



a revitalization devotional
Bethlehem Covenant Church

Editor's Note:

This devotional is intended to be read daily over a thirty-day period. The reader will want to have a Bible on hand to explore the scripture referenced each day, an integral part of the study.

Each entry explores an aspect of one of the ten “Healthy Missional Markers” that the Evangelical Covenant Church has identified for its churches. Put simply, a *healthy* church is one that pursues Christ; a *missional* church is one that pursues Christ’s priorities in the world.

Vitality in the church begins with God who redeems all things for good, and with his people when they engage in repentance and prayer in a sense of desperation and brokenness before him. Each contributor to this devotional has prayed and struggled to discern God’s will and to communicate it in their reflections, but it is unrealistic to expect any one of us to do so alone. It is in community that we are able to discover God’s leading as we read his Word together and see his Spirit at work. The reader is thus invited to go beyond passively soaking in the material in this devotional, and to actively join in broken, desperate prayer, seeking to understand these marks of the healthy, missional church for him or herself.

Special thanks go to each of the writers for their wonderful contributions, the church staff and volunteers who helped to assemble the devotional, and to the Council, Vitality Team, and Long Range Planning Commission at Bethlehem Covenant Church for their support in this project.

- Liz Compton

Reading #1

2 Timothy 3:16

Centrality of the Word of God: We believe that the Bible is the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine and conduct.

“Where is it written?” I find comfort in those often-used Covenant words. When we question a thought or practice, we can go to the source of all truth to find out if it is based on what God has to say about it, or whether what a person thinks is right. Being able to go straight to the source is very reassuring.

The words “inspired by God” in the passage literally means “God-breathed”. If God breathed these words Himself, they are living and powerful and life changing. Our Pietistic founders knew the importance of this living Word, and letting it become such a part of us that we can sense the Holy Spirit working within us. It is more than simply information, laws, and rules, but words to live by – it is basically an instruction manual for a full and meaningful life!

This passage and the healthy missional marker fit together so well. What Paul refers to as “useful”, that is all scripture, can form the basis for everything we need to know regarding our faith, what we say about it, and how we live it out and reveal it to the world. I like the New International Reader’s Version (my kids’ Bible) take on it: “God has breathed life into all of Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right.”

As God, through Paul, was encouraging Timothy in his ministry, so God encourages us today in ours.

- Cindy Bergstrom

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Reading #2

Colossians 1:25-29

Centrality of the Word of God: Our preaching and teaching in all settings reflects careful preparation, relevance, and creativity.

“Some Preaching Advice”

Right before speaking my mind often wanders to good preaching advice. My college philosophy professor Steve Bouma-Prediger spoke of the awe he had whenever he was invited to preach. “If you don’t enter the pulpit with fear and trembling,” he told us, “you probably shouldn’t be there.” Those words remind me that like the Apostle Paul, I am just a servant sent to toil and struggle teaching a wisdom that is not my own. I am not supposed to be too comfortable in the pulpit.

On the last day of seminary I was stopped in the hallway by my theology professor C. John Weborg. He embraced me. Then with a penetrating stare he told me simply, “Your confidence is in the Word.” My confidence is not in a clever story or a tidy three-point outline. My confidence is in the Word of God. Like Paul, my commission is to “make the word of God fully known.” Oh, there should still be a healthy amount of fear and trembling, but the Word of God is all the confidence that I really need.

Recently I was reading a book on preaching by my friend and mentor Glen Wiberg. One of Glen’s teachers told him: “The goal is not to be a great preacher; the goal is to preach a great Gospel.” I like to be creative and persuasive in the pulpit, but the goal must always be to proclaim the Good News. “It is [Jesus] who we proclaim... so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” This is the “true hope of glory,” that new life can come to life in anyone when they accept Good News.

- Pastor Ryan Eikenbary-Barber

Reading #3

Psalm 119:9-16

Centrality of the Word of God: Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to study and apply Biblical truth in ways that lead to a scripturally integrated life.

Once I watched my dad put together Ikea furniture without looking at the instructions. It should have been easy enough, right? He knows what the table is supposed to look like, so he puts parts where he thinks they should go. But when he is done blindly putting pieces in their places, he is left with a few unused nuts and bolts. He then goes on to examine his work: the table is slightly lopsided, and it wobbles, so my dad begins the tedious work of taking it apart and starting over again, this time following the instructions carefully.

Knowing what a holy and pure life is and actually living one are two completely different things. As the instruction manual is to the buyers of Ikea, the Bible is to us. If we live on our own rule we will end up like many Do-It-Yourself dads: leaving important pieces unused, we’ll have to take our table apart and start from the beginning, this time being sure to follow the instructions.

We should know the Bible like a carpenter knows his work, and God’s word should carve our life, just as the carpenter’s knife carves wood. But becoming a carpenter doesn’t happen overnight, and each day we need to store up this information and let God’s word flow through us, so that we won’t be looking at leftover pieces in our lives that weren’t used.

