



A 30 Day Devotional

Provided by Classis Grand Rapids South
OneFaithManyFaces.org

Week 1 – “The Solas”

Sunday – October 1

Approaching God You are about to embark on a journey of remembrance. For 500 years, God has continued to shape and form us as Reformed Christians. As we begin this journey of remembering how God has sustained us, and as we look forward to the ways in which God will continue to reform us in the future, be reminded of how precious you are in God’s sight:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

Listening to God To *reform* is to “make changes in order to improve” something. By God’s grace alone and through faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is able to make changes in our heart in order to improve it. As Reformed people we are called to constantly return to this personal reformation.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

We’re never done reforming. Reformation is a daily activity this side of heaven.

Talking to God Reformation isn’t a one-time event, and we aren’t the only ones responsible for our own reformation. We can only be reformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. How has the Holy Spirit reformed you this week? This month? This year? What praises and blessings can you offer God for the ways in which He has enabled you to be reformed? Have you resisted any reformation God desires for you? Do you need to confess for resisting His reformation?

Responding to God As you seek to have your mind renewed and transformed by the Holy Spirit, survey your daily actions and thoughts. Do they align with God’s will? If your thoughts and actions aren’t aligned, take one small step today to align yourself with His good, pleasing, and perfect will. Allow God to reform you!

Surrendering to God “God, I am not strong enough on my own to be more like you. Soften my heart to receive your correction and reform. Strengthen my spirit to reject conformity to the world each new day. Renew and reform my mind each new day so that I might act in conformity with your good, pleasing, and perfect will. Amen.”

By Arek O’Connell

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Contrary to some popular views, the goal of Martin Luther’s (1483–1546) Ninety-five Theses of October 31, 1517 was not division. Rather, his desire was to reform the Roman church from within. However, Luther’s writings were condemned by Pope Leo X and Luther was required to recant his views or face excommunication. He refused and was excommunicated in January, 1521. At the Diet of Worms (a legislative assembly held in modern day Germany in April, 1521) he was asked again to recant and refused. Luther desired reform and unity, but quickly discovered that this was not going to happen.

Monday – October 2 – Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)

Approaching God God’s Word was written long ago, but the same Spirit that inspired its human words continues to use these very words to speak to us today. These are *God’s words*, written *for us*.

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Listening to God As you receive God’s words, notice that these are not just any words. No other text can truly claim to be of divine origin. This book is not like any other book. According to the writer of Hebrews, it is active and not dead:

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you through His Word?

Talking to God Are you sensing something from the Spirit? If not, what is going on inside your heart? Are you feeling, fearing, or wondering about something related to God’s unique Word to you? If so, take a deep breath and speak honestly and openly to God. Express what you sense from the Spirit, your fears, concerns, confusion, or even failures.

Responding to God After speaking to God, stop for a moment and evaluate the past week. What guided your decisions? What moved your emotions? Are there other “texts” or “books” in our culture that carry more weight for you than Scripture? If so, confess this and ask the Spirit to renew your heart’s desire to be guided by God’s Word.

Surrendering to God “Heavenly Father, Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and help me lead a life that depends on and is guided by your Word, for it is a lamp unto my feet. I ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

By Jordan Barrett

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Although they were not systematized until the 20th century, the 5 solas (Latin: sola, meaning “alone”) represent and summarize the Protestant Reformer’s core theological convictions about salvation. For example, the Reformers rejected the Roman Catholic view that the authority of the church stems from Scripture and tradition. In contrast, the Reformers argued for sola scriptura (“Scripture alone”). Scripture is not the only source and authority, but it alone is the final and most authoritative source because in it Jesus is revealed to us, the one who is Lord and our ultimate authority. John Wycliffe’s translation of the Bible into vernacular English (1382–95) is an early example of this conviction.

