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grow

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*the journey*



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## 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

# the republic: the inspiration of defeat

Downcast and dejected, the political campaign manager sat in the church he loved—the church from which his campaign duties had kept him away for months. How could his candidate have lost?

His mind wandered as he relived the previous months. He had given almost every waking minute to the campaign. What had gone wrong? Did the voters understand the consequences of their choices—even their choice not to vote? He was searching for guidance, for his country and his own future.

He believed he had agreed to manage the campaign for all the right reasons—not for personal gain nor because of the candidate’s charisma, but because of their shared principles, which aligned so completely. He knew how desperately our country, like a ship in turbulent waters, needed a rudder to guide it.

For over a year, he had orchestrated media events, managed phone banks, organized volunteers, coordinated rides to the polls and marshaled teenagers to paint posters and attend rallies. He thrived on the surge of adrenaline he got from taking action! Involvement in politics made him feel he was doing something positive for his country and family. But, the result of this campaign was emptiness.

He tuned back in to the pastor who was discussing the power of prayer and how God could change hearts and lives. Was life change really essential for the electorate to understand the key principles at stake in the governance of our country? His perception of the power of prayer seemed so weak in comparison to the power and influence of politics. Heart and life change seemed so slow in comparison with the fast pace of political campaigns. Though changing minds was the root of the issue, this kind of change simply could take many years. He acknowledged something was needed to help the voters understand the staged, air-brushed media events, the sound bites that sometimes distorted the candidate’s message and the, sometimes impossible, campaign promises.

Political campaigns were often superficial and often did not address the root issues. He prayed for guidance ... Perhaps prayer was not as weak as he once thought.

He would continue to influence his circle of friends to be informed and vote. He knew the importance of every political office for checks and balances and that it is our duty to make our opinion known to our elected officials. But, he would invest more time in changing lives, his own and others. And, he would seek help for his country from God through prayer.

*“...Do not be afraid. Stand firm, and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”—Exodus 14:13-14 (page 48)*

**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.)**

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: Romans 13:1 (page 777)  
and Philippians 3:20-21 (page 805)*

We have a dual citizenship: on this earth, where we are subject to the governing authorities, and in heaven.

What type of leader do you find it easy to be led by and what type of leader is more difficult for you? Why do you believe God allows ungodly leaders to be in charge in some cases?

In what ways does it comfort you to know that, as a believer, your ultimate citizenship is in heaven?

For further study, read the remainder of Romans 13 and Matthew 8:5-10 (page 664).

**tuesday**

*Read: Proverbs 21:1 (page 445)*

Describe an example of a leader, either from modern times or from scripture, who acted to bring about God's purposes even though the leader may not have believed in God.

For further study, read Mark 9:35 (page 691).

**wednesday**

*Read: Ezekiel 36:24-36 (page 591)*

In what ways has God already given you a new heart?

How is heart change helpful in the political process?

**thursday**

*Read: Colossians 4:2-6 (page 808)*

What answers to prayer have you seen that are relevant to our country or our leaders?  
How can we speak wisely to influence others in regard to the political process?

Write down your prayer concerns. Include what you will pray for our country and the political process.

**friday**

*Read: 2 Chronicles 16:7 (page 305)  
and 2 Chronicles 20:6-9, 17 (page 307)*

In what ways have you relied on government leaders to the exclusion of God?

Why do you believe the Lord fought for Jehoshaphat? How can we apply 2 Chronicles 20:17 to the political situation in our country today?

# the republic: one nation under God

"In all my life, no one had ever been so warm and loving to me outside of my family. And now it was coming from a man who had loathed me for years and whom I had known for barely two hours." Chuck Colson, in *Born Again* said that of his introduction to Harold Hughes.

Colson was Richard Nixon's "hatchet man" during Nixon's years in the White House. Hughes was a powerful democratic senator from Iowa from 1969 to 1975. Hughes, a strong vocal critic of Nixon, told their mutual friend Doug Coe prior to meeting Colson: "There isn't anyone I dislike more than Colson. I'm against everything he stands for." Yet at their first meeting, Colson and Hughes found themselves hugging and proclaiming their commitment to Christ and each other as brothers in Christ.

In this year of presidential hype, you may be asking yourself, "Who would Jesus vote for?" Maybe the question you should ask is, "As a follower of Christ, what is my responsibility toward those with an opposing political view?"

