

# **CONNECT Devotions**

## **MSM 2011-2012**

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# What is “Family Connect”?

*“Bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord”- Ephesians 6:4*

At Prince of Peace our goal is to equip new disciples in order to spread the Good News beyond the doors of our sanctuary. In the Middle School Ministry we feel strongly that in order to do this we need to equip you, as parents, in order to empower you in the faith development of your student. If you have been attending Prince of Peace and had your youth enrolled in our children’s programming, you are already familiar with Keeping the Promise and how we at Prince of Peace wish to be with you on your journey of faith as a family.

Search Institute conducted an intensified survey of all the factors that influence faith among youth in today’s society and they discovered that the number ONE most influential factor was the **degree by which parents were engaged**, both in their own faith and in the development of their children’s faith. Because we believe that the early adolescent years are so very critical for parents in having a significant impact on their child’s faith, we have prepared an easy, life-changing tool called CONNECT DEVO’S.

Each week, whether MSM meets on Wednesday or not, entails a devotion specifically geared around that week’s topic or larger theme. These devotions are meant to be engaging, and even fun to read as Jeff and KT share personal stories from their years growing up. We have posted our curriculum on the MSM website ([www.popmsm.org](http://www.popmsm.org)) for parents to view each week the specific questions that their student’s small group is working on together. Your assignment as a parent is to sit down each week with your Middle School student, prior to Wednesday night, and participate in this devotion with them. There are two segments:

**Getting Started:** A short reading from God’s Word that will be the base for the week’s topic.

**Thoughts:** This is a 15 minute devotion geared to help you as a parent to engage in God’s Word with your teenager around the topic that will be discussed on Wednesday night, or in other relevant topics on weeks when small groups don’t gather at Prince of Peace. This is designed to help your teen prepare for Wednesday’s lesson, for you as a family to further your Biblical discussions together, and for you to grow in your faith journey alongside your student. Both Jeff and Katie have created some very meaningful devotions to help in your student’s faith.

We hope that this will be a useful tool for your family. Thank you for being a part of our Middle School Ministry and taking the time to walk with your child in his/her faith development. If there is anything we can help you with throughout the year, please don’t hesitate to contact us. We also hope you feel compelled to use the websites listed below as tools, since they are designed to help equip you as parents of students.

[www.almenconi.com/topics/parent](http://www.almenconi.com/topics/parent) : Helpful insight for parents with teens

[www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org) : Center for parent/youth understanding

[www.rejoiceministries.org](http://www.rejoiceministries.org) : Christian articles and help for more Christ-centered marriage

[www.focusonthefamily.org](http://www.focusonthefamily.org) : A ministry that empowers parents to raise Christian kids

Jeff Lexvold Ministry	952.898.9341	<a href="mailto:jlexvold@princeofpeaceonline.org">jlexvold@princeofpeaceonline.org</a>	Director of Middle School
Katie LeClair Coordinator	952.898.9330	<a href="mailto:kleclair@princeofpeaceonline.org">kleclair@princeofpeaceonline.org</a>	Middle School Associate
Kristine Krueger Manager	952-898-9337	<a href="mailto:kkrueger@princeofpeaceonline.org">kkrueger@princeofpeaceonline.org</a>	Family Ministry Project
Becky Cumming Representative	651.681.0342	<a href="mailto:bcum314@msn.com">bcum314@msn.com</a>	MSM Leadership Team



## Middle School Ministry

**Middle School Ministry** (MSM) is an ministry specifically designed for **6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Graders** and their parents who are interested in learning about being a disciple of Jesus Christ and pursuing a lifestyle that reflects Christ as Lord.

### A Typical Wednesday Night Schedule

6:15-6:50	Freestyle student hangout time in Community Room
6:30-6:50	Leader Huddle for all MSM mentors in room 130
6:50-7:00	Doors Open, Welcoming Students
7:00-7:40	Large Group- worship, skits, announcements, message
7:40-8:30	Small Group gathering and discussions

### Student Expectations

*There are a few expectations that the MSM Advisory Leadership Team (MSMALT) would like each student to pursue during their three years in MSM. It is a deep desire that students have a recognizable faith in Christ when they enter high school. We find that it is the students who are lovingly encouraged in these expectations who live out their faith in a dynamic way beginning in Middle School and continuing life-long.*

- 1. Attend at least one (1) Connect Event each year and bring a friend who is new to POP.**
- 2. Attend either summer faith experiences:**
  - A) One MSM mission trip** (*Denver trip, June 23-30; info mtg. 11/2 at 8:00 p.m. WC room 130*)
  - B) One week at Ingham Lake Bible Camp** (*July 22-27; discount ends 3/24*)
- 3. Participate in MSM Wednesdays on a regular basis.**

# Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Family Ministry Vision

Prince of Peace Family Ministry is a community who  
loves God,  
loves others,  
and loves the way God made them,

daring to believe  
in a **loving** and **big** God  
who sets people free  
to put their faith into action.

We equip children, youth, and families to...  
**Grow** in their understanding of the holy scriptures,  
**Invest** in authentic life-changing relationships,  
**Serve** others intentionally,  
**Discover** their giftedness and identity in Christ...

as part of an **all-day-everyday** life  
lived in worship of **God**,  
praying in the power of the **Holy Spirit**,  
and being made new in **Christ**

so that  
all might trust in God's **grace**  
as God increases **faith**  
and fills us with a "nothing-is-impossible" **hope**.

  
*Prince of Peace*  
Lutheran Church

## **MSM Year #1 (2010/2011)**

### **Taking Root**

Who Are We?

Christians Go Global

Salvation

Faith

Holy Communion

The Lord's Prayer-A

The Lord's Prayer-B

### **Growing Deeper**

The Holy Spirit

The Devil

Temptation

Tragedy and Suffering

Death and Dying

Evangelism: Philip

Fear

### **Relationships**

Friendships

Truth

Families

The Golden Rule

Sexual Integrity

Being a True Friend

## **MSM Year #2 (2011/2012)**

### **Taking Root**

Who is God?

Covenants – Abraham

World Religions

The Kingdom of Heaven

The Apostles Creed #1

The Apostles Creed #2

Holy Baptism

### **Growing Deeper**

Religion or Relationship?

Prophets & Prophecy

Our Purpose

Science and the Bible

World Hunger

David: Hearing God's Call

Grace & Forgiveness

### **Relationships**

Self-Image

Samson: Relationships

Diversity

Depression and Suicide

Anger

Disappointment

## **MSM Year #3 (2012/2013)**

### **Taking Root**

Being A Disciple

The Power of Prayer#1

The Power of Prayer#2

Living Worship

God's Mighty Word

The 10 Commandments

Loving God: Com. 1-4

Loving Others: Com. 5-10

### **Growing Deeper**

Fruits of the Spirit

Trusting God

Making Good Decisions

The Crucifixion

The Resurrection

Heaven and Hell

### **Relationships**

Serving Others

Gifts and Giving

Drugs and Alcohol

Sexual Integrity #1

Sexual Integrity #2

Dating

# MSM 2011-2012 Calendar

## Lessons

Sun. September 11	Leader Launch, 12:30-3:00	
September 21	Family CONNECT Night / Bible KTP, 7-8:30	
September 28	MSM Large & Small Groups	Pizza, Pop, Praise '11-12
Sun. October 2	Small Group Mentor training w/ David Lose (All F.M. Leaders)	
October 5	MSM Large & Small Groups	Abraham/Covenant
October 12	MSM Large & Small Groups	Diversity
<b>October 19</b>	<b>MEA – No MSM</b>	
October 26	MSM Large & Small Groups	Apostles Creed Wk. 1
November 2	MSM Large & Small Groups ( <i>Mission Info Mtg.</i> )	Apostles Creed Wk. 2
November 9	MSM Large & Small Groups ( <i>MentorMtg. 5:30</i> )	Who is God?
<i>Saturday, Nov. 12</i>	<i>Fall Fun-Bash, 7pm-midnight (register at <a href="http://www.popmsm.org">www.popmsm.org</a>)</i>	
November 16	Service projects #1	
<b>November 23</b>	<b>Thanksgiving break – No MSM</b>	
November 30	MSM Large & Small Groups	Grace & Forgiveness
December 7	MSM Large & Small Groups	Holy Baptism
December 14	MSM Large group, Christmas parties	
<b>December 21/28</b>	<b>Christmas Break – No MSM</b>	
January 4	MSM Large & Small Groups	Creation: Our Purpose
January 11	MSM Large & Small Groups	Science & The Bible
January 18	MSM Large & Small Groups ( <i>MentorMtg. 5:30</i> )	World Hunger
January 25	Family CONNECT Night (with parents and students) 7-8:30	
February 1	MSM Large & Small Groups	Self Image: God's Image
February 8	Service Projects - FMSC	
<i>Saturday, Feb. 11</i>	<i>Neon Tubing Extravaganza, 4pm-11:30 (register online)</i>	
February 15	MSM Large & Small Groups	Samson: Relationships
February 22	Ash Wednesday family worship 7-8:30	
February 29	MSM Large & Small Groups	The Kingdom of Heaven
March 7	MSM Large & Small Groups	World Religions
March 14	MSM Large & Small Groups	Religion Vs. Relationship
March 21	Service Projects	
<b>March 28</b>	<b>Spring Break – No MSM</b>	
April 4	MSM Large & Small Groups	Depression & Suicide
April 11	MSM Large & Small Groups ( <i>MentorMtg. 5:30</i> )	Disappointment
April 18 BRIDGE	MSM Large & Small Groups	Anger
<i>Frid.-Sun. 4/20-22</i>	<i>Spring Recharge Retreat at Camp Okoboji (register online)</i>	
April 25	MSM/SHM Stations of the Cross/Prayer Night	
<i>Saturday, April 28</i>	<i>Service Projects - Serve City (sign up with small group)</i>	
May 2	MSM Large & Small Groups	Prophecy & Prophets
May 9	MSM Large & Small Groups	David: Hearing God's Call
May 16	Year-end Small Group Parties (on and off-site)	
May 23	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Banquet (with parents), 6:00-7:30 pm at POP	
June 23-30	Mission Trip to Denver. Register by noon on Jan. 12, Info mtg. on 11/2	
July 22-27	Ingham Lake Bible Camp. Early discount date ends March 24	

\_\_\_\_\_ denotes M.O.T.I.O.N [Mission Outpost This is Our Night] nights when students are to bring in food for mission outpost.

# Service Projects

## Serve Option 'A'

If you select this option for the year, your small group will be participating in four service projects. Three of them will be on regular scheduled Wednesday nights. The fourth is **Serve City** held in late April or early May. See the MSM calendar for exact dates of service nights. You as a mentor will be allowed to select two of these serving opportunities. The staff will provide you with numerous options on places you can serve weeks prior to the serving date. You are responsible to sign up for one of these at a Huddle or come up with your own unique service event. MSM staff will then give you a kit specific to your project, with times, directions, maps, and wrap-up questions for you to lead your group through a Christ-centered service opportunity.

Some of the options this year are as follows:

Apple Valley Villa Nursing Home	Dakota Woodlands	Mission Outpost Food Drive
Mission Outpost In-House	Toy Cleaning	Fleece Blankets
Compassion International	Ebenezer Ridges Bingo	Care Free Living
Soldier Packages	Mission Outpost Linen Drive	Operation Christmas Child Promo Posters
River Valley Project Explore	Operation Christmas Child Shoebox	Create Your Own Project

## Serve Option 'B'

If you select this option for the year, your small group will spend their time in service through an on-going relationship with an 'adopted' vital age person. You will be responsible for setting up six different times from October to May when the majority of your group is able to visit their 'bridge builder'. Your group will be trained and given materials that will make this service option easy and fun.

## The Winter/February Service Project: FMSC

There is one service project at the end of January that is typically a week long. POP partners with Feed My Starving Children. This partnership provides all the food, labor, and supplies to put together thousands of meals that will feed communities for an entire year in third world countries that need food. All of the MSM groups will be able to pack meals on this last Wednesday of January, regardless what service option you've chosen for the year. Please encourage your students and their parents to register for an additional packing slot during the week as many volunteers and financial resources are needed to reach our goal each year.

# Middle School Connect Events

## 2011-2012

Register for any of these events at our website: [www.popmsm.org](http://www.popmsm.org)

### **Fall Fun-Bash**      **Saturday, November 12th**

Get ready for a highly relational super-charged night for students to make current friendships stronger, meet new friends, and have a BASH of a time at the POP campus. Students will fully enjoy playing Capture the Flag and a fall bonfire that includes campfire songs and food into the wee hours of the night. We encourage small groups to attend this event together, but with one addition: every POP-registered student should pray about not only inviting but bringing one friend who is new to POP. Registration is online at [www.popmsm.org](http://www.popmsm.org) and only \$10! 7:00-midnight

### **Neon Tubing Extravaganza**      **Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>**

Let's glow in the snow! Students will dress up in wild Neon colors, meeting at POP to fuel up on snacks and hot dogs before loading the busses for Green Acres Sledding Hills. There we'll set up in the chalet and then hit the tubing hills like crazy maniacs! Let's get some mega tubing chains going faster than ever before! After a few hours of glowing tubing mahem, we'll hop on the busses back to POP for a few more hours of camp games, full-volume worship, a camp devotional, and a glow-in-the-dark game of Romans and Christians throughout the Worship Center building led by Camp Ingham staff. We'll wrap up the night with an outside campfire and crazy fun God-songs led by the camp staff before parent-pick up. As with Nitro November, we are asking that small groups attend this event together, and that students would pray about not only inviting but bringing at least one friend who is new to POP. This is a great lead up to Camp Recharge in April. Registration is online at [www.popmsm.org](http://www.popmsm.org).

### **Camp Recharge**      **Friday-Sunday, April 20-22**

Experience summer camp squished into one awesome weekend of intensified praise and wild games. This is a fabulous opportunity for you to get a great glimpse of how fun camp really is, especially if you might attend the full week of summer camp for MSM at Ingham Lake! Check out their website at [www.okoboji.org](http://www.okoboji.org). There is a special themes for each recharge, so stay tuned as this awesome weekend draws near. Meet @ 3:30 p.m. on Friday in the Teen Center parking lot, and return @ 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. Cost will be just \$49 for the first 35 to sign up, and \$89 after that. Get recharged! (Leaders are welcome to bring their small group or attend without a group as a sponsor!)

## **Other ways students can get involved in MSM: Student Leadership Team**

Students entering 6-8th grades in the 2011-2012 school year are invited to deepen their faith and leadership skills through ministry at MSM. Is your "thing" music? Graphic Design? Media arts? Event Planning? Skits? Friendship strengthening? Praying for others? Organizing our 6:15 Community Room game time? Technology (video, audio)? Whether it's "up-front" or "behind-the-scenes" action, dare to believe God could be calling you to see just how much "The Word is Alive" in& through us!

What began as two separate teams is now combining to form one faith-in-action team of all 3 grades with many layers of skills, talents, abilities, hopes and dreams for what God is up to! Our year will begin with an off-site fall training retreat in early October to make new friends and plan our year of ministry together. We will be meeting twice each month on Tuesday nights **from 6:00-7:30 p.m.** for teambuilding & Bible study (Luke/Acts). [For musicians, additional Tuesday rehearsals may be needed throughout the year and will be announced as needed.]

