

## contents

series/sermon title	week	"journey" reflection author
<b>series: "road trip"</b> (pages 5-16)		
who goes with you?	8.31	Julie Gass
what's your destination	9.7	John Ream
embrace the detour	9.14	Dennis Hoff
<b>series: "documentary"</b> (pages 17-28)		
fog of war	9.21	Rob Ames
expelled	9.28	Steve Davis
maxed out	10.05	Terrilynn O'Brock
<b>series: "where you live: following christ"</b> (pages 29-44)		
second-class citizens	10.12	Sarah Byall
what's your vision	10.19	Aaron Laue
at home	10.26	Gary Blakeman
the new normal	11.02	Jim Burcham

## editors & designers

Matt Nagle

Ryan Heckman  
Michael Maybee

Gina Kellogg

## resources

All books listed below and other specific companion resources to each Sunday series are available in the HCC Bookstore.

- **The Story of God Bible** (Today's New International Version). All page references for scripture readings in *The Journey* are from this Bible, available at the Connect space.
- **www.BibleGateway.com** and **www.StudyLight.org**. Both web sites are great online sources for additional information.
- **... for Everyone Commentaries** by Tom Wright. Individual commentaries on each book of the New Testament (*Matthew for Everyone*, *John for Everyone*, *Mark for Everyone*, etc.) help explain its background and history.
- **The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels** by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall. Refer to this great tool when you want to better understand a specific topic in the Gospels.
- **Hard Sayings of the Bible** by Peter H. Davids, Frederick Fyvie Bruce, Manfred T. Brauch and Walter C. Kaiser. A helpful resource when something in the scriptures stumps you.
- **Bible Study Library (Logos Bible Software 3)** by Logos Bible Software. This software program can help you study the Bible more extensively and in its original languages.

Visit [www.heartlandchurch.org](http://www.heartlandchurch.org) for an online version of *The Journey guide*.

## welcome to the journey...

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..."*

—The Apostle Paul, Colossians 3:16

Have you ever played T-Ball? I don't remember much about it, other than the fact that it was lame. Few kids could catch, even less knew the rules, and—of course—you had to hit off a rubber batting tee.

*"What's the point?"* I thought.

Soon I graduated from the pee wees and, to my disgust, my Little League coach also made us practice with a tee! Same with my high school coach. College coach? Ditto. Little did I know that the little tee would follow me through every league, team and coach! Turns out, every Major League ballplayer practices off a tee—Still! *Why?* Because, unlike with a live pitch, everything on a tee is stationary, and ballplayers can—almost daily—work out all the kinks in their swing. Sometimes, it's for just a minute or two; other times, they spend hours at it. This is all so that, come game time, they can simply just react and let their natural instincts take over.

Some of you might be asking the same thing about reading the Bible: *"What's the point?"*

Well, the Scriptures are a bit like a batting tee. They are a stationary—or written—tool that God has given us to grow in relationship with him. By reading it, we understand him better—not to mention ourselves. We begin to see the world differently, and our perspective on life begins to change. Burdens are lifted, hope fills the spaces, and we slowly begin to work out all the kinks in our swing.

But here's the deal: Our life in Christ takes practice. This is why the Scriptures are essential to our growth. We gotta take it everywhere; read it daily ... Could be for a few minutes, could be for hours. So that as the curveballs of real life come our way, we will have grown so practiced in the ways of Jesus that we can just let our natural instincts take over.

Thus, *The Journey*. We've designed this little guide to help each of us—no matter what "league" we're in—develop a healthy rhythm and discipline to our days, months and years.

swing away,  
dan deeble

## road trip: who goes with you?

Who is journeying through life with you? People in your small group and friends at school or work may come to mind. Typically, small groups stay together for an average of 18 months, time in school is limited, and most of us change jobs a number of times during our working careers. Over our lifetimes, most of us will spend the greatest amount of time with our family members.

As adults, we can choose our immediate family through marriage, and we strive to choose wisely. But all of us are fallible, and marriage is a huge risk. If we pause to think about what can happen over the long haul, it can cause panic in even the bravest hearts. "For richer, for poorer ... " (But what if your spouse loses his or her job or a business collapses?) "In sickness and in health ... " (But what if your husband or wife develops Alzheimer's or diabetes?) It is an unhappy fact that a significant percentage of marriages will not survive the struggles life has in store.

We have no choice about the family we are born or adopted into and the struggles we encounter there. In adulthood, some may choose to distance themselves from their families of origin because of pain and struggles experienced in those relationships. This was the choice Chris made in the film "Into the Wild."

Before deciding whether to walk away or to struggle through, we need to ask, "Will this separation or isolation accomplish God's purposes for my life or in the lives of my family? Would God's purposes be better served if I choose to struggle through and stay in relationship with my family?"