When a Roman Centurion approached him asking for help, Jesus didn't harangue him for serving in a brutal occupying force and tell him to leave. Rather, Jesus told his followers, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (Matthew 8:10, page 664). When asked about paying taxes to the Roman government, whose pantheistic culture went against everything his Jewish culture held dear, Jesus didn't say to withhold the money. He said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21, page 676). When God instructed Peter to go to the home of the Roman Centurion Cornelius, Peter went and said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34, page 753).

Prolife, prochoice, marriage only for one-man one-woman, same-sex marriage, universal health care, war...the topics go on and on, and there are Christians on both sides of the issues. Since the founding of this country, many godly men and women have held diametrically opposing views. We can, and should, debate vigorously from a biblical worldview the issues as best we can, but we must temper the debate with respect and grace, because we can't see into other's hearts as God does.

You can be assured that after their meeting many years ago, Harold Hughes and Chuck Colson still held opposing views on many issues facing our nation, and both continued exercising their right to voice those views. I believe they both sought to do what they felt was best for the country, from a biblical worldview, to accept one another in spite of their differences and to leave the rest up to God. What will you do?

*"That's all I need to know," he said. "I love you now as my brother in Christ. I will stand with you, defend you anywhere and trust you with anything I have."—U.S. Senator Harold Hughes to Chuck Colson in the book *Born Again**

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: Acts 10:1-33 (page 752)*

God instructed Peter to go to the home of the Roman Centurion Cornelius. How did Peter view the Romans and how do you think he felt at that request? Are there any "Romans" in your life God may be calling you to go to?

tuesday

*Read: Matthew 8:5-13 (page 664)*

A Roman Centurion approached Jesus asking for help. As part of a brutal occupying force, the people of Judea hated the Romans and were looking for their messiah to overthrow them. Consider how Jesus responded to this man. What can you learn from Jesus' response that you can apply in your own life?

wednesday

*Read: Luke 6:12-16 (page 705) and Acts 1:13 (page 745)*

One of the 12 Jesus selected was "Simon who was called the Zealot." The Zealots were a fanatical sect arising in Judea during the first century A.D. and militantly opposing the Roman domination of Palestine. What does Jesus' selection of such a person say to you? Are there any "zealots" in your life and, if so, how should you respond?

**thursday**

*Read: Genesis 41:1-40 (page 29)*

Joseph was God-fearing and found himself before Pharaoh in Egypt. How did he respond to being in Egypt at Pharaoh's throne? Knowing that the Egyptians did not share his same values, how did Joseph respond? What can you learn from Joseph's example?

**friday**

*Read: Colossians 3:8-13 (page 808)*

How are we to view Christians with different backgrounds and beliefs? Consider how you would respond to them.

## every man a disciple

As soon as I had spoken, I knew I had said the wrong thing. Once again, I tried to convert them to my way of thinking instead of introducing them to the “bridegroom,” Jesus Christ.

We had just left a wedding where my in-laws and their close friends—the parents of the bride—were very offended by the pastor’s comments regarding a wife’s submission to her husband. (I think he handled the subject poorly. Even though he spoke truth, he was rather indelicate and insensitive in his presentation.) When they expressed their feelings, I leapt in with my brilliant comment of, “Most people don’t really understand the true nature of biblical submission. Anyone who did couldn’t possibly object to such a loving, selfless relationship.” The silence that followed was deafening.

In the years since then, I have thought of several ways I could have handled it better. None of them involved convincing them they were wrong and getting them to agree with me.

Jesus did not command us to make people think, vote or dress like we do. He commanded us to make disciples. Discipleship doesn’t mean devotion to some particular moral agenda or political party. It is about passionate devotion to the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that the disciple’s relationship with him must take first priority in the disciple’s life. He went so far as to say, “Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one’s own self!—can’t be my disciple” (Luke 14:25-27, from The Message paraphrase of the Bible).

People have to get to know Jesus before they can become devoted to him. And it is our job as believers—disciples—to introduce them to him. How would you feel if someone told you, “Let me introduce you to this guy who says you are categorically wrong about ... fill in the blank”? Now, suppose someone offered to introduce you to a person who is dying to meet you—someone who desperately wants to know you as his close friend. Which offer would you respond to eagerly?

When we tell people about the life-changing power of a relationship with Jesus, we must be sensitive to where they are and how they are feeling. Someone already feeling conviction and a desire to address the sin in his or her life may benefit more from hearing about God’s grace. But those living in denial about their sins may need to hear about the consequences of their actions. We will reach more people for Jesus through involvement in their lives, good listening skills and by speaking the truth gently and lovingly.