**MSM Mission trip info  
Sheet attached here  
(see website)**

**MSM Mission trip  
Info sheet placed here  
(See MSM website)**

**MSM Mission Trip  
Info sheet here  
(See website)**

**MSM Mission Trip  
Info sheet here  
(see website for this)**

**INGHAM LAKE  
BIBLE CAMP  
Brochure**

**(see website under events)**

**Ingham Lake Bible Camp  
Info sheet  
(see website under 'events')**

# Why You Should Consider Being a Mentor/Co-leader

**Do you remember your junior high years? Those years of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade when your strongest question about the world and people around you was “Am I lovable?” and “Who loves me?”. There are 300+ students at Prince of Peace and even more outside these walls who are asking these same questions. There are 5 main reasons why you ought to prayerfully consider being a mentor:**

MSM Mentors are used by God to become genuine caregivers of young students who long to be loved and are looking for direction in life.

MSM Mentors are deeply appreciated by and connected to parents because of the time they have invested into their students’ lives and character formation. Mentors are encouragement to parents.

MSM Mentors further their own faith journey as they learn along with their students and other mentors through Bible study, inspirational speakers, and service opportunities.

MSM Mentors are surrounded by a team of other mentors both young and old who laugh, cry, play, and pray together as genuine Christ-centered friendships are built and a community with a mission is lived out.

MSM Mentors invest in the next generation by spiritually shaping the hearts and minds of a handful of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who need God-loving adults in their lives as students seek to find their identity and answer the question “Am I loved?”

## **Mentors commit to:**

- Attending Wednesday night ministry from 6:30-8:30
- Making periodic connections with parents on students’ behalf
- Participating in service projects with your group
- Being willing to connect with students outside of MSM on occasion
- Pursuing to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ

# FINDING HELP

Educational Materials, Advocacy & Support Group Information on Depression,  
Bipolar Illness, Schizophrenia, Suicide Prevention and Grief after Suicide

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Call For Help</b>	651-224-1133
<b>SAVE - Suicide Awareness Voices of Education</b> Information on depression and suicide prevention. <a href="http://www.save.org">www.save.org</a>	952-946-7998 1-888-511-7283
<b>Nystrom and Associates</b> Full spectrum of child, teen, and adult outpatient mental health services, including psychiatric care, individual, family, couple, and group therapy. <i>ALL clinical staff members are grounded in strong <b>Christian values</b>.</i> <a href="http://www.nystromcounseling.com">www.nystromcounseling.com</a>	952-997-3020
<b>Child Protection/Social Services</b>	651-554-6000
<b>Center for Grief</b> 1133 Grand Ave., St. Paul Grief therapy for individuals and families and consultation and critical incident response for schools, organizations and businesses.	651-641-0177
<b>Community-University Health Care Center</b> Mental health programs for GLBT, Native American, Latino, Southeast Asian and Somali communities. <a href="http://www.ahc.umn.edu/CUHCC">www.ahc.umn.edu/CUHCC</a>	612-638-0670
<b>Consumer Survivor Network (CSN) Twin Cities Metro Warmline</b> Someone to talk to, someone who will listen Non-crisis line for mental health consumers Thurs., Sat.-4:00-8:00 p.m.	651-637-2800 1-800-483-2007
<b>Crisis Center Prevention</b>	952-891-7171
<b>Crisis Connection</b> Free confidential counseling. Available to anyone calling from the 7 county Twin Cities metro area.	612-379-6363 Hearing Impaired 612-379-6377
<b>Front Door</b> Makes arrangements for a social worker visitation.	612-348-4111
<b>Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH)</b> <i>Parent support group information.</i> <a href="http://www.macmh.org">www.macmh.org</a>	651-644-7333 1-800-528-4511
<b>Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Network of MN</b> Consumer organization dedicated to self-help, education and advocacy. <a href="http://www.mhcsn.net">www.mhcsn.net</a>	651-637-2800 1-800-483-2007
<b>MN Mental Health Association</b> Information on brain illnesses and REACH support groups for family and friends of people with brain illnesses. <a href="http://www.mentalhealthmn.org">www.mentalhealthmn.org</a>	1-800-862-1799

**Natural Medicine Consultants**

952-922-6916

Information on brain illnesses, support group information for children and adults.

**Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER Center)** 952-827-2966

Founded by parents helping parents to improve and expand opportunities that enhance the quality of life for children and adults with disabilities.

1-800-537-2237

[www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)**Marriage Help** *(See Nystrom & Associates for counseling)*[www.rejoiceministries.org](http://www.rejoiceministries.org)**Minnesota Psychiatric Society**

651-407-1873

Psychiatrist referral information (MN only).

[www.mnpsychsoc.org](http://www.mnpsychsoc.org)**National Alliance for the Mentally Ill Minnesota (NAMI)**

651-645-2948

Provide family and consumer education and support.

[www.nami.org/nami.mn](http://www.nami.org/nami.mn)**People, Inc.**

651-774-0011

Promotes independence and community integration for people with brain illnesses.

[www.peopleincorporated.org](http://www.peopleincorporated.org)**Rise, Inc.**

763-786-8334

Provides vocational evaluation, training, job placement, transitional housing and support services for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

[www.rise.org](http://www.rise.org)**Untied Way First Call For Help**

211

Referral agency

[www.211unitedway.org](http://www.211unitedway.org)**Walk-In Counseling Center**

612-870-0565

2421 Chicago Ave. So. Minneapolis

Mon., Wed., &amp; Fri.-1:00-3:00 p.m.

Mon.,-Thurs.-6:30-8:30 p.m.

[www.walkin.org](http://www.walkin.org)**HOPELINE for Teens**

Teens talking to pastors anonymously

1-800-394-HOPE

**Unexpected Tragedies:**Please call and inform Jeff Lexvold  
Or Katie LeClair651-329-8283 (c)  
952-905-0321 (c)

## Other Miscellaneous Procedures

❖ **Weather Emergencies**—When a warning siren sounds or a Prince of Peace staff member or mentor determines that weather conditions are potentially dangerous, all ministry will cease immediately and participants will be escorted to “safe areas” dictated by evacuation procedures and maps. Move away from the perimeter of the building and exterior glass. Close the door behind you when leaving an exterior room or office area. Do not leave the building for any reason. When an “all clear” is determined, ministry will resume.

❖ **Church Closing Information**—There are typically several times throughout the year when it is questionable whether there will be programming.

1. If the church is closed during the daytime, it will not re-open for evening events.
2. Evening ministry decisions will be made by 2:00 p.m. We will contact WCCO AM radio (830) and WCCO television (Channel 4) to announce closings. Every attempt will be made to contact ministry mentors. The church phone message at 952.435.8102 will be changed to announce closing information.
3. If a ministry mentor chooses to cancel a particular ministry group, it is the responsibility of the mentor to contact participants and the staff contact person.
4. Weekend closings affecting worship and special events will be communicated on the church phone message at 952.435.8102.

**Sudden Unexpected tragedies** - In the event that a tragedy occurs within any one of our MSM families, please contact the director on his cell phone at any time of the day so that he can set in motion the appropriate action needed. It is a privilege and a responsibility of the body of Christ to care for those who are undergoing pain and suffering.

Call Jeff Lexvold at **651-329-8283**. If he doesn't answer, immediately call him back, text him, and/or leave him a message.

If there is no answer a second time, leave him a message explaining the situation. Don't forget to give him your name along with a phone number.

If Jeff is unavailable, call Katie LeClair at **952-905-0321**

# F.A.Q.'s

**Following is a list of Frequently Asked Questions (F.A.Q.'s). Please contact Jeff or Katie if you have any questions, either general or specific, that relate to Middle School Ministry.**

[jlexvold@princeofpeaceonline.org](mailto:jlexvold@princeofpeaceonline.org) or call 952-898-9341

[kleclair@princeofpeaceonline.org](mailto:kleclair@princeofpeaceonline.org) or call 952-898-9330

## **WHY ISN'T THERE DIFFERENT TIME OPTIONS TO GATHER WITH OUR SMALL GROUP LIKE ON SUNDAY MORNINGS OR EARLIER ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS?**

There are a number of reasons why we meet at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesdays as one large group and don't offer any other day/time options. The primary reason is that most people have already set aside Wednesday evenings as their family "church night." The majority of our families are already coming to the Prince of Peace campus to bring their younger children to Children's Ministry earlier in the night.

Due to room limitations, it is not possible to meet earlier on Wednesday evenings because of all the rooms that are being occupied by the Children's Ministry small groups. The children's choir takes place during this earlier time as does WOW worship which meets in the sanctuary.

Probably the main reason why we don't split up MSM large and small groups into different time or day options is that it is much more efficient and even cost effective, not to mention that we're able to put together a much more dynamic gathering on one night during the same time. By having all of the middle school students gather at the same time, we are able to provide talented presenters on specific topics who wouldn't be able to present the given topic outside of the given time slot. Periodically we bring in professionals, so paying them for one presentation rather than two is financially more feasible.

## **CAN MY FRIEND VISIT ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS?**

Most definitely YES! There are many students that bring their friends to the Middle School Ministry large and small group gatherings. All we ask is that the two of you be on your best behavior and that you respect your small group leader and the others around during their visit.

If they enjoy attending with you, we ask you to have them register online after attending a few times so that they get on our mailing list for all of the upcoming events. This will also assure that they officially get placed in your small group and that we have their emergency contact information.

## **WHY DON'T MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS GO TO CAMP WAPO?**

We acknowledge that Camp Wapo is a great camp, and that most of our youth entering Middle School Ministries have had great experiences at this camp a few or more years in a row. We would like to offer an new experience, one that is geared specifically towards middle school students with a Bible camp that has an extremely strong junior high ministry emphasis.

As a youth minister who has personally attended many summer camps over the last 12 years with children's ministry and junior/senior high teenagers, I find that there are but a few that are geared specifically towards the junior and senior high teens with ministry objectives that fit well with our vision.

Most teens who attend Ingham for a week in the summer who were reluctant because they loved Wapo so much actually enjoyed it even **better** than what they had experienced as a child at Camp Wapo. There are DVD's available of our week at Camp Ingham for your student to check out. Camp Ingham is for students entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade through students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Students entering 6<sup>th</sup> grade should go to Wapo.

## **DO PARENTS DRIVE DOWN TO CAMP, WHERE IS IT, AND HOW DO I REGISTER?**

We actually all ride the bus to encourage students to get to know the others campers. There are no options for parents to drive, unless under specific situations where a camper must arrive late or leave early. Parents are asked to check the MSM website and register their student before the close of the early bird rate, usually by March 15th. The \$30 bus is tacked onto the camp payment when registering. Camp generally runs around \$375 without an early bird discount.

Camp Ingham is on Lake Ingham about 3 hours southwest of the Twin Cities just north of Emmetsville and south of Estherville, IA off of I90. Okoboji and Ingham are two separate camp locations all run under the same ministry staff and director. We hold Middle School summer camp at the Ingham Lake campsite because there is much more secluded acres for students to run around and play capture the flag, commandos, and other fun games. To check out the camp website, go to [www.okoboji.org](http://www.okoboji.org), or call the camp at 1-800-okoboji.

## **YOU WERE AT MY SCHOOL FOR LUNCH, SO WHY DIDN'T YOU COME TO MY TABLE?**

We actually get asked that a lot. We want to respect each and every one of you. We don't want to do ANYTHING that either embarrasses you or makes you feel uncomfortable in front of your friends. Just know that we won't approach your table at lunch unless you flag us over or give us an invitational gesture with your hand or do something (like yelling: 'Hey Jeff' or 'Hey Jeff, come here!') that tells us you don't mind if we come over and visit with you and your friends for a while. Don't ever worry, we're not going to do anything weird to make you embarrassed. You'll be glad you asked us to hang out with you. Thanks for asking us to lunch!

## **WHY DO YOU DIVIDE THE SMALL GROUPS BY GENDER?**

While most mixed-gendered small groups work pretty well throughout Children's Ministry years, once the students reach the late childhood / early teen years there is so much happening within themselves that the dynamics of the entire group changes. The only time we have made exceptions in the past years were for a few groups whose leaders were confident that things would work out. By the middle of the year, these leaders almost always ask for their group to be split by gender because dynamics of the group changes so drastically with students at this age.

## **WHAT DOES THE CONFIRMATION PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?**

Confirmation, preferably called "Affirmation of Baptism", is an in-depth yet spiritually enriching ministry that takes place in Senior High Ministry at POP. Typically students set aside time in their freshman year to participate; however, families can join this process at other times as well. Parent involvement in this process is a new addition to Affirmation of Baptism. This year, there are two separate sets of discipleship courses offered for students in high school. An "Affirmation of Baptism" celebration takes place following the completion of special training classes. Parents who desire to have their children continue their Christian faith journey following "Affirmation of Baptism" will encourage them to attend the Senior High student ministries on Wednesday nights along with serving the Lord on mission trips and retreats throughout their Senior High years. Please visit

<http://www.princeofpeaceonline.org/ministries/family/shm/aff-of-bap.html> for more info.

## **WHAT KIND OF LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE FOR MY MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT?**

Students entering 6-8th grades in the 2011-2012 school year are invited to deepen their faith and leadership skills through ministry at MSM. Those interested in music, graphic design, media arts, event planning, skits, and friendship strengthening are encouraged to sign up. These students organizing our 6:15 F r e e s t y l e Community Room game time and other “up-front” or “behind-the-scenes” ministries. What began as two separate teams is now combining to form one faith-in-action team of all 3 grades with many layers of skills, talents, abilities, hopes and dreams for what God is up to! Our year will begin with an off-site fall training retreat in early October to make new friends and plan our year of ministry together. We will be meeting twice each month on Tuesday nights from 6:00-7:30 p.m. for teambuilding & Bible study. [For musicians, additional Tuesday rehearsals may be needed throughout the year and will be announced as needed.] Registration is open all year, online at [popmsm.org](http://popmsm.org).

## **ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO FUNDRAISE FOR TRIPS?**

There sure are! Students who are registered for the summer mission trip can choose to be in various work groups in the spring and the fall. Some groups will do leaf raking, lawn aerating, and yard work, while other groups will do cleaning like washing windows and various light household duties. Many of the jobs have a set suggested donation amount. All donations made to help support the students’ mission trip are tax deductible as these monies are included in the overall giving report at year’s end. Many students, if they are willing to work hard for a few weekends can pay the majority of the cost towards their trip.

## **WHAT DOES THE REGISTRATION FEE GO TOWARDS?**

Much of our expenses are tied up in printing and mailing costs (which includes letters and postcards, leader curriculum, family devotion booklets, brochures, etc), special guest speakers, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Bibles (Keeping the Promise) and Family Connect Nights, recreational games to promote fellowship for the students prior to the start of large group, 4 mentor trainings throughout the year, various supplies, and many more things that which contribute to the expenses of this ministry.