The butterfly breaking out of her cocoon is a beautiful natural example of struggle. It takes every ounce of strength the butterfly has. She must rest frequently. A person seeing the struggle may want to help the fragile butterfly along by breaking away part of the cocoon. But, if the butterfly doesn't go through the struggle herself, she will die. She must gain strength through struggle to live and take flight and become all that God intended for her.

Whether it is our family of origin or our family by marriage, could it be that God has a purpose for our struggles, even if some of our worst fears come to pass? While most of us will experience hardships, heartache, pain or loss at some point in our lives, let's allow God to paint on the canvas of our lives and make us into the magnificent masterpieces he intends us to be. Through the process, we can become more compassionate and wiser, build stronger relationships and encounter a dimension of God's comfort and grace we would have missed otherwise.

*"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out where the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood. At best, he knows the triumph of high achievement; if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."*

—Theodore Roosevelt

# sunday notes

This Wednesday night, 7-9 p.m., come worship with us and celebrate communion at New Community, the first Wednesday of every month. (You'll find space to journal your thoughts and prayers during and after New Community in the back of this booklet.)

## monday

*Read: Genesis 2:15-25 (page 2)*

Why is it not good to be alone?

Think about those you are journeying through life with: How have they benefited you?

How have you been of help to them?

For further study, read Mark 10:2-9 (page 692).

**tuesday**

*Read: Matthew 10 (pages 665-666)*

How did their journey with Jesus affect the disciples' lives? If you have volunteered or served with others close to you, how did it affect your close relationships?

**wednesday**

*Read: James 4:1-12 (page 831)*

Our relationships cannot help but be affected by our brokenness.

How can you be a healing agent for your family?

For further study, read Proverbs 27:17 (page 450).

**thursday**

*Read: Psalm 133 (page 425)*

If you have experienced unity with fellow Christians, what has the impact been on your relationships? On those outside your circle of friends?

**friday**

*Read: Isaiah 45:9-12 (page 497-498)*

How does the fact that we are all uniquely created by God apply to family relationships?

How has God molded you for the better?

## road trip: what's your destination?

You might say it was the “mother of all road trips”! There was nothing quite like it before, and nothing since. Actually, the trip wasn't that far; as the “crow flies,” it was about 235 miles. But the route getting there was more like 610 miles, probably more, all on foot and mostly in the desert. It was quite a group of roadies—about 1.8 million in all, men, women and children. It started with a challenge, “Let my people go...” Ten plagues later, they left Rameses in Egypt and headed toward some land that had been promised to them. You know the account. Two years into the dreadful trip, there they are, standing just outside and looking into the land of milk and honey, Canaan. They think they've arrived, but they're not even close to their destination.

Perhaps they only heard the first part of God's challenge to Pharaoh, “Let my people go...!” and missed the last part, “... so that they may worship me.” They were slaves in Egypt and wanted their freedom, and what's wrong with that? Their feet may have been standing on the banks of the Jordan ready to wade across to the promised land, but their hearts were miles away from God. So the road trip took a U-turn back into the desert. Thirty-eight years later, they arrived, worshipping God and living in Canaan: God's destination.

Sometimes when I think about my “road trip” with Christ, I ask myself, “Is my destination his destination?” Am I distracted by my own desires to be freed from life's difficult situations—to get “comfortable” in the desert? Am I picking the easy battles and trying to sacrifice without committing? I think God wants my heart, and he wants yours, too.

My son went to Ethiopia a few months ago, along with other young adults from Heartland who had sponsored children there. On his return, I asked him what he got out of the trip. He said, “I don't want to go through life doing a little bit for Jesus here and a little bit for Jesus there. I want to jump in and make a commitment, live my life for him... I want it to be an adventure!” And I thought, “Now, that's a road trip!”

*“The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment,  
your peace of mind or even your happiness ... If you want to know why  
you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.*

*You were born by his purpose and for his purpose.”*

*—The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren*

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read Philippians 2:1-11 (page 804)*

It's evident, in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, that they are on a "road trip" with Christ. Their destination, like each of ours, is to live every day intimately with Christ now and eventually for the remainder of eternity. What do you find helps you stay on track with Christ and his purpose for you? In what ways do you keep your relationship with him connected and personal?

**tuesday**

*Reread Philippians 2:1-11 (page 804), focusing on verses 1-4*

Yes, these Philippians are “road-tripping” ... together. It’s not a “road race” of individual competitors but a “road trip” where everyone has the same purpose: life with Christ. The focus is not a few winners but the group making it to the destination. According to Paul, what keeps these Philippians together and moving in the same direction? In what ways do you help other believers stay on track? In what ways do others help you stay focused?