Tuesday – October 3 – Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)

Approaching God As you enter the presence of the Holy God become aware of the presence of the Lord who was, and is, and is to come. Breathe in the following refrain:

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place, throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (Psalm 90:1-2)

Listening to God So often we have an agenda for our lives we think God should follow. When life doesn't go as we think it should and God seems to have a different plan than we do, feelings of entitlement, frustration, and anxiety cloud our hearts and minds. God reminds us in all circumstances: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Read these words several times slowly. Listen to what God is saying to you through these words today.

Talking to God God's power is made perfect in us through the grace at the cross. Remember that we did nothing, nor can we ever do anything to earn these gifts. Remember the sacrifice and the suffering Jesus experienced so that God's true power in the resurrection might be revealed. Spend some time in praise and thanksgiving to God for the gifts of grace, reconciliation, and redemption.

Responding to God Our pride often stands in the way of truly accepting God's grace in our lives. Ask God to reveal your walls of pride that hide the true power and love God desires in your life. Confess this pride. With humility, ask God to help you let go of this pride and find contentment in the Lord, whatever the circumstances.

Surrendering to God “Lord God, salvation comes through your grace alone. Nothing I can do will make me right before you. Only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the cross could do that. Lord, may your grace shatter the walls of pride in my life that I want to hide behind. Lord, when I am weak, make me strong in you.”

By Laurie Zueverink

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

The Reformers taught that there is nothing we can do to earn God's grace. His grace is his unmerited favor and so it is by God's grace alone that we are saved. As the Heidelberg Catechism states, “God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes [credits] to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.” Salvation is not deserved and is not earned. The Reformers believed they were echoing the Bible's teachings, especially Paul's (Eph 2:8-9).

Wednesday- October 4 – Sola Fide (Faith Alone)

Approaching God The God you are about to approach by faith today is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Faith makes you aware of His presence. This is a special time: you and God. You enter His presence believing that Jesus invited you in.

Indeed, you stand forgiven before God because of good works! *What?* How can I stand before God because of good works? Aren't my good works like filthy rags before the Holy One? That is true. Nevertheless, you stand before God because of *Christ's* good works. Christ's perfect obedience—in life and in death—earned you salvation. By faith you accept Christ's gift and by faith you open your heart to the Lord today and let His Spirit revive you.

“The people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.” (Romans 9:31-32)

Listening to God Salvation is by faith alone. Luther and Calvin claimed this to be Bible-truth. The Protestant Reformation was built on this truth: you cannot save yourself.

“For we maintain that a person is justified **by faith** apart from the works of the law. (Romans 3:28, my emphasis)

You have no part in your salvation. The work of salvation is God's work in Christ, 100%. There is nothing left for you, not even 1%.

Talking to God Turn your attention to God and ponder at this work of salvation. Can you join the Apostle Paul and say, “For it is by grace [I] have been saved, through faith—and this is not from [me], it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). How do you respond to this act of grace? Would you turn to the Lord and thank Him for this free gift?

Responding to God If you have not experienced salvation by faith now it's your turn to respond to God and accept the grace of Christ: your salvation. Turn to the Lord and ask Him to save you, to make you His child. Ask the Lord to save you from your sin, to snatch you from the kingdom of darkness, and to move you into the Kingdom of the Son.

Surrendering to God “God of Abraham, I come to you by faith. Thank you that my salvation is by faith, through the good works of Christ. Amen”

By Daniel Bud

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

How do sinners receive God's grace? The Reformers taught that it was by faith alone. Faith is not a work – we cannot receive credit for having faith. The Belgic Confession tells us that “the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith,” meaning that faith is not something we produce on our own, but is a gift from God. This means that “faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ” and this is why Romans 1:17 (“the righteous will live by faith”) was such a central verse for Martin Luther in the early stages of his “protests” and in the Reformation as a whole.

