

Presence Series Study Guide
Weeks 5-8
Spring 2013

the Holy Spirit
Presence
Acts 1-5

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Presence
A series in the book of Acts 1-5

SOUTHSIDE
COMMUNITY CHURCH
In and for the neighbourhood

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Presence: Life in the Power of the Spirit

Practices

Week 5

Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you...
(From *The Confessions* by Augustine of Hippo)

We live from our heart...our depths - most of which we do not understand...
(From *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard)

*Seek first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness,
And all else shall be provided to you*
(Jesus, Matthew 6:33)

Dallas Willard tells us that we live from the heart. What he means is that the outcome of our lives - the things that we do - are largely the result of unseen and hidden impulses, hopes, fears, and loves deep within our person. Most of us don't want to acknowledge this. We have been taught that our behaviours and our lives are largely the result of conscious choice. We sing songs like "I have *decided* to follow Jesus..." and assume that we have made a decision in our mind about Jesus' lordship. In terms of discipleship, we assume that if we get our thinking right, that good and right behaviour will follow. But, this is just not how we live. Thinking tends to follow behind our action. Any decision we have to follow Jesus emerges in the midst of discovering Jesus' initial decision to choose *us*. Conversion to Jesus is simply returning his love. In discipleship, when we respond to our kids tersely or we pretend to look away from a person in need so that we can avoid helping, we later reflect on what happened and wonder, "Why did I do such a thing?" Our thinking helps us to identify places where our character and our impulses are not Christlike, but our thinking rarely leads us into Christ-likeness.



This is because God created us in his image as *loving* and relational beings. God is not a great Mind floating through the universe, but rather the communion of Father, Son, and Spirit. God *is* love. And so we also live in and according to love. We cannot help but love and to be driven by the things and people that we love. This is how God created us. But we are sinful. Our love tends to be disordered, in that we love things over people or we love people in a way that restricts or controls them. Jesus tells us that we know when our love is disordered when we notice ourselves worrying. In that famous passage in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells



us not to worry, but to learn how to receive life from God the way that plants and animals do. We should not "worry about tomorrow" but rather desire or love first *the Kingdom* and its righteousness, and "all else shall be provided" for us. When we learn how to desire and love *God* (what Jesus essentially means by "seek first the Kingdom"), then the rest of our loves - our love

for our family, our community, our desire for security and a good future - are placed into proper order. What results is peace that passes understanding. What results is a transformed heart.

But *how* does our heart change? I think one of the reasons that we like to think of discipleship as passing on information is that we live in an information age. We know how to pass on discipleship materials. But, if discipleship is about a "renovation of the heart" (Willard), if it is about changing the things that we desire, then it is a more complex process. How do we learn to seek and desire *first* God's Kingdom? Of course, God in the Holy Spirit renews and transforms our heart. But, how is it that we might *participate* in the transforming work of the Holy Spirit? How do we open our lives up for the heart-work of the Holy Spirit?

We practice the Kingdom life. Over the last thirty years, philosophers have noticed that our hearts and desires are shaped by the everyday activities that we do with other people, and they call these everyday shared activities "practices." For example, in the Lower Mainland, we practice being fans of the Canucks. We collectively watch and record Canucks games. We participate in discussions about the games. We listen to sports radio and read about hockey on TSN.ca. These are shared practices that *do* shape our

heart and our desires. When we do not do these things, our “love” for the Canucks fades or at the very least takes a different role in our lives. Many such practices make up our lives: the practices of consumerism, the practices that make up our workplace, the practice of parenthood or marriage and many others. Although these practices can orient our lives toward good ends (such as marriage or parenthood), none of them will orient our lives around the *one greatest good* for our lives: the Kingdom of God.



This is why our shared practices as a church are so important. We engage in shared spiritual practices together - morning and evening prayer, Scripture reading, generosity, blessing one another and practicing hospitality - so that our hearts might be transformed; so that in the midst of all the other demands on us that we might learn to be a people who desire first God's kingdom. We participate in our shared spiritual practices as a way of partnering with the Spirit, learning to love the things that God does.