The actual cost per student far exceeds the registration fee, but that we must rely on offerings taken at worship both in MSM and on Sundays to help offset all the additional costs. Among the larger churches that are doing an exceptional job, \$50-\$100 is an average price per student for a registration fee. We charge individually for each Connect Event because it allows students the freedom to choose which events they would like to participate in. This is opposed to including the cost of a given event into the registration fee and then expecting that they attend.

Please know that we don’t want financial hardships to play any role in having your student involved with ministry participation. If your family is in financial, contact Kristine Krueger at 952-898-9337 or stop in to pick up a scholarship form.

## **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT PARENTS ATTEND THE FALL & WINTER FAMILY CONNECT NIGHTS?**

This is a common question. Here are three main reasons why your presence is crucial:

- 1) It is on these two nights, one in the fall and one towards the end of winter that we come together as an entire group of parents and even students on most occasions to learn and laugh together. You will receive important information such as the MSM Devotions along with vital instructions on important items for the calendar.
- 2) On these nights, you learn about upcoming service projects that you as parents can do with your student’s small group. You also will find out all the specific details pertaining to the upcoming Connect Events and get the chance to register your student for these and summer trips before they get booked up.

3) Finally, it speaks volumes to your middle school student when you take the time to attend this hour and half with them. Not only do your students see that they are important, but they understand that the faith journey they are on is highly important and valued. These are fun-filled nights of ministry connections! Please do everything you can to attend with your student.

### **HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT THE ‘CONNECT’ EVENTS SHOULD BE?**

The student leadership team discusses what events in the pervious year were successful and which ones need to change so that they are well-attended and well liked. The students then intentionally plan so that friends outside of the church will want to participate. The MSM Advisory Leadership Team partners with students to make sure everything is planned accordingly.

The Recharge Retreat is a weekend at Camp Okoboji that MSM students go to every spring. It is an outstanding faith-filled and fun retreat that allows students to make close friends while giving them a snapshot into what a full week of camp might look like in the summer. Registrations for these events are on the MSM website: [www.popmsm.org](http://www.popmsm.org)

### **WHAT’S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I CAN DO AS A PARENT WITH MY TEEN REGARDING MSM THROUGHOUT THE YEAR?**

We feel that the most important thing you can do as a parent is partner with your student on his or her faith journey. How you can do this takes many forms, but one of the most important ways is through the Family Connect Devotions. We suggest that you set aside 15 additional minutes of your time, either on Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday night, for you and your student to prepare for his or her Wednesday night experience.

Other ways you can partner with your student is to participate as a leader on one of the Connect Events, attend one of the three service projects that your student’s small group will be doing throughout the year, sit next to them at worship each week, pray for and with them when you say ‘goodnight,’ and simply let them see your love for the Lord Jesus Christ who paid for the price of your sins on the cross. Nothing will impact the faith of your children and their walk with God more than being able to see your faith and your desire to walk with the Lord.

# Our Small Group Covenant

**A "covenant" is a promise that two or more people make with one another as a promise of how they will live or interact together. It includes positive promises of what their relationship looks like when it's going well, and also includes agreed-upon consequences if things don't go well. So, here's how OUR small group agrees on how we will interact this year...**

How will we show respect to one another?	How should we respect the place where we are meeting?
How will we stay on track with the discussions?	How will we show honor and respect to God together?
How do we expect our leader to show respect to us?	What are some things that should happen if anyone does not abide by this covenant?
How will we show our respect to our leader?	What are some commitments we want to make to grow in our faith this year, both inside and outside of MSM?

*This is what the students agree to within their groups.*

# **Paste Concordance**

**Topics Here**

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**MSM Family  
CONNECT  
Devotions**

# Beginning with 3 P's – Pizza, Pop & Praise 09.28.11

**Getting Started:** Students, turn to Genesis 1:1 and read it out loud while your mom or dad turns to the New Testament and reads John 1:1 when you finish reading your verse.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** You are beginning a new journey as you read this devotion. It is the first of many that you will encounter through the many weeks and months that lie ahead. Each one is filled with surprising stories, either of a young boy named Jeff and his off-the-wall A.D.H.D. shenanigans, or of a young girl named Katie who seemed to have life all figured out from the time she was out of diapers. Every time you read one of these devotions, or pick up your Bible, or spend a few moments in prayer with the Lord, it represents a new beginning in deepening your walk with Christ Jesus. People have mixed emotions about new beginnings; they either like them or they despise them. I like beginning new things! Going to a new school, the first team practice, the first few hours of a long trip, moving to a new community, going on your first date (*even though this hopefully won't happen for many years, it's still a blast!*), hanging out with a new friend, starting a challenging new project, and even the first day of school or a brand new school year are all beginnings that can be exciting for some, and yet scary for others.

The story to kick off this devotion series has to do with a new beginning that didn't go so well. It was the first day of 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and little Jeffy (*now that I remember, I was 6 feet tall in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, so I guess I wasn't that little*) decided that the bathroom stall needed a variety of expressive words along with a matching picture for the enjoyment of future guests. I used none other than a permanent black sharpie for my artistic drawing and words of 'wisdom'. I still don't know to this day how the principle found out, but I didn't even get to the lunch hour before I was dragged into his office. Take note; there are eyes everywhere. You never know who's watching and when! To say the least, I was in big trouble, not only with the school but at home with the mighty wrath of my parents. Miraculously living through the rest of that day and night, I spent the next three weeks in detention cleaning the bathroom stalls and other gross parts of the school until it was spotless. Other stupid decisions throughout that 6<sup>th</sup> grade year ranked me, according to Mr. Anderson whom I just talked with a few years ago, as the kid who held the most detention in his 35 years of teaching. Hear me when I say I'm not proud of this; those detentions and my home life because of my actions were very painful. I do thank God for the severity of the discipline that I received otherwise I wouldn't have changed my behavior. To say the least, when I started my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year at the other school, I didn't express my words and draw any pictures like I had the year before. It was a new beginning to a new year with new teachers where I could start with a fresh slate.

In your scripture reading, you learned that with God there is a new beginning. He creates new things and washes your slate clean every single time you turn to Christ and love Him as your Lord. The word that needs to be written, not on bathroom stalls but on our hearts and tongues, is that Jesus is Lord and has been Lord since the beginning of all creation. The beginning to all knowledge and wisdom starts with the fear, or reverence, of our Lord (*Proverbs 1:7*). May you begin this new faith journey by spending a few moments at the start of each day in prayer, giving your heart and mind to Christ. Do this, and each of your beginnings should be filled with excitement and joy as you grow into a stronger disciple.

**What could you start doing that would deepen your faith in a new way?**

**Pray:** *Pray that you will worship the Lord with all your heart and that this year, at home, at school and at church, will be honoring to God.*

# Covenant: Abraham

10.05.11

**Getting Started:** Spend a few minutes tonight looking up and reading Gen. 12:1-4; Deut. 5:10, 7:9; 1 Chronicles 16:15; and Ps. 105:8.

**What do these verses have in common? God keeps his promises.**

**KT's Thoughts:** What would it be like if we served a God we could not trust? What if God was fickle (meaning, that God changes his mind on a whim...)? What if God threw out demands and promises but didn't follow through?

Sometimes in my walk with Jesus, I forget that God never breaks a promise. This week in MSM we'll be discussing what it means to be in a *covenant* with others. A covenant is a promise between two or more people, agreed upon by all, and carries with it blessings and consequences if it is not kept. In the Bible, we learn of God's covenant with Abraham, Noah, David, and God's people, and finally, his covenant with us through Christ's death and resurrection, making us his own people.

I was in college and struggling with a pattern of behavior that was not healthy. I believed in God, but also was caught up in trying to fix my own life, even though I knew God had the power to heal and restore. For some reason I thought it was up to me to prove my worth to God and if I could only "repent" enough, or follow God's commandments just enough, THEN God would help me. I was even taught by my church at the time that there was something I could and must do, in order to make it so that God would have to help me. I thought, if I mess up, God won't care about me as much, but if I can find out how to obey, God will have to bless me.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that it puts me as the one who must hold up all of the "covenant" between God and me. The good news is even better than I was taught. God's promise upholds both ends of the spectrum. When I was caught in sin and struggling the most, it was there where God was really meeting me, saying that I needed to completely surrender and let him love me and care for me. Giving up was the best thing I could have done, to let God completely take over. He promises to restore and bring back to new life those who are dead in their sins and trespasses, totally by his grace alone, through nothing I could have done - not even saying "I'm sorry!" Just because he loves me.

Before we can make a covenant with one another in our small groups and in our church, we first must understand that God is the one who keeps the covenant as we rely upon him by faith alone. The minute we start to think that there's something we can "do" to "make" God work for us or help us, we've lost. But the minute we surrender and say, I'm done for before I even begin, then God steps in and says, "Yes. I'll never leave you nor forsake you."

**What are some of God's promises that you are thankful for? Are there any of His promises that are difficult for you to believe?**

**How will you keep your promises with God and with others?**

**Prayer:** *Lord, draw me closer to you this year. Help me to hear and learn your promises and help me to rely upon you by faith alone. Amen.*

# Diversity

## 10.12.11

**Getting Started:** Read Acts 2:1-12.

**KT's Thoughts:** If you read through that list, you ran across some very difficult names of countries and places that probably aren't on modern day maps. Basically what happened is that God's Spirit was poured out on all kinds of people, nations, tongues, and tribes. This was really big news at the time, because in the Old Testament, God's Spirit only came upon those who were Hebrews. Now, the announcement since Christ's resurrection is that salvation is through Christ - for all! This is the good news: death is defeated and by the blood of Jesus we have been made clean and purchased through baptism for new, abundant and eternal life. But wait. What about those who are different than us?

I grew up in rural northeastern Wisconsin, and before I went to college, I had interacted personally as friends with only two people who were not white. Everyone else I knew, who my family was friends with, or who I went to school with were Caucasians with European descent. My world was pretty small, huh? I grew up in a home where my dad would make racist comments. He said he was in the army with those of other colors, and he said "they" were "nice enough," but then he'd go on to put them down and belittle them, simply because they were born with a different color skin.

During college, I became friends with people not only from different religious backgrounds, but also many different ethnicities. What an exciting world we really do live in! I've always said I was ready for diversity because I grew up watching Sesame Street! One of my friends was an African-American named Jonathan who invited me to his "Black church" in Racine, WI. It was a Pentecostal church that primarily sang and danced for several hours before an "apostle" got up to preach. This was a great intercultural experience for me, to attend as a "minority" but I was welcomed with open arms.

Have you ever heard the term being "color blind" as it relates to becoming friends with those of another racial or ethnic backgrounds? I'd like to challenge that phrase. Here's why. I don't believe God created people with such rich color and diversity only to have us be blind to those differences. Instead, I believe God wants us to notice one another's colors and differences so that we can *celebrate* the beautiful world God made. These things should not divide us, they should bring us closer to God and one another. To acknowledge our differences is actually to acknowledge how wonderful our loving heavenly Father is, and how creative he is to make us all different. The thing that unites us truly is his Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who as we read in Acts 2 had people from all different places praising God.

**Is there much diversity in your school, how about at church?**

**How is it possible for people of different religious, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds to get along together?**

**Pray:** *God, help us be sensitive to the things that unite and divide us. Help us to celebrate your creation by not being blind to differences but to draw closer to your Son who can unite us. Amen.*

# MEA break

## 10.19.11

**Getting Started:** Read Ecclesiastes 12:12. (Really, look it up and read it!)

**KT's Thoughts:** No really, did you read the verse? You must look it up! Okay if you won't get out your Bible, it says, "But beyond these, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body."

Yes the Bible really says that it is possible to study, too much! That's why schools intentionally put breaks in their calendar. Even schools which meet year-round have some weeks off! [But I'll say for all the parents reading this with their son or daughter, we know this is no excuse not to study when school is in session!]

Since I grew up in Wisconsin, we didn't have MEA. (That is a joke. We had a break in October, but it wouldn't have been called "MEA" -get it?) I do remember counting the days every time there was a break coming up. Though I didn't mind school, I *really* liked the breaks! I even looked forward to them so much that I would count the hours on the last day in school before the break and I can still remember the "butterfly" feelings I had getting excited to have some days off. My family didn't really go anywhere special or do much out of the ordinary, but God made me to be the kind of kid who needed just space and time to think, create, write, and play.

I remember one year, for my birthday in September, I got one of those long sticks with a leather horse head on one end. It had a mane, and reins at the end of it that I could "ride around" on. I remember "galloping" around outside by our lake for hours dreaming up stories and pretending to be a cowgirl. My brother and I (when we weren't fighting, which seemed to be often...) would make up code language symbols and leave each other secret notes under rocks with clues where the other notes were, all over our property with the neighbor boy. I remember using our breaks as times to get really creative and imaginative. Though our verse for this week says to put the books away (sort of), I liked to write books and stories. That's how I used my break time.

Did you know that God made us not only to think, create, and play, but also to have breaks? On the 7th day of creation, God rested. He declared a "Sabbath," commanding us (because God knew we wouldn't do it on our own) to rest. He commanded us to take time off. To relax. To play. To have space. To cease from normal stuff and kick back.

**How will you use this break to "take a break?"**

**How has God "wired" you, when you relax, what do you enjoy doing?**

**What would the school year be like with no breaks?**

**Pray together:** *God we are thankful for rest and breaks in our schedule. Help us glorify you with our time - in school and out. Amen!*

# Apostles' Creed Week 1

## 10.26.11

**Getting Started:** Try to recite the Apostles' Creed. *"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord, who was...."*

**Jeff's Thoughts:** Have you ever truthfully asked yourself what it is that you believe in? To believe in something is to put trust in someone or something, to have faith in a particular person or object to a degree that you're willing to bet anything that this belief is absolute and true. I would bet that every person in the entire world believes in something or in someone else so strongly that they're willing to stand by that belief no matter what. What do you believe in? What are you willing to stand up for and have faith in, even if no one else does? This is such an important question that I would like you and your parent(s) to take a few moments when you reach the end of this sentence and discuss what it is you strongly believe in. *(Stop reading now, and discuss what you believe in; be honest.)*

I have to be honest with you; when I was your age, I believed in basically three things. The first strong belief I had was in my parents. The reason I believed so strongly in them was they were always there. Everyday, there they were: in the kitchen making me meals, at my bedside praying for me, sitting next to me at church, on the bleachers yelling for me at my sporting events, in my face when I needed to be disciplined, and everywhere else I was or wasn't. Because my parents were always around and cared about being part of my world, I believed that their love for me was real and authentic. The second strong belief I had was in my friends. I had about four really close buds I talked to and hung out with on a daily basis, and in many cases, an hourly basis. What I believed about these four guys was that they would always be my friends no matter what happened, that I could rely on them to be by my side whenever I needed them. The third significant belief that I had was in myself, in my own inner being. I guess I believed my dad when he said that I could accomplish just about anything with a lot of hard work and a good, positive spirit. Hearing this year after year, by the time I had reached junior high, I grew to have quite a bit of confidence and self-assurance. When all else failed, I turned to my inner spirit which always seemed to tell me to keep going, and to never quit striving for excellence.