- Liz Fong

Reading #4

Mark 8:34-38

Life Transforming Walk with Jesus: We teach our people how to be attentive to Christ in all situations.

Look at your weekly/monthly/yearly schedule of church events. For those who participate, each event that is well planned and well implemented has the possibility of making or keeping one more attentive to Christ in all circumstances. Look also at your fellow participants, your fellow travelers along the way. They can be excellent models of walking with Christ. Also, Jesus comes to us in many ways, and often in surprising and unexpected ways.

Consider each of the following fellow travelers. Do you see Jesus?

- The younger person looking for where to turn in life.
- The older person struggling to remember how to proceed.
- The single parent dedicated to helping daughters and sons to develop well.
- The parent or grandparent aching for children and grandchildren to know Jesus and his saving grace.
- The single adult with no children and few friends.
- The person who feels "I do not really measure up to what others expect of me. I do not quite belong."
- The person surrounded and imprisoned by holding on to hurts and wrongs.
- The person for whom there is no job, or whose work is nothing more than a financial and survival necessity.

Jesus' saving grace is widely inclusive of all persons in God's creation. Jesus enfolds each of these fellow travelers in his love and care. God holds each created person to be of great worth in any and all circumstances. Should we do less?

- Duane Johnson

Reading #5

Luke 9:23-27

Life Transforming Walk With Jesus: Our people understand the radical nature of the message and mission of Jesus that continually deconstructs and reconstructs a person's life.

In Eugene Peterson's The Message, Luke 9:23-27 speaks to the self-sacrifice one must have everyday in living a life for Christ. Living in our culture, constantly surrounded by invaders to our soul, we must die everyday (so Christ can live within us), in order to truly live each day. Being a Christian shouldn't be safe. It should transform, every day.

I've been reading a young pioneer in the New Monasticism movement, Shane Claiborne. In his book *The Irresistible Revolution*, he says this:

"I'm not sure where we get the notion that Christianity is safe or that Christians should play it cool. Growing up I always thought that Christians were good, upstanding citizens, but the more I get to know Jesus, the more trouble he seems to get me into. Soren Kierkegaard puts it well: 'To want to admire, instead of follow, Christ is not an invention of bad people; no it is more an invention of those who spinelessly want to keep themselves detached at a safe distance from Jesus.' Some Christians take so few risks, it's no wonder folks have a hard time believing in heaven. Most of us live in such fear of death that it's as if no one really believes in the resurrection anymore.... While the ghettos may have their share of violence and crime, the suburbs are the home of the more subtle demonic forces- numbness, complacency, comfort- and these are the things that can eat away at our souls." (p. 226)

- Blake Christiansen

Reading #6

2 Peter 1:5-9

Life Transforming Walk With Jesus: Our people are equipped/growing in their ability to use a wide variety of spiritual growth resources, experiences, and settings.

To me this scripture speaks to the importance of continuing to learn and grow in our ability to discern and understand God's will in our lives. In teaching, my theme has been that a particular class is just the beginning. By introducing the learner to new concepts and resources, I hope to open doors to life-long learning. As I have continued to learn in my life, I keep realizing that there is always so much more to learn. It is never ending and fun to keep searching and growing.

The "Healthy Missional Church" can/should provide good tools for us to continue growing spiritually and learning how to live the Christian life. We need to purposefully offer many opportunities— worship and prayer services, classes, seminars, discussion groups, Bible studies, fun and fellowship, etc.— to enable people of all ages to develop their God-given talents and use them in serving God and other people. Then faith will grow into goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and, most importantly, love.

Prayer: Oh God, please help me remember that I need to keep growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that my church will continue to be a place that nurtures spiritual growth. Remind me to respond to opportunities to learn and help others learn. Thank you for giving me the ability to learn and to use my talents to be productive in your work. Thank you for showing all of us how to love. Amen.

- Mary Ann Smith

Reading #7

Matthew 9:35-38

Intentional Evangelism: We are burdened for the spiritual condition of those who do not yet know Christ.

Our topic today is particularly daunting, a heavy burden indeed.

How are we to handle the burden of the spiritual condition of those who do not yet know Christ? Our passage will give us some help, but I believe it needs to be in the greater context of where this occurs in Christ's ministry.

Webster's defines *intentional* as an act performed by intention or design; i.e. having a plan. *Evangelism* is defined as "the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ." To me, this would mean that Intentional Evangelism would be having a plan to win or revive personal commitments to Christ.