This week, we are looking at two different stories in the book of Acts. Both stories show the early church engaged in formative practices that look a little bit like our five shared practices. Both stories show a people whose hearts are being transformed. Barnabas gladly gives his possessions for the good of the community. It can be a good call to commitment for each of us - to practice the kingdom life in faith and hope, for the sake of love.



Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer (Adapted from Psalm 27)

The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?
The Lord is my stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?

[Offer the challenges of your day to the Lord]

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.
Heavenly Father, I seek you today with all my mind
Lord Jesus, I seek you today with all my heart
Holy Spirit, I seek you today with all my strength
Help me to notice your work in the world
To show hospitality to the stranger and my neighbour
To bless others as I have been blessed.
I am, today, confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord. Amen.

Evening Prayer (From Psalm 46)

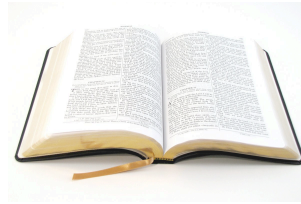
God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters
roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging
*[Reflect on your day. Where has God met you? Give thanks for these.
What troubles do you need to release to God? Do this.]*

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
The Lord Almighty is with us;
The God of Jacob is our fortress.
Come and see the works of the Lord,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth;
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear,
He burns the shields with fire.
*[Pray for God to bring peace and justice in your neighbourhood.
Pray for our work as a church, that we will be witnesses to God.
Then hear the following words from God:]*

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in all the earth.

Heart - Morning & Evening Prayer
Mind - Daily Scripture Reading
Strength - Practicing Generous Stewardship
One Another - Blessing Each Other
Neighbour - Practicing Hospitality**

Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Read Acts 2:42-47

1. Do a “practices audit” on your life. List the regular activities that make up your home life, your work life, your church life and your life in the neighbourhood. What do these regular activities say about what you value? How do they capture your attention and your heart?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47. List the different practices that made up their life together as a church. Where or how do we do this at Southside? What practices do we miss?

Friday

Loving God with our Mind

Read Acts 2:42; Acts 17:10-12; Romans 12:1-2

1. Just because we live from the heart does not mean that our intellectual capacity is unimportant. God gave us an amazing capacity to understand and make sense of his world. He has given us the capacity to grow in our thinking and in our ability to reason and understand. But, this takes practice. What daily and/or weekly practices do you engage in to develop your intellect? What books have you read that challenge your thinking? What lectures have you listened to? What new things are you thinking about and learning?
2. Read Acts 2:42, 17:10-12 and Romans 12:1-2. The early church gathered to hear the apostles’ teaching. The church in Berea *tested* the teaching of Paul against the Scriptures to make sure what Paul said was right. *These* are wonderful pictures of how we love God with our mind. Do you *test* what you hear at Mission Group evening or in a gathering against your understanding of the Scriptures? Why or why not? [note - this is not about starting an argument, but about *learning* God’s Word]. Do we gather with expectation to hear Christian teaching? How can we create better practices for learning Scripture in our church?
3. Romans 12 gives us a picture of *why* we should be learning Scripture: it is so we can learn to think Christianly, so that we can “test and approve” of God’s will. Write down a one-sentence action plan for your practice of Scripture reading: what can you do to participate in God’s transformation of your mind?

Saturday

Loving God with our Heart

Read Acts 2:42-43; Ezekiel 11:17-21

1. Reflect on the condition of your heart and your practice of prayer and worship.
 - a. When have you felt that your heart is undivided and devoted to God?
 - b. How would you describe the state of your heart right now?
 - c. When do you pray? How do you pray?
 - d. When do you worship God? How do you worship God?
2. Read Acts 2:42-43 and Ezekiel 11:17-21. How is the promise given to Ezekiel coming true in the Acts passage? List the connections that you see.
3. The community in Acts gathered for prayer *and* worship/fellowship (breaking of bread); this was their way of participating in God's renewal of their hearts. Write a one-sentence action plan for your practice of prayer and worship: what can you do to open your heart to God's transformation?