In your answer in whom or what you believe in, did you by chance say God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit? If you would've asked me at your age if I strongly believed in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, I probably would've given you the answer *"I'm not quite sure!"* It's alright to seek the existence of the Trinity. In fact, God tells us in Psalms 105:3 to *"look to the Lord, seek His face always"*. The Bible tells us that God is honored when we search for His presence. It is when we take a stand of disbelief and choose not to place our faith in Him that God is dishonored and turns His back on us. The three beliefs that I had as a young teenager all helped me later in life to believe deeply in God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Believing in my parents is similar now to believing in God, for He is and always has been with me, loving on me wherever I go. Believing in my friends back in junior high is similar now to believing in Jesus because the Lord surrounds me with compassion and affection as we hang out together, like my close friends would have. Having a strong belief in my inner being is similar in a way to believing in the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is God's voice within that directs me and encourages me to keep striving ahead.

**What are those things in your life that you trust and put your faith in?**

**Why is it critical to believe in God and that Jesus has rescued you for all eternity?**

**Pray:** *Pray for God's Holy Spirit to fill you with a deeper faith so that you may believe with all your heart in the Triune God - The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

# Apostles' Creed Week 2

## 11.02.11

**Getting Started:** Read 2 Cor. 13:13 Do you see all 3 members of the trinity in these verses?

**KT's Thoughts:** When did you learn to make the sign of the cross on your body? Since the Trinity is often depicted as a triangle (three parts of one symbol), have you ever wondered why we don't trace a triangle on our bodies instead of the letter "t"? Okay, okay, I know, I just called it "the sign of the cross." It's not a lower case letter "t." The touch of God the Father begins at our forehead, then Jesus the son "comes down" to our heart and the Holy Spirit goes across our lungs and the air we breathe as Spirit. Try it!

Even though I was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church and had my first communion there in first grade, the only thing I remember from that church was making the sign of the cross. When I got into second and third grade we switched churches, and the new church frowned upon such rituals. When I stop to think about it now, making the sign of the cross "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" is a very powerful image. As Lutheran Christians we believe the cross of suffering and death is where God meets us. While some Christians believe God meets in power and glory and healing, we actually believe differently. We believe that in our sin, brokenness and sickness, God truly identifies with us and redeems all the difficult and disease that is at the root of who we are: hopeless without God's love.

After I receive communion, as I'm walking back to my seat, I've developed my own habit of making the sign of the cross on my body. If you watch at church, some people do this, and some people don't. Do you notice other times of our worship services where people make the sign of the cross? I like to think of it as God creating us from the top of who we are (our forehead), Jesus descending from heaven to earth as a baby and the Holy Spirit sealing us with God's love, truth and forgiveness as we breathe in and out. There are other images too. Can you think of others?

God as trinity (three-in-one) is very hard to explain. It's kind of like trying to explain to a clam what the international space station is, or trying to explain to an ant what a quark or a neutron is. A tadpole wouldn't be able to imagine much of anything above water because that's the only world he knows. We can't imagine much outside of our universe because that's the only dimension we are familiar with. So we come up with really poor examples for the trinity like water, steam and ice; or the shell, the yoke, and the white part of an egg; or the sun, the rays and the light; or a person can be a sister, mother, and aunt. These are all interesting things to think about, but they don't capture the true essence of God being three persons in one person, because these examples involve separating an essence, and we believe God is one, not three! Have I confused you yet? I'm confused! Instead of spending our energy trying to figure God out, I wonder if it isn't more important to be thankful that even if we are as small and finite as a clam or an ant, God did come down to meet us and save us and grant us eternal life. We accept this by faith with good reason: God is truth, and always keeps his promises!

**What is it about the Trinity that is difficult to comprehend or understand?**

**How would you describe the Trinity to someone else?**

**Pray together:** *God, I believe by faith that you are a loving and big God who cares about me and has revealed yourself to me in new and exciting ways. Thank you! Amen.*

# Who is God?

11.09.11

**Getting Started:** Read John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12. What is similar about these verses?

**KT's Thoughts:** I remember playing on a hill behind my house when I was about 5 years old with my brother Jon-Paul. We didn't go to church very often, but there was a day when we were discussing the sky and heaven and what happens after people die.

"What is heaven like?" I remember asking and thinking about.

We both decided that heaven had a lot of candy and toys and you could probably play as long as you want there, and there was no bad weather and lots of sunshine. We also talked about walking on clouds and being able to fly.

"What is God like?" Have you ever asked that question? How has God made himself known? Where does God live? Is there anything God can't or won't do? Why do different religions in the world have different practices to worship God? What if I have doubts about God? What if ...?

I may be a strange person (okay, I'm pretty sure I am!) but I've never really had any trouble believing in God. At different times in my life, I've experienced God in different ways, but I've always known God is there. As I think about who God is and what God does and how the world works, people have asked me how can I be so sure? And what about people who just aren't so sure?

One of the privileges I've grown into in my walk with Jesus is being somewhat "saturated" with God and God's word. What do you think of when you see the word "saturated?" I think of a dripping sponge that is heavy with soapy water. You can wring it and wring it and it still seeps out liquid. One of the ways that I've been able to grow close to God and experience his love and grace is through reading the Bible and asking a lot of questions about it. Did you know it's okay to really question the Bible? Some people do not think it is, but it's a good thing to develop questions and wonderings about God and his word. I used to spend hours memorizing the Bible when I was in grade school and elementary school. Meditating (thinking about it over and over) on God's words is a practice I developed that helped me find good questions to ask of my pastors and parents. I sometimes challenge people who are having doubts about God: how much time have you really spent letting God reveal himself to you through his word? Do you listen to the sermons at church? Do you pray? Do you sing songs to Jesus? These things all help build faith.

At the end of the day though, we can't know God by "facts and figures." God isn't a scientific equation that we can figure out by mathematics or by measurements. God is Spirit, and as Creator, he made our hearts and minds to wonder and wait. We know God (as the above scriptures say) best by his son Jesus. He reveals God to us!

So before we take a look at many aspects of God at MSM this week, spend some time wondering about how God has already shown himself to you. I'll bet you have a list of wonderings and also some revealings you can think of!

**Which of these questions in this devotion have you asked or wondered?**

**What do you picture when you hear the word "God"? Is it Jesus?**

**Pray:** *Dear Jesus, thank you for revealing God to me as you are God in flesh. Help me to find good questions and answers and to walk by faith in your light. Amen.*

# Service Project Night

## 11.16.11

**Getting Started:** Read Acts 3:1-10.

**KT's Thoughts:** Well that was the ultimate mission trip, wasn't it? And it happened for Peter and John, right at church! Here was a "lame" man who had given up hope for healing, who was reduced to begging for money, and had to be carried from place to place. This humiliating lifestyle was his from birth. Can you imagine?

Instead of giving him money, which Peter and John did not have, what did they do? The Holy Spirit worked a miracle through them to give the man use of his legs again! First he walks, then he jumps, then he praises God.

Okay so none of us have probably ever physically witnessed something like that, but when we serve others, something just as wonderful happens, because the same Holy Spirit works through us. I'm remembering the tears on a man's face in West Virginia when we finished painting his house, which was located in a flood plain and had been affected many times by weather related disasters. He was crying before our mission team left the final day because we had restored dignity to his life by giving him a beautiful new exterior to his house. Not everyone got on ladders and painted. Some made the meals. Some raked the yard. Some picked up garbage. Some cleaned the brushes, but God worked through our team to help this man praise God.

I'd still love to know what it feels like to tell some to walk in the name of Jesus and actually see it happen. That would be pretty cool, don't you think? As you serve others this week at MSM, your small group maybe directly impacting others (face-to-face) or you may be working on a project for others who you will never meet. One thing I would like to challenge you is just as you read through this story in Acts, that you concentrate on one main thing: do it in the Name of Jesus (v. 6). You see, anyone can do a good deed. There are civic and non-profit organizations all over our counties that do good things for others. But life transformation happens when we serve in Jesus' Name. When we share the good news. When we pray for others and each other before, during and after the event. What we really hope for is that God will work through us to bless others, and for them to know and love God because we served.

**In what ways can you serve others while at school, at home, and with your friends?**

**Why is it so important for us as disciples of Christ to serve others?**

**Pray:** *Dear God, help me to be a light for your kingdom. Help me to serve others in your name with joy. Amen.*

# Thanksgiving

## 11.23.11

**Getting Started:** Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** Have you ever thought about what Thanksgiving really is and why we as Christians celebrate it? Beyond the turkey and scrumptious meal and spending time with relatives, this holiday celebration never really meant much to me as a youngster. It always seemed so weird why we, as a nation, would set aside a day to honor a meal that some early settlers and Native Americans had hundreds of years ago. I have come to discover that it is so much more than this. Thanksgiving is about being thankful to God, and giving thanks to our Lord for all we've been given.

The longer I live and the older I get the more thankful I become of things I never would have even considered back in my middle school years. As a student at that age, pretty much all I gave thanks for was my Walkman and Boombox, both of which could play a cassette tape and travel with me wherever I went. I suppose in today's standards it would be comparable to having your very own Ipod or phone that you could have with you at all times. For those of you who have these devices, I bet you are quite thankful to have them. But I will bet, if you are anything like me at that age, you could care less about most other things.

There are a ton of things that I should have been more thankful for, but wasn't. Things such as a sister and a brother; a hot meal that was prepared for me every day before and after I got home from school; parents who supported me financially and physically with all the school sports and activities that I wanted to participate in; A grandma who liked having me over to cook split pea soup and to play scrabble with; a dad who came to every single game that was on my schedule no matter what; a warm bed to sleep in and abundant food to eat whenever I was hungry; huge overnight birthday parties with as many friends as I wanted; the total of ten weeks of detention I received in sixth grade for being disrespectful; a dad who wouldn't think twice to use his belt when I dishonored him or others; stylish clothes to wear; daily and weekly chores like a yard that would take seven straight hours to mow; and a God who wanted to be in a relationship with me so much so that He would become a human being and then suffer for my sinful self in order to pay the price for me and others to have a joy-filled life both here and into eternity....

Did you notice that most of these were just 'normal' everyday things to me that I just took for granted? Did you also notice that some of these things that I should've been thankful for were things that at the time weren't very pleasant? There are things that you have had to go through or are presently going through that are not very pleasant, but you need to be thankful for them as well. These are things that produce integrity, that deeply shape your character. I thank God today for those ten weeks of detention as I sat with my nose against the chalkboard during recess for an hour straight day after day otherwise I might be sitting in a jail cell for disrespecting others. I thank God, I think, for a 3-acre yard and over 50 trees that took seven hours to mow because it taught me perseverance and a strong working ethic. Give thanks to God in all situations and for all things, for there are hidden blessings in everything.

**What are some 'normal' everyday things you should be thanking God for?** (Think of an additional thing you are thankful for regarding your parents, and tell them)

**What would you need to sacrifice in order to participate in the next MSM mission trip in a year or in the SHM spring break trip next year?**

**Pray:** *Lord, make me aware and thankful of the 'little' things in my life. May I praise you for the gifts you've given me, because nothing is possible without You. Amen.*

# Grace and Forgiveness

11.30.11

**Getting Started:** Read 2 Tim. 1:8-10. What do you learn about grace in these verses?

**KT's Thoughts:** The church I grew up in had long church services. I'm talking about two or three hours on Sunday morning (and that was after an hour of Sunday School) and then we would go back for another two hours most Sunday nights. I had good friends there, and really enjoyed church. Every week, it seemed, the pastor would make an appeal to those in the church. He would ask us to raise our hands or come forward to pray at the altar to repent of our sins and receive forgiveness. He would appeal to us to accept Jesus Christ as our "personal Lord and Savior" and pray "the sinner's prayer." It seemed like I did this week after week, and so did many other people. I remember the guilt I felt, and I remember that just didn't seem to be sin's remedy. If my sins were a sickness and a disease, the pastor's advice and prescription of repentance and feeling sorry enough and praying hard enough for Jesus to "come into my heart" didn't seem to be working. In fact, the more I was exposed to this type of teaching, the more it seemed like sin had a grip on me.

As Lutheran Christians, we see this picture quite differently. We believe that there is actually even better news than "feeling sorry enough" for our sins or hoping to "make a decision to ask Jesus into our hearts." The even better news is that because of God's action in Christ by his Spirit, on the cross, Jesus paid the full price for our sins. This means that his grace is now total and sufficient for salvation. God meets us with his grace in baptism as he does the salvation work of naming us with a new name: Christian. And God came the full way to find us, save us, rescue us and deliver us. While we were yet dead in our sins, according to Ephesians 2, God saved us. When I discovered this great news of the gospel, it was even better news than I had been told growing up. How could a dead person choose Jesus? They can't! How could a dead person repent of their sins? They can't. First God must give us new life by his grace. Then we repent. This may seem like a trivial theological idea to you, but it changed everything for me.

For years I struggled with never knowing if I had said I was sorry enough to God. I never knew if my repentance was genuine enough to fully earn God's forgiveness and approval. I could never be sure of God's favor or if my sin would separate me from his love. I felt like every time I sinned I "fell from grace" and had to earn it back again. What a hard and horrible trap of hopelessness this religious thought was. When God met me by God's spirit in baptism, the work was completely done. I was completely set free, not by anything I could do, because God did it all. When someone is forgiven and free, they are set loose to truly live! This changed everything for me. Years of hoping I might be good enough were washed away in the truth of God's baptismal love and I experienced true freedom to love God and others (and yes, even myself, which for many of us is the hardest thing of all!)

**Talk about a time when you wanted to be forgiven but felt unforgivable?**

**What does it mean to you that God has forgiven you through the blood of Jesus?**

**Pray:** *Lord Jesus, thank you for forgiving me of my sinful ways and for strengthening me with your grace. Help me to show forgiveness and grace to others. Amen.*

# Holy Baptism

## 12.07.11

**Getting Started:** As you read Romans 8:22-26, imagine what it must be like for a Holy Creator like God to adopt sinful, self-centered children like us to be with Him in eternity.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** Have you ever gone to an adoption agency, or known anyone who has been adopted or has adopted a child? A friend and a person who directed the Children's Ministry Department at Prince of Peace, Kate Fairchild, recently adopted a beautiful little girl named Ayan from Ethiopia, Africa. There were many obstacles or sacrifices Matt and Kate had to endure in order to bring this beautiful little 4½ month old baby to their home in Lakeville. They had months of legal paperwork; exhausting examinations of their health and their home to ensure that they were properly suited to adopt; deep financial commitments ranging from \$12-14,000; a 24-hour travel ordeal to her country; and all the emotional strains that go along with preparing and caring for a new baby.

While they were visiting the foster care center in the small village of Tunto, Ethiopia where they were going to be getting little Ayan, they met two young orphaned sisters named Kalkidan – age 4, and Salem – age 9, who did not yet have any referrals. (*No one had claimed or wanted them because the sisters didn't want to be separated.*) Matt and Kate brought little Ayan home in December and later contacted the orphanage organization in the early spring to ask whether the two sisters had been adopted. When they found out that nobody had claimed them yet, God put it on their hearts to make an even bigger sacrifice to go back to Ethiopia to claim the sisters and adopt them as their own. A year ago, Kalkidan and Salem were welcomed into their home and loving family as Ayan had. The biggest fear these older sisters have is doing anything bad that would cause Matt and Kate to want to send them back to Ethiopia. There is nothing that they could do that would cause the Fairchilds to not want them as their children anymore. God is the same way with you and me. God made a HUGE sacrifice so that we could be His adopted children.