Thursday- October 5 – Solus Christus (Christ Alone)

Approaching God You are about to encounter the only true God, your heavenly Father. But your only access to Him is through the gate He provides to you. He accepts and welcomes you only if you use the proper gate. Jesus says to you:

“**I am the gate**; whoever enters through me will be saved.” (John 10:9, my emphasis)

Any other attempt to get to God would fail. You approach a jealous God. Ponder the truth of this verse and the futility of seeking other gates or entry points into God’s presence, mercy, and grace:

“A prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.” (Deuteronomy 18:20)

Listening to God The Reformation happened in the context of the abuses observed within the Western Church, or the Catholic Church. But due to the split in the church in 1054 AD, there was another branch: the Orthodox Church in the East. The Eastern Orthodox Church was not heavily affected by the Reformation, so they still perceive salvation as the work of a national church: since you are born into a nation, the national church (Russian, Serbian, Romanian in my case) is in charge of saving you. The church itself is the depository of the grace that can save you. But that’s not what the Bible says. Christ alone saves! Not the saints. Not the church. Listen to this:

“Salvation is found in **no** one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12, my emphasis)

Talking to God From the beginning of the covenant with Abraham, God has made the promise that He would be our God and that we would be His people. In the Ten Commandments, He repeatedly said that we should have no other gods besides Him. Can you say that you “Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”? Or do you feel like you’ve been chasing after other gods: fame, money, power, pleasure?

Responding to God It is time to recognize that you need to experience liberation from the bondage of all other false gods. Would you ask the Lord to bless you with love that is devoted only to Christ, and Christ alone?

Surrendering to God “Father, I come to you and I thank you for Christ, the author and perfecter of my faith. I surrender all to Christ. I belong to Him. He is my only Savior, my only Lord! Amen”

By Daniel Bud

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

As the Heidelberg Catechism states, “God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.” Salvation is found and offered nowhere else but in Christ alone. In relation to the other solas, it is offered by grace and not by works, comes to us through the gift of faith given by the Spirit, is found in Christ alone, and the glory can only be given to God alone.

Friday- October 6 – Soli Deo Gloria (To God Alone Be Glory)

Approaching God As you come into God’s presence, remember that He is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). Recognize places in your body where you are holding tension and relax. Take a few deep breaths and release your concerns to the keeping of your powerful, loving heavenly Father (1 Peter 5:7).

Listening to God Read these words from Revelation 4:8-11, where the veil between our world and the heavenly realm is lifted. Here we gain insight into the reality of God’s magnificence. He receives constant praise because He deserves it!

“Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’”

Talking to God Imagine yourself in God’s throne room and join your voice with the four creatures and twenty-four elders. For which qualities or actions do you want to glorify God? His work in the whole scope of history? Things He has done in your own life? Glorify God for the things He brings to mind.

Responding to God Revelation 4:10 says the twenty-four elders lay their crowns down before the throne. Think of the honors or achievements you have attained in life. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there is any aspect of “glory” you are clinging to for your own sake, for your own sense of identity or security. Commit to set your sights and your efforts on promoting God’s glory and His great joy.

Surrendering to God “Lord, our world claims many paths to glory—wealth, fame, beauty, achievement. You showed us a different way in Jesus Christ. Thank you. Today, help me bring glory not to myself but to you.”

By Kristy Manion

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Soli Deo Gloria (Latin: glory to God alone) does imply a call to do all things to the glory of God alone (e.g., 1 Cor 10:31). However, the Reformers meant this in the context of salvation: no church and no person can claim any glory regarding a person’s salvation. “We never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory . . . The elect [or predestined] are justified [i.e., declared righteous] by the Lord, in order that they may glory in him, and in none else” (John Calvin).

Saturday – October 7

Approaching God Join Martin Luther who experienced God’s presence 500 years ago as he focused on these verses:

“Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior and my hope is in you all day long.” (Psalm 25:4-5)

Listening to God Throughout this day, ask the Lord the question, “What are you teaching me today about your ways and your truths?” Then listen and look with anticipation for Him to show you and speak to you...and be ready to obey Him.

Talking to God What is God teaching you through the five *Solas* you meditated on this week? In which are you strongest when it comes to your understanding? In which are you weakest? How are you doing in spending time with Him in prayer?