Monday

Loving God with all our Strength; Loving One Another

Read Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; Isaiah 55

1. In many ways, the *transformed heart and mind* are put on display in these next two practices. Because their hearts are open to God and because they understand that, "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it," they give gladly to one another and to God. Barnabas in chapter 4 is the picture of a disciple. How does the picture of the community in chapter 2 and the picture of Barnabas challenge you? When have you gladly given generously to another or to God's people? What was that like?
2. The community in Acts 2 does not have anyone in need. How is this community a picture of Isaiah 55? Do we have people in need in our community? In our Mission Group? Should having no one in need among us still be a goal? What would we need to believe about God and how would we need to trust God to live in this way?
3. Write a one-sentence action plan for how you will steward your resources for God's kingdom this week. How will you give to one another and the community this week?
4. Write a one-sentence action plan for how you will bless another in our community this week.

Tuesday

Loving our Neighbour

Read Acts 2:42-47; Isaiah 60:1-3

1. It is not insignificant that the passage in Acts 2 ends with the masses coming to know Jesus. This crazy life that devotes our heart to God, that begins to understand all of life in relationship to God's kingdom and so gives boldly to one another *is attractive*. It is a way of life that many in our world are longing to live. The Isaiah 60 passage gives a picture of a day when the masses will come to Jerusalem because they are compelled by a "great light" that is there. How do you see the Acts community living as a "great light"?
2. In what ways are we in our Mission Groups and congregations a light in our neighbourhoods? How do our practices help make us attractive to the world?
3. We covenant together to practice hospitality with our neighbours. To welcome and serve those that are not yet a part of our community. When have you practiced hospitality with a neighbour recently? Sit down with your family and make a list of two or three people that you want to host in the next two or three weeks. Now go and set it up!

Wednesday

Review

Read Acts 4:32-37

1. Go back and review the previous days. Put all your one-sentence commitments in one place. Bring these to your Mission Group and commit yourself again to your participation in our five shared practices.
2. Read Acts 4. If Barnabas is a picture of a disciple whose heart has been formed by the Holy Spirit, what encouragement do you gain from his story? What can we learn from him?

****You may have noticed that our weekly shared practices (generosity, blessing and hospitality) for this week are all included in the daily Scripture Reading section.**

Sermon Notes

Presence Week 5

Presence: Life in the Power of the Spirit

Power

Week 6

Acts 3:1-10

*For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does.
Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.
For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life,
even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.
(John 5:20-21)*

*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.
He/She will do even greater things than these...and I will do whatever you ask
in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.
(John 14:12-13)*

*The seventy-two returned with joy and said,
“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name...”
(Luke 10:17)*

Jesus insists throughout the gospels - but especially in the gospels of John and Luke - that it is good for the disciples that he will ascend to heaven. This must have been confusing for the disciples. In Jesus, they recognized the Kingdom of God. They knew that a new era or age or aeon had dawned with Jesus' resurrection. The Old Testament and other Jewish writings at the time anticipated the resurrection of *all* the righteous at the end of time along with the judgment and punishment of the unrighteous. As an oppressed people, they longed for God to raise *us* while punishing *them*. With the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples knew that this new age had arrived. In Acts 1, we can see their confusion when they ask Jesus, “Lord, at this time are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Their question has two parts: (1) Are you, at this time going to exalt us? And, (2) Are you, at this time going to punish *them* - the Gentile overlords that do not keep the law?