All of Christ's followers are children adopted into God's family. It's as though one day Jesus walked into an adoption agency, took one look at us, and said "I want to adopt them as my own, right now, today!" The Lord doesn't force us to go with Him. He chooses us with the hope that we will choose Him as our new parent, and go with Him as we go on a new journey while leaving our old life behind. We would be spiritually wise to go with Him to be raised under His care, His rules, His protection, and His loving grace. Because God has adopted us, we receive an early inheritance or really big brother right now called the Holy Spirit that strengthens and cares for us. The rest of this inheritance that we will be given will be enjoyed when we die and go to spend eternity with our loving Father God in heaven. A wise person, according to Kate, is someone who is obedient and seeks the face of God by following His Word, even if that means going against the cultural norms. Our prayer is that you are wise for what and whom you seek to follow by saying 'yes' to God.

**How is being baptized similar to being adopted?**

**Do you think it matters whether you're a baby or an adult when you are baptized?**

**Pray:** *Pray that you will find joy and a true sense of being part of God's family because God has chosen to pick you up and take you home with Him. Have faith to go with Him.*

# Christmas Party Night

## 12.14.11

**Getting Started:** Read Psalm 33:1-7. What is your favorite verse from this section?

**KT's Thoughts:** Being a musician, I'm often told that my emotions seem to dip lower and jump higher than people who aren't into "the arts." Are you an artist or musician? Can you relate? If I want to express my happiness or gladness, a lot of times, I crank up really happy music and just "rock out!" Yes, even in my car or with my ear buds on.

At other times, when I'm feeling sad or something bad happened that day, I don't know why, but slower or "minor-key" music soothes me and calms me down. I don't normally like listening to "happy" or "upbeat" music when I'm sad. How about you?

Music usually accompanies celebrations. At weddings, graduation parties, anniversaries, cookie-baking nights with the family, and even MSM Christmas parties! Music puts us to motion and gets our feet tapping. It usually has me grabbing my guitar or keyboard and trying to learn the song's chord structures, too!

I was really happy the day I discovered that there were Apple iPhone apps just for musicians like me. I have several of them that help me pick out notes, chords, and different sounds when I'm on the road or not in front of my computer. I like to play a game with myself where I guess what "key" a song is in, and then test it with my keyboard app on my phone! (I'm usually correct within one or two guesses.) I suppose this might sound weird to you, but most musicians are kind of weird. The same way I'm a little quirky about this, some people are quirky about how they party. Did you know that the book of Psalms has a lot to say about how we "party"?

In Psalm 33, we're encouraged to find instruments and make some noise with them. We're encouraged to make up new songs for God! (Now you know why we sing so many different songs at MSM: It's in the Bible to do so!). Instruments at parties bring a level of excitement that doesn't exist with only voices, or just a cd-player. Instruments help the people using them enter into the music and create the music. But Psalm 33 also gives us another reason to "party." Verse 6 says that just by speaking, God created stuff. His word brought things into existence that had never been before. When we grasp this concept by faith, it gives us reason to rejoice. We truly worship a God of new beginnings!

Verse 5 says, "He loves whatever is just and good, and his unfailing love fills the earth." As you gather this week with your MSM small group to party, consider making some music for God. Maybe that will be with actual music or maybe it will be with art, or maybe it will be with food, etc. Be sure to take some time as a family to reflect on God's goodness and sing a new song of love to him! Be creative! And be loud!

**What do you enjoy most about parties?**

**What will you do to make your MSM party a fun time?**

**What is one thing your family could do to "party" together?**

**Pray together:** *God it is fun to praise you with music. It is fun to praise you with my friends. Help me worship you at full volume all my days. Amen.*

# Christmas

12.21.11

**Getting Started:** Read Matt. 1:18-25. What are your thoughts about Joseph after reading this?

**KT's Thoughts:** Christmas isn't a time for fear. Is it?

There's actually a lot of fear in the biblical Christmas story. The angel in this passage tells Joseph to not be afraid (v. 20). Angels tell shepherds later to not be afraid (Luke 2:9-10). An angel tells Mary to not be afraid (Luke 1:30) when she hears the news that she is to bear Jesus as a son. A different angel tells the priest Zechariah to not be afraid (Luke 1:13). Isn't it interesting that God sends heavenly messengers (angels) to tell people to not fear? Wouldn't it be sort of terrifying to see an angel? No wonder the angels had to tell the humans to calm down, whoa!

Christmas can mean many things to your family and yourself. It probably doesn't signify a time of fear, but if we celebrated Christmas as the time when God encountered the world in the flesh for the first time, and really thought about what that means, it might make us a little nervous, if not fearful. But God came... as a baby. No one that I know of is afraid of a baby. Okay, okay, maybe changing a baby's diaper seems scary (ha ha!) but in general, what harm can a baby do?

And it might make people a little fearful if Christmas really was celebrated as God becoming a man, because it might mean we have to change how we approach December Twenty-Fifth. It might mean we have to be good ("for goodness sakes!") not because we want to get stuff, but because we want to live as God intended us to. It might mean we have to give more than we get. It might mean we have to slow down instead of "speed up" and buy more or attend more parties. It might mean we go play in the snow God made for us instead of complaining about the cold weather. It might mean we attend church more frequently to contemplate God's gift to the world. Yeah, now that I wonder about all this, part of me thinks I'd be afraid of living that way. I wouldn't be very popular, and people would probably be upset if they didn't get all the gifts I usually give.

Yet, the angels still say to us, "Do not be afraid, for unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Do not be afraid. Even in the misguided attempts to understand Christmas, we still have a savior. Even in the gifts we didn't want or need, even in the overpacked schedules and gift receipts, even in the crowded malls and too-much-suger, we have a savior! Christ the Lord! This Christmas, we wish YOU and your family a Merry Happy Joyous CHRISTmas!

**What do you enjoy most about Christmas?**

**What does the world outside of the church say Christmas is all about?**

**What could your family do so that your focus is on celebrating the birth of Christ rather than on decorations and gift getting?**

**Pray together:** *God thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus. Help us live not in fear but in gratitude for what you have given to us. Amen!*

# Creation: Our Purpose

01.04.12

**Getting Started:** Read Eph. 2:10. Why does this verse say we were created?

**KT's Thoughts:** Picture a little Katie sitting at the kitchen table with her super patient mom doing kitchen-type work. Katie has a "book" she has written and illustrated in both hands, bound together with yarn at the seams and is reading and explaining every page to her mom (did I mention the mom is super patient?)

This is a picture of me more times than I can count from the time I learned the English language. I used to tell my mom that I wanted to be a librarian, because I thought the librarian was the one who wrote all the books in the shelves at the library! I would make up stories night and day, make pictures to go along with them, and share them with my mom, who always encouraged me and said what a great "author" I was. When my mom would read books to me, she would always make a point of reading the author's name and the illustrator's name on the cover. She would look at me before even beginning the story, and tell me I could have my name on many books some day.

So, by the time I got my first manual type writer (yes this was before an electric one) I was banging out story books. And then I got my first electric type writer (so much easier to type fast!) and I was writing 100 page story books as a 5th and 6th grader. Still I would show up in the kitchen and read them to my mom and she would listen to every word and always encourage me.

God created me this way. Eph. 2:10 above says that we are God's workmanship. God creates us just the way we are. Some of us are mechanical. Some of us are artistic. Some of us are athletic. Some of us are intellectual. Some of us are curious. God likes us the way he made us, and God designed each of us with a purpose in mind, to bring him glory and be creative inside his creation. We each have a part to play to "reconcile" (connect and make right) one another and the world God made. Some of us do that by speaking. Some do it by smiling. Some do it by writing. Some do it by passing a hockey puck down the ice. I happen to be someone who never runs out of printed words. I love to write papers, speeches, emails, songs, and even facebook statuses! If you pay close attention when I speak at MSM, I write all those pages out word for word before I get up to speak before you and I have timed each page and have prayed over each word, sentence and paragraph. It's how God wired me.

If God put the circuits of your life together, to work just right, how does that look? Some days I will admit, I wonder why God created me the way he did. Some days I just don't feel like I fit in with anyone, or anywhere. I cry out for God to make it clear to me the way to walk. God always does. Sometimes God speaks through others, through church sermons, through books, through television shows! It's amazing to be a part of God's design and plan.

**What do you like about how God designed you? What do you dislike & why?**

**Pray together:** *Dear God, thank you for creating me just as I am. Help me to understand your plans for me and help me to be thankful for how I have been designed. Amen.*

# Science and the Bible

01.11.12

**Getting Started:** As you read Psalm 74:12-17 out loud, who is the one who has the power to crush dinosaurs (*Leviathan*), create the sun and the moon, and establish all boundaries on earth.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** Have you ever wondered what could happen if someone believed that God really did not exist? Think about it. If there is a creator, then we as His creatures along with all the other forms of creation (ex: animals, the forests, the oceans, this planet and others) have been uniquely designed and created with a purpose to love and worship the One who created all things. Great value is given to something that has been handcrafted and created with specific purpose and meaning. Have you ever received a gift from someone who spent hours or even days actually handcrafting it? My grandmother, just a few years before she died, made my sister a beautiful rug and quilt that she has proudly displayed in her home. For our wedding, my wife and I received hand made cedar chairs that my step-dad designed and made us for our home. I've spent my own time and money to take extra precautions to protect them from weathering or getting damaged because I highly value what he has created and given to us.

If a personal friend or loved one takes the time and energy to personally design and make something for you, you will cherish that item and more than likely take really good care of it. The opposite is true as well. What do you usually do with things that don't have any real value to you, such as kids' old toys on the bottom of the toy box in your closet? Because you have forgotten who gave each of them to you, and they don't have any real value, you'll probably end up throwing them in the garbage or sending them away to some other place. You toss them out, you get rid of them. It's the same for people who come to the realization that there is no God. If people weren't created and uniquely designed with purpose and meaning, but somehow just evolved over millions of years from swamp water and monkeys as true evolutionists and atheists believe, the meaning of life radically changes. Survival of the fittest, where the strongest race is to become dominant over all other species and races, becomes the meaning to life for an evolutionist and atheist. If the devil can convince a person that there is no loving God that created all things, that we're all here due to some weird molecular accident, then the value put on life and even other human beings will be nothing. How might Satan try to alter the course of humanity and try to accomplish such a humungous task of taking God the Creator out of the whole equation? Much of this has already happened through a man named Charles Darwin and his book entitled "The Origin of Species" written in 1859.

Did you know that Joseph Stalin, while attending a Christian parochial school, wrote an essay on how he was going to live his life serving God? Everything changed for young Joseph when he went off to college and read Darwin's book on evolution and the survival of the fittest. You may know him better as Stalin, the cruel dictator of Russia who is responsible for taking the lives of millions of people. Hitler too took on an evolutionist mindset as he single handedly influenced an entire Nazi army to round up millions of "lesser" people to be eliminated. Life for an evolutionist has no meaning other than to rule over the weak and become their own god.

**Why is it that you're taught only about the theory of evolution at school and nothing about creation?**

**Why is it critical to believe that God created us rather than we just evolved from sludge?**

**Pray:** *God thank you for creating us and the world, the universe, the sun moon and stars. Thank you for your love and entrusting us with stewardship. Help us be a blessing in creation. Amen.*

# World Hunger

01.18.12

**Getting Started:** Read: Luke 22:19. What is the hungriest you ever remember being? When you think of the Lord's Supper, (also known as Holy Communion) what comes to mind?

**KT's Thoughts:** How many times have you been between meals and you use the phrase, "I'm starving!" I am one of those people who gets ultra crabby when I am hungry. I get shaky, irritated, short-fused and can't think of much else other than food! And this is usually only after a few hours of not eating. A few bites into my next meal, and my mood starts to go back to where I hope it should be. It's funny how important food can be, even when we go for only a few hours without it!

The Bible actually says a lot about food. Jesus had compassion on the crowds, and in two different Gospel accounts at one time fed over 5,000 and then 4,000 people with just a few fish and a few loaves of bread. This was a miracle, but it was also food, just plain food, even if it was heavenly food. This helped the people that followed Jesus remember Moses and how God fed the Israelites with manna and quail in the desert, another food miracle. I can't imagine what it would have been like to be one of the disciples handing out baskets of food and seeing the bread or fish multiply for the people right there in front of my eyes.

The verse you read above is taken from a narrative of another meal story. Jesus fed his disciples their last meal saying the bread was "his body" and the wine was "his blood." If you didn't know about Christianity or Holy Communion, this might sound super gross. What Jesus was doing in this common meal was making his disciples one. They were gathered together so that they could be sent out together to share the good news of the kingdom of God. This would fill people's hopes with the fulfillment of the dreams of a savior who came for them. This would fill people's dreams with the realization of their purpose in life. And for those who are poor, it would fill them with the means to pay for food and shelter and be a part of a community that would be their family if their natural family fell on hard times. There is a direct correlation between the meal Jesus ate with his disciples and what mission he was sending them on. If Jesus is the bread of life, he is the food we all need to live and help others live.

At MSM this week, we'll be discussing global poverty, world hunger, and a practical way to live as God's kingdom come. While God could do a miracle and make it so all people had money and food to survive, instead what God did is employ believers in Jesus to be his body: his hands, feet, mouth, ears, arms, knees, elbows, smile, and fingers to distribute generously out of our abundance to be the healing the world needs. God uses each one of us as we are able.

**How has partaking in Communion helped encourage you to be on God's mission?**

**What is one thing you can do in the next week to raise awareness among your peers about world hunger?**

**Pray Together.** *Lord, thank you for providing me with good food to eat so that I can be healthy. Let me also hunger for you and your word! Amen.*

# Family Connect Night

## 01.25.12

**Getting Started:** Read Titus 3:3-8. What do these verses have to do with baptism?

**KT's Thoughts:** For our Family Connect night this year, we are focusing on baptismal promises. Many of us do not remember our own baptism, because we might have been baptized as infants. Some of us were baptized as teens or adults. Many church denominations have similar traditions regarding baptism, and there is a rich benefit in learning some of the distinctions between them as you grow in your faith. We believe that baptism is truly the beginning of our faith life and practice! It is a big big big deal! A very exciting one, in fact!

In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther wrote, "In baptism God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised." In Romans 6, St. Paul speaks of this promise, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Don't worry if that sounds too confusing. It is good news: because of God's action in Jesus, we are saved. Martin Luther also wrote, "It is not water that does these things, but God's Word with the water and our trust in this Word. Water by itself is only water, but with the Word of God it is a life-giving water which by grace gives the new birth through the Holy Spirit."

In the Lutheran tradition, families and sponsors (and the entire congregation) make promises to the God and to one another in how our faith life should work and look. At Prince of Peace, we keep track of these promises every year of a child's faith life in special events called K.T.P.'s (Keeping the Promises of Baptism). Did you grow up with this tradition? If so, what impact do you feel it has had? If not, what are some things you think are positive about churches who believe and practice the sacrament this way?

