



If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

- John 12:26 (*The Message*)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

- Matthew 28:19-20

If you want to be great at a sport, you learn, hire a coach, invest time and energy practicing, and commit your life to it. If you want to be good at a job, you go to school, study, learn your strengths, observe, grow in experience and choose a wise mentor. So what do you do if you want to grow as a follower of Jesus, to grow in faith?

This month, we begin a journey through the Bible asking two questions, one as individuals and one as a church.

- 1) How does my life help others to see and know the love of Jesus?
- 2) What are we doing to contribute to a more Christ-like community?

STARTING PLACES

- OCT 4 WHO IS THE AUTHOR? (ACTS 3:15-16)**
Who is the author of your life? Sometimes we let our lives be defined by external circumstances of the culture around us. Sometimes we let our lives be defined by the crowd. We live in a culture that says you can write your own story. The Bible has something else to offer followers of Jesus.
Followers of Jesus let God's word be the author of their lives.
- OCT 11 WONDER (GENESIS 1:27)**
Why am I here? Is there a God? Where did the universe come from? Who made God? Across the centuries, philosophers, scientists, artists, and children have continued to ask big questions. Perhaps the answers we seek aren't found in proofs or treatises. Let's explore the gift of faith and wonder.
Followers of Jesus take time to play, rest, and give thanks for God's creation.
- OCT 18 OOPS (PSALM 51:3-4)**
Have you ever made a mistake? Done something you wish you hadn't done? Hurt someone, either intentionally or unintentionally? Often we think of sin as our mistakes, or breaking a rule. "Oops," we might say, and then ask God to forgive us. Yet the Biblical origin stories of Genesis lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of sin and where it originates.
Followers of Jesus are not controlled by desire, fear, and shame.
- OCT 25 YOU MADE A PROMISE (GENESIS 12:2-3)**
God calls a people and gives a purpose: To reveal the one true God and show the way of living in the love of this Creator of all that is. God desires a people who will trust, who are willing to leave the familiar behind and go where God calls them to be a blessing. God promises an unconditional love and uncompromising mercy and asks only for a promise of trust and obedience in return.
Followers of Jesus respond to God's call with a promise.

STARTING PLACES

DAILY QUESTIONS

OCT 5-10 WHO IS THE AUTHOR?

Monday	Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What Bible story or passage has been meaningful or has had an impact in your life?
Tuesday	Read Acts 3:1-16. In what ways is Jesus the “author” of your life, and in what ways is he not?
Wednesday	Read Romans 12:1-2. How does culture, “the pattern of this world”, influence your life?
Thursday	Read Exodus 23:2. In what circumstances of your life is following the crowd easier than following Jesus?
Friday	Read Psalm 119:105-112. What role does the Bible play in your life?
Saturday	Read Psalm 19:7-10. What role would you like the Bible to play in your life?

OCT 12-17 WONDER

Monday	Read Genesis 1:1-2:3. Why do you think God rested?
Tuesday	Read Genesis 2:4-25. What does Eden symbolize for you?
Wednesday	Read Psalm 19:1-6. Reflect on a time when you felt such wonder and awe at the beauty of creation that you felt God’s presence?
Thursday	Read Psalm 8:1-9. How are you a steward of, or how are you caring for, God’s creation?
Friday	Read Job 38:1-11. What do the accounts of creation in the Bible tell us about God?
Saturday	Read Psalm 104:1-35. What do the accounts of creation in the Bible tell us about humanity?

STARTING PLACES

OCT 19-24

OOPS

Monday	Read Psalm 51:1-6. How do you define sin?
Tuesday	Genesis 3:1-7. What is the serpent saying to you that causes you not to trust God? What voices in your life tempt you or cause you shame?
Wednesday	Read Genesis 3:8-13. What are ways you hide your sins, rationalize them, or cast blame for them on others?
Thursday	Read Genesis 3:14-24. In what ways are you held accountable to God and others?
Friday	Read Genesis 4:1-16. What do you think is the source of evil and malice in our world?
Saturday	Read 2 Samuel 12:1-10. When you need someone to be honest and truthful with you, or hold you accountable, to whom do you turn?