But Jesus, like always, dodges this wrong-headed question. God's way of inaugurating and establishing his kingdom is so different from what we would expect. Rather than bring his kingdom by force, he comes as a baby. Rather than punish the lawbreakers, he takes upon himself the judgment of sin. And now, rather than focus the power of renewal and resurrection on only one person - Jesus - God the Father and God the Son pour out the Holy Spirit so that those *in* Jesus might also do the *work* in the *power* of Jesus. Jesus does not, at the moment of the ascension, restore the Kingdom to Israel (which would bring history to a close) because to do so would run contrary to the bottom-up way of God's power at work in the world. God's Kingdom is not a flash across the sky, but rather a mustard seed that grows in our midst, it is yeast that works its way through the whole batch of dough, it is a treasure buried in a field.

We now live in the time "between the times." As those whose faith connects us to the new era, the age of God's resurrection and reconciling power but who still live bound to the age of sin and death. As such, we are to live and act in the *way* of Jesus through the *power* of Jesus. We are a reconciled people of the resurrection, alive in and through the Holy Spirit. We are to be a sign of the age to come. In Acts 3, we see the reality of life between the times. Peter encounters a man begging. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter announces the healing power of Jesus and the man springs to his feet. It is easy to get distracted in this story by the miraculous. We read about the healing and immediately feel inadequate. Why don't we pray more often for healing? Why have I not prayed and immediately seen someone healed? But these concerns take us away from the more important theme: in Jesus, we now belong to the age of resurrection; the same Holy Spirit at work in Jesus is now given and at work in us.



The direct healing might be unusual, but it should not be surprising. This week we will explore the upside down nature of Kingdom power in hope that we will learn to participate in this power the way Peter has.

Let us live in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer (Adapted from Psalm 27)

The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?

The Lord is my stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?

[Offer the challenges of your day to the Lord]

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek:

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

Heavenly Father, I seek you today with all my mind

Lord Jesus, I seek you today with all my heart

Holy Spirit, I seek you today with all my strength

Help me to notice your work in the world

To show hospitality to the stranger and my neighbour

To bless others as I have been blessed.

I am, today, confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord. Amen.

Evening Prayer (From Psalm 46)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though earth give way

and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters
roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging

*[Reflect on your day. Where has God met you? Give thanks for these.
What troubles do you need to release to God? Do this.]*

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

The Lord Almighty is with us;

The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Come and see the works of the Lord,

the desolations he has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth;

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear,

He burns the shields with fire.

[Pray for God to bring peace and justice in your neighbourhood.

Pray for our work as a church, that we will be witnesses to God.

Then hear the following words from God:]

Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in all the earth.

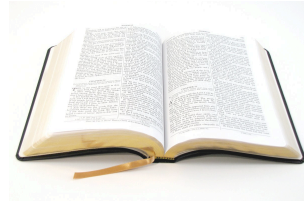
Daily Reading - Mind

Thursday

Overview

Read Acts 3:1-10; 3:11-26

1. Read 3:1-10. We often don't know what to do with stories of dramatic healings. What is your emotional reaction to this story? What questions does it bring up? What events in your own life does this remind you of (either times of healing or times when you have asked and not been healed)?



Friday

The Kingdom

Read Acts 3:11-26

1. As I suggested in the introduction - this passage is less about healing and more about the reality of God's presence and power in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Read 3:11-26. What is the big idea of Peter's sermon? How does this help us to understand the healing?
2. What connections does Peter make between the story of Jesus, the prophets, and the healing? Does Peter say anything that surprises you or raises new questions? What are they?
3. How do you think Peter's sermon connects back to the healing?

Saturday

Life in the Kingdom

Read Luke 10:1-24; Acts 1:8

1. In Luke 10, Jesus sends the disciples out like “sheep into the midst of wolves.” Read through the instructions, which of Jesus’ instructions to the disciples will make them vulnerable? Why do you think they are to be vulnerable in mission? What is it about God and God’s kingdom that almost *requires* us to be vulnerable when we are sent in mission?
2. Look at verses 16-20, what do the disciples realize when they are sent out in mission? What does Jesus tell them? How is this similar to the life of the early church and Acts 3:1-10?
3. Dallas Willard has called the power of the Kingdom “upside down.” What do you think this means? How is it that God’s power at work in the world is an “upside down” or “bottom up” kind of power? What biblical examples can you think of?