As we gather for the Family Connect Night, we're going to reflect on the promises that were made (by God and by us) in baptism. Consider it a mish-mash of all the K.T.P.'s so far. Maybe it'll be the first time your family has renewed their promises and start a new course to live these promises of baptism everyday! (It's totally okay if your family has not participated in baptism instruction up till this point. We'll get you all caught up!) I didn't grow up in a family that adhered to any baptismal promises. Sometimes I really wish I had. I also didn't grow up in a church that understood or preached the importance of God's action in baptism as a daily reminder that God has named and chosen me for his own. I can wake up each morning now and go to sleep each night at peace with God because baptism is a promise that will never be broken. I am God's! Yes!

Here is a copy of what we promise in baptism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

### **The Promises of Baptism...**

**"As you bring your children to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:**

**to live with them among God's faithful people,  
bring them to the word of God and the holy supper,  
teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,  
place in their hands the holy scriptures,  
and nurture them in faith and prayer,  
so that your children may learn to trust God,  
proclaim Christ through word and deed,  
care for others and the world God made,  
and work for justice and peace.  
Do you promise to help your children grow in the Christian faith and life?"**

**Parents: share the story of your child's baptism with him or her. What are some of the ways your family has kept these promises? What might need a little tweaking?**

**Pray together:** *Dear God, thank you for your gift of baptism. Help us keep our promises by your grace. Amen.*

# Self Image: God's Image

## 02.01.12

**Getting Started:** Read 2 Peter 1:9-12. What are some of the names we are called in these verses?

**KT's thoughts:** My mom says I was born with "ski feet." I was actually a teenie tiny baby, 5 pounds 12 ounces and 18 inches. I was a skinny kid growing up with lonnnnnngggggg straight hair all the way down my back. That all changed when I became a teenager. Almost over night, my hair went crazy curly after I got it cut short, and I started to gain weight. I'm told this is kind of normal for that time of life, especially since a tendency to be overweight runs on both sides of my family. I remember going to the guy who cut my family's hair, and he took my mom aside, and told her he was absolutely certain, in all his years of cutting hair, that there is no natural way my hair "all of the sudden" turned crazy curly. He was convinced I was sneaking out in the middle of the night and getting (bad and cheap!) perms! Well, I wasn't. It was all natural, and it was awkward for me.

Through middle school and high school, I put on quite a bit of weight. I was rarely comfortable in my clothes, and looking back at pictures, I remember looking at other girls in my class wishing I was "smaller." Oh yes, lest I forget, I also grew tall at a pace much quicker than others, so I always seemed to be the awkward tall person in my class. Years ahead of everyone else! Did I use the word "awkward" yet? Well it was! I was!

During my junior year of high school and the summer before my senior year, because "senior pictures" were coming up, I decided that I needed to get my weight under control. In a healthy way, with a measured pace, I found a diet and exercise program that worked great for me and I worked hard at eating healthier and losing weight so that I could be more comfortable. It was not that I "hated" how I looked, but I was uncomfortable and wanted to feel lighter and lose the weight. If you know anyone who has successfully implemented a good health plan of diet and exercise, and who has lost weight over a long period of time, they usually have stories of clothes fitting looser, their face looking thinner, and other people starting to notice and compliment them. These things happened for me too. I've heard stories of people with eating disorders who didn't have people encouraging them to take it slow, or consult a doctor. I've recommended doctors and counselors (therapists) to friends and students who struggle with these types of diseases, because there is help for those who can't get a grip on their mind and body. Usually the people we are hardest on is ourselves. It's a completely normal part of adolescence to go through growth spurts. Gaining or losing weight. Acne. Liking and then not liking what we see in the mirror. We may get picked on or told we don't measure up to other's standards. One standard we will always measure up to is the treasure God sees in us. God wants us to take good care of our minds and bodies, but there is an important balance. First we need to hear and believe that we are loved unconditionally just as we are.

**What are some things your parents like about you? What are some things you like about yourself?**

**How do you think God sees you?**

**Pray together:** *God I want to learn about why and how you made me the way I am. Help me to see how I am a chosen treasure in your eyes! Amen.*

# Service Project Night

## 02.08.12

**Getting Started:** Read Leviticus 19:18 and Galatians 5:14. What do these verses have in common?

**KT's Thoughts:** Did you know that "loving our neighbor as ourselves" is one of the most often repeated commands in the Bible? Besides the two listed above, you could also check out Matt. 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; and James 2:8.

When I was first starting to read the Bible for myself, probably around middle school age, I remember this command sounding funny to me. It just sounds funny to say that I love myself. Loving others? I get that. But loving others as much as I love me? That just sounded funny to me. It didn't make much sense. Loving others, as you can see from it being a verse way back in Deuteronomy (some of the earliest pages in our scriptures), is a big deal to God. Love is his ultimate law. Have you ever been led to believe that being "right" is the ultimate law? Or being "popular" or "nice" is the ultimate law? The final answer from God is one of the hardest answers for most of us: to love.

I remember being in church hearing the sermon on this when I was in middle school, thinking about God's wisdom and why he would command such a thing. Do I love myself? Do I even like myself? I would ask myself these questions? What would it look like if we didn't love ourselves? We wouldn't eat. We wouldn't try to match our clothes. We would not do our homework. We wouldn't try to pick "favorite" things. We wouldn't care about much of anything. Even if we struggle with our own identity, love for ourselves is a big deal. God made us who we are. But wait. If God made *us* who we are, doesn't that mean that he made others who they are too?

When I think about it that way, I'm back to square one. I will admit that loving others is one of the hardest commandments God gave me. I can follow things like reading God's word, or going to church regularly, taking a Sabbath, and praying for others. But loving others? And loving our enemies? How could God ask such a thing of us? We all know how God could ask such a thing of us. He did it. He loved us so much that he was not only willing to, but sent his son to become one of us to make a way to know and love God in return. Because of the cross, we are free to love and serve others. God took the first move. Now it's our turn to bless others. And maybe bless ourselves in the process. And maybe ultimately bless God!

When we choose to work on loving our neighbor by serving others, what we're really doing is saying thank you to God for giving us other people to bless and love. Sometimes loving others is easy, and sometimes it's a mighty big challenge. In those moments when it's easy, I find myself reminding myself to thank God and rejoice. In those moments when it's very difficult, I ask God to help me be humble and honest and give me new ways to see how God made the other person so that I can be genuine in my love for them.

**Who do you think your 'neighbors' are as stated in the Holy Bible?**

**How might you be able to serve others this week like that of Jesus?**

**Pray:** *Dear God, thank you for the gift of others in my life. Thank you for helping me see myself as you made me, and see others the way you made them. Amen.*

# Relationships: Samson

## 02.15.12

**Getting Started:** Read Judges 13:1-5 and Judges 13:20-25.

**KT's Thoughts:** If you really want an exciting "soap opera" story line, I challenge you to read Judges 13-16 some time this week. Here is a story with all sorts of twists and turns: angels, murders, affairs, untended power, violence, deceit, and also Godly Spirit encounters!

Samson was a ruler over Israel for 20 years. Admittedly, Samson makes some really bad relationship blunders. He exercises some of the poorest judgment in the Bible for a leader. But there was also something very special about Samson that most of the leaders in the Old Testament don't have on record: God's Spirit continually filled him by grace to do mighty acts, and this in spite of his poor character. God used Samson to help deliver Israel from their enemies, the Philistines.

Now, I've never murdered anyone, and I've never destroyed any Philistine strongholds. My parents were not visited by angels to announce my birth, and I've cut my hair a time or two (which was something Samson was not allowed to do). I've made some unwise relationship decisions in the course of my life though, and I've got regrets and things I need forgiveness for (thank God, I am forgiven). And like Samson, I too have been filled with God's mighty spirit.

As you read and learn about Samson's complicated story this week, consider how big God's grace is that even though Samson was conniving and made poor decisions, God had a plan for Samson's life. God's plan came shining through, even though Samson didn't deserve God's favor or God's Spirit.

I've felt like that several times in my life. I've been given opportunities to make friends with wise people and also to let others go who are not good influences on me. Sometimes I've chosen wisely. Sometimes I have not. How about you? Samson's parents were responsible to God for his care and bringing him up in God's ways. Samson did not always adhere to their counsel. Have there been times when you have tried to go a different way than God's ways and your parent's wisdom?

When I was in high school, a friend of mine knew a boy from another school that she thought I would like to get to know. She gave me his phone number and wanted me to call him and talk to him. He also called me a few times and we were trying to make plans to meet each other. The friend who was trying to "set us up" was not someone my mom trusted, and so my mom intervened and told me that she did not want me trying to date any guy that this friend recommended because this friend did not exercise good judgment when it came to dating. I was really upset at my mom. I didn't want her interfering in my life. I wanted to meet someone new and I wanted it to be exciting and maybe even a little dangerous. In the end, even though I was upset, I chose to obey my mom and ended the phone calls with the guy because my mom knew things I didn't know. Navigating those hard times by God's grace became an important part of relationships and growing up. I am thankful for parents who looked out for me and even sometimes told me, "no" because they loved me. I'm also thankful God's Spirit never left me, even when I messed up.

**In what ways can you be like Samson when it comes to relationships?**

**What are the important relationships in your life? How important is Jesus?**

**Pray:** *Dear God, thank you for the powerful stories of people like Samson that we can relate to. Help us trust your ways and your word and follow you. Amen.*

# Ash Wednesday

02.22.12

Students are invited to attend the special  
Ash Wednesday worship service with their parents at 7:00 pm.

**Getting Started:** Students, read Matthew 6:1-6 out loud. Parents, please read the four verses found in chapter six, verses fourteen through eighteen. (6:14-18).

**Jeff's Thoughts:** The forty days of Lent that starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Sunday have been observed by Christians since the fourth century, about 1,700 years. Easter, the most celebrated and by far the most important Christian holiday, was always preceded by a fast. A 'fast' is to voluntarily abstain from food or certain kinds of food for a period of time while going through the process of grief, sorrow, or repentance in the hope of growing closer to God. Fasts typically range in duration from a couple of days to as long as three or more weeks. Fasts are meant to help people rely fully on the Lord's strength and bring forth both spiritual power and renewal. For those of you who think that we as followers of Christ don't ever need to or shouldn't have to fast, Jesus himself ranks it in the same category as prayer. If you read verse sixteen again, you will notice that Jesus says "when" you fast, not "if" you fast. Have you ever, out of a clear decision to rely on God, fasted by replacing food and/or candy for deep prayer with God?

When I was the youth director at Vasa Lutheran near Red Wing, we would participate in the 30-hour famine each year. There were about twenty teens in our youth group, and each teen would raise money and gather sponsors for her or his participation in the 30-hour fast that would go towards World Vision's fabulous appeal against world hunger. ([www.30hourfamine.org](http://www.30hourfamine.org)) Our teens partnered with over 600,000 other teens from around the United States to make a difference in the lives of children in the poorest countries and communities in the world by going without food for 30 hours. I wasn't sure if I could survive not eating a thing for 30 hours, but I knew that it must be somewhat safe if thousands of teens do it every year. I also wanted to be faithful to those who sponsored me (many donated a dollar an hour), so I knew I had to last throughout every minute of the event.

Not only did our youth group raise over \$2,000 to help support World Vision's famine relief, but all teens admitted that this fasting experience drew them closer to the Lord Jesus, especially during the last couple of hours when our band led us into a meaningful time of worship. Later I read that because of our efforts and the efforts of everyone else who participated in the fast that year, 227 small health clinics were built in 28 countries; half a million children were able to get shots to keep disease away; 766 schools in 36 countries were either built or fixed; and 750,000 more people were given access to clean drinking water with new wells that were built with monies we raised.

Fasting does make a difference, whether it is done to raise money to fight hunger in the world or done to bring forth spiritual and emotional renewal with God. I have fasted other times over the years when I had felt a deep desire to seek God's specific direction for my life. Every time, God blesses me abundantly for those hours spent with Him in prayer in place of eating. My prayer is that you will take Jesus' advice and fast when the burdens of life get you down.

\* Fasting is a wonderful spiritual discipline, but please do not try fasting on your own without consulting an adult and do it under adult supervision.

## **What is symbolic of having ashes placed on your forehead in the sign of the cross at the Ash Wednesday Service?**

**Pray Together:** *Lord, thank you for opportunities to feel your presence with me, things like fasting, praying, and worshipping. Give me the strength to give up things in my life in order to seek a stronger relationship with you. Amen.*

# The Kingdom of Heaven

02.29.12

**Getting Started:** Read Matthew 20:1-16 out loud. Realize as you read that the way people are being asked to work for the landowner in this story is very similar to how God brings all sorts of people into His Kingdom at various stages of their lives, both the young and very old.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** This is one of those stories that almost everyone can relate to. I remember when I read this parable for the first time. I had that confused look on my face like "huh! WHAT?" and I wouldn't be too surprised if you had the same kind of expression. The reason I'm sure many people can relate to this story is because most everyone has experienced a time when someone else received something that they thought the others shouldn't have. Has a friend or maybe a sibling ever got something much better than what you got? If you're like me, you immediately pull the "*that's not fair!*" lever.

I've pulled that lever a number of times while growing up. It even started before I was born. My parents had purchased an 8 mm video camera in 1964 to take home videos of my older sister and brother. A few months before I was born, the camera broke. Do you think they went out and got it fixed so that I could be on 5 of the 15 roles of film that they had already taken of Dawn and Dan? No! Every year I had to sit through hours of films with not a second of me on them. NOT FAIR! Later on it seemed like every time I went over to a friend's house, they would have some really cool go-cart, dirt bike, swimming pool, or video game machine (*which was rare to have in the early 80's*) that I didn't have. I'd come home and pull the lever. Even today, I often hear of people either being born into a wealthy family or striking it rich by winning the lottery; then I have to refrain myself from pulling the lever once again. Probably the most memorable time that I grabbed this lever and slammed it down was Christmas Eve my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. I know it's hard to imagine an 8<sup>th</sup> grader throwing a fit, but believe it or not, I threw a dandy. First off, as the youngest child, my eyes were always pierced at my brother and sister to see that I received whatever they had received. So often it seemed like they were given better things and greater privileges than me, just because "*they were older*" as my mother put it. I wasn't happy with this excuse, but I had to live with it.

I'm not quite sure what set me off. Since it was Christmas break and we were out of school, I had probably been handed that line too many times already. As my sister played Santa by placing the packages on each person's pile in the fireplace room, I helped dad make popcorn so we'd have proper nourishment for the gift unwrapping ceremony. I was in a great mood until I stepped into the room and saw that both my brother and sister had twice as many gifts as I had. At first I thought they were just teasing me, so I played along and asked where they put the rest of my gifts. When my brother pointed and laughed at me, I lost it! I threw myself off of the couch launching the bowl of buttery-soaked popcorn into the air and all over the room. I screamed at the top of my lungs "*This sucks!*", and then ran upstairs. The lever came slamming down, and it took a loving mom to explain that the same amount of money was spent on each of us before I was able to lift the lever of unfairness back up. God is going to lead anyone who is willing to "work" into His Kingdom, whether we like it or not. It wasn't easy, but knowing that I'm not the judge, I had to stop pulling the lever years ago, trust God, and thank Him for all that I do have and not worry what I don't have.