Responding to God A gem of a book to pick up is *Prayers of the Reformers*, by Thomas McPherson. One can read the prayers that came from the hearts of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer, and many other teachers and pastors. The *Solas* are not simply theological truths, but spiritual truths birthed from one’s time with God. May they become spiritual truths **for us** as we go through this month of Always Reforming.

Surrendering to God Martin Luther’s Prayer for True Understanding from Psalm 25:4:

“Dear Lord God, give me your grace that I may rightly understand your Word, and more than that, do it. O most blessed Lord Jesus Christ, see to it that my search after knowledge leads me to glorify you alone. If not, let me not know a single letter. Give only what I, a poor sinner, need to glorify you. Amen.”

By David Struyk

Week 2 – “The Fire”

Sunday, October 8

Approaching God Silence yourself in God’s Presence. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you reflect on the following verses and meditation. The most common symbol of the Holy Spirit found in the Bible is flaming fire. John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16.) What does that mean for us as the Church of Jesus Christ?

Listening to God We cannot accomplish the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:18-20 without this gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised. God in His infinite wisdom has already given us everything we need to be hot burning fires with hearts ablaze for God.

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13).

Talking to God Consider a piece of coal. It is cold and alone with little value or purpose. When a flame is applied that coal burns and becomes a hot ember, full of potential; however, if it remains alone it will not burn to its potential or cause other coals to burn. It remains lukewarm or dies out. But if several hot embers or coals are piled up together, working together, doing what they were created to do, they can make pretty good hamburgers, steak, fish, or veggies.

A soul that does not yet know Jesus is like that cold piece of coal. When that person makes Jesus Lord of their lives, the Spirit ignites that cold charcoal into a hot burning coal. The now-burning coal needs the close proximity of other hot burning embers (their fellow Christians) to do lots of good things for God. But even these embers will become tired, exhausted, and weary, losing their fervor and passion. They need a fresh gust of wind to re-invigorate them and make them a raging fire that cannot be contained.

We need the ongoing fresh wind of the Holy Spirit to keep us ablaze, hot, and on fire for Jesus. Unless you are in daily contact with the fire of God’s presence, you will soon be cold and powerless. Ask again and again, even daily, for the flame of the presence of the Holy Spirit to burn afresh in you.

Responding to God We must prepare the way of the Lord by remaining cleansed, obedient, consciously dependent upon Him, and hungering for His manifested presence and power. The church must be ablaze, led by leaders who are ablaze for God. How hot is the fire in your soul? Are you burning with unquenchable zeal and fervor for the Kingdom of God? Or do you identify with a cold solitary lump of coal? Perhaps you once burned hot, but now your coal is burned out? Is anything standing in the way of you asking the Holy Spirit to breathe His breath upon you and baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire? Talk with God about it.

Surrendering to God “Fill me Holy Spirit. I surrender my all to you, and I ask you Holy Spirit to take over all of me. I choose to die to myself. It is not my will but your will Oh Lord. Use me, use even me.”

By Rev. Mary Sterenberg

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Menno Simons (1496–1561) was a Roman Catholic priest who later became a leader of a group of Dutch Anabaptists (his followers became known as Mennonites). His aim of unity, and others, can be seen in Simons’ statement: “No one is excommunicated of the brethren but those who have already separated and expelled themselves from Christ’s communion either by false doctrine or improper conduct. For we do not want to expel any, but rather to receive; not to amputate, but rather to heal; not to discard, but rather to win back; not to grieve, but rather to comfort; not to condemn, but rather to save.”

Monday – October 9

Approaching God You are about to enter a holy place, the presence of God. Allow yourself to be enveloped by the mystery, majesty, and glory that is God as you read these verses.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

Listening to God Our generous, giving, loving God delights in pouring out His grace upon us. One of His great gifts of grace is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Listen to this promise from Jesus:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

Read the verse again and allow yourself to be amazed and grateful that God honors us by giving us the third person of the Trinity to dwell in us—God in us!!