Monday

Life in the Kingdom

Read Luke 10:1-24; Acts 1:8

1. When have you been vulnerable or taken a risk for the sake of mission? Did you experience the strength and/or the power of the Holy Spirit?
2. Practice participation in the upside down power of the Kingdom this week, Look back over your hospitality and blessing plans from last week. Plan to risk this week by blessing someone and hosting one more person on your ‘hospitality’ list.

Tuesday

Healing in the Kingdom

Read Luke 8:40-56; Acts 3:1-10

1. There are two stories of healing here. Both are a demonstration of the Kingdom and a sign that Jesus is the one that brings about the Kingdom. What does the power of God accomplish in these stories? What does this tell us about the Kingdom?
2. The stories also point toward Jesus. How is Jesus responsive to the needs of those present? What does this tell us about God?
3. How is it that Peter points toward the way Jesus healed in Acts 3? How does Peter show the nature and presence of God’s kingdom? How does Peter *notice* or attend to the man at the gate?
4. How well do we *notice* those in need around us? Do we ignore them because we don’t always understand or trust in the power of the Spirit?

Wednesday

Review

Read Acts 3:1-10

1. Go over the questions from the week. List one or two things that moved you or challenged you this week. Bring them to your Mission Group.

Weekly Shared Practices



Practicing Generosity

Last week, we reflected upon the fact that the early church had nobody in need. This week, we see a story where Peter attended to the needs of the man in front of him and trusted God to meet those needs. Our practice of stewardship takes place in a needy world. This is true not only of our money, but also our time and talents. This week, look for an opportunity to give either time or money to a need that is in front of you.

Blessing One Another

Find a way to secretly bless two different people in your congregation this week.

Practicing Hospitality

Keep working through the list you made last week. Over the next 2-3 weeks, try to host 2-3 different neighbours.

Sermon Notes

Presence Week 6

Presence: Life in the Power of the Spirit

Proclamation

Week 7

Acts 3:11–4:22

Many kids have great memories of going to Granny and Grandpa's house. I am one of those kids. No doubt about it. I remember running into the house and going straight to the cookie jar – my grandma made the best oatmeal cookies. I also remember a clock they had – with a pendulum. When I was young I remember seeing it swing back and forth as it powered the clock to tell the correct time.

The sharing of our faith is like a pendulum in many ways. It seems as if in each generation, there is a pendulum swing between proclamation and social justice. In my grandparents generation (and my parents for the most part) the heavy emphasis was put on articulating our faith in a manner which was simple, presentable and came in a variety of formula's. Proclamation of a sort. I remember in years gone by learning to share my faith in several programs like the ***Four Spiritual Laws, Steps to Peace with God, Evangelism Explosion, The Roman Road and The Bridge Diagram***. Each of these programs were meant to help a Christian to proclaim their beliefs of what it mean to be a Christian... or how to become one.

But the pendulum has swung once again. This is not the first time. Many in my generation felt that far too much emphasis was put on proclamation over acts of mercy. When it came to proclamation, the emphasis was on what we believed and carried with it s a sense of trying to "convert" someone. Our generation has pushed back against this and swung towards living a "demonstration" of the gospel. Now we often quote or misquote St. Francis by saying, "Witness always – use words if necessary." Our goal seems to be to practice the reality of Christ present in the world without having to actually talk about it a lot.



Perhaps the pendulum has swung too far. We must stop trying to get people to believe a set of doctrine as my grandparents generation did, but we must also be careful not to assume actions are enough. We must encourage and equip one another to speak as well as to act about the reality of the kingdom of God and, the fact that the kingdom has a king. His name is Jesus.