**Why do you think the land owner in the parable paid the same amount to the 'late' workers as he did the 'early' workers? How is this similar to God?**

**Why does God give everyone a chance for salvation, even if someone has worked harder and longer in building God's kingdom than someone else?**

**Pray:** *Pray for an open heart, strength and courage to pick up your cross to follow Jesus.*

# World Religions

03.07.11

**Getting Started:** After reading Matthew 7:13-14, discuss who the gate is and why this gate is so narrow rather than being wide and easy to get through.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** One of the things I like most in life is wide variety. Do you know anyone who loves to mix two or three different breakfast cereals? The more you can mix in that bowl, the better it is I say. Or how about having a wide range of bright colored clothing hanging in the closet to choose from? That's why you'll see me wearing orange or purple pants from time to time, just for variety's sake. I bought a bright yellow car this summer primarily because there aren't many yellow cars on the road. They're all so similar in color that it's rather boring. I can never get just one bouquet of flowers because there usually is not enough variety of colors in one. Students who have traveled on trips with me wonder why it is that I enjoy mixing all the kool aid colors together; now you know! I love being outdoors, especially in the wide open areas. You're probably wondering by now, "what does this have anything to do with different religions?" I know that I'm a little strange and maybe even rare because I enjoy a wide range of varieties in just about everything. When it comes to the subject of religions, though, I bet there are more people who prefer a variety to choose from rather than being told that there is only one way to God.

We live in a world culture where the devil has been given authority by God to rule over the world and its inhabitants. One of the ways Satan has deceived the human race is by persuading humanity into thinking that God isn't real, and that if He was real, He wouldn't be so narrow as providing only one way (*Jesus*) to salvation. Throughout the Bible, the one fundamental message about Jesus the Messiah is that the only way to God and salvation is through faith in Him. In the Bible verse you read above, Jesus is speaking to the crowds informing them that the way to God and life after death is by going through the narrow gate. How do we know that Jesus is the narrow gate that He refers to in this verse? If you turn to John 10:9, Jesus comes out and plainly states "*I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved*".

What do we do in a world full of people, some who call themselves Christians, who want to be politically correct and say that all religions lead to salvation and eternal life with God? Why is the road to heaven so narrow that only a few will find it? If faith in Jesus is the only way to God, then how should we treat our friends and others who are practicing another religion? These and many more tough questions will hopefully be answered this coming Wednesday night. Parents, if you would like to attend, please don't hesitate to come and listen to our guest speaker while he educates the students on some of the major religions and gives Biblically solid answers to these and other questions. Feel free to check out the various questions and scripture readings on the next page that your student will be covering in his/her small group this week.

**How would our world look different if everyone believed that Jesus was the only way to eternal life with God?**

**Pray:** *Pray that the Holy Spirit will open the hearts and minds of all who are in attendance on Wednesday, that each of us can play a role this week in loving others who aren't disciples of Christ, that our love would influence them to find and walk through the 'narrow gate'.*

# Religion or Relationship?

03.14.12

**Getting Started:** Read Colossians 3:12-15. What would our world be like if more people lived just like this?

**KT's Thoughts:** When you hear the word "religion" what comes to your mind? It's a loaded word. Some people use it in a very negative light. Some people use it in a very positive light. Did you ever have a friend ask you, "Are you religious?" and they meant it in a mean way?

Basically, "religion" is just a patterned way of living according to some type of faith tradition. Islam is a religion. Mormonism is a religion. Judaism is a religion. And yes, so is Christianity. We have a pattered and set way of doing life. The verses you read in Colossians are some of these patterns, but they would actually apply to many other world religions as well.

I know I'm a little different than most people, but I don't mind being called "religious." I know that my lifestyle, regardless if I am employed by a church or not, is a little different than how a lot of people live. Regular church attendance, giving a portion of my finances to God's work, volunteering to serve others, studying the Bible for hours at a time, keeping a private prayer journal, sharing my faith with others, living honestly and with integrity, and claiming that Jesus is the only way to God the Father are all part of my religious habits. I know it is not the same way many choose to follow and walk with God, but these habits stem from a living relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. I'm not even a fan of saying that others must follow Jesus the same way I do, but I do call all people to be set free in Jesus' name and live by grace through faith in Jesus! The Spirit leads us all in different ways, which brings us back to that relationship thing.

Many people who are afraid of being called "religious" actually have vibrant and alive relationships with God. They are bold in their witness. They are faithful in prayer. They share their income and talents with others. It looks different for all Christians because God is alive and working differently through all of us. The minute we turn "our way" of following Jesus into "law" and turning our habits that work well for us into "the way it must be done," we cross lines that dampen our ability to share our relationship with God with others, and we turn it into more of a dead religion.

That is when the verses in Colossians turn into something more like the first half of the chapter (if you have time, please skim it!). If we try to live by rules, we'll fail. But if we let God build our relationship with God, and we walk by faith, things not only get very interesting and exciting, we are transformed! Remember, through Jesus, we can know and serve God. We relate to God as children. We relate to Jesus as brothers and sisters. We relate to the Spirit as worshippers and students.

**Can a person be religious and still have no relationship with God?**

**How is our relationship with God similar to our relationship with others?**

**Pray together:** *God help me not to follow you simply by empty religious habit, but help me know you, your goodness, your truth, and your love. Amen.*

# Service Project Night

## 03.21.12

**Getting Started:** Read 1Corinthians 12:4-6 out loud.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** There are all sorts of ways that you can be a servant to others. The key to serving others is to find something that you enjoy doing or are good at and then offer to do that as a volunteer without any form of financial compensation in return. When people serve, in essence they are following the Golden Rule that Jesus commanded his followers to do, which is “*do unto others what you would like done unto you.*” Consider for a moment your MSM mentor. Each week these men and women take the time to prepare for small groups. Then, after working a long day in the middle of their work week and during their own family time, they invest two hours every Wed. night to make a difference in your life. They do this out of their love for Jesus and in response to what the Lord has done for them. For the past six years, one of our MSM mentors takes her golden retriever, Trooper, to a hospital and visits for two to three hours every Thursday with children who have terminal or very severe illnesses. Why would anyone want to volunteer to see the faces of young children and teens week after week knowing that many of them will not ever leave the hospital alive? It's because if she was sick, she would want to have something to smile about. What better to bring a smile to a child's face than the love of a puppy dog who wags his big tail and smothers you with furry kinds of love. This mentor is sharing the love of God in a very meaningful way.

When I went to college, I tried out for the St. Thomas Liturgical mass choir and landed a spot in the bass section. For all four years, this choir would sing on Sunday for church which helped me to stay somewhat grounded with God. More than that though, being in the choir turned into the vehicle, with the Holy Spirit as the gas, that drove me to the first true form of serving others on a weekly basis for the betterment of the body of Christ. Then, during the spring semester of 1991, this group took a pilgrimage tour to Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Germany. If you know history, the Berlin Wall was destroyed just a few months before this, and the Russian soldiers who had occupied Poland for so many years had just withdrew from that country leaving behind an entire nation who weren't allowed to outwardly express their faith or openly worship Jesus Christ beyond certain church buildings.

I recall our first choir concert in one of the oldest standing churches in Europe located in downtown Warsaw. The church sat 500 people, but there were over 2,000 people who had gathered, most of whom were outside in the streets. By the time we finished our 1 ½ hour concert, the people were all crying and uncontrollably clapping because for the first time in decades they could worship God openly and with a free spirit. When we were escorted outside, over 5,000 people had gathered to hear, for most of them, the first Christian Choir sing praises to the Lord out on their public streets. It was 10:30pm, and we did our entire concert again for the masses and media that had gathered to give glory to God. It was like this everywhere we went in Poland. Through our songs and the simple talent of singing, God's spirit was moving in an infectious way. Out of this awesome experience came a deep desire to serve others by pointing them to Christ Jesus. The following year I got that opportunity by volunteering as an 8<sup>th</sup> grade leader at my church that led me four years later to seminary to become a youth pastor. All because God took one of my talents and turned it into a way that directed others to him.

**What are some 'gifts' that the Lord has blessed you with that you could use to bring glory to God?**

**What are some ways you could use your gifts to serve others?**

**Pray:** *Dear God, thank you for the opportunity to minister in your name. Help me make a difference in the lives of others. Amen.*

# Spring Break

## 03.28.12

**Getting Started:** God's Word says: *"Having the same love, being one on spirit and purpose, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others"* – Philippians 2:2-4

**Jeff's Thoughts:** Growing up in the early '80's, taking a few days or even a week off for spring break wasn't practiced, at least in the small farming community 50 miles south of the Twin Cities I called home. The first time I experienced spring break was my freshmen year at St. Thomas University in 1989. Upon reading an ad for a college student to sell trips to sunny Mazatlan, Mexico with the opportunity to go free by reaching a certain quota, I immediately jumped on the challenge. Within just a few months of wooing my friends and classmates I filled the plane getting me a free week-long trip and \$275 to spend as I pleased. Wow! What a fun first spring break trip.

Looking back the only thing this trip didn't have was God. It was a week without God. If God was there, I surely didn't notice or even care. It was MY vacation, filled with what I wanted to do and plenty of it. I actually wish my first spring break trip could've been like what the Senior High Ministry students at Prince of Peace spring breaks are. Every spring they plan a fantastic week long adventure, usually somewhere in the United States, where they go as a mighty team to make an impact on not only their lives but the lives of others. It's a week filled not only with fun but with deep faith opportunities and service, the kind that doesn't last just for a week but a lifetime.

For Christmas each year, ever since my sons were entering 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I would give them the gift of the down-payment for them to attend the church mission trip in the summer knowing that they would have a similar opportunity to serve others over spring break when they reached Senior High. I wanted them to experience a mighty week with God and life-changing faith adventures a few times before reaching high school. When the choice came for them on what they would do and how they would spend that week each year, they would be more open and possibly excited to spend it not just for themselves, but for others. Because they had gone on the MSM mission trip a few times, when every new school year would start in SHM (Senior High Ministry) they would express a desire to spend their week of spring break serving others with other students from POP. My oldest son, who is majoring in Biblical Theology at Bethel University, spent his spring breaks with SHM in L.A. California; in Atlanta, Georgia; in Seattle, Washington; and two weeks in Tanzania, Africa throughout his high school years. Even though each year would be a different location and a different group of students that he would be with, he looked forward to and felt good that he could serve others in such a way that it would make an incredible impact on their own faith and the faith of those whom they served.

If your family typically takes you to spend a week vacationing somewhere together as a family, in a small way you are serving others by participating. Your parents love you very much, and they have sacrificed their time and a ton of money for the family to foster a closer relationship to spend a week of quality time together. If this week is when your family sets aside their bonding time, you may need to find an alternative week in the summer when you can experience an annual mission trip where you are investing not just in yourself, but in the lives of others by loving them the way our Lord Jesus does.

**If you have not attended a week-long mission trip, what is keeping you from doing so? If you have, share a memory of what it was like helping others.**

**Pray Together:** *Lord, present me with the opportunities to go into the world and serve others in your name. Let me have the attitude of Isaiah 6:8 that says "Here I am Lord, send me". Amen*

# Depression and Suicide

04.04.12

**Getting Started:** Read Psalm 27 slowly all the way through.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** It's extremely alarming: according to the National Institute of Mental Health, 18 teens per day kill themselves in the U.S. for a total of 6500 young lives lost each year. Over 1,000 teenagers try to commit suicide every day, almost one teen per minute in the U.S. Fortunately, because of caring classmates, friends, and loved ones, most of these attempts are unsuccessful. If you're able to catch some of the warning signs for suicide, you will be more able to help that other person in their time of need. Whatever you do, though, don't think that they'll be fine or pass it off for another day, it may be too late!

It was a month before Christmas, but less than a week before my entire family was coming to my house to celebrate the holidays. Everything was ready to go except our tan carpet was brown with deep blotches of dirt from not being cleaned for over a year. I immediately called Kenny, a very nice young man who ran his own carpet cleaning service and who I was able to share my faith with the year before. After talking with him for a few minutes on the phone, he informed me that there was no way he could fit me in until a week or two. I disappointedly hung up the phone. Moments later, Kenny called me back. He said he was coming right over to do my carpets. I was curious with the sudden switch in his schedule, but with everything going on in my mind with all of the things I had to do to get ready for the family celebration I really didn't think too much of it. When Kenny got to my house, all he wanted to do was talk which really bugged me because I was in "let's get this job done" mode so that I could go on to the next thing on my list. He told me how much his life stunk, that his wife had left him over the summer and took his two young daughters with her. He also said that it was as if God directed him to my house that day knowing that I had gone through a divorce a year prior and that I leaned on God's strength to get through those difficult months. When I heard this, I realized that I needed to stop thinking about myself and spend some time talking with Kenny about how he needed to turn to the Lord Jesus now more than ever. After a half an hour, he seemed to be encouraged, especially when he heard about a book that had answered a lot of my questions and brought me closer to the Lord throughout the past few years. The book was Letters From A Skeptic by Dr. Greg Boyd. As Kenny started spraying my carpet, he wondered if he could borrow my copy and read it that night and over the weekend. Selfishly, I didn't want to let my only copy out of the house, so I told Kenny that I would stop by the bookstore that evening and send a copy to him in the mail so that he would get it by Saturday morning. He was thrilled to hear that he would be able to have and read his own copy of this book over the weekend. After an hour, Kenny finished the carpets and left.

That night, a few things came up and I never got to the bookstore. The next day, I stopped and purchased Kenny a copy of the book and was meaning to mail it out but figured it wouldn't matter too much what day it arrived, so inconsiderately I waited a few days. Monday morning, Kenny was found dead in his apartment from committing suicide. He never received the book because I was too "busy" and selfish to send it. Was I to blame for Kenny's death? No. Could I have brought that book over to his apartment and loved on him the way Christ Jesus would have? Yes! If only I had put on these attributes listed in Colossians in how we as Christians ought to live, Kenny might still be alive today. A psychiatrist who is trained in treating depression and suicidal tendencies will be the guest speaker this Wednesday. Your parents and friends are welcome to attend.

**Do you know anyone who might be struggling with depression, or even thoughts of suicide?**

**What can you do to help others who are depressed?**

**Pray:** *Pray for any one you know who may be struggling with depression. Lord, help them find hope and a deep sense of purpose in living for you. Amen.*

# Disappointment

04.11.12

**Getting Started:** Read Psalm 31:10-16.

## KT's Thoughts:

Middle school years are characterized by times of disappointment. Disappointment sometimes moves in with its nasty cousins: complaining and despair. Sounds to me like the writer of Psalm 31 felt this way. This is a trust psalm but it's also a reality psalm. This person was dealing with some major set backs!

I am the type of person who has high expectations. I have always been this way. I set high standards for myself, expect great things, push myself to achieve, and end up expecting that in others. When what I expect doesn't happen, you guessed it. I start complaining. I start grumbling. I get crabby. I let my disappointment breed bitterness and get upset with people and with myself. Then I start to despair. I think, "Oh no, nothing ever goes right. Where is God? Why are you letting this happen, God?" There's a better way.

