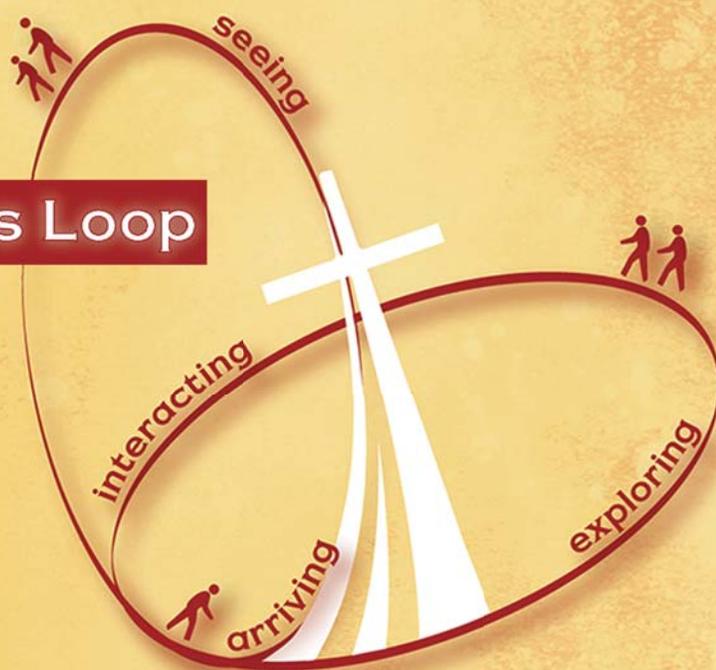


Devotional Week One

The Jesus Loop



Sunday
September 9

*Today's key
verses*

Galatians
1:11-16

Paul thought he had already arrived. He was Jewish and circumcised; he was deeply religious; he believed the law and the prophets; he was zealous for God and opposed to God's enemies.

Some of us, like Paul, may think that we have already arrived. We're Christian and have been baptized; we are deeply religious; we believe the whole Bible; we go to Sunday worship and maybe a small group, too; we give our time and money to the church. But have we arrived?

As Paul discovered, simple belief in Jesus and his saving grace is the essence of true faith. We need to arrive at faith in Jesus, not just faith in a tradition or institution, but faith in Jesus. This does not come from human origin, but only from God. He often works through humans, religious tradition, and the church; but, until we have clearly responded to God's call to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we have not arrived. Plus, even once we arrive at true faith, we need to be arriving daily at our commitment to Jesus. So, do you only think that you have arrived, or are you daily arriving at real faith in Jesus?

Jesus, I believe in you. Help me arrive each day anew with faith in you. Amen.

Monday
September
10

*Today's key
verses*

Galatians
1:6-7

Can you imagine what it was like for the Galatians—steeped in Greek and Roman tradition, many of them faithful to the Jewish tradition, and brand new Christians—to try to stay faithful to Jesus? It must have been very difficult. Apparently they had been thrown “into confusion” by those presenting another gospel. This other gospel, a gospel of winning God’s favor by hard work and righteous deeds, was popular and winsome. Who doesn’t want to earn their own way by their own merit? It sounds positively American!

The simple truth is that it is easier to get off the Jesus Loop than to stay on it. Once you arrive at faith in Jesus as the Galatians did, it won’t be long before someone is pointing out the necessity of effort and work. And, of course, it is true that the Christian life takes effort and work. Scripture reading, prayer, and faithfulness all take effort. But remember (and here is the essential truth of the gospel) our arrival on the Jesus Loop and our continued travel on the loop is all about what God has done, not what we or any other human has done. We stay on the loop by staying with the grace of Jesus. Our responsive and necessary effort and hard spiritual work only draw us back to the necessity of grace. So, stay on the loop of grace.

Dear God, I like to work and earn my way. Remind me again that there is no earning your favor. Remind me of your pure grace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Tuesday
September
11

*Today's key
verses*

Galatians
1:9,11;2:2,5,7

In Paul's mind, the gospel is the highlight and purpose of his life. The gospel is the truth of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ and it gives us the freedom to live and grow in Christ. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection form the core realities of the gospel. All of these are themes that Paul touches on in all his letters as well as here in Galatians 1 and 2. The key themes of the gospel are the highlights that drive Paul's passion and purpose.

I think Paul finds it hard to grasp that there could be any believer for whom the God-given gospel is not the highlight of their life. The Galatians have somehow lost sight of this highlight. Moreover, some leaders are promoting other priorities. Paul is incensed. Certainly, Paul can see the importance of tradition and human ideas. But he does not think these human things can compare to the highlight of the gospel. He wants us to open our eyes so that we can see the highlights of grace and salvation.

Seeing the highlights on the Jesus Loop is all about making sure our eyes are opened to what God has done for us. It may be as simple as singing a song about grace, or going to worship regularly. But it is also about turning away from human ideologies and traditions that pull us away from the gospel. Is the gospel the highlight in your life?