Our culture tries to tell us that we must not be too upfront about our beliefs, and certainly not push what we believe on others. But our culture tells us many things we should not believe. Sharing our faith with others does demand a level of respect and a posture of service. But sometimes it may also invite us to be prophetic in a culture that has lost its way on numbers of issues, and to be bold in stating that the solution is not found in working harder to be better people, but in recognizing the person of Jesus in our midst. What we need today is a group of people who will be the hands and feet of Jesus in the midst of their neighbourhoods, but who will also proclaim the reality that it is Jesus who makes a difference.

How will the Spirit empower you this week to make sure the pendulum of evangelism is swinging appropriately and not too far in either direction without the pull of the other.



the Holy Spirit
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A series in the book of Acts 1-5

Daily Shared Practices - Heart



Morning Prayer

As you awake each day this week, greet Jesus and reflect (or sing) one or two verses and the chorus of this old hymn.

Tell me the old, old story of unseen things above

Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.

Tell me the story simply, as to a little child, for I am weak and weary, and helpless and defiled.

Refrain - Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and His love.

Tell me the story slowly, that I may take it in, that wonderful redemption, God's remedy for sin.

Tell me the story often, for I forget so soon; The early dew of morning has passed away at noon.

Refrain

Tell me the story softly, with earnest tones and grave; Remember I'm the sinner whom Jesus came to save.

Tell me the story always, if you would really be, in any time of trouble, a comforter to me.

Refrain

Tell me the same old story when you have cause to fear. That this world's empty glory is costing me too dear.

Yes, and when that world's glory is dawning on my soul, tell me the old, old story: "Christ Jesus makes thee whole."

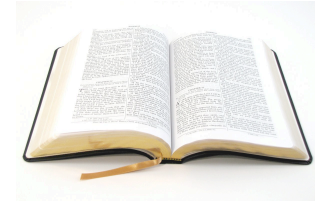
Refrain - Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story, Tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and His love.

Lord, Help me to see any opportunity that you may give me today to tell others the story of your presence in our lives.

Evening Prayer

Reflect back on the day and give thanks to God for where you have seen Him at work. Be specific. Reflect on where He gave you opportunity to share about your relationship with Him. Sing before you sleep.

Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Review

Read Acts 2:14-41

1. Luke records Peter's first speech in Acts 2:14-41. Read that speech again making note of the points he makes from 14-21, 22-28, 29-36. In verse 36 he states his main point of the speech and calls for action in verse 38. What did God say to you in this first speech?
2. This is a very different Peter than we have seen before. Peter has been filled with the Spirit of God. How has the Spirit given you a boldness to speak about the kingdom of God and about the king?
3. We all have different gifts. Some have the gift of leadership – some mercy and helps. Some have the gift of public speaking while others the gift of compassion. Do you think every Christ follower who is filled with the Spirit of God (that was His promise) should be ready and willing to tell others about the king and how He has changed our lives? How could you be helped to be better prepared to do this?

Friday

Preview

Read Acts 2:11-4:22

1. Read Acts 3:11-4:22. Find several different translations and read the text several times through – asking God to stop you in one or two places where He wants to speak to you. Make note of those places, writing down the phrase or verse for later reference.
2. What did you hear God say to you as you read today? Why do you think he was saying that to you?

Note: If this seems difficult to do, then have your discipling partner work through it with you and help you to learn to hear God speak in the text.

Saturday

Practice

1. Simply read the text again today so that you will be familiar with it as we gather tomorrow. Do you think people make comments about you – that you have been with Jesus – in the same way as they did with Peter and John?



Monday

Discovery

Read Acts 3:11-4:22; Deut. 18:15-19; Gen. 22:18; 26:4; Psalm 118:22

1. Make sure to review the teach from the gathering yesterday. What did God say to you yesterday? What do you think He would say to the church as a result of the text?
2. Read Acts 3:11-4:22 one more time. Put yourself in the crowd that day as Peter makes his speech. What do you hear him saying? What accusations does he make against the people listening? Does that include each of us?
3. What do they say about Jesus? How would you say that if you had to give such a speech in your neighbourhood? What do you learn that is new to you about Christ in this passage?
4. Read the following OT passages to discover how Peter referred to the history of God with His people. Deut. 18:15-19 , Gen. 22:18; 26:4, Psalm 118:22.
5. What do you/we need to do as a result of this text?