*“But, in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”—1 Peter 3:15 (page 834)*

# sunday notes

monday

*Read: Matthew 28:18-20 (page 683)*

Why do you think Jesus started off with the statement about his authority? How does that make you feel about your responsibility and your ability to make disciples?

**tuesday**

*Read: Matthew Luke 14:25-33 (page 715)*

Jesus makes it very clear that our relationship with him must be our highest priority and that discipleship requires sacrifice. But the rewards—fullness of life on earth and eternal life with God—are worth it.

Think of the ways you have denied yourself and taken up your cross to follow Jesus. Prayerfully thank God for giving you the strength to take these steps. Ask him for the strength to continue and to take the next step. What is that next step?

Consider the ways in which your life is fuller because you are a follower of Christ and thank God for those blessings.

**wednesday**

*Read: James 1: 22-25 (page 830)*

Discipleship involves diligent study of God's word. But mere "head knowledge" is useless if it does not influence how we live.

If you have never done it before, take a few minutes to jot down your favorite Scripture verses—the ones that have the greatest influence on how you live your life. Now, share those with a new believer or nonbeliever and discuss their effect on you.

**thursday**

*Read: Romans 7:14-25 (page 773)  
and 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (page 810)*

Have you ever felt that you were not “good enough” to share your faith with someone else? How does it make you feel that even the Apostle Paul struggled with sin, yet was a powerful witness for Christ?

Paul did not just tell people about the Gospel; he shared his very life—openly and honestly—with them. Who are you sharing the Gospel with as you share your life with them? If there is no one, pray that God would bring such a person into your life.

**friday**

*Read: Acts 2:1-40 (page 745)*

Peter and the other disciples persuaded 3,000 people to give their lives to Christ that day.

How responsive do you think the crowd would have been if they had not witnessed the dramatic display of the Holy Spirit’s power in the disciples’ lives?

Not every life displays the Holy Spirit’s power this dramatically. It is usually more subtle, but it should still be obvious to those around us. What are some of the ways his power is displayed in your life? Prayerfully thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit and his influence on your life.

## the '80s: lost

We all have been lost (in an earthly sense) from time to time. When I did not know Jesus, I was spiritually lost—I wandered aimlessly through the wilderness of life. I was totally lost, walking in circles, when Jesus called to me. Thank God for search and rescue.

When I found Jesus, my life became different. Jesus showed me a love, a peace and a joy I had never before experienced. I began going to church, worshiping and praying, every week. I felt I was on a mountain top. Weeks went by, then months. Now, I am so busy. My job is ever more demanding. My home life is always filled with activities and chores. The world is spinning ever faster. I don't seem to have any time. I must take control. I have to take control when things go wrong. I have to fix things that fall apart. Anxiety and apprehension have replaced peace and joy. I have lost my way. How can this be? After all, I found Jesus.

It is a different kind of lost, because I still have the salvation given to me when I accepted Christ. But I am trying to control and direct my life. In *No Man Left Behind*, Patrick Morely says, "When we try to be independent, we sin. When we walk by faith, Christ's righteousness is lived out in obedience." When I try to be independent, I get lost.

Luke 15 consists of three parables about being lost: "The Lost Sheep," "The Lost Coin" and "The Lost Son." At the end of each, we see a celebration. These are not secret celebrations but public events including family, neighbors and friends. When the lost son comes home, he is a part of the celebration. What joy he must have felt when he repented to his father and was forgiven. Jesus tells us there is rejoicing in heaven over even one sinner who repents.

When I sin, I fall away from God. I am in the dark and cannot see the path that leads to God. At first, I try to find my way back, but I stumble and fall. I realize I can't get back on my own. I must toss aside my pride, admit my sins and seek forgiveness. When I do, I feel a hand firmly grasp my sweaty palm and start leading me. The light begins to dawn, and my path starts to become clear. I hear a loving whisper say, "Welcome home." What joy and relief to be back in loving arms. No wonder there is a celebration!

*"The modern age has been characterized by a Promethean spirit, a restless energy that preys on speed records and shortcuts, unmindful of the past, uncaring of the future, existing only for the moment and the quick fix. The earthly rhythms that characterize a more pastoral way of life have been shunted aside to make room for the fast track of an urbanized existence. Lost in a sea of perpetual technological transition, modern man and woman find themselves increasingly alienated from the ecological choreography of the planet."—Jeremy Rifkin*

# sunday notes

monday

*Read: Luke 15:1-10 (page 716)*

Reflect on the time when you were found.  
How did it feel?