Our reading is the final three verses of Matthew 9. In most of the chapter Jesus is healing people, challenging the Pharisees, and attracting large crowds. In verse 36 he sees the crowds and has compassion on them because "they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." He then identifies the problem — "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." In verse 38 he tells his disciples that there is work to be done. As yet there is no plan. In Matthew 10 Christ lays out his plan for "Intentional Evangelism" by sending the disciples out in pairs. These chapters bridge Christ's personal commitment to his ministry and his plan for introducing his ministry to many more people through the disciples. Twenty-one centuries after Christ, I see that there is still a plentiful harvest, and still only a few workers. I believe our best efforts at evangelism— winning or reviving personal commitments to Christ— will require us to come up with a plan to meet people where they are, and trust in the Lord. Our challenge, therefore, is to build a plan that will help us achieve this goal.

- Bill Hunstock

Reading #8

Matthew 28:18-20

Intentional Evangelism: We have identifiable pathways for evangelism to take place in our ministries.

How many times do we really make it clear what being a disciple of Christ is like? How often do we explain the cost of discipleship?

In my job, I make reports to donors, and I give accurate representations of what has been accomplished with their donations. I often grumble about these reports and the drudgery of that paperwork and how “it would be so nice if we could just do what we do and not have to report it to anyone!”

If we’re honest, we admit we get satisfaction out of this kind of measurement, particularly in our churches. How many times do we judge success by membership, or attendance figures, or Vacation Bible School numbers? I know I feel good about these things. But when I take a closer look at today’s passage, I see that Jesus commands us to make disciples, not vote on a slate of new members. We are focusing on the wrong “Healthy Missional Marker” if that marker reads “let’s bring in more people.” We need intentionality about how we help people to know Christ, and about how we make them disciples.

It isn’t easy. The cost of discipleship can be very great. But the flip side—the cost of non-discipleship—is even greater. We should make *discipleship* our Healthy Missional Marker, living out God’s love and sharing His saving grace. And the best part? Jesus himself tells us that “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- Bruce Taylor

Reading #9

John 10:14-16

Intentional Evangelism: Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to build spiritual friendships and know how to share their faith as God-birthed opportunities arise.

Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd. He leads, feeds, protects, rescues and comforts his sheep. That name wouldn’t have been a surprise to Jesus’ disciples. They knew God as the Shepherd of Israel, pictured that way often in the Hebrew Scriptures. Messiah was to be a shepherd: surely Jesus had come to rescue the people of Israel and lead them to freedom in their own country under God’s rule.

What may have surprised the disciples was Jesus’ claim that he would bring “other sheep that are not of this fold” into the one flock for which he was laying down his life. “Other sheep”? “One flock, one shepherd”? What was Jesus talking about? We who have not descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob know he was claiming to be Lord of the whole world, not just of Israel. He came to give life to all of us. We all can belong to his flock!

Jesus made another claim, one that might surprise us: these “other sheep” “will listen to my voice.” How will they hear him? We are the body of Christ in the world, his hands and feet, his mouth. God acts through us. If others hear the Good News of Jesus, it will be because we speak. We have the amazing privilege of telling those around us the Good News with the promise that the “other sheep” will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and respond to him. A wonderful collaboration: Jesus calls, we tell, they listen and respond. Praise God!

- Jim Johnson

Reading #10

Matthew 25:37-40

Transforming Communities Through Active Compassion, Mercy and Justice Ministries: We are burdened for the hurting people in our community and beyond.

On a recent trip to Denver, Colorado with a group of high school students, the host at the ministry with which we were working challenged our group one morning to head out into the city and find a homeless person for whom we could purchase a meal. Additionally, we were challenged to “learn their story” as we broke bread together. While many of the students initially expressed concern over how “awkward” this might be, it became abundantly clear that the potential awkwardness was not going to be in actually treating a homeless individual to a meal. Rather, it became clear that the discomfort of the situation was truly the consequence of the callousness of our own hearts, insofar as we slowly realized that the difficulty of our task was *not* in the *feeding* of the hungry, but rather in the *seeing* of the hungry. It took a special sort of looking that day to actually “see” the homeless, which included the shedding of stereotypes and embracing (as opposed to ignoring) fringe culture. Once we saw them, however, doing the work of the Gospel became much easier and more fruitful.

When reading Matthew 25: 37-40, it is important to note that the actual *descriptions* of the tasks of compassion, mercy and justice described there (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned) are all preceded with the question, “When did we see?” The first step to transforming our community is to truly see the people who are hurting, in need of mercy, and those who have suffered injustice, in part by way of ignoring stereotypes and embracing a situation wholly different from our own. Ask God to open your eyes, that you might see His people today.

- Matt Ridenour

Reading #11

Micah 6:8

Transforming Communities Through Active Compassion, Mercy and Justice Ministries: We have identifiable pathways for compassion, mercy and justice ministries to take place.

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

In Micah we read of a prophet who attacks the powerful for their economic policies, policies that benefit the wealthy at the expense of everyone else. In the end, Micah calls us back to what he considers the roots of salvation: justice, kindness and a humble attitude before God.

As Christians we are called to set aside our own narrow self-interest in favor of God’s Kingdom.