Tuesday

Hope

Read Acts 4:12-13; Acts 4:20

1. Acts 4:12 and 13 are two very encouraging verses in this passage. What encouragement do you draw from these two verses?
2. What hope does that give you for your future as a follower of Christ? What fears does it bring up?
3. How does it relate to Acts 4:20? Could you say this?

Wednesday

Gathering

1. In preparation for gathering this evening, be prepared to share with others what you have learned this week in the Study Guide, sermon and in prayer.
2. What has God said to you this week that you will put into action? What do you think He has said that we as a church need to put into action?
3. Be prepared to share with your group how you blessed others this week and how you practiced hospitality.

Weekly Shared Practices



Strength

What are some ways that you might be able to cut extra-spending and practice generosity in the month ahead? Come to group with a few creative suggestions and stories of how we might practice being more generous.

Neighbour

Come to group prepared to share a story of how God has used you this week to speak about Jesus.

Come to group this week prepared to share a story of a time when a neighbour or co-worker made a comment that they recognized “you had been with Jesus.”

One Another

Come to group prepared to share a story of how you blessed others this week.

Sermon Notes

Presence Week 7

Presence: Life in the Power of the Spirit

Prayer

Week 8

Acts 4:23-31

When I say “prayer,” what comes to mind?

Perhaps you are someone who has an image of prayer being about a person bowed before the Lord being quiet. Perhaps it is a few people who have sought a quiet place to intercede on behalf of others.

Or maybe you are a person who has a totally different image. Maybe you picture a large group of people who have gathered together on a Friday night and are making an amazing amount of noise as they lift their voices together in unison, crying out to God to work in power?



These are two opposite ends of the spectrum, but both reflect images of prayer that I have had. One is quiet and reflective, the other boisterous and exuberant.

Maybe when I say “prayer” you feel guilty. You know you do not pray as you could, or wish, or desire to. Perhaps you long for someone to encourage you in the reality of prayer so that you will get more out of it. You are convinced that there must be more than you are experiencing. Maybe you are just so frustrated because of the fact that every time you try to pray, your mind wonders and your attention drifts to all of the other things you need to do during the day. Besides, what difference does it make anyway?

Whatever your experience, my guess is that most of us reading this introduction long for more (or, at least we used to) and wish we did again. If we were convinced that prayer made a difference and that we could communicate with the Lord in a personal way, none of us would turn that down. Yet it seems as if we limp along, hoping for more - settling for reality. But there is more. We should never settle for reality at present but always hope for the future.

What if we had it all wrong when it comes to prayer? What if prayer was not really about getting an easier life or making things go smoothly? What if prayer wasn't all about God fixing our mistakes or forgiving us for bad words that we said? What if there was a whole different purpose and approach to what prayer was all about? Instead, what if prayer went from being a defensive shield to an offensive weapon? What if it moved from being about changing circumstances to changing us? What if it was more about the words God wants us to say than the words He doesn't? What if it was more about joining God on mission than it was asking Him to fulfill ours?

This week's text will push us to over the top on learning about prayer. It is a different paradigm than most of us have ever thought or dreamed of and it is a different perspective that will cause us to stop and ask not why we don't, but rather how will we more. May God bless you as you engage with God on mission this week.

Daily Shared Practices - Heart

Morning Prayer

"In the morning when I rise, Give me Jesus."

Jesus thanks for a new day. Help me to be aware of presence constantly, always giving thanks to you for each event, person and purpose throughout the day.

Jesus there is nothing that you have for me today that is too big for me to handle when you are with me.

Jesus help me to always have the same attitude as you had in considering the needs and wishes of others ahead of my own.