OCT 26-31

YOU MADE A PROMISE

Monday	Read Genesis 12:1-9. Name or jot down a list of people God has used in a mighty way despite what the world would see as limitations?
Tuesday	Read Genesis 17:1-27. What are God's promises to us as God's people?
Wednesday	Read Genesis 22:1-19. How willing are you to commit your future and the meaning and significance of your life to God?
Thursday	Read Genesis 26:17-32. In what ways is your faith commitment and promise a continuation of the faith and tradition of those who came before you?
Friday	Read Genesis 32:22-32. In what ways are you wrestling with God in your life?
Saturday	Read Genesis 50:15-21. Where have you witnessed God at work even in the difficult times of your life?

STARTING PLACES

WHO IS THE AUTHOR?

SERMON ON OCT 4, 2020

Choose a question to get started!

- If someone asked you to name something that the Bible says, what is the first thing that comes to mind?
- What is your favorite Scripture verse or Bible passage, and why?

Read Acts 3:1-16.

Luke tells this story near the beginning of the Book of Acts about Peter and John, who heal a blind beggar. The crowd, who witness the joy in the healed man, want to know where Peter and John received such power. Peter answers the gathered crowd, and in his response he gives the credit to Jesus while referring to him as the “author of life”.

- Make a list of the people or things that have authority in your life. Think about things you’ve done or decisions you’ve made in the last few weeks. What are the factors that drive your day-to-day decisions, that motivate you, that influence you? (For example: money, job success, fear, fitting in, friends, family, God, the Bible, cultural norms, tradition, habit, personal feelings).
- As you look through your list, which ones hold the most power in daily choices?
- Which factors are most important in the big decisions you make?

Now answer these two questions:

- How is Jesus the author of your life?
- How is Jesus not the author of your life?

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Psalm 119:105-112.

The word “Bible” literally translates as “book”. As *the* book of our Christian faith, the Bible is actually a collection of books – sixty-six to be exact – written by particular authors in particular circumstances. And the books are very diverse. They include poetry and songs, history, prophecy, teaching and law, visions, and letters. These books were written over a thousand years, with stories shared around tables and campfires that date back even further. What holds it all together? The Bible tells the story of God’s people, and at the heart of this story, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

STARTING PLACES

So why does the Bible matter? Why do we encourage people to read the Bible daily?

The answer: We believe that the words of the Bible have the power to bring about an encounter between God and the reader or hearer. We believe that the Bible has the power, through these encounters, to shape our life to be more Christ-like, more loving and hopeful. We believe that the Holy Spirit works through the Bible to transform us. The invitation to read the Bible is an invitation to let God speak courage into your life in the places where you fear; to speak peace into your life in the places where you are upset; to speak hope into the world in the places that seem hopeless;; to speak to every one of the power and eternal nature of God's love.

DISCIPLE, a Bible study written by Richard and Julia Wilke, says this about reading the Bible:

"Our goal is not to learn the Bible as we learn algebra. Nor do we read a book of Scripture as we would read a detective story or novel. Rather, as we read, we listen for the Holy Spirit to help us understand eternal, universal truths. We watch for unexpected insights that are personal, just for us. We savor a promise..."

Followers of Jesus let God's word be the author of their lives.

- What role does the Bible play in your life?
- What role would you like the Bible to play in your life?

FaithFit Challenge!

Read a passage of the Bible every day.

2 ideas to get you started:

1. Pick a book of the Bible. If you aren't sure where to start, begin with Genesis or John. Select a consistent time each day (when you get up, when you go to bed, etc.) and read until you learn something, you realize something about God, or you feel something. Put a bookmark in that place, and then pick up at that location and repeat.

2. Use the Clay Church daily Scripture and question as a guide for a daily time of reading and devotion.

STARTING PLACES

WONDER

SERMON ON OCT 11, 2020

A question to get you started!

- **What pastime, hobby, or activity brings you the most joy, or what do you do to have fun?**

Read Psalm 8 and Psalm 104.