**wednesday**

*Reread Philippians 2:1:11 (page 804), focusing on verses 5-11*

The Philippians’ destination, like ours, is to live each day intimately with Christ and in relationship with others. List three individuals in your sphere of influence with whom you are most personally connected. In each of these relationships, how might you have the same attitude of mind that Christ Jesus had? In each of these relationships, what ways do you think God may have worked through them for your good?

**thursday**

*Reread Philippians 2:1:11 (page 804), focusing on verses 3-4*

“Road tripping” can be challenging and difficult. Paul’s exhortations in verses 3 and 4 imply some difficulties typical of the Philippians. Think about the roadies in your small groups, mentoring, work, leadership groups and other relationships. How do you value others’ above yourself and their interests—without ignoring your own? In what ways might Christ want you to put others before yourself? How might he want you to attend to your own interests?

**friday**

*Reread Philippians 2:1:11 (page 804), focusing on verses 1-4*

Heartland is on a “road trip.” As a body of believers, is our destination and God’s destination for us the same? Are we one in spirit, compassionate, obedient and ready to put others before ourselves? Do we have the same attitude of mind that Jesus Christ had? Prayerfully, what are some ways in which God might be asking you to get involved and help get us closer to our destination?

It’s an adventure!

## road trip: embrace the detour

My plan had run its course. Fresh out of ideas and hope, I sat in resignation of life itself. There I sat in the little room waiting for the doctor to come in. I do not recall his name. We shared a total of 10 minutes of life together that day. That was all the time it took for him to prescribe a bottle of "Let's try this." Perhaps it could help to get me re-engaged in life. Yet, like a small child hoping to get sick on the peas he is compelled to eat, I wanted to take the medication to spite all of my "friends" I felt had let me down. I wanted to see everyone else suffer as the medicine turned me into the zombie I imagined it would. Needless to say, the journey I was on did not fit any plan I had ever made. I was angry, bitter, frustrated and, yet, emotionally nonresponsive.

I took the medication as prescribed for a time. A short time it was. I had a lot of time to think because I had disengaged from most everything in life. I was the only person from whom I could not get away. It was not a pleasant time, but the fear of re-engaging in life, and failing, had lost its sting. How could things possibly be worse? How could I escape the reality that I had abandoned everything in life that brings purpose, joy and life? Did I really think I could feel fulfilled living a life of resignation and spite? I was angry and believed nothing positive could come out of this living hell.

I prayed to God for strength to reach out. I started by reaching out to a friend in my brokenness. No magic, no judgments, he just listened. We played that day. I had not given myself that gift in some time. Then, I opened my heart enough to the vulnerability of a men's group at 6:30 a.m.! I was desperate! Next, I began to actually talk to others at church rather than sneak in and sneak out. I began to take ownership, by the grace of God, in the life detour I took of my own choosing. I began re-engaging in community and sharing life and love.

I am still mending bridges and nursing wounds. I have found many more people are on my team than I ever imagined. Growing, living, loving and bonding still does not work the way I want it to! Still, I embrace the fact that it is the way God intended. I will not carry the load alone.

*"There is nothing like returning to a place  
that remains unchanged to find the ways  
in which you yourself have altered."*

—Nelson Mandela

# sunday notes

monday

*Read Galatians 6:2-5 (page 798-799)*

In your "detours" of life, what has God shown to you?

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned from your experience?

**tuesday**

*Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-15 (page 456)*

How have your friends played a part in your spiritual health?

What would you like more of in your "cord of three" strands?

**wednesday**

*Read John 8:1-11 (page 732-733)*

What about this passage is most profound to you?

What does this passage convey about Christ's love and mercy to you?

**thursday**

*Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 (page 790)*

The Lord had opened a door for Paul. He chose a different path. How does this passage speak to you about our dependence on God and brothers in Christ?

Have you ever made a similar choice? How did it make you feel?

**friday**

*Read Matthew 7:7-12 (page 663)*

What help do you want in the detours of life?

Pray a prayer reflecting on a difficult detour in your life.

## documentary: fog of war

There's plenty to hate about war. I hate the suffering and loss: of life, loved ones and, for some, faith. I hate the violence put upon the innocent. I hate that ordinary men prove capable of extraordinary atrocity. I hate that there is cowardice and brutality and treachery and greed. No just war is fought without injustice.

And yet I love the warrior—the unsung hero, the faithful brother, the liberator and convicted servant. I love the quiet sacrifice, the unlikely brotherhood, the unity of the home front and the cause that is greater than the individual. “The lord is a warrior” (Exodus 15:3, page 48), and his character has been cast in men and women in wars through the ages.

God knows war, has engaged in it, taken sides, chosen victors, seized occupied lands and swallowed an army with the sea. He has been prayed to and praised for his providence in battle. War has served God's purposes. However harsh that truth may seem, it is recorded throughout the Old Testament. It seems that whenever there's great tragedy, by cause of war or otherwise, our impulse is to question the presence of God in that awful moment. I think the Bible tells us he's there and with purpose—perhaps far more purpose than we are to comprehend.