**tuesday**

*Read: Luke 15:11-32 (page 716)*

We all stray away and become lost from time to time.

How does it feel when you are lost?

**wednesday**

*Read: Genesis 3:1-7 (page 2)*

The serpent works on us to this day.

What are some of the things the serpent is using to help you lose your way?

## thursday

*Read: Romans 3:23-24 (page 770)*

Being lost is separation from God.

How does this passage speak to being lost and then found?

## friday

*Read: Luke 15:11-32 (page 716)*

Focus on the celebration.

How will you respond to a brother or sister finding their way back to Christ?

## the '80s: love

Music and the theme of love is a combination created, I am guessing, when the first notes ever heard were played. The theme reverberates down the corridors of time to sing its tune still today. Reflecting on the '80s, I fondly recall songs at the top of the charts that explored this love—songs such as, “Sowing the Seeds of Love” and “What Is Love?” These stories set to music resonated with the hearts of just about anyone with an ear to hear. What is at the root of this desire so easily elicited by this music? What chord responds in our hearts when we hear lyrics such as, “. . .anything is possible when you're sowing the seeds of love”?

The popularity of these songs throughout time indicates they connect with something deep yet very common among listeners. Why are our hearts so easily aroused by a song of love and the hope for it?

These songs connect universally with something deep within us, the longing to be loved for who we are—to feel a warm embrace when our spirits are low. They echo in our hearts because we long for grace in the face of shame, assurance for our wounded souls and understanding when life does not make sense. We find in them the love we crave—love that soothes away our feelings of insignificance and loneliness, healing our hurting hearts.

Centuries of cultural change have not tarnished this timeless treasure of love embedded in music. From this, we can easily conclude that we are made for love, to give and receive love. Love and our heart are a combination created when we were.

There is a book of songs, a love story, written and performed long before the '80s, that carries this theme of love. It includes hits such as “Song of Solomon,” “Psalms” and even the nebulous title of “1 John.” These songs have stood the test of time and are chart-toppers yet today.

This love story sings a story of someone sacrificing everything for us. It invites us to embrace this loving sacrifice—to open our heart, let go of the temporal tune our culture offers and take hold of the ultimate love. This week, explore this timeless love song of God.

*“Love is the greatest refreshment in life.”—Pablo Picasso*

# sunday notes

monday

*Read: 1 John 2:28-3:1 (page 839)*

What does it mean to you to be a child of God?

What is your experience of his love for you?

tuesday

*Read: 1 John 3:11-24 (page 839)*

Describe a time in your life when someone gave a great gift to you out of love.

What did that feel like? In what ways does your heart come alive when you give love?

wednesday

*Read: Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) 1:5-6  
and 2:8-13 (page 461)*

Solomon's beloved does not feel beautiful (as evidenced by her self-description in 1:5-6). Because Solomon describes her as he sees her, through his deep love, she begins to see herself as beautiful. When we see ourselves through God's loving eyes, we begin to see ourselves as beautiful.

What stirs in your heart as you read this passage? In what ways do you see yourself differently when you look from God's point of view?

**thursday**

*Read: Luke 15:11-31 (page 716)*

What part of this passage speaks loudest to your heart?

**friday**

*Read: Psalm 23 (page 377)*

In light of your present circumstances, what does this song sing to you?

## the '80s: life to the fullest

There's a great scene in the 1989 movie, "Parenthood," in which Gil, played by Steve Martin, is having a conversation with his grandmother. She's telling him about the early years with her husband, and she says, "You know, when I was 19, grandpa took me on a roller coaster. Up, down, up, down! Oh, what a ride! I always wanted to go again. You know, it was just so interesting to me that a ride could make me so frightened, so scared, so sick, so excited and so thrilled all together! Some didn't like it. They went on the merry-go-round. That just goes around. Nothing. I like the roller coaster. You get more out of it."