What set the God of the Hebrews apart from other gods of the Mesopotamian religions was this: Creation wasn't an accident in a battle of the gods. The *Creator of all that is* didn't create and go away. The *Creator of all that is* created with intention and continued to care for every part of what was created and for every person created.

- **What do the accounts of creation in the Bible tell you about God?**
- **What do the accounts of creation in the Bible tell you about humanity?**

Read Job 38:1-11.

In the book of Job, the main character cries out to God for an audience with Him. In chapters 38-41, God answers Job's plea from a whirlwind, and in the answer, God lays out an account of creation that captures the majesty and mystery of all we know, and don't know, of earth and the heavens. Wonder and praise become the key for Job's understanding of humanity's relationship with God and God's love for us.

- **Describe a time when you felt such awe and wonder at God's creation that the only response was to praise God.**

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3.

In our Western culture, we read a story expecting a main point to be presented, and then logic to back it up. In Eastern culture, particularly the literature of Biblical times, the key to learning was discovery. The author wanted the reader (or more commonly hearer) to ask questions and discover something hidden in the story.

We easily default to read Genesis 1 with a Western perspective. We read it like narrative or a science report. But Genesis 1 is Eastern poetry with something embedded within.

- **What questions do you want to ask of Genesis 1:1-2:3?**

STARTING PLACES

Pastor Brian, in his sermon, laid out a number of questions and observations for this passage. If you were present for the sermon, share what you remember. If no one from your circle was, review the clip from the video of the sermon and then share.

When we dig into the questions Brian shared, we find the hidden gem at the heart of this passage is *the call to Sabbath-keeping*. The first Creation story begins and ends with nothing, creation from nothing, and God doing nothing on the seventh day. This connects with the word at the exact middle of the passage, the Hebrew “moa”, which often gets translated as seasons, but also is used for Sabbath or rest, doing nothing. Evening to morning, the Jewish day, is yet another reminder that the day starts not with work, but with rest. And this story was told in the time of Moses and the escape from slavery. Why a story of rest to begin the Bible? Because the Israelites needed to hear: Your identity and worth doesn’t come from how many bricks you produce. Your identity and value comes from who you are and Who created you. This is the first lesson of Torah, the very first teaching.

Followers of Jesus take time to play, rest, and give thanks for God’s creation.

- What do you think it means to be made “in the image of God”?
- What does Sabbath look like in your life?
- How can Sabbath remind you of who you are?

FaithFit Challenge!

Schedule a time in your calendar every week for play, rest, and giving thanks for God’s creation (mark it down and protect it).

2 tips:

1. If you don’t think you’ll hold to a commitment of a full day, start with blocks of three or four hours. If you don’t think you can keep from checking email or the internet during the time you’ve set aside, turn off your phone.
2. Don’t worry about “doing sabbath right”. Play. Rest. Pray. Your only two objectives are to not work and to remember your identity is in God’s very creation of you, not in what you do or accomplish.

STARTING PLACES

OOPS

SERMON ON OCT 18, 2020

Choose a question to get started!

- Tell about a time when you found yourself in trouble.
- How do you define sin?

Read Genesis 3:1-24.

- As you read this story, what questions do you want to ask?

When God finds Adam and Eve hiding in the garden, God asks an interesting question. "Who told you that you were naked?" – Genesis 3:1 (NIV)

In the sermon on Sunday, Pastor Brian asked everyone to identify the voices in our lives that cause shame, fear, and unrestrained desire. Then he shared this: "Followers of Jesus are not controlled by desire, fear, and shame...Ultimately, the way to silence the voices of temptation isn't will power, it's trust in God."

- What are the voices in your life that tempt you, that cause you shame, or that overpower God's voice?
- Where do you need to trust God more in your life?

Read Genesis 4:1-16.

Why did Cain kill his brother Abel? Some Jewish teachers point to the parallels of this story with the story of Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve were tempted not to trust God, losing trust that they were made in God's image, shame and desire took over their lives. When Cain sees his brother's offering is better received than his, he questions God's love for him, and fear enters the story and takes over his actions.

- What do you think is the source of sin and malice in our world?
- What fears do you find sometimes control your life?

Read Psalm 51:1-17

- What words or phrases stand out to you in Psalm 51?