Questions of war are not easy, I think, because God is both judge and lover. He is both just and merciful. I used to oversimplify his word this way: “The Old Testament God was wrathful towards man's sin, and the New Testament God came with love and redemption.” I've since concluded that as he is both, so too must we be both. I struggle with the tactical answers. How do we love when weapons are drawn? How do we rightly appropriate force against evil? All I can divine is that we must endeavor to do both according to God's will.

Above all I know God is for peace. I know that God opposes suffering, lifts up the oppressed and considers peacemakers his children. I see it in the life and words of Jesus. I read it in the psalms. I know it from the biblical record of God's quest to redeem and return the lost to his kingdom. God is good, and good is intolerant—sometimes violently—of evil.

*“Both [North and South] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes.”*  
—Abraham Lincoln

# sunday notes

monday

*Read: Deuteronomy 7:1-16 (page 126)*

Challenging as they are to read, these words remind me that God is present, engaged and with purpose even when I can't immediately see why or how. Where might God be moving to free the oppressed or topple the unrighteous? Where might his will be done by individuals or by armies?

**tuesday**

*Read: Matthew 5 (pages 661-662)*

Jesus lived out these words, and there was no truer an example than the way he suffered and died without resistance. What purpose was served in the way Jesus lived and was crucified? What actions does Matthew 5 stir your heart to take to live more like Jesus?

**wednesday**

*Read: Exodus 15:1-12 (page 48)*

What are the characteristics of a warrior that the Israelites of Moses' time saw in God? What characteristics of a warrior do you see in Christ and hope for yourself?

**thursday**

*Read: Deuteronomy 20:10-18 (pages 133-134)*

God created and loved the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, yet he handed them over to the Israelites whom he commanded to show them no mercy. As you read this passage, did your heart ache for these people? How does your knowledge of God, as revealed by Jesus' life, influence your interpretation of these events and drive your desire for mercy? Praise God for giving you a heart to love your enemies.

**friday**

*Read: Romans 12:14-21 (page 776)*

Robert E. Lee prayed for his enemies every night. Ask God for what wisdom and faith you need to live out his commands in this passage.

## documentary: expelled

“Will you help me dad?” The plaintive request came from my 9th grade daughter, Stephanie, at the dinner table. Her science assignment required her to pick a topic, do the research and then present a report complete with the mandatory trifold, corrugated cardboard display. The topic Stephanie chose was evolution, but she wanted to present the case for intelligent design. Her teacher, Mr. Kim, had made it clear he had no time for people who held such “backward ideas.”

“Well, honey,” I started slowly. “Of course, I’ll help you. What you need to do is carefully research your position, give scientific evidence and present your facts clearly. How they’re received is beyond your control.”

So we began our research. When the day came for her presentation, I sat at the back of the classroom wanting to make sure some high school science teacher didn’t abuse his authority and try to bully my daughter. As it turned out, I didn’t have anything to fear. Stephanie presented a clear and reasoned case for intelligent design. She was able to clearly present the lack of transitional species in the fossil record, the difference between micro- and macro-evolution and the statistical absurdity that something as complex as the human eye could have evolved by random chance. I was proud of her courage and controlled presentation.

We learned a couple of things. First, there is a deeply held bias toward anyone who would question the status quo, especially when it comes to Darwinian evolution. But we also learned that a reasoned argument, sticking to the facts and leaving the highly charged emotions behind can at times win the day.

Paul encountered the same thing during his missionary journeys. Frequently he was criticized and attacked for bucking the status quo, whether it was the Jewish beliefs or pagan gods. But he pressed on, stuck to the facts and gave reasoned arguments for Jesus and the truth of his death and resurrection and, in the end, some heard and came to faith in Christ.

So what happened to Stephanie? In the end Mr. Kim was very complimentary of her presentation, a few of her fellow students told her she presented things they’d not heard of before and, in the end, she received an “A” for her efforts.

*“What men dislike, because it opposes their pride and lusts,  
they will not be convinced of; but it is easy to cause them to believe things  
they wish to be true. God always sends with his word full proofs of its divine authority;  
but when men are bent to disobey, and willing to object,  
he often permits a snare to be laid wherein they are entangled.”*  
— Matthew Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Bible*

Other suggested readings regarding intelligent design: Hank Hanegraaffs’ *The Face That Demonstrates the Farce of Evolution* and Michael Behe’s *Darwin on Trial*.

# sunday notes

This Wednesday night, 7-9 p.m., come worship with us and celebrate communion at New Community, the first Wednesday of every month. (You'll find space to journal your thoughts and prayers during and after New Community in the back of this booklet.)