And isn't that really a picture of the abundant life into which Jesus calls us? He never said it would be easy, without struggle or hardship. We are guaranteed times when it will be scary to trust him, when all we can do is cling tightly to him and close our eyes; let him take us where he's going, leaning into the turns as if on the back of a motorcycle that he's driving dangerously into the night. There will be growing pains and times when we can't think beyond the rain to the new life and growth ahead—when we can't imagine the Promised Land after the desert. But, there will also be times of intense joy and excitement, when trusting comes easily, when he shows us things about himself and about ourselves that are beyond all our wildest imaginations! There will be ups and downs, twists and turns, loop-de-loops and things around the next turn that we won't be able to see in advance. The thrill of the ride is in the unknowns.

The enemy will inevitably come and try to steal our joy, kill our life and destroy our trust. He will attempt to fill us with fear, doubt and a mere will to survive instead of a desire and passion to thrive and be and feel fully alive in every sense of the word. For some, the enemy will succeed at what he's come to do. He will steal their hope for something more, something greater than themselves, something luminous and thrilling. Instead, they will be left with the merry-go-round of life: the same round-and-round motion offering the same view as the last revolution around the same unchanging, stationary point of reference.

As for me, I'm with grandma: "I like the roller coaster. You get more out of it."

*"Basic elemental instinct to survive / Stirs the higher passions / Thrill to be alive ... / From the point of ignition / To the final drive / The point of the journey / Is not to arrive / Anything can happen..."—Rush, "Prime Mover" (1987)*

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# sunday notes

monday

*Read: John 10:10 (page 735)*

What images and feelings does this passage conjure for you? In what ways has the enemy stolen life and joy from you? When have you experienced a life more abundant?

tuesday

*Read: Romans 6:1-14 (page 772)*

Part of life more abundant means living with faith in God's grace and not with shame over our inability to keep the law.

In what areas of your life are you or have you been living out of shame? In what areas have you lived with faith in God's grace? How might Jesus be calling you to make some adjustments in these areas?

wednesday

*Read: Ephesians 2:10 (page 800) and Romans 12:4-8 (page 776)*

Being without purpose leaves us feeling empty and unfulfilled, sucking the life out of us. Knowing our purpose and fulfilling it, however, breathes new life into us.

Have you utilized the resources at Heartland to help you discover your gifts, passions and purpose? If so, what did you find out about yourself and how are you putting that into practice? If not, consider discovering more about who God designed you to be by studying the book *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ* in a small-group setting. The book is available in the HCC Bookstore.

**thursday**

*Read: Matthew 16:24-28 (page 671)*

Society teaches us that “life to the fullest” means living for ourselves, looking out for No. 1, doing whatever it takes to come out ahead of the next guy. This passage teaches the opposite approach: losing your life in order to find it. In other words, fully surrendering everything about you to Jesus’ control and offering it all back to him.

What thoughts, images or feelings does reading this passage bring up for you? In what ways have you found life through losing it? What are some areas of your life that you might need to “lose” to come more fully into abundant life?

**friday**

*Read: 2 Corinthians 5:16-18 (page 792)*

Becoming “new,” or the process of sanctification, is really a life-long process and not just a once-and-for-all deal. There will always be something old in you that God will bring to the surface to make new.

How is God making you a new creation? What “old” in your life are you thankful he is removing from your life?

## serve: gifts

As our pilot announced that it was 30° F and snowing in New York, and the flight attendants prepared for landing, I fretted over the Christmas gifts I had not yet purchased. “What can I get for a young French woman, as beautiful as a model, intelligent enough to practice law in three countries?” I thought. “I don’t have enough money! What can I get for her mother (from Paris!) whom I have never met? I hate shopping! What about the twin sister and her fiancé, both from wealthy families? I don’t even know the stores in New York!”

I had met my new daughter-in-law just once, a couple of months before she and my son, Josh, eloped. Now we would finally meet her family ... and celebrate Christmas with them. We had little time and even less money to find the “perfect” gifts. What kind of first impression would we make? I felt like the proverbial “country cousin.”

As we wrestled with our luggage at the taxi stand, I called Josh, asking for advice on where to go and what to get. I had to get started if I was going to find suitable gifts. He calmly said he needed me to take care of the girls and shopping would wait until he got off work on Christmas Eve. The window of time suddenly shrunk! Our celebration was to be on Christmas Eve!

So, there we were, late afternoon, Christmas Eve, Fifth Avenue. As we made our way through the crowds, going from store to store, Josh and I found some beautiful gifts. To make it easy, he said, he would pay for them all, and we would sort it out later. (We never did, and he never intended for us to.) I found my anxiety turning into excitement. I suddenly noticed the decorations and the tree at Rockefeller Center. I felt the anticipation of giving, of bringing happiness to others. I felt the spirit of Christmas and the joy of sharing that with my son.