Talking to God –In response to this promise— this gift of grace—what words of praise and thanksgiving do you offer Him? Are there any barriers that are keeping you from realizing the power of the Holy Spirit within you? Anything you need to confess?

Responding to God If you have not experienced the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, commit to opening your mind and heart to the working of the Holy Spirit and invite the Spirit to work through you to continue to reform this world and bring God’s kingdom.

Surrendering to God “God, with deepest gratitude and humility I offer myself to be a vessel through which the power of the Holy Spirit can work. Use me to continue to build your kingdom through love and grace.”

By Jolene DeHeer

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Concerning the person of the Holy Spirit, the Heidelberg Catechism states that “First, He is, together with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God. [Matt 28:19] Second, He is also given to me,[1 Cor 6:19] to make me by true faith share in Christ and all His benefits,[Gal 3:14] to comfort me,[John 15:26] and to remain with me forever. [John 14:16]”

Tuesday – October 10

Approaching God Thank Thank Abba Father for welcoming you into His holy presence and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in truth. “God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)

Listening to God Pause a moment and quiet your mind. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you in the quietness of your heart. Invite the Spirit to open your ears so you can hear the voice of God. Ask Him to guide you in truth. Ask Him to show you sin you need to confess to Him.

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:13a)

Talking to God “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11:2-3a)

Father God may your Spirit rest on me. I ask for godly wisdom, godly understanding, godly counsel, and godly knowledge. I ask that I would delight in the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Spirit of God, open my eyes so I see you. Give me a desire to seek you with all my heart. May you be my deepest desire.

Responding to God Help me Father as I strive to live according to your Word. Thank you that because your Spirit lives in me I can have my mind controlled by you and experience life and peace.

“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” (Romans 8:6-9)

Surrendering to God “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God.” (Romans 8:12-14)

Spirit of God, I surrender myself to you. As your child, I thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to lead me so I can live according to your Holy Word. With a grateful heart, I ask for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me. Melt me of my desire to sin, mold me to the image of Christ, fill me, Holy Spirit, so your grace splashes out on those I encounter. Use me as you will. Thank you, God, for the gift of your Holy Spirit as He guides me into all truth.

By Jill Jansen

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Early Reformers, such as the English Bible translator, William Tyndale (1494–1536), taught that the Holy Spirit was crucial for the Christian life. Our problem is “the heart, with all the powers, affections, and appetites, wherewith we can but sin” and our solution is “the Spirit, which [frees] the heart.” The root of our problem is not our behavior, but is within us. Tyndale and others observed that it’s not merely that we have done wrong things and need to start doing right things. Our behaviors are manifestations of our heart, our inner desires, and we need the Spirit to free us from this slavery.

Wednesday – October 11

Approaching God As you prepare to enter God’s presence, allow yourself to be amazed that God would choose to speak to us.

“This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it—the Lord is his name: ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’” (Jeremiah 33:2-3)

Listening to God The outpouring of the Spirit caused some confusion:

“These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’” (Acts 2:15-17)

I am forever amazed by how God speaks so openly and clearly to us through Old Testament prophets in the New Testament. I find myself a little lost in the story of Pentecost, because the Holy Spirit is the most difficult portion of the Trinity to understand. But it helps when, in verse 16, Peter blurts out, "No! No! No! You got it all wrong! It's like this!" And then in verse 17, he goes on to set everyone straight by quoting the prophet Joel. We are living “in those last days”! All of us—young and old, male and female, servants and free—are blessed to be indwelt by the powerful Holy Spirit.

Talking to God: You have heard God speak to you through the promise from Joel. In response to His promise, what words praise and thanksgiving do you offer Him? Are there any barriers that are keeping you from realizing the power of the Holy Spirit within you? Anything you need to confess?

Responding to God: The Holy Spirit itself pulls us back into Scripture, proving its credibility and truth, and showing us the depth of God's love. God reveals Himself to us in these tiny bite-sized pieces we can handle without choking. We just need to go back to the source more often to eat. Who else but our loving Lord and Savior would send a spirit that could bring us back to His scripture when we need spiritual feeding and then arranges that scripture in a way only He could.