## monday

*Read: 1 Peter 3:8-22 (page 834)*

Focusing on verse 15 for a moment, how prepared do you feel to reason with skeptics on God's creation of the world? What do you think sometimes makes it difficult to use "gentleness and respect" in such a situation? Pray that God will help you be prepared and give you the best response in the next opportunity.

**tuesday**

*Read: Acts 17:16-34 (page 759)*

How did Paul respond to the pagan beliefs of the Athenians? What was their response? What can you learn for your life from Paul's experience in Athens?

**wednesday**

*Read: Acts 19:8-10 (page 760)*

What happened when Paul bucked the system and spoke of things that were contrary to the popular Jewish beliefs? How did Paul respond? Can you think of a time in your life when you were "put down" for your beliefs? How did/could you respond?

**thursday**

*Read: John 1:1-14 (page 726)*

To whom does "him" refer in verse 3? What feeling(s) does verse 10 trigger in you—for yourself and for those who do not recognize him?

**friday**

*Read: Exodus 7 (page 42-43)*

God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but people often harden their own hearts. What does it mean to harden your heart toward the truth of God? Pray for someone you know whose heart is hardened.

## documentary: maxed out

Boy, was I mad! Every month, I used my credit card for travel expenses for work. My limit was fairly low, and every month I would exceed my limit. The credit-card company sent me a letter saying that if I did not stop exceeding my limit they would take my card away. I called the credit-card company and asked to have my limit raised. After all, every month I paid the bill in full with my expense check from work. I explained this to the credit-card customer service person, but it did no good. Their records showed that I could not afford an increased line of credit.

This was irritating enough, but what really made me mad was later that day when my mom received a letter from the same credit-card company raising her limit. Mom was almost charged to her credit limit, regularly paid only the monthly minimum, and they were giving her more credit! It didn't make sense to me.

That was almost 25 years ago. Over the years, I watched my mom struggle with paying off those credit-card balances that seemed to keep growing through purchases and interest. My husband and I have a different credit card now. I still pay the monthly bill in full, though we use it for everyday expenses to earn frequent flyer miles. It is a nice way to save up for a vacation. But, some months the bill comes in and I wonder, "What did we spend this money on?" It is so very easy to just keep buying when all you have to do is swipe that card.

The Bible instructs us about the dangers of being in debt. It also instructs us in the wise use of our money. This week, we will take a look at some of the passages dealing with debt. Some debt is unavoidable, but my hope is that we may re-examine our reasons for incurring debt and eliminate those that are unnecessary.

*"Let no debt remain outstanding,  
except the continuing debt to love one another,  
for he who loves his fellowman  
has fulfilled the law."  
—Romans 13:8 (page 777)*

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 (page 456)*

In this passage, Solomon describes how the accumulation of money and goods can be disadvantageous. How would you evaluate your attitude toward money and goods in light of this passage? What effect (positive and/or negative) does this have on your life?

**tuesday**

*Read: Proverbs 22:7 (page 446) and 26-27 (page 447)*

Some debt is unavoidable—home mortgages or auto loans, for example. Few of us can purchase either one for cash. Other types of debt can be avoided. In this passage, the Bible describes what happens when you are in debt. What effect does your debt situation have on your life and the life of your family?

**wednesday**

*Read: Proverbs 6:1-5 (page 435)*

On Monday and Tuesday, you were asked to examine your debt situation and the effect it has on your life. In this passage, we read Solomon's advice on how to get out of debt (actually a co-signed debt). If you are in debt, what is your plan for getting free? If you are blessed with little or no debt, how might your experiences in getting to that point benefit others? Ask God to show you the way and to give you strength to make the tough decisions.

## thursday

*Read: Matthew 6:19-24 (page 663)*

If you just had this car you would be a success! If your kitchen had these appliances, you would be able to do so much more! Everyday we see advertising that tells us the road to happiness, success, more energy or more time is more "stuff." Where is the line between what is "necessary" in our lives and "storing up riches on earth"? When do we cross the line between functioning at an effective level in our daily lives and "serving money"? What checkpoints do you have in place (or need to put in place) to stay on the right side of the line?

## friday

*Read: Deuteronomy 15:1-9 (page 130)*

Today, after reading this passage, I want you to sit back and play what I call the "What if" game. What if every seven years your debts were forgiven? What if every seven years everyone's debts were forgiven? What would your life look like? What would your community look like? What would the world look like? What if ...