STARTING PLACES

In the story of Adam and Eve, God sees the two of them in their distress over being naked and brings them comfort. God clothes them. In the story of Cain and Abel, God sees Cain in the distress of the consequences of killing his brother, and he provides a mark to give him the security of knowing no one will harm him. God's mercy knows no bounds. God sent Jesus so that we would know this mercy. Knowing this mercy:

Followers of Jesus are not controlled by desire, fear, or shame.

- What does it look like in your life to repent of your sins?
- How have you experienced God's mercy?

FaithFit Challenge!

Take 15 to 30 minutes sometime this week and spend it with God in an act of confession. In this time, grab a journal or a piece of paper and a pen, and write down the voices in your life that speak fear, or shame, or that tempt you.

Tips:

1. Further questions to think about: What are the voices of culture, of family, of your past, that lead you to sin, to doing things you shouldn't? What are the voices that sometimes overpower God's voice in your life?
2. As an act of repentance, of turning back to God, pray through the list one by one and ask God to help you trust His voice. If it helps, pray through each one, "God help me hear Your voice", and then cross it off. Or pray through the list and then wad up the paper and throw it away, or take it outside or to your fireplace and burn it.

STARTING PLACES

YOU MADE A PROMISE

SERMON ON OCT 25, 2020

Choose a question to get started!

- Share an important promise in your life that you made and kept.
- Tell about a time when someone in your life broke a promise.

Read Genesis 12:1-6 and Genesis 17:1-17.

God makes a covenant with Abraham. A covenant is a promise, made between two parties. The one who has power in the relationship, in this case God, offers a promise and provisions it. The other party, Abraham in this story, can accept or reject the offer, but can't negotiate or change it. Throughout the Bible, God doesn't offer this promise to the strongest or most able, nor to the perfect or flawless. God offers the promise to those who will say yes and respond in faith and trust. As followers of Jesus, we believe that this covenant, this promise of God's love, is offered to each of us. Blessing comes in saying yes to the promise, and our trust in God's faithfulness.

- What are marks by which one can distinguish that we are followers of Jesus and part of God's people?
- What evidences of obedience and trust distinguish your commitment to God?
- The tithe is one mark of commitment introduced in the Old Testament. Do you tithe? What are your reasons?

Read Genesis 22:1-19.

When we read the story of Abraham, and God's invitation for him to sacrifice his son Isaac, we're appalled. Consider, though, that we read this story in light of our 21st century culture, knowledge, and values. For us today, the idea is unthinkable. In the time of Abraham, however, child sacrifice was not uncommon among other Caananite religions. What made this story distinctive in its own time was that ultimately God wasn't after an infant sacrifice. God desired loyalty and commitment. We *read* this story and think, "How could God ask such a thing?" In the midst of ancient cultures of sacrifice, those in the time of Abraham would *hear* this story and think, "This is a God unlike other gods, one who doesn't want or need sacrifice."

- How willing are you to commit your future and the meaning and significance of your life to God?
- Why does God want your full commitment?

STARTING PLACES

When someone becomes a member of the church by baptism, the following promise is made:

- I renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of my sin.
- I accept the freedom and power God gives me to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.
- I confess Jesus Christ as my Savior, put my whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as my Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.

Then whenever someone reaffirms their faith – confirmation, membership transfer, joining a new church – the promise of their baptism is extended:

- As a member of Christ's universal church, I will be loyal to The United Methodist Church and do all in my power to strengthen its ministries.
- As a member of this congregation, I will faithfully participate in its ministries by my prayers, my presence, my gifts, my service, and my witness.

Followers of Jesus respond to God's call with a promise.

- What do these promises made before God and community mean to you?
- In what ways do you live out these promises before God?
- In what ways have you failed to live these promises?
- How would you like to grow in your commitment to and relationship with God through Jesus?

FaithFit Challenge!

On a piece of paper, create five columns and label them prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Now in each column, share the ways that you support the church, the body of Christ, in each of these areas. Next, identify one area where you would like to grow in your commitment and promise, and share it with a Circle member, a pastor, or a spiritual friend.