Let us recommit ourselves to hearing the words of Micah anew so that our lives and the life of our church are in line with what God calls us to do. God loves us, and if we can show mercy, kindness, love our God and be with him, we will have that goodness in our lives. The goodness of God, and the beauty of life!

- Cheryl Hunstock

Reading #12

Jeremiah 5:26-29

Transforming Communities Through Active Compassion, Mercy and Justice Ministries: Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to see and address the hurts and the causes of hurt in our community and beyond.

Passion refers to pain, agony, and suffering. Compassion means to suffer with someone. Several definitions I read explained that compassion includes a strong desire to spare someone or alleviate pain. The Jeremiah passage seems to be describing a people who are not exhibiting compassion. God has become angry not only because his people are full of power, deceit, and wealth, but because they are not seeking justice. Eugene Peterson's paraphrase the Message puts it this way: "They stand for nothing, stand up for no one, throw orphans to the wolves, exploit the poor. Do you think I'll stand by and do nothing about this?" God's Decree. 'Don't you think I'll take serious measures against a people like this?'" God clearly takes this apathy seriously. He is not a God who tolerates indifference.

This missional marker and Bible passage challenge us to examine ourselves and our church. Are we hurting with the people around us? Did we suffer with the victims of the hurricane and tsunami in Japan? Do we feel the pain and devastation of those in our own country who have lost homes and loved ones to natural disasters? Are we aware of the frustration and discouragement of people in our community looking for jobs? How do we train ourselves and one another to see these hurts, and how do we grow in our ability to feel such compassion for our neighbors that we are compelled to do something about it?

Lord, help us to equip ourselves and one another to meet the needs of our hurting neighbors.

- Alyssa Isaacs

Reading #13

Galatians 3:6-9

Global Perspective and Engagement: We raise the sights of our members beyond our congregation and community by developing a Biblical worldview and often pray for and reference global matters.

I have always been fascinated by missionaries. Some of my earliest memories include listening with rapt attention to their stories—I was easily caught up in their adventures, and deeply moved by how God used them to draw people in far away lands into His Kingdom. One summer the missionary speakers at Bible Camp were from Congo, and they taught us a Bible verse in Lingala. Over the years I silently rehearsed it to be sure I never forgot it.

Fast forward about 35 years: I am now a labor and delivery nurse working in a busy metropolitan hospital that cares for a large immigrant population; many women are from Africa. One woman was obviously quite depressed, and related a particularly sad story of her escape from the atrocities in her home country. I discovered that her native tongue was Lingala, and said "Mbote," which is a greeting in Lingala, and her eyes grew. I told her I'd learned a bit more Lingala as a little girl at Bible Camp and recited the verse to her. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she said "Oh yes, and I need to remember that." The verse was Psalm 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Her whole countenance lifted after that, and I felt that God had preserved that one little verse in my memory all those years for that one woman who needed to hear Him speak to her in her own language.

I'm finding more and more that the mission field is moving to our own communities and we need to be ready every day to be the Light of God in a dark world. We don't have to travel far to do so, but we do need to be sensitive to His prompting when He calls us to say or do something kind to those He brings to us each day.

- Deb Sholds

Reading #14

Acts 1:8

Global Perspective and Engagement: We have identifiable pathways to support the cause of Christ globally.

These words are the very last thing Jesus said before ascending into heaven, so they must be important.

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." We've all had the experience of the lights going off during a bad storm. If it lasts more than a day, then we worry our food will spoil or our pipes will freeze. It's very reassuring when the power comes back on.

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The disciples must have thought this was a very challenging command from Jesus. The conniving priests, angry mobs, and villainous Romans who'd murdered Jesus just forty days ago were in Jerusalem. Witnessing in Judea wasn't so bad, but "those people" in Samaria? And going to "the ends of the earth" meant having to cross oceans or mountains and deserts!

We don't have to face the life threatening persecution or the physical hardships of travel like those in the first century, but we still have the power of the Holy Spirit with us to face today's challenges.

Healthy, missional churches with a global perspective will instruct, encourage and guide their members on the pathway of discipleship, here at home or far overseas, like Jesus commanded.

- Phil Swanson

Reading #15

Revelation 7:9-10

Global Perspective and Engagement: Our people are equipped and growing in their ability to participate in the global dimensions of our ministry.

Today's scripture reading is Revelation 7:9-10. For years I have avoided the book of Revelation because so much of it is so difficult to understand. I do not have trouble with this passage, though. John in his vision sees people from "all nations, tribes, and languages" glorifying God. That brings up the question, "How did all those people hear the gospel so that they could understand the message?" They must have had the same question that the Ethiopian dignitary had in Acts 8 when Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. The man responded, "How can I when there is no one to instruct me?" The answer to this is our follow-up to Christ's Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 where we are told to "go and make disciples of all nations".