## where you live—following christ: second-class citizens?

Through the diminishing fog of slumber, I realized that I had yet again managed to sleep through my alarm on a Monday morning. “Great!” I thought as I dashed about my house racing to find an outfit with the least number of wrinkles. Grabbing an apple, and racing across town to my office, I secretly hoped that everyone would be busy checking e-mails, returning phone calls, settling into their week and would therefore not notice my tardiness. Instead, as I hurried through the doors of our building, I ran straight into three members of our office’s Leadership Team—including my boss. I fumbled through an apology for my lateness and then put forth my best effort at keeping a low profile. As I settled in, I couldn’t help but acknowledge the sinking feeling that I had possibly just solidified my place on the nonleadership team at work.

It occurred to me that while it was probable that I may have let my earthly bosses down that morning, I was still a first-class member of my father’s-in-heaven workforce thanks to the gift of his grace and forgiveness, which constantly covers my personal shortcomings. Not wanting to let my heavenly boss down as well, I pondered how an imperfect person goes about working under God’s authority while at the same time working for earthly masters who may not recognize God as an authority in their own lives.

The gospels reveal Jesus as he showed up and labored each day with a kingdom mission. We are taught in the New Testament about his character, his personal interactions and Jesus’ behavior under pressure, as well as his work ethic. Jesus was both a leader and a servant. He spoke the truth in love. Jesus lived a life of integrity, knowing that his actions and words were being observed, scrutinized and criticized by those around him. He showed up every day and worked hard even when he was tired. Jesus allowed himself to be used for his Father’s purposes and never grew weary of pointing lost people toward the freedom of God’s salvation and the hope of his kingdom. If our true vocation is to point people in this world toward God, then Jesus is surely the example we are to follow—no matter where we are employed or what mistakes we make on a daily basis.

By choosing to toil daily under God’s authority, we become part of a workforce of ordinary people who are being divinely used to accomplish the extraordinary. Let us be signposts for others and point our lives toward his kingdom.

*“We are meant to be signposts for Christ in the sense that the critical purpose of our lives is not what people think of us, but that they think of Jesus Christ because of us. As signposts, we should be almost invisible, pointing the way to the visible Christ. We are to make the invisible Christ more visible in all that we do.”*  
—Tim Hansel

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: 1 Peter 2:1-12 , focus on verse 9 (page 833)*

Believers are chosen, special, different and accountable for bringing others into the knowledge of God so they, too, can know they are chosen and loved by the creator. Why do you think it is sometimes difficult to share God's truth with others? Picture people in your mind with whom you would like to share the message of God's love and grace and pray specifically for each person's heart, life circumstances and salvation.

## tuesday

*Read: Colossians 3:22-4:1 (page 808)*

It is often difficult to do, give, put forth and offer our best efforts in every circumstance we face, yet we are told that by doing so we are serving the Lord. We are instructed to obey our earthly masters (or bosses) as we would obey God. What aspect of authority in your life brings you the greatest challenge in the area of obedience? Why do you believe you experience this? Take time to pray for wisdom, courage and strength in overcoming these obstacles to obedience so that you can continue to give your absolute best in service to God.

## wednesday

*Read: Matthew 5:13-16 (page 661)*

As believers, we are told to be a light in a dark world. Take a moment to consider the attributes and benefits of light. Think about your own character qualities exhibited in your workplace. Compare and contrast your character qualities with the qualities you listed for light. What similarities or differences do you notice? Ask God to grant you courage and wisdom to continue to become a better light in your workplace.

## thursday

*Read: Romans 13:1-5 (page 777)*

By establishing the authorities over us, God establishes himself as the authority over our authorities. What resistance do you experience when dealing with authority? If you struggle at work to respect your superiors, why is that? How do you show Christ's love to those in authority over you? Ask God to reveal the obstacles in your heart that prevent you from honoring God in your dealings with these people.

## friday

*Read: Titus 3:1-8, focus on verse 1-2 (page 819)*

Based on this passage, ask God to reveal to you how you can improve your interactions with coworkers, customers and colleagues. Ask yourself if you are walking with integrity, working hard when you are tired, honoring those not present and putting others before yourself. Spend time in prayer specifically directed toward your work environment: the people there, the circumstances, the challenges and the difficulties faced. Ask God to create opportunities for you to practice living this verse in a way that points to him.

# where you live—following christ: what's your vision?

I recently spent a season without a clear vision of my life. Who was I? What was I doing? Where was I going? All the while, I was sensing a predatory anxiety creeping about the perimeter of my faith. My evenings were times of wayward *nonaccomplishment*, and the mornings were times of uninspired dread. I was, at best, existing on my talents and, at worst, wasting them. It all started about the time I signed up for this very writing assignment you are reading. Now that my first draft is well over a month late, I am just now emerging from that season. Perhaps it's the process God uses—the undulation of life that reacquaints us with the brokenness that is the theme of this existence. But it seems as though each time I find myself moving through a trough of life, it always has purpose and orchestration as I look back from a more elevated vantage point.