Dear Heavenly Father, highlight your gospel in my life. Open my eyes that I may see you, your grace, and the sacrifice of your Son, my Savior and Lord, as the biggest highlight of all. Amen.

Wednesday
September
12

*Today's key
verses*

Galatians
1:6-16

Take a highlighter and mark the words gospel, grace, preach(ing), God, and Christ every time they occur throughout Galatians 1:6–2:5. (If you don't want to mark up your Bible, simply write each word down every time it occurs.) What highlights do you now see? Does Paul use these words positively or negatively? It isn't hard to see what Paul believes in.

Now, take a different color highlighter and mark the four times Paul uses the word "human" (verses 10,11,12,16). What highlights (or lowlights) do you see? Does Paul use this word positively or negatively? Hmm ... What does Paul have against humans?

I don't think Paul has anything against humans, but he does understand that all humans, and all things of human origin are tainted by sin. The highest highs that human beings can reach can't come close to the height of God's gospel grace in Christ. One can either trumpet the glories of humankind or preach Christ. As you live your life what will be your highlights?

Lord, enable me to see your highlights. Give me ears to hear and eyes to see you and your gospel. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday
September
13

*Today's key
verses*

Galatians
2:1-5

Kayla and Krista wouldn't get out of the car. Dylan and Jenna really had no choice; they were still little enough that we could carry them. But Kayla and Krista had seen the Grand Canyon once –they got out of the car and looked once– they didn't need to see it anymore. "It's just a hole in the ground," Kayla declared. They sat in the minivan and did their best imitation of oppressed middle schoolers who had been dragged across country to explore what they didn't want to explore. But Diane and I did not give up. The next day we rode our bikes on a tour of the canyon's rim. Today all of us look back fondly on the trip.

Before the early Jewish Christians had fully explored the depth of their new Christian faith, they were not open to their Gentile brothers and sisters. Simply put they wanted them to be Jewish as well as Christian. They wanted a gospel based on tradition and the Jewish covenant. But Paul does not give up on them. He explains and explores the truth of salvation by grace until they too see the light. But it takes work. It takes effort. It takes some exploration. Imagine if they had never taken the time to explore. The depths of the gospel of grace would still be closed. But they did explore and grow and learn.

We too must be open to constant exploration. Seeing the highlights once is never enough. We must explore and grow.

Thank you, God, for giving us the opportunity to explore the profound truths of your word. Keep us ever open to all that we can see and learn about you. Amen.

Friday
September
14

*Today's key
verses*

Galatians
2:2, 6-10

After all the time that Paul spends making clear that the gospel of grace is all about God and Christ and is not of human origin or from human authority, isn't it surprising that he spends so much time talking about other humans? In just a few verses he mentions Peter, James, John and Barnabus. He speaks of Jews and Gentiles. He celebrates the "right hand of fellowship," and is pleased to report that he and all the other Apostles are in agreement. If the Gospel isn't about human authority and approval, why does Paul spend so much time and effort on interacting with others? The short answer is, the Jesus loop is always a group experience. Jesus never intended for us to go it alone.

Paul, even with all his authority, firm calling, and stalwart faith, wants to make sure that his leadership and teaching are confirmed by others who are on the Jesus Loop with him. All of Paul's letters are filled with personal references and connections. Being on the Jesus Loop is all about Jesus and divine initiation and authority. At the same time, we realize that our continued path on the loop is dependent on our connections with others.

If you were tracing out your own path on the Jesus Loop, whose name would you mention? Who confirms and encourages your walk? Who is walking with you?

Jesus, make me a faithful team member with others traveling the Jesus Loop. Keep me faithful to you and open to others. Amen.

Saturday
September
15

*Today's key
verse*

Galatians
5:1

I Wonder...

I wonder what
ever happened
to Thomas?

I wonder if you
believe that
Jesus is alive?

Most of you reading this picked up this devotional after a worship service at Brookside. Your mere presence in church, at a worship service, indicates that you have arrived at a place where the Gospel is preached. In worship you have seen many of the highlights of the Gospel: Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection have been sung, read, and preached. You have explored the reality of salvation by grace, not by human effort or works. Finally, all throughout the worship service you interacted with others in greeting, song, mutual congregational listening and responding. In short, you have been on the Jesus loop: Arriving, Seeing, Exploring, and Interacting. This is good.

The question is, do you realize that this loop is infinity loop ... it never ends and just keeps delivering? Do you stay moving on the loop or do you stall, or, worse yet, jump off the loop all together? Do you realize that the Loop is a 24 hour, 7 days a week loop?

Jesus' Loop is all about the freedom of knowing that you are on the right track – it's the only loop the keeps you in freedom. Let's freely live out the Jesus Loop.

Lord, keep me on the Jesus Loop. Deliver me from the temptation to find some other loop that may look temporarily more attractive. In Jesus name, Amen.