The message of Christ is not meant for any exclusive group; it is quite clear that it is meant for everyone, and over the years people in my church have taken this to heart. We have an ongoing missions emphasis, several members have served as short term missionaries in Japan, Cameroon and China, many more have participated in mission trips for specific purposes to Alaska, Congo, Ecuador, Mexico, Native American Communities and Taiwan, to say nothing of the literally dozens who have assisted in various projects in Chile.

So, is it enough? No, Christ's Great Commission is an ongoing responsibility. As long as we are committed Christians we have the responsibility to follow Christ's call and serve others, first to those around us and secondly to those beyond our daily pattern of activity.

- Dave Swanson

Reading #16

John 13:34-35

Compelling Christian Community: We understand that our love for one another is a powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus.

How are our friends and neighbors going to come to know Jesus as the Son of God? In these verses from John's gospel, Jesus tells us how we are to live if we are going to be a witness to him. He gives his disciples a new command, to love one another as he has loved them, in order that others may know that they are his disciples. If we follow this command by showing our friends and neighbors Jesus' love, we are also introducing them to the one who is our God.

A community that follows this command is unique in our society. A community of people whose goal is to love one another, where the primary motivation is a relationship with Jesus, and differences among members are seen as gifts. In Jesus' community of disciples, acts of kindness are most valued when given as pure gifts of love in honor of Jesus' command.

Is Jesus' command just dreamy idealism? Not if we believe that Jesus is God, and the love and power he showed during his life, death and resurrection is available to us. This is the core of a compelling Christian community. We can follow Jesus' radical command to love one another because our hearts have been changed and drawn to follow him. Jesus is calling us to be this generation of disciples, becoming a community where Christ-like love is alive and Jesus is known by all.

- Juli Swanson

Reading #17

Colossians 3:12-17

Compelling Christian Community: We love each other as we are, not as we should be.

One of the great blessings of church is that it is a place where I can come to find peace and support from a Christian community. Life is neither always fair nor joyful as we journey through our years. Because of the opportunities to serve in my church, my life has been enriched.

I particularly think of the opportunities I've had to do short-term mission work in Chile with close to thirty fellow church members. Through this experience, my wife Mary Ann and I got to share time with good friends over nearly a fifteen-year period, and also to develop great friendships with fellow Christians in Chile. As with nearly all acts of service, when we give unconditional love we receive more than we give.

Other acts of "compelling Christian Community" come in our church when we support each other in good times and bad. There are times to support each other by attending a funeral of a friend's family member, or a wedding to celebrate the blessing of a new marriage, or the blessing of a baptism, or just being there for a hug.

It has been said that, "Joy not shared is halved. Sorrow not shared is doubled." Moments like these make our churches places of Compelling Christian Community.

- Lowery Smith

Reading #18

Acts 2:42-47

Compelling Christian Community: We share life together beyond the worship service.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

After reading these verses, I asked myself how my faith and life would be different if I had never been a part of a community of faith. What if I had just attended Sunday services, said ‘hello’ to a few people, and left without really getting to know anyone?

As I look back, I don’t recall the message of specific Sunday sermons, but I do recall the people of faith and the countless ways I have been blessed through them. Working, playing, learning, laughing, crying, and giving praise to God with fellow Christians is God’s gift to us.

May we reach out to others to share this wonderful gift!

- Bev Adamson

Reading #19

Colossians 1:15-20

Compelling Worship: We exalt and celebrate God for who he is, what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do.

I enjoy looking at astronomy pictures. There is astounding beauty in faraway nebulae and galaxies, but one of my favorite images is rather plain upon first examination. The Hubble Ultra Deep Field at first appears to be a picture of a number of unremarkable stars, but is in fact an image of a tiny fraction of the sky, zoomed in so far that very few of the spots in the blackness are individual stars, but are actually entire galaxies far outside our own Milky Way. When I look at this picture, it shakes me out of my self-centered concerns for just a minute as I try to get my mind around a tiny portion of a universe that is incomprehensibly huge.

And yet this scripture passage reminds us that the same God who created this vast cosmos was pleased (he didn’t just tolerate it, but he was pleased) to approach us in a way that we could comprehend and initiate a relationship with us. Then he invited the church to participate in his work. Surely our response to God’s attributes and actions, both in the past and present, must be to worship.

Next time you go to worship, instead of going through the motions because that’s what we do on Sunday, or being distracted by style preferences, try to get a glimpse of the glory and love of God and then celebrate because you can be in his presence.

- Paul Compton

Reading #20**Psalm 28:6-9**

Compelling Worship: Worship reflects careful preparation to help give voice to many dimensions of response to God such as adoration, praise, contrition, lament, and commitment.

Sometimes it's the sermon... sometimes the reading of the scriptures or communion. Or it could be the choir anthem, the children's sermon or the offertory. There is always an element of the worship service that speaks to my heart – heartfelt worship. We strive to have all elements of the service work together, centering on the Word, so that everyone in the congregation will hear the “Good News” in many different forms.