I was really disappointed when I was in middle school. My parents had split up, after years of arguing and fighting. My dad would move out, then he would move back in. My mom promised things would change. Things never really changed. I would get my hopes up and then they would get let down again. My parents finally split for what seemed like a permanent thing (something that I actually wanted, because I was tired of their fighting every night) and then after we got settled in a new house, a new town, and a new school, two months later, they got back together! I was not only disappointed, I was very upset, confused, and I didn't even bother to ask God why. I said, "Goodbye." For a few years I lived in disappointment toward my family, my parents, and ultimately (since I thought God had the power to control it, but didn't) God.

Instead of asking God, "why" in these situations, I have two different questions disciples should ask. The first is "where?" Where is God and what is God up to? Where is the action of the Spirit? How misguided was I to miss it? The next is, "What's next?" *Okay so my plan fell through. What else does God have in store? What's next?* Do you see how asking these kind of questions start to inspire hope?

Even though I didn't ask the "What's next?" question, God answered it for me. He brought me to a very low point in my life, where deciding to live without God's influence on me would lead to dark days that I was not happy. God allowed me to be mad at him, and God allowed me to try to live without his provision and still He provided. The Spirit never left me alone. By the time I got to high school, I was asked to lead the singing at a small home church, and through singing God's word in song, God called me back to him through persistent love. Even though I was disappointed, there was a new life given to me when I surrendered. God was always there.

**When's the last time you were seriously disappointed? Let down? Angry? Hurt? Expecting something and the opposite happened?**

**How can God help you when you are disappointed?**

**Pray together:** *Lord, thank you that you never leave us. Help us to trust you more. Amen.*

# Anger

## 04.18.12

**Getting Started:** Student, read Psalm 86:15 out loud and notice what the bible is saying about God and specifically about anger.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** There is a misconception about anger not only among students today but among adults as well. We have added this to the three year curriculum in MSM because it is something that Jesus spoke about, included in many of his parables, and even engaged in at various times with others. There are at least 17 different types of anger, ranging from a 'chilly' feeling all the way to the top where 'explosive' behavior reigns. Does God get angry? There are numerous times throughout scripture that the wrath of God, or the outcome of his anger with his people and the injustices being put on them by other nations, brought forth condemnation. Even through the extreme examples of God's wrath such as the flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God never once uses his anger in an instant or sudden reactionary way. The scriptures say "*God is slow to anger*". It is only after years of humanity living in sin and being unrepentant that God responds in a wrathful way. God always gives sufficient time to extend grace and forgiveness. His first response is always one of compassion, which is what God seems to want us to replace anger towards others with as well.

Out of all the devotions I've written, this is one that is quite easy to write as it is something I have personally had to learn how to manage not only in my youth but throughout my adult years as well. Do you find yourself getting angry often? For someone who has gone through fourteen weeks of anger management, I have learned where my anger comes from and how to manage it appropriately. Because I am rationally able to recognize what things bother me and why, I get angry much less and surely don't lose my temper like I used to. There are certain feelings lying at the core of all anger. For me, frustration from a feeling of inadequacy has haunted me since early childhood. Being the youngest of three with a speech impediment (*speaking problem*) that kept others from understanding me, along with a dad who had unrestrained anger outbursts on a regular basis, were just some of the ingredients that led to an explosive temperament.

By the time I had hit 6<sup>th</sup> grade, my sudden temper outbursts and hostility had led me to say inappropriate things to my parents and act irrational to others. One time, when I didn't get to go somewhere but my older brother got to go to his friend's house, I stormed into my room and punched the wall so hard my fist went right through the sheet rock. Placing a poster over the area kept it hidden until years later when it suddenly reappeared prior to moving. Years later in my marriage and even sometimes with my own children, I would find myself enraged at the brink of violence instead of choosing to have patience and kindness whenever I felt disrespected. I couldn't figure out why this was. With the support of my family, I enlisted in a fourteen week course on anger management. I was the only one in the room of sixteen people who hadn't been court ordered to be there. I discovered why I and others get angry and what I needed to do to disarm any future outbursts, saving my relationships with my loved ones and quite possibly my career in youth ministry. There are underlying feelings inside each of us that must be dealt with in order to get a handle on anger so that we can respond to others with kindness and compassion no matter how we are treated by them. By the grace of God, it is possible.

**What kinds of things make you upset and angry? Why is that?**

**How can the Lord help you from losing your temper or after you lost your temper?**

**Pray Together:** *Lord, I offer my anger to you. Please help me to control it, replace any bitterness I might have with love and patience. When I get angry, surround me with your spirit of everlasting peace. Thank you God for being with me. Amen.*

# Student Prayer Night

04.25.12

**Getting Started:** Read John 15:7 and Matthew 7:7-8. How are these two similar, different?

**Jeff's Thoughts:** With over 60 devotions that have been written for these three years of MSM, many of them have contained something regarding prayer. Jesus informs his listeners that "if you abide in me, what you ask for will be answered". To abide with someone means to always be with them, to remain with them throughout each day. Jesus cares deeply in having a meaningful relationship with you, so much so that he paid the price on the cross with his blood so that you can, through faith in him, be with him for all eternity. Did you notice though that Jesus does not say that you will receive exactly what you ask for? Sometimes what we ask for isn't for our best interest nor would it be what we need in strengthening our faith and our walk with God. Prayer can be a difficult thing to understand. Here are quotes from famous people regarding prayer.

*"Seven days without prayer makes one WEAK!"* - Allen E. Bartlett

*"They who cease to pray cease to prosper"* -Sir William Gurney Benham

*"Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but taking hold of God's willingness"* -Phillips Brooks

*"Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers, pray for powers equal to your tasks!"* Phillips Brooks

*"Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised"* - John Bunyan

*"God's way of answering the Christian's prayer for more patience, experience, hope and love often is to put them into the furnace of affliction so that these things can be birthed and achieved"* - R. Cecil

*"Prayer requires more of the heart than of the tongue"* - Adam Clarke

*"It isn't a pack-horse to carry your load, it isn't a wagon, it's only a road. And perhaps the reward of the spirit who tries is not the ending goal, but the exercise".* - Edmund Vance Cooke

*"work as if you were to live 100 years; pray as if you were to die tomorrow"* - Benjamin Franklin

*"Prayer is like the turning on of an electric switch. It does not create the current; it simply provides a channel through which the electric current can flow"* - Max Handel

*"Prayer is exhaling the spirit of man and inhaling the spirit of God"* - Edwin Keith

*"Trouble and perplexity drive me to prayer, and prayer drives away both these"* - Philip Melancthon

*"They who have steeped their souls in prayer can every anguish calmly bear"* - Richard Milnes

*"I have been driven many time to my knees by the overwhelming conviction there was nowhere else I could go"* - Abraham Lincoln

*"The fewer the words the better the prayer"* - Martin Luther

*"Prayer is not artful monologue of voice uplifted from the sod, It is Love's tender dialogue between the soul and an Almighty God"* - John Richard Moreland

*"Though smooth be the heartless prayer, no ear in heaven will mind it; And the finest phrase falls dead, if there is no feeling behind it"* - Ella Wheeler Wilcox

**In what ways could your prayer practices be changed in order to abide in Christ? *Pray Now!***

# Prophets and Prophecy

05.02.12

**Getting Started:** ‘Good’ people don’t always go to heaven, only those who are disciples of Jesus Christ and have said “Yes” to Him as their Lord. As you read Romans 9:1-5, think about how many people you could influence if you took a bold stand in your faith, knowing that Jesus is truly God’s Son who fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah in the Bible.

**Jeff’s Thoughts:** Have you ever wanted to tell a family member or a friend about Jesus, but you were scared to take that stand because you really wanted them to like you? It’s easy to share your faith in Christ with a stranger or someone you don’t know very well, but it really takes a lot of zeal for God to try to lead someone you already know closer to the Lord. I, being the youngest, have an older brother and an older sister. All my life I wanted so badly to hang out with my brother, but I was the annoying little brother that didn’t matter much. In 1996, my brother’s wife was having an affair with another man and soon the two of them got divorced. In 1998, my wife of seven years was having an affair with another man which also led to a divorce 8 months later. Over the next two years, I would drive down and spend time hanging out at my brother’s house, all the time encouraging him not to listen to his friends but to look to the Lord for answers. In the winter of 2000, something really awesome happened! My brother and I went to Cancun, Mexico for a week together for some much needed rest and relaxation. My dream had come true; my brother actually wanted to hang out with me, for an entire week! Days before the trip, though, I started to worry about the kind of decisions he was going to make while in Cancun, whether they were going to be God-honoring ones or self-serving ones. I waited till we got on the plane when I apprehensively shared with him that my love for the Lord was going to continue directing me, even throughout my week in the tropics an entire country away. I was hoping and praying that he would catch the hint that I wanted him to also walk with the Lord during our vacation in sunny Mexico. He turned to me with admiration in his voice and surprisingly said “that’s what I like about you little bro; you have strong values and you’re not scared to voice them or live them out no matter where you are”.

It was awesome to witness how my zeal to honor God had a bit of influence on my big brother, especially in a setting where temptation could have played a dangerous role. All week during our stay in Cancun, the two of us had a fabulous time all the while honoring God. This was the beginning of a new, Christ-centered friendship that led my brother to attend a prayer breakfast with me a few months later on Palm Sunday where he stood up and re-dedicated his life to the Lord. A major part of the theme for this Wednesday is being equipped with zeal for the Gospel and not being scared to tell others the truth about your faith in Jesus Christ. Don’t be afraid to let your zeal for the Lord Jesus shine brightly, especially with your friends and family. It might be scary, but you never know how your zeal and your faith in the Lord will affect someone else.

Just as the biblical prophets represented the voice and commands of the most High God, we can also speak God’s truth into the lives of people around us.

**Is there anyone in your family (relatives of sort) who needs to hear the Good News that Jesus has saved them and given them power to overcome Satan’s evil? In what ways could you share this with them?**

**Pray:** *Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you the courage and the desire to take a stand and do what is right and honorable to others for God.*

# David: Hearing God's Call

05.09.12

**Getting Started:** As you read Matthew 10:37-39 out loud, consider what Jesus must have meant when he asks his followers to pick up and carry their cross.

**Jeff's Thoughts:** In the spring of 1995 during one of our short breaks on the midnight shift at the Red Wing Shoe Company, I found myself sitting alone again at one of the lunch tables, reading my Bible. I hadn't read my Bible much until a few years prior to this when I started volunteering as a small group leader with 8<sup>th</sup> grade teens on Sunday morning at a local church. As I sat at this table, there seemed to be a very strong force leading me to read my Bible for specific direction that God wanted me to consider. You see, during a typical work day, I serviced over 100 customers in a company where I had become very financially successful, and at night I worked the late shift at the shoe warehouse so my family would have medical insurance coverage. I worked over 75 hours per week, much like some of your parents, to support my family. The difference was, though, that neither of these jobs nor the many hours spent doing them even came close to the amount of joy I experienced during the one hour every Sunday morning as a leader.

As I sat at this table paging through the Bible, I stumbled across this radical verse in Matthew where Jesus instructs his followers to take up their cross and follow Him. At that moment, I knew what God was directing me to do. In order for me to truly follow the Lord Jesus and be completely satisfied, I had to pick up MY cross and carry it. The one hour a week as a small group mentor was so enjoyable because that was what God was calling me to do as a full-time job. I knew that night that someday in the future I would no longer be working the night shift packaging shoes or driving from home-to-home selling dairy products. There would be a huge price to pay in order to become a youth pastor, but I knew that God would truly bless this journey if I just had enough guts to pick up my cross and follow His calling on my life. There were many things that I had to do to pursue full-time ministry.

Two months later, I quit my job at the shoe company after working there for three years, and enrolled at Luther Seminary in St. Paul to start a master's program in Christian Education. One week after applying for seminary, I received a call from a local pastor in town who wanted to hire me as their junior and senior high youth director. While working for this church, God blessed me financially through one of the leaders there who hired me on his roofing crew for the next four years while I finished my schooling. I welcomed Christ and opened my heart to the Lord that night at the shoe company when I opened my Bible, not caring what the others thought of me as they cursed my intentions to read God's Word. The cross I carried over these years was letting go of a 6-figure income, going deeper in debt with more school loans, years of doing research papers, fear of the unknown, and convincing my friends and family that I hadn't lost my mind. In some small way, I think I have an idea what Jesus must've meant when He said "*if you lose your life for my sake, you will find it.*" Hearing God's call isn't easy, but looking back I sure am happy that I trusted Him as my Lord for leading me into the new life and occupation that I have now.

**What "finer things" of life would you be willing to give up in order to serve Jesus more?**

*(Parents, share with your kids some sacrifices you've had to make for the sake of God's Kingdom. If you can't think of any off hand, share something that you could sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel...)*

**Pray:** *If your greatest love isn't Jesus, ask the Lord to fill your heart for love for Him.*

# Year-End Parties

05.16.12

**Getting Started:** Read all 9 verses of Psalm 113. What “mood” does this writer write from? (Happy, sad, bored, curious, etc.)

**KT’s Thoughts:** Does it feel like summer is coming? Or does the school year seem to be dragging on? This week as you celebrate the end of this particular MSM year with your small group, reflect on Psalm 113.

What are some things most parties always have in common? Food? Music? Space? Dancing? Festive clothing? Games? Noise? A lack of a “solid plan”? Good friends? New friends? Excitement?

What’s the craziest party you’ve ever been to? I think the biggest craziest party I have ever been to was at a national youth conference with a church I used to be a volunteer at. Every other year, all the youth groups from all the churches in that denomination go to a major city stadium for several days of music concerts, praise and worship gatherings, national speakers, bible study break outs and community service projects, not to mention hotel after-parties and lots of touristy stuff! This particular year at “Challenge” we were in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Chris Tomlin had just released his album “Arriving.” It had all of his now-classic songs on it like “How Great is Our God” and “Holy is the Lord” and “Your Grace is Enough.” I remember walking among the seats of the Salt Palace hours before one of the sessions. The conference organizers had asked people to come early and pray over the space and ask God to pour out the Spirit on students at the nightly rally and break open the windows of heaven with joy and healing.

That may not sound like a party to you, but it was sort of like the pre-party. There were leaders on their knees praying over each of the seats where students would be sitting soon. There were other leaders singing on their own and other leaders weeping as they prayed, hoping their students would know how much God loved each and every one of them. That night when we all gathered for the full-volume worship and praise, the singing didn’t seem to end. The venue needed to shut down because of contract time limits and the band needed to leave too. It was well after midnight and as we were being ushered out, the singing (acapella) got louder and louder into the hallways of the Salt Palace and then onto the streets. I remember coming home in the next few days and most of us had no voice left!

We were created to worship and celebrate God. Sometimes we get to experience God in loud and powerful ways. Sometimes the celebration is more quiet. You can celebrate God with your small group this week and reflect on Psalm 113 which says nothing compares to how Great God is!

**How has God been good to you this year? What do you praise God for?**

**Pray:** *Lord thank you for your awesomeness and your power. Thank you for making a difference in my life. You are good always. I love you. Amen.*