLSA, OSHA, ADA, and EEOC just to name some of them.

While they provide protections to workers that Paul never dreamed of, the modern employee still faces stiff challenges: a corporate structure run by bean counters who care more about their stock returns than a healthy work environment, companies shedding workers who drop their productivity as they age or suffer from ill health. It’s hard to be a Christian and be loyal to the boss when the boss is a faceless organization that shows little loyalty in return. We are always in danger of becoming the disillusioned work force exemplified by the workers’ saying in the old Soviet Union: “As long as they pretend they are paying us, we’ll pretend we are working.”

In an ideal world, employers heed Paul’s admonishment in verse 9, but we don’t live in an ideal world. However, Paul reminds us that the failure of others to live a Christian life does not relieve us of our obligation to live as Christ calls us to.

Notes

7/1/2026 - WEEK 26 DAY 3

Our Struggle Against Evil: Ephesians 6:10-12

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

The book of Ephesians is about living a godly life in a godless world. Remember, the city of Ephesus was filled with shrines to Roman emperors and temples to Greek gods and goddesses. The Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. People made a fortune by practicing sorcery and by selling multi-breasted statues to travelers desperate for fertility in their families and crops.

In this context, Paul began to wrap up his letter to the Ephesian Christians by challenging them to take a stand “against the devil’s schemes... against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Being a follower of Jesus in Ephesus was not for the weak-willed.

This challenge is echoed in other parts of the Bible.

“The devil... was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

How are you being called to stand against the dark, evil spiritual forces of the devil? What does this look like for your family? What does this mean for your friendships, work life, or community? What could this imply for your church?

Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Embrace this truth. Live this life. Be ready to resist and stand against the enemy of your soul.

Notes

7/2/2026 - WEEK 26 DAY 4

The Armor of God: Ephesians 6:13-17

Devotional By: Lisa Hindsley

In 1981, my husband, Keith and I went to Denmark with our friends from Ball State, Tony and Cheri Huffer. Tony had answered an ad from Youth for Christ/Denmark for “guest English teachers/singers” to travel around the country singing in public schools. The Huffers asked us to form a foursome and join them the second year. Tony is an excellent songwriter, so we went armed with many original Christian songs and a few written by others. We made close to 100 school visits that year.

One of our most requested songs was “Travelin’ Shoes”, a catchy a capella tune which students and adults loved. It was a few verses about death knocking on the door to ask a sinner, gambler, liar and then finally a Christian if they were “ready to go”. Three “No’s” were followed by a joyful “YES, YES, YES!” The three sinners sang: “I ain’t got on my travelin’ shoes” and the Christian sang “YES! Because I just got on my travelin’ shoes!” In today’s passage about the full armor of God, I’m going to focus on the feet. Good shoes are an essential part of God’s armor.

I don’t think the kids liked the song because they were thinking about death and whether or not they would be ready when it came knocking, but it was musically dynamic and lively and after singing it 400 times, it was well-executed—opening the door for us to talk to them after the school visit at weekend concerts and openly share the Gospel and offer an invitation to follow Jesus. (And of course, explain that the “Travelin’ Shoes” represented the Gospel of peace with the message of salvation and why they needed to get them on before death knocked on the door.)

This was a wonderful time in our young lives as we were literally putting on our traveling shoes and going all the way across the ocean to share the Gospel with young students. I love the verse, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who brings good news” (Isaiah 52:7).

Today’s verse urges us to put on the full armor of God (not just the shoes of the Gospel of peace), but the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. This is a powerful metaphor for equipping ourselves by choosing the proper attire— to make sure we are ready to go...whether it’s our time to enter into glory or to share this good news about Jesus with others.

What are you going to wear today? Do you have on your “Travelin’ Shoes?”

Notes

7/3/2026 - WEEK 26 DAY 5

Praying in the Spirit: Ephesians 6:18-24

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

Prayer is one of the most important components of our walk with Jesus. In today's scripture, Paul advises us to pray constantly in the Spirit. When I pray, I worry that my words aren't eloquent enough, or that I fall into the trap of "rote recitations." When I feel like my thoughts are a jumbled mess before God, I take heart: He isn't looking for a polished performance; He is listening to my heart. Once filled with the Spirit, God gives us the necessary words even when we aren't sure what they are. Even when I don't have all the words, Paul's advice in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to "pray continually" (NIV) or "pray without ceasing" (NKJV). Talk with God regularly and the conversation becomes easier. Notice that I say conversation because listening is also a component of consistent prayer.

I have made it a habit for a couple of decades now to always pray during my commute to work. With radio off and phone silenced, the lack of outside distractions makes it easier for me to focus on God so I can praise, thank, ask forgiveness, raise up whatever and whomever is on my heart at that particular time, and listen. If I struggle with the words, I always find the Lord's prayer as a good beginning place. Jesus says in Matthew 6:9-13, "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'" Our Methodist traditions have deviated slightly from the NIV translation, but starting with these words, I believe, is a great way to begin a deliberate, consistent habit of regular prayer.

Through the years, I've heard people tell me that consistent prayer is difficult because some or even many prayers don't seem to be answered. My favorite response to this lament comes from the late Charles Stanley, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta. He said (and I'm paraphrasing), "When we pray, God either gives us exactly what we ask for or something better. Too many times we fuss about not getting exactly what we asked for which causes us to miss out on the something better." I love this.

On this eve of America's 250th birthday, I am forever grateful to live in a place where I can pray freely. Are you struggling to start or maintain a consistent prayer life? What are the barriers? How can you begin to overcome them?

Notes



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