In Matthew 22:1-14 (page 676), Jesus tells a parable of a wedding banquet—that of Christ and his bride, the church. The expectation is that we come dressed appropriately, and he is the only one who can give us the righteous attire required. Gifts are appropriate at weddings, too, and I can imagine we might feel like I did at Christmas if we had nothing to bring. But, the good news is that we don’t have to come empty-handed. He gives us spiritual gifts of service that are to honor him. And, much like my story, the gifts are perfect, they are freely given to us and our giving of them results in great joy.

*“I have no gift to bring ... that’s fit to give the King. I played my drum for him, I played my best for him, pah rum pum pum pum.”—Katherine K. Davis (“The Little Drummer Boy”)*

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: Ephesians 4:1-16 (page 801)*

This passage lists and describes the spiritual gifts used “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” What are you doing when others are encouraged by you? What are you doing when you feel most compassionate toward others? These are indicators of your spiritual gifts. If you are having difficulty identifying your spiritual gifts, volunteer in various areas until you discover where you see your service building up others. Ask those close to you what they see in you as spiritual gifts.

For further study, read *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ* by Bruce L. Bugbee, Romans 12:1-8 (page 776) and 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31 (page 786).

**tuesday**

*Read: Matthew 22:37-40 (page 676),  
Galatians 5:13 (page 798) and 1 Peter 4:10-11 (page 835)*

God gives us spiritual gifts so that we can serve others. How and where are you serving? How does it bring honor and praise to God?

**wednesday**

*Read: Romans 12:3-8 (page 776)*

God has a specific plan and place for each of us to serve. Pray that he will reveal to you where you fit in the body of Christ. Then watch for opportunities to open up for you to serve.

## thursday

*Read: Exodus 3:10-12 (page 40),  
2 Timothy 1:6-7 (page 817) and Psalm 138:8 (page 427)*

Even Moses felt inadequate when called for service to God, but the Lord promises he'll work through us. How do you feel about stepping out and serving? Pray that God will give you a heart for service and that he will fulfill his purpose for you.

## friday

*Read: John 13:3-5, 12-17 (page 738)  
and Philippians 2:5-7 (page 804)*

Jesus has given us the example of service we are to follow. How can you become more like him in this area?

# life stories

Ten minutes after picking up my 5-year old granddaughter at the French School on Manhattan's Upper Eastside, we settled into our time-honored after-school routine. Walking to Starbucks at 75th and 1st streets, we indulged in our usual afternoon snack: chocolate milk and an M&M cookie for Tasha and a venti Americano for me. Sitting by the window, we talked about what Tasha learned that day or made up stories about Mr. Fix It or the firefighter pigs from her Richard Scarry books (stories to which she always added her real-life firefighting hero, Firefighter Rob). Then we drew pictures—fish, turtles, flowers, birds, icebergs and the Titanic.

Today, the conversation turned from storybooks to family stories; Tasha listened intently as I shared tales from my boyhood on the big farm in central Missouri. I told her about raising pigs, harvesting wheat on the big combines and riding tractors. I told her about a time when I was very small and, to my Grandma's horror, I crossed the neighbors' fence and stood next to their massive Hereford bull. Until that day, no one had suspected the bull was anything but ferocious. After my little expedition across the fence, I guess we all rested a bit easier.

One of Tasha's favorite stories was about the time back in May of '61 when my Uncle Earl and Uncle Ronnie and I went fishing and a tornado came toward us. She listened closely as I told the tale and transitioned into another in which my grandma told me about seeing four tornados on the ground at once in southeast Kansas. As we finished our treats and prepared to head home, it occurred to me how special these after-school times were. This wasn't just idle conversation over cookies and caffeine; I was passing my life on to my granddaughter. In two stories, I had given her bits of life from four generations of our family.

Stories are wonderful channels of life, allowing us to give a portion of our lives to others—to pass along those things which make us unique and alive to those in whom we invest. Jesus was a master storyteller, using parables to pour his life into his disciples. The Bible itself is a treasure trove of life-changing stories that allows us to draw on that life. For example, Acts 10 (page 752) tells how Cornelius' devotion to God and service to the poor opened a door for God to bring salvation to the Gentiles. How can we catch that spirit of consistent service to God and the poor? How can we pray and walk into that kind of life? This week, we'll explore this and other stories that will reflect into our lives.