At our church, we select songs by praying and then reading the sermon text for a Sunday, then considering the sermon focus, the season of the church year as well as communion or confirmation... it can become time consuming and at times frustrating trying to ‘locate’ that perfect hymn. Yet, with several members involved in this process, it always seems to work – intentional, careful preparation that prepares a place for the Spirit to work among us.

In your temple courts, O Father, once again assembled now,
Sing we praises as we gather, in contrition humbly bow.
Here a foretaste we are given of the holy Sabbath peace
Which for us is stored in heaven, when life's woes and strife shall cease.

For the hour of mercy granted we present our heartfelt praise;
Thanks, O Lord, for truths implanted, thanks for tokens of your grace.
Thanks for warnings, for instruction, thanks for newborn hope received;
Thanks for light, blind fear's destruction, for anxiety relieved.

Help us now your Word to cherish, sanctify our service, Lord!
That your truth our souls may nourish, be your will in us restored!
Help us in our daily living, as we face the days ahead,
That we may be always giving room to you, by you be led. Amen

Covenant Hymnal # 507

- Sally Sundberg

Reading #21**Ephesians 3:14-21**

Heartfelt Worship: People leave worship knowing something more about the heart of God and about their own hearts.

The dictionary/thesaurus that comes with my word processing software shows “heartfelt” to mean “sincere” or “genuine” and adds “deeply felt” to the definition. So how does sincere, deeply felt worship teach me something more about the heart of God? And what does genuine worship teach me about my own heart? Paul's prayer for spiritual strength is a perfect example of true worship. Consider just a couple of things:

Paul is praying for us (“throughout all generations”) as much as he is praying for the church in Ephesus. He is not praying for one person alone, but for us, together, as we make up the body of believers. Genuine, heartfelt worship is something we do in community. It is in community “with all the saints” that we find the strength to comprehend God's heart and the vastness of his love for us. It is among others that we become rooted and grounded in love.

Being “filled with all the fullness of God” comes from knowing the unknowable richness of Christ's love for us. When we worship from the heart, we become more than we are ourselves. We become filled with all the fullness of God, and this fullness can only happen if we know something that is beyond our human capacity to know: Christ's love. Heartfelt worship – genuine, sincere, deeply felt worship – transforms us. To God alone be glory!

- Jo Anne Taylor

Reading #22

Romans 12:3-8

Sacrificial and Generous Living and Giving: We help people discover, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts.

I am sure this is a familiar passage for most of us. In his letter to the Romans, Paul told them to carefully judge themselves using the faith God had given them. Each person was urged to figure out where they fit in the body of Christ. Although we often find it difficult to discern exactly where God wants us to serve within the church, we can be certain God has given us a gift we should be using to glorify him. That gift may not be as visible as those given to others, but when we all work together much can be accomplished. So I encourage each of us to seek out God's gift to us and then be willing to use the gift where needed.

During the Veritas workshop, Mark Stromberg told our church we could do anything, but not everything. I have found that to be an important statement to keep in mind as we look to the future. Although it is not possible to be everything to everyone, we certainly have many different gifts within our church.

It has also been stated that each church needs to find its place in God's mission in the world. That is a slightly different view from what we often think when we talk about the mission of our church. As we move forward working to discern where we fit in God's mission, may we be willing to listen to where the Holy Spirit is calling us to action in our immediate neighborhood or in other parts of the world needing our gifts of time or financial resources.

- Charlotte Sjoberg

Reading #23

Malachi 3:8-10

Sacrificial and Generous Living and Giving: We regularly, graciously, and unapologetically teach on the importance of financial stewardship in the spiritual growth of the Christian.

Malachi's message came at a lackluster time. While they were free from Babylonian captivity and living under the umbrella of the Persian Empire, the people of Malachi's time were spiritually and economically depressed. Gone were the glory days of King David, or Elijah. No kings slew giants; no prophets called down fire from Heaven. Gone was Solomon's temple, with its gilded cedar floors and olivewood statues. In its place was a temple without a physical manifestation of God, without proof that He dwelt among them (v.1). Where Judah had once recounted miracles they had witnessed, now they had only stories from long ago. Malachi is addressing a formerly great people who had lost touch with a living God. God was holy and unchanging (v.6), but the people of Judah had lost the heart of their faith (v.7). Their present situation – of drought and pestilence, of constant conflict and economic hardship – had been used as an excuse to give up on their faith. Their sufferings had suffocated their devotion, they thought.

