



HOPE STARTS HERE

May 25-30, 2020

As we face this challenging time of social distancing, we want to join in daily devotionals, structured around our church's Core Values, to encourage us in our walk with God. Open by reading the Bible passage(s) for each day, then read the devotional text. Take a few moments to reflect, then close in prayer, including the prompt for each day but adding the praises and prayers that are on your own heart. May God bless us as we seek his face together!

May 25—Found People Find People

Adam Falkenstein

BE JESUS TO OUR CITY

[Jeremiah 29:4-7](#)

We have been in a time of isolation, and things finally seem to be turning back around. Businesses are slowly opening back up, families are beginning to feel comfortable hosting small get-togethers at their homes, our church is pursuing how to effectively do ministry in person again.

Even as the process begins to gain momentum, it could be very easy to fall back into the “fortress” mentality. This is the mentality that so many believers unconsciously have where their faith is only “for them.” They withdraw from the world and from culture because it is “un-Christian.”

But this passage in Jeremiah is the Lord speaking directly to his people who have been enslaved and sent into exile in the pagan city of Babylon. He instructs them to make homes in the city, get jobs and even marry and build families with its residents. God instructs them to “do life” in the city so as to be a blessing to the community they are in.

Our church sign says NORTH OLMSTED Evangelical Friends Church. Regardless of where you live, our body of believers has been planted in this city. In this season of renewal, let us continually look for new ways to serve the community, to “do life” with them and be the hands and feet of Jesus to the city of North Olmsted. We will likely find it is in this time that our neighbors need it the most.

Prayer prompt: Lord, burden my heart with the needs of this city. Don't let my faith be a fortress where I hide, but a gift that I share through love and compassion with my community.

LISTEN

[James 1:13-25, Proverbs 27:17](#)

My best friend and I are very different people. She's outspoken and confident, whereas I have no problem existing exclusively in the background. One of the best things about our friendship is that God uses our differences to challenge each other. She causes me to think deeper and understand the world around me. And I have shown her how powerful empathy can be. Looking back on our seven years of friendship, I can see the places where God used our differences to grow us as individuals.

Proverbs 27:17 reads, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." It's a well-known verse but is lacking in practical application. What does "sharpening" look like? How is it accomplished?

I'm not sure there's one right answer, certainly not one that can be answered in 250 words or less, but I would like to think it starts with listening: learning the talents and giftings God has given other people, understanding their perspectives and being patient with one another as we learn how to interact. James 1:19 tells us to be quick to listen and slow to speak.

Perhaps one of the best ways to serve someone and sharpen one another is to learn to listen. It not only grows our relationship with that person, but it also deepens our awareness of the Holy Spirit. Jesus takes time to listen to all of us; let us do that for someone else today.

Prayer prompt: Jesus, increase my ability to listen first.

THE WORDS WE USE

[Ephesians 4:29-5:2; Luke 6:43-45](#)

It is time once again, in the midst of all that is happening and not happening surrounding COVID-19, that all of us STOP and check our mouths. Media and social media are full of words; many of them are not helpful and in fact harmful. What are you saying? In what manner are you saying it?

Paul plainly speaks to the church in Ephesus and to us: “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.” The word “corrupting” is the same word Jesus uses in Luke 6 when he talks about “bad fruit.” Bad fruit is rotten fruit. Therefore, corrupting talk is rotten speech. Here are three questions drawn from Ephesians 4 that we can ask ourselves:

1. Do our words build up the faith of others? (v.29)
2. Are others hearing grace in our words? (v.29)
3. Do are words reflect our hope in God, or do they grieve the Holy Spirit? (v.30)

Throughout Scripture, we are continually reminded that the words that we speak are purely and simply a reflection of the condition of our hearts. Do you want to know the condition of your heart? Look at the words you speak and the words you write on social media.

If you need to change your language, change your heart. Paul goes on to say, “Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving,” as Christ has been to you. “Be imitators of God, walk in love, be a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Prayer prompt: Lord Jesus, may whatever we do, in word or deed, be done in your name, giving thanks to the Father through you (Colossians 3:17).