*"People create stories create people; or rather stories create people create stories."*—Chinua Achebe

# sunday notes

## monday

*Read: Acts 10 (page 752)*

Cornelius' devotion to God and obedience opened the path of salvation to the Gentiles.

What does the path of devotion look like in your life? Reflect on a time when you, or someone you know, has been called to obedience and then watched God open doors because of it. Give thanks to God for that situation and pray that he will open more opportunities for obedience and give you the grace to walk into them fully.

## tuesday

*Read: Genesis 37:3-36 (page 27) and Genesis 45:1-9 (page 33)*

Joseph's journey into upper management in Egypt started on a pretty sour note, but when we fast-forward to his reunion with his brothers, he has come to recognize that his suffering saved many from death.

We've all had times when it seemed that life had beaten us up, thrown us in a hole and sold us into slavery. Maybe you feel that way now. Pray that God will give you the strength to persevere through suffering and that he will impart to you his vision for the results. Thank him for the opportunity to suffer for the benefit of others.

For further study, read Genesis 37-45 (page 27).

## wednesday

*Read: Luke 12:13-21 (page 713)*

Jesus knew how to tell a good story to make a point. Here, he gives the parable of a man who, at the worst possible time, totally misses the boat regarding what is truly important.

How does this parable speak to you about the priorities in your life? In what areas of your life have you "stored up things for yourself"? Pray that God will give you a vision of how your life can be "rich toward God."

## thursday

*Read: Acts 9:1-18 (page 751)*

To say that Saul's reputation preceded him among the early Church would be a major understatement—his solid track record of persecution of believers spread fear among the faithful. So it was quite a leap of obedience for Ananias to be faithful to the vision God gave him regarding ministering to Saul. But, because of that obedience, Saul became the missionary, Apostle Paul, and—as a result—the Gospel spread throughout the known world. Right down to us, today here in Johnson County, Ananias' obedience is touching lives long after his death.

What does obedience look like in your life in the here and now? Pray that God will give you clear vision for his purposes, an ear for his voice and the grace to walk into obedience. Pray that he will give you victory over any fears or obstacles that may have prevented obedience in your life.

## friday

*Read: Luke 10: 38-41 (page 711)*

Martha of the New Testament may have been trying to entertain like today's Martha Stewart, but in her service to the Lord, she missed something far more important—time with the Lord. Right there in front of her was the one thing more important than service: Jesus himself.

It is sad to see believers work so hard in the service of the Lord that they fail to get refreshment from intimate daily contact with Jesus. How does the passage above reflect on your life? Pray that God will refresh you in his presence and give you power for service.

# baptism : what's this all about anyway?

Baptism—what do you think of when you hear the word? I grew up Baptist and, like it or not, when I think of baptism, images of the choir loft at the First Baptist Church of Crane creep in from the deep recesses of memory. The baptismal, located behind the choir loft, was nestled within a mural depicting a brook bisecting the scene, an orchard to the right and a tree perched atop the steeper left bank, its branches hanging out over the water. A sheet of clear Plexiglas separated the congregation from the sublime. At 10, I was baptized—mostly, because I didn't want to *"burn in hell for all eternity."* That, and after a million renditions of "Just as I Am," you inevitably want to be part of *"the club."*

Speaking with a group of coworkers from various denominations, I found a common thread: Baptism is a much bigger deal to their respective denominations than it is to them. The differences?

- Full-emersion vs. sprinkling
- Infant vs. adult
- Necessary for salvation vs. unnecessary for salvation
- Required for membership vs. optional for membership

Why does something so important to the denomination not even register for the practitioner? Is it because the powers-that-be feel it necessary to build an organization around rules requiring allegiance to be "in the club"? But is my choice to follow Christ about being "in" a club or "on" a journey?

Each Bible story about salvation comes back to the basic idea that if one "believes on" the Lord Jesus Christ, he or she shall receive eternal life. The phrase "believe on" has at its core the fundamental idea that one takes no credit for one's surrender or salvation. Everything is contingent upon what Christ did and continues to do for each of us. Let's not kid ourselves; there will be judgment one day, but my opinion as to who does things the "right way" will carry no weight when that time of judgment arrives.