Malachi carries a different message, a hard message: hard times hadn't led to weak faith; it was the other way around (v.9). They were not Job, suffering righteously under some cosmic test. They were Judah: always believing in God, without wholly buying into His plan. They offered to Him begrudgingly. Rather than be consumed by His love, and empty their hands to Him, they held back. Because it seemed sensible. Because it seemed prudent. But God wants commitment, not prudent half-measures. "Throw[ing] open the flood gates of Heaven," isn't a half-measure (v.10). It's a loving God pouring untold blessings out to His committed people, a people He desires will give those blessing back, knowing you cannot out-give God. The myth of the sacrifice is that it is us going without, that it's imprudent, too much. The truth is that there is too much to give. The truth is that we commit to a God whose nature compels Him to bless, care and protect His children. And we are wise to give up the things we can't keep, receiving instead the things no one can take away.

- Dave Johnson

Reading #24

Matthew 6:25-34

Sacrificial and Generous Living and Giving: We have many examples of lifestyle choices being made on the basis of stewardship and the priority God plays in the lives of our members.

What does it mean to live and give sacrificially and generously? When I first think of stewardship, I automatically think of money — of how much money should we give to church. And while I do feel it is important to financially support our church and its ministries, I am realizing generous living and giving means more.

To live a sacrificial and generous life goes deeper into who we are — and not just our money. It is about time and energy and choices we make daily that affect other people.

To be a healthy church, we need to give of ourselves and really think about what gifts we can offer. Each of us has something to give — or maybe give up — that could benefit the church body. Maybe you aren't a singer, but you can clear dishes after a Wednesday meal. Maybe you don't feel led to teach Sunday School, but could you commit to praying for our children each month? Each week?

In the Matthew passage Jesus is telling us to not worry about the daily things in our lives. I realize this is easier said than done, but I believe for us to grow stronger, God wants us to fully trust and fully depend on Him! Maybe in fully trusting, we can better live sacrificial and generous lives.

- Becky Ramgren

Reading #25

Titus 1:7-9

Culture of Godly Leadership: Our leaders at all levels serve with character, competence, and conviction.

Titus begins this passage with “Since an Overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless . . .” — WOW! Our first thought is of the pressure this puts on our pastors, our council presidents, our conference superintendents, and our Covenant president. Can anyone meet this standard? Titus concludes with the words “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it,” and we can feel good about this when we hear these leaders teaching and preaching the Word of God each week and encouraging us.

But is this passage only directed at these leaders? As I read Titus’ message again, I realize that he might not just be speaking to those we view as the leaders of the church—he might be speaking to all of us. The footnotes in my Bible state that the term Overseer is interchangeable with Elder, which implies our Church leaders. While the term “Elder” indicates qualification (maturity and experience), “Overseer” indicates responsibility (watching over God’s flock). The responsibility for watching over God’s flock belongs to all of us. So maybe in some way, we are all overseers, perhaps as parents, or in our other responsibilities at church or in our daily lives. We all have some level of responsibility for others, whether it’s the poor or the needy, the abused or the sick, or those who have not yet come to know Christ.

Lord, help us all be Overseers and do your work, your mission. Give us strength and wisdom to watch over your flock and help us to fulfill your mission here on earth. Like the words from Chris Tomlin’s song “God of the City” – Greater things have yet to come and greater things are still to be done. Amen.

- Dick Sundberg

Reading #26

Hebrews 13:7, 1 Peter 5:2-3

Culture of Godly Leadership: A spirit of collegiality pervades, with our people trusting our leaders and our leaders trusting our people.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate them.

This responsibility and directive comes to the people. How do they know if their leaders are trustworthy so they can imitate them? What do they use as a test?

I exhort the elders...to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.

The onus here is on the leaders to promote trust by their genuineness, their love and care.

Trust in the dictionary has words in its definition such as: reliance on integrity, justice, hope, feeling of security and an obligation imposed on one in authority. How is this demonstrated? By living lives that are honest and open and filled with God's Spirit of love. The urge to protect image or turf or reputation should not be part of the equation. Honesty also includes the ability to admit mistakes or commission of hurtful acts. Reconciliation is another aspect of having trust restored.

A leader's willingness to tend to the flock is evidenced by acts of love. 1 John 4:18 says: "let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." So, trust comes by action that is tested, and then there is a commonality with the people who can then be imitators.

- Pat Koontz

Reading #27

2 Timothy 2:2

Culture of Godly Leadership: We continually identify and train godly leaders for all dimensions of our ministry.

What is a godly leader? While there may be many different definitions, the scripture passage tells us that it is someone who not only knows and lives by the teachings of Jesus but passes along the message to others so that they may in turn be leaders and teachers.

As a teacher, I sometimes struggle with finding the correct balance of teaching vs. learning. I work with students who are 9-11 years old and I am constantly amazed at what they can comprehend and teach to each other. I love watching students take control of their learning and then in turn teach a friend in their group who is struggling to understand the concept of the day. I have to admit that it is sometimes very difficult to give up the responsibility of being the person that imparts the knowledge in the classroom, but if I don't allow them the opportunity to teach each other, then how will they learn to be leaders and teachers?