Jesus help me to be aware of the good works that you have laid out in advance for me to do today.

Now Jesus lead me through this day by your Spirit. Help me not to fall behind you or run ahead of you, but to walk with you throughout this day.

Evening Prayer

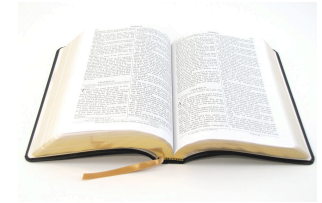
"In the evening when I rest, Give me Jesus."

Jesus thanks for guiding me through the day today and giving me strength to accomplish what you had for me. I saw you in _____. I missed joining you when _____. I am sorry for going my own way when _____. Help me tomorrow to pay closer attention to _____.

Jesus now give me rest and refresh me so that tomorrow we might walk through the day and I may get to know you even better.



Daily Reading - Mind



Thursday

Preview

Read Acts 4:23-31

1. What is prayer? Take time as we begin this week to list a few of the things you know about prayer. How would you describe prayer to a neighbour who asks you what it is?
2. What great experiences have you had with prayer before? What are some key answers you have had to prayer in the past? What frustration have you experienced in prayer? Why?

Friday

Discovery

Read Acts 4:23-31; Psalm 2

1. As you read through Acts 4:23-31 again today, make a list of all that the early Christians did and said in prayer? What guided their prayer?
2. How is their prayer different from what we have become accustomed to in prayer?
3. Read Psalm 2 to discover the passage that the early church is using in its prayer. Be prepared to share what you have gleaned from the passage about prayer with the group next Wednesday.

Saturday

Practice

1. Could you use this text and write a prayer about our life as a community at Southside at present? Be prepared to share your prayer with others next week.

Monday

Review

Read Acts 4:23-31

1. Review what you heard in the sermon yesterday. What did God say to you? What do you think he was saying to the church?
2. As you read the text pay attention this time to the implications towards mission. If we inserted a verse at the beginning of the text for today that clarified that God had given instructions for His people to go out into the neighbourhood and share the gospel with people, would that make a difference to the way you read the text? How?
3. How does God answer their prayer? How long did it take? Is this usual or outside the norm?
4. What key things would God have you pray for your group or for Southside today? Do you expect him to act as quickly? Why not?

Tuesday

HIStory

Read 1 Sam. 3; Ps. 51; Neh. 1; Jn. 17; Col. 4:2-6

1. God has always invited His people to have conversation with Him. It started in the Garden of Eden and continues throughout the pages of scripture. Read some of these great prayers for a sense of encouragement today:
 - a. 1 Samuel 3
 - b. Psalm 51
 - c. Nehemiah 1
 - d. John 17
 - e. Colossians 4:2-6
 - f. What other great prayers come to mind...
2. Someone once said that prayer is more about changing us than it is about changing our circumstances. What do you think of this statement?

Wednesday

Read Acts 4:23-31

1. Are you ready for your group this evening? Be prepared to share those things which you have learned this week. Share your understanding, your re-write, your reflections, your sense of what God has said to you and to the church.
2. Read the text a final time (Acts 4:23-31) and list any final questions you want to have answered this week. What are we supposed to do?

Weekly Shared Practices

Strength - Practicing Generosity

We are now only a month away from our team going to Albania as part of our obedience in following God into Sauk, Albania. How might you contribute towards the cost of the team going? We always bear witness to the God we believe in. If God is generous, how is he displaying that generosity through you? Be prepared to discuss in your group time.

Neighbour - Practicing Hospitality

What steps did you take to practice hospitality with your friend who does not know Christ this week? How did you interact with the neighbours this week? Did you see God at work in your neighbourhood?

One Another - Bless One Another

Hebrews 10:24-25 encourages us to not stop meeting together. For us at Southside this includes Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings, but it also means that we do life together. How have you or can you do life with others from your group this week that would be a blessing to them?

Sermon Notes

Presence Week 8