I came to a personal epiphany a few years ago. My healthy existence required taking care of myself mentally, physically and spiritually. Therefore I constructed a daily routine of:

- 1) Reading my bible and journaling my thoughts and feelings (mental)
- 2) Working out and eating a healthy diet for my body type (physical)
- 3) Praying for everyone with whom I come into contact and asking God to use me as a positive influence in their lives and asking God to help me to submit my will to his—and be excited about it (spiritual).

When I do these things, my days are filled with a purpose, a peace, a joy and an eternal perspective that astounds. This may have something to do with the two greatest commandments:

- 1) LOVE THE LORD WITH YOUR ALL .
- 2) LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

I suppose the real question I must ponder is, "Is my vision for my life what God specifically designed for me or is it something that the enemy (Satan) is coaxing me to desire?" Is the enemy coaxing me to aim for something just a little left of center? Something that isn't completely wrong but is a slight perversion of what God specifically designed me to do and be? I do believe God has and does give each of us a clear vision of what it is we are to do and be. However, over time, that once-clear vision becomes distorted. Be encouraged to take a bold step toward that once clear vision and ask God to polish it so that you may observe and believe it once again, the way in which it was intended to be observed and believed, with a child-like faith.

*"Whenever God gives a vision to a saint, he puts him, as it were, in the shadow of his hand, and the saint's duty is to be still and listen. There is a darkness that comes from excess of light, and then is the time to listen ... When God gives a vision and darkness follows, wait. God will make you in accordance with the vision he has given if you will wait his time."*  
—Oswald Chambers

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: Psalm 1:1-6 (pages 369)*

List some of the promises in these verses. What changes to your current routines would you make if you believed these promises?

Consider all the inputs: What you read, eat, listen to, watch and touch.

Consider all the processing: What and how you think and feel.

Consider all the outputs: What and how you speak and act.

**tuesday**

*Read: Genesis 37:1-11 (pages 27)*

Joseph was mocked and called a dreamer. Have you ever had a vision of your life that might not land well with others? How did others' reactions affect your willingness to trust God and follow that vision? If you are unclear on God's vision for your life, ask him to reveal it to you. Then pray for the courage to trust him, no matter how ordinary or outlandish the vision might seem to you or to others.

**wednesday**

*Read: Matthew 6:25-34 (pages 63)*

I encourage you to read these verses through two or more times, asking God to hold the mirror of truth up to your life.

How do these verses reveal the primary focus of your thought life?

How can you retrain your mind to focus on that which is eternal?

## thursday

*Read: Matthew 7:7-12 (pages 663)*

List several petitions you have made to God: What? When? Why? How? Who? Where?

Reflect on the sincerity and nobility of these requests.

In prayer, thank God for his answers, regardless of how they may have differed from your expectations. For those still unanswered, evaluate your trust in God's capability to answer. Evaluate your own willingness to accept whatever his answer may be.

## friday

*Read: Matthew 7:24-27 (pages 663)*

Journal all the thoughts and feelings that come up as you consider the following questions.

Are you willing to pray that God make the No. 1 desire of your heart to desire him above all other desires?

Are you willing to become an obedient child to a perfect father?

Are you willing to submit your will to his will?

## where you live—following christ: at home

Proverbs 31:10-31 (page 453) describes “The Wife of Noble Character” and lists her many admirable attributes. She is energetic, talented and frugal. She rises early to care for her family and map out the day for her servants. She is wise and fears the Lord. After having read about this virtuous woman, I thought to myself, “Now, this is a wife who knows how to manage the affairs of her home.”

When God established the institution of marriage, it was meant to prepare us for the kingdom of heaven. God gave Adam a helper and companion when he gave him Eve. The marital relationship is symbolic of the relationship between Christ and his followers, the church. We, the followers of Christ, are the wife (or bride) and Christ is the husband (or groom). Observe how the wife in Proverbs 31 manages the responsibilities of her home. Might this be symbolic of how Christ expects us to care for all that he has given us? In order to be good stewards of our homes, as well as our mental and spiritual assets, we must “follow him.”

One of the more familiar statements of Jesus was simply, “Follow me.” When he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he looked at Peter and Peter’s brother Andrew, both fishermen, and said, “Follow me, and I’ll make you fishers of men.” He said the same thing to James and John, also fishermen (Matthew 4:18-22, page 661). Today, he requires no less from each of us than to follow him whether at work, home or anywhere in between.

*“Nor need we power or splendor, wide hall or lordly dome;  
the good, the true, the tender;  
these form the wealth of home.”*

—Sarah J. Hale

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: Proverbs 31 (page 453), focusing on verse 20*

We are encouraged throughout the Bible to care for the poor and needy. The woman of Proverbs 31 opens her arms to the poor and needy. If the opportunity to open your home to a stranger in need presented itself today, how would you respond (or how have you responded)?