At 35, I was baptized again. Unlike the boyhood decision born of fear, my adult baptism served as a public declaration identifying myself as a *sold-out follower of Christ: whatever, wherever, whenever and why ever!*

The question I believe we all need to ponder in our own hearts is this: Are we doing it because of internal promptings or external pressures? I'm pretty sure that, if it's due to external pressures, we're just doing it to be *in the club*. There are better reasons. I want to encourage us to allow GOD to change our hearts and motivate the decision from the inside. Jesus, born the Son of God, lived about 30 years before he was moved by the Holy Spirit to get baptized! It's okay to wait. God gets us there, in his time.

*"I believe there are too many practitioners in the church who are not believers."*—C.S. Lewis

# sunday notes

monday

*Read: Luke 3:1-23 (page 702)*

What does baptism symbolize to you? In what ways have you personally been compelled to live a new life?

tuesday

*Read: John 1:19-34 (page 726) and Acts 2:1-38 (page 745)*

What is the difference between baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Spirit?

wednesday

*Read: Mark 1:1-11 (page 684)*

The beginning of the good news! How has the Holy Spirit revealed the good news in your life?

## thursday

*Read: Matthew 3 and 4 (page 660)*

Observe the differences and similarities (what, where, when, how) in John the Baptist's ministry and Jesus' ministry. What ministry is the Holy Spirit calling you to? Pray for strength and discernment to close the door to personal ambition, what other people think you should be doing, and to surrender completely to the voice of the Holy Spirit and God's plan for your life.

## friday

*Read: Luke 4:16-30 (page 703)*

Be encouraged, as it will take a great deal of time to convince formerly familiar hearts that Jesus has really changed you. It seems that the better people know the old you, the more skeptical they are of the new you. This skepticism is natural for others and a good thing for us. It keeps us in constant need of communing with the Holy Spirit and following Christ; it deters us from drawing disciples away unto ourselves. How have old acquaintances expressed skepticism about the lasting change in your life? How have they become convinced and what was the impact on them?

## **new community, 7.02**

*notes and prayers*

## **new community, 8.06**

*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 ...*



**heartland**  
community church

# 2008

gather | grow | go

## january

- 9 (Wed) - New Community
- 6 (Sun) - About Heartland class

## february

- 2 (Sat) - Leadership Community
- 6 (Wed) - New Community
- 8 (Fri) - Network class
- 9 (Sat) - Network class consultations
- 17 (Sun) - go. Party

*(About Heartland class not offered in February)*

## march

- 1 (Sat) - GoodSense class
- 2 (Sun) - About Heartland class
- 5 (Wed) - New Community
- 21 (Fri) - Good Friday
- 23 (Sun) - Easter Sunday

## april

- 2 (Wed) - New Community
- 6 (Sun) - About Heartland class
- 6-13 (Sun—Sun) - HEMiWeek
- 12 (Sat) - Leadership Community

## may

- 4 (Sun) - About Heartland class
- 7 (Wed) - New Community
- 18 (Sun) - go. Party
- 30 (Fri) - Membership Graduation

## june

- 1 (Sun) - About Heartland class
- 4 (Wed) - New Community
- 13 (Fri) - Network class
- 14 (Sat) - Network class consultations
- 22 (Sun) - go. Halftime

## july

- 2 (Wed) - New Community

*(About Heartland class not offered in July)*

## august

- 3 (Sun) - About Heartland
- 6 (Wed) - New Community
- 17 (Sun) - go. Party
- 23 (Sat) - Leadership Community
- 24 (Sun) - Baptism

*(We will not have morning services on the 29th - the Baptism will be our service that day)*

## september

- 3 (Wed) - New Community
- 7 (Sun) - About Heartland class

## october

- 1 (Wed) - New Community
- 3-4 (Fri—Sat) - Elder Retreat  
*(includes Business/Financial Issues and Management Issues)*
- 5 (Sun) - About Heartland class
- 10 (Fri) - Network class
- 11 (Sat) - Network class consultations
- 19 (Sun) - go. Party

## november

- 1 (Sat) - Leadership Community
- 2 (Sun) - About Heartland class
- 5 (Wed) - New Community
- 23 (Sun) - HCC Celebration

## december

- 3 (Wed) - New Community
- 7 (Sun) - About Heartland
- 24 (Tue) - Christmas Eve
- 25 (Wed) - Christmas Day (no service)

Times, locations, and other details for the events listed above will be available at [www.heartlandchurch.org](http://www.heartlandchurch.org) and in the bulletin as those events get closer.