Not everyone is called to be a classroom teacher, but we all have something to teach, whether it be how to preach, how to bake, how to paint, or how to understand the Bible. Godly leaders are those who are willing to lead while preparing the next leaders.

- Karna Sjoborg

Reading #28

Romans 12:1-2

Fruitful Organizational Structures: We can articulate a compelling, Christ-honoring vision for our church.

Discovering God's will so as to articulate a vision for the church is a daunting task, especially when we're faced with the reality of our need for revitalization. In today's scripture, Paul explains that discovering God's will requires a transformation of our lives.

If you were to write up a "transformation plan" for a new Christian, what would it include? Developing a deeper love for God? Exercising will power to obey his commands? Spending time in fellowship and worship? According to the apostle Paul, the starting place for transformation in the believer's life is the renewal of the mind. In his book *Love Your God With All Your Mind*, J.P. Moreland suggests that this is because change in our bodies' actions and habits requires a new perspective, fresh insights about our lives and the world, an understanding of what changes need to be made, and knowledge of how to make those changes.

If we as the church are to escape the patterns ingrained in us by the world around us, we have to deliberately change the way we think about things. We have to make God's priorities our priorities. We have to see people the way God sees people. We have to open ourselves to his Word, and let his Spirit work in us.

This amounts to a complete sacrifice: life lived for God, holy and pleasing to him. This kind of transformation leads us away from self and towards God, and it is distinctly uncomfortable at times. But it is true worship, and reasonable, viewed in light of God's mercy towards us. And it is in living transformed, sacrificial lives that we are able to discern and articulate a Christ-honoring vision for our church.

- Liz Compton

Reading #29

Philippians 2:1-4

Fruitful Organizational Structures: We embrace evaluation as normal and natural and work through conflict constructively.

When we, a group of people bound together by a common membership, sit in a room and evaluate anything about the church to which we belong—let's say, whether the cookies at coffee time should be Oreo or Hydrox—how are we to behave if some want the first choice and others want the second? The difference of opinions sets us on edge.

On the subject of many members getting along as a single body, Paul, the great orator and master of rhetoric, sets up a classic conditional sentence: if [a condition to be met], then [consequence of the condition]. "Like-minded" is the goal in the second clause and is not arrived at with a leap and burst of will. We cannot skip ahead. Before the meeting is called to order, before chairs are placed around tables, the ballots prepared, or Robert's Rules of Order studied, we must attend to the first of the two clauses, the condition that must be met.

Each person's path to corporate unity must go through Christ, with an abiding so complete as to gain the fruits of relationship: encouragement, fellowship, tenderness, and compassion. These fruits join us in our pews, stay for coffee time, come along to the meetings.

We still may not agree on matters far weightier than cookies. Yet when the fruits of relationship with Christ are shared, one with another in humility, the cost and unease of discordant opinion can be subsumed in true like-mindedness, defined by Paul as a shared love, spirit, and purpose, not as consensus on a motion.

- Nancy Nordenson

Reading #30

Exodus 18:19-23

Fruitful Organizational Structures: Our organizational structures are designed to be efficient at making decisions while at the same time building congregational ownership for those decisions.

A church's organizational structure is built from the dedicated leaders within its congregation. Like the physical foundation of the church itself, leaders form cornerstones upon which great things are built. Building anything requires decision making, and leaders are essential to the decision making process in the church. They make decisions, but more importantly, they bring the congregation into the decisions. Congregational ownership for decisions is important, for without it the foundation of trust upon which the church has been established is eroded.

The selection of leaders is equally important. In the scripture reading, Jethro advises Moses on the selection of leaders (judges in this case) to assist in resolving disputes. So what makes a good church leader? The passage outlines the key attributes of being capable, God fearing, and trustworthy. "Capable" speaks to the basic ability to complete the required duties competently- it does not require the leader to be an expert or even the best within the congregation. "God fearing" clearly speaks to the person's faith in God. Again, the leader need not be the most pious or holy of the congregation- and only God truly knows one's faith. "Trustworthy" can be defined simply as reliable or deserving of trust and confidence. In leadership, trust is everything. If the congregation does not trust a leader, it will not matter how capable or God-fearing that individual is. No one wants to follow a leader they cannot trust and any organization lacking trust in leadership will not be fruitful.

Like Moses, a Pastor must share the burden of decision making with a leadership team, preferably one that is capable, God fearing, and trustworthy. They must strive to be both efficient and transparent: Efficiency will allow decisions to be made in a timely manner, and transparency will provide the congregation access to the reasons behind the decisions and build the ownership necessary to promote trust.

- Kevin Legler

The 10 Healthy Missional Markers

- Centrality of the Word of God
- Life transforming walk with Jesus
- Intentional evangelism
- Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy and justice ministries
- Global perspective and engagement
- Compelling Christian community
- Heartfelt worship
- Sacrificial and generous living and giving
- Culture of godly leadership
- Fruitful organizational structures