**tuesday**

*Read: Proverbs 31 (page 453), focusing on verses 12, 27 and 28,  
and Colossians 3:18-21 (page 808)*

This week, we are studying what it looks like to follow Jesus in our homes. How we treat our family members is important to God. In today's reading, the woman of Proverbs 31 brings her husband good, and not harm, all the days of her life. Paul suggests how we are to love and respect family members. What specifically could you do to be a better father, mother or child in your home? Make a concentrated effort to follow through with your ideas

**wednesday**

*Read: Isaiah 6:1-8 (page 470)*

Will you allow the Holy Spirit to bring you face to face with God? If you do, you too will hear what Isaiah heard: "the voice of the Lord." Then, you too might say, "Here am I! Send me." How are you following his voice as to how it relates to your home life? When have you heard the "voice of the Lord," and what was your response?

## thursday

*Read: Acts 2:42-47 (page 746)*

Have you opened your home to “break bread” and celebrate Christ with a small group? If you have, what benefits have come from doing this? If you haven’t yet done that, would you like to? You can start or join a small group by stopping by the “Grow Table” in the atrium on Sunday.

## friday

*Read: Matthew 4:18-22 (page 661)*

When Jesus asked Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him, it was to make them fishers of men. List some of the ways you think you could use your home to become a better disciple and, therefore, a better “fisher of men.” Pray that God would help you to find ways to use your home for this purpose.

## where you live—following christ: the new normal

Paul writes in Colossians 1:27, “To them, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery ... ” Sounds simple enough. God is reaching out to all of his people. But by what means? Is God going to address all people over a big public-address system? All I have to do is sit back and let God make his announcements?

Paul finishes in Colossians 1:27 with “...which is Christ in you, the hope of Glory.” I believe that Paul is referring to sanctification, the process of Christ being formed in us. I venture to say that we are to be the public-address system that spreads the word of God. And to effectively and convincingly spread God’s word, we must be transformed by it into the image of his son, Jesus. We must be sanctified.

Sanctification is a process, a life-long process, to grow in maturity with Christ. To be mature is to strip away all the nonessentials and get down to the basics—to be like Christ. No more, no less. This is what I am working at day after day—doing my best with the energy God so generously gives me.

When addressing sanctification, C.S. Lewis wrote, “But I should, myself, be ‘chary’ of describing such operations of the Holy Ghost as ‘experiences’ if by experiences we mean things necessarily discoverable by introspection. And I should be more ‘chary’ of mapping out a series of such experiences as an indispensable *norm* (emphasis added) for all Christians.” My new normal—my series of experiences—may not be your new normal.

In my own life, the new norm is to take time each day to discover by introspection what experiences Christ has led me through that day. These experiences that I reflect upon are, for the most part, little items. Over time, through reading the Bible and acknowledging Christ’s presence in my daily life, I am able to see what Christ is doing to mold me. Through the excitement of owning a business to the fear of battling the IRS (with everything in between), Christ has used these experiences that I may grow to maturity in him. As C.S. Lewis mentioned in regards to mapping out a series of experiences, I decided to give it a try. It was an amazing exercise. I highly recommend it as a way to identify and define your new normal.

*“When humility delivers a person from attachment  
to their own works and reputation,  
they discover true joy is only possible  
when we have completely forgotten ourselves.”  
—Thomas Merton*

# sunday notes

This Wednesday night, 7-9 p.m., come worship with us and celebrate communion at New Community, the first Wednesday of every month. (You'll find space to journal your thoughts and prayers during and after New Community in the back of this booklet.)

## monday

*Read: Colossians 1:24-29 (page 807)*

Let us consider Christ dwelling and reigning in us.

How would you describe the glorious riches of this mystery?

**tuesday**

*Read: Ephesians 2:8-10 (page 800)*

Reflect back on your own experiences with Christ.

What maturity has come to you in preparation?

**wednesday**

*Read: 2 Corinthians 9 (page 793)*

"Sow a thought and you reap an act; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny." (*Life and Labor* by Samuel Smiles).

Compare your "normal" sowing before becoming a follower of Christ to your "new normal" sowing. Offer a prayer to God thanking him for what you have reaped and asking him to continue to guide your sowing.

**thursday**

*Read: Proverbs 11:25 (page 438)*

How refreshed do you feel? Who refreshed you? Who do you know who needs refreshing?

**friday**

*Read: Galatians 6:9-10 (page 799)*

Have you ever become weary from doing good? What was it that wearied you?  
Whose strength were you relying on?

## **new community, 9.3**

*notes and prayers*

## **new community, 10.1**

*notes and prayers*

## **stubborn prayers**

*Following in the footsteps of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 (page 718), we offer our stubborn prayers. You may record yours here ...*