DEEPENING FELLOWSHIP AND FAITH

[Acts 2:42](#)

Last summer, my family was part of the Breaking Bread ministry. Summers are usually pretty busy for us, but we were able to make time to meet with two to three families once a month for three months. We had game nights, taco parties, cookouts and times of fellowship during which we were able to have some deeper conversations with people in our church. The Breaking Bread ministry helped our family get to know more people in the church whom we may not have met otherwise.

It's possible to attend church on Sundays but feel disconnected throughout the week when we don't have the fellowship that God intends for us to have. In God's kingdom, loved people don't do life alone. This pandemic has caused all of us to feel more isolated since we have not been able to meet in person. As we adjust to a "new normal," I encourage everyone to join a small group or another ministry group that allows you to connect with people in our church.

There's something about getting to know people on a deeper level that deepens our fellowship and our faith. When we get to know people on a more personal level, we feel more comfortable sharing our thoughts, fears and vulnerabilities. We walk alongside each other through the highs and lows of life. With God we are never alone, but fellowship with God's people can help us feel his presence even more.

Prayer prompt: Heavenly Father, help me to strengthen my fellowship with your church. Show me the role you have for me as our church meets in smaller groups this summer.

PAYING IT FORWARD

[Hebrews 13:16-21; Galatians 6:10; Proverbs 3:9; Romans 12:6-8](#)

For most of my life I have felt unfairly blessed. What I mean is that I have often felt guilty for how blessed I am. Now, I know that guilt is not from God. However, it took me some time to realize that and to figure out what to do with these blessings: give back. Maybe more appropriately, give forward. God has blessed us so that we may bless others. Everything we have is from the Lord, and when he tells us to give “the firstfruits,” he means it.

My husband and daughter run a nonprofit, Fresh Start. They have used their abilities, gifts and other means that God has given them to pay it forward, to help the homeless and provide clothing and showers to them. Their theme verses are Hebrews 13:16 and Galatians 6:10.

It’s funny to me that we have to be reminded to do good; but we do need that reminder, don’t we? Scott and I often look at our lives and question, “Are we giving selflessly and sacrificially?” The answer is not always yes. We need that reminder to “do good.” Do you need that reminder today?

Lastly, when I look at what they have done I am so proud of them, but I am very aware that I could not do what they are doing. Then I am gently reminded that I am not supposed to. God has gifted each of us differently to fulfill all of his purposes and plans. Then he draws us closer to him, empowering us to use our *personalized* God-given talents to join him in this endeavor.

Prayer prompt: Father, thank you for the gifts you have blessed me with. Remind me daily to use these gifts to bless others. Open my eyes to see those around me that need a smile, a kind word, something to eat or anything else that I may be able to provide. Give me the courage to reach out in faith and help.

WITH ONE VOICE

[Romans 15:1-7](#)

This has been a season of surprising contrasts. Well, maybe they're not that surprising. This is an era of intense polarization, when the home pages of news organizations often don't seem to be covering the same world, and apparently exist mostly to take jabs at one another. Social media algorithms keep feeding us content similar to what we've already read, so we can't imagine how others could hold a different view—aren't they paying attention?

It would be all too easy to pause after reading Romans 15:1 and to have pride set in. I don't know of anybody who reads that verse and identifies with the "weak." No, I'm strong. Of course I'm strong.

But if we do that, we miss Paul's point. This passage follows a long section about not passing judgment on one another, but instead focusing on what Christ has done for us. God is the God of endurance and encouragement, Paul reminds us.

As we come back together tomorrow, we will do so with many opinions about this time: about the orders given by our state, about the wearing of face masks, about whether services are resuming too early or too late. But let us focus on Paul's words that we should "live in harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Prayer prompt: Jesus, remind us that you did not please yourself but sought our good. In the same way, let me please my neighbor, welcoming others as you have welcomed me, for your glory.

Join us for Sunday services via live stream or in person at 9:15 and 11 a.m.!

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