Surrendering to God: “Thank you, God, for loving us enough to pour out your Spirit upon us. Help us to live in the power of that Spirit. Amen.”

By Dave Westhouse

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Part of Martin Luther’s reformation and retrieval of theology included his understanding that knowledge of God and a relationship with Him is what the Holy Spirit brings us. “And besides giving and entrusting to us everything in heaven and on earth, He has given us His Son and His Holy Spirit in order to bring us to Himself through them. . . . Without Christ we see nothing in God but an angry and terrible Judge. But we could know nothing of Christ either, if it were not revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.”

Thursday- October 12

Approaching God Spend a few minutes meditating on this verse:

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.” (Revelation 22:17)

God has called you, with urgency and authority, to come and drink the water of life. You are the one who is thirsty—you are spiritually needy, like a traveler looking for water in a parched land. Don’t pass this verse by because you have read it before. Think about it and let the incredible invitation sink in. Since you are thirsty, come.

Listening to God “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:37-39)

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is often described as water—water is essential to our living, and when we don’t have it, we crave it desperately. Jesus promised that if we came to Him, we could drink freely. And if we believed in Him, the Holy Spirit would pour into us like water. The Spirit continually refreshes and renews us, like water energizes our bodies. We need Him every day.

Talking to God Read through the verses from John again. This time, focus on praise and thanksgiving for the gift of the Spirit. Have you come to Jesus to drink? Have you believed in Him and received streams of living water? If you are holding yourself back, take this time to ask Him to change your heart, and give you a thirst for the Spirit.

Responding to God This month we are thinking about our history of reformation. The Reformers were not, as many people tend to think, enhancing or changing Christianity, but were instead returning to the Bible, to what was really true. Today, look up verses in the Bible about the Holy Spirit. Spend time considering what the Word of God says, and then write down your thoughts on the verses. Do you feel refreshed in your heart because you have returned to the Word of God? Have you been thinking about the Spirit biblically? Does going over these verses change your daily actions?

Surrendering to God “Holy Spirit, thank you for always being with me and for guiding me when I am lost. Today I pray that you will lead me and my church to return to the life-giving water that will refresh our spirits. Amen.”

By Audrey Bryant

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Is the Bible the Word of God? How would we answer this? John Calvin became known for his teaching on internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. “The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of Himself in His Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit therefore who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded...because until He illumines their minds, they ever waver among many doubts!”

Friday – October 13

Approaching God Come to a place where you can slow down your heart and mind. God is already with you, but invite Him into your place by asking for more of Him. Receive God’s goodness as you read these verses.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” (John 15:9-10)

Listening to God Our compassionate God longs for us to experience His tenderness in our lives. We receive the love of Jesus freely and without merit. Listen to this prayer of Jesus just for us:

“I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:23)

There is nothing we need to do to earn God’s loving presence. No amount of ministry, money, or sacrifice will grow God’s love for us. His love is planted in us. So in all situations, He *is* in us.

Talking to God Just as He did with Martin Luther, God has opened the eyes of our heart to receive His abiding love. As God has loved us first, He looks for our response of love in return. That is how our relationship continues to be nourished. Is there any blockage or barrier that is keeping you from a full-out response to God? Do you need His power to love Him more? Is anything keeping you from loving others more with the love of Jesus?

Responding to God Let’s practice remaining in God’s love. Let’s grow in confidence that God in us will help us to receive, remain in, and respond to the incredible love of God through His Son.

Surrendering to God “God, I give you my deepest and sincerest thanks for being my beloved. Bless you Father, Spirit, and Son for placing your lovingkindness deep within me. I freely receive your love. Lead me to share it with those around me—those who are like me and those who are not.”

By Paul Sausser

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

The Holy Spirit is found in nearly every teaching by the Reformers. Yet, it was not just a teaching but was also part of their worship. In the words of a hymn by Martin Luther:

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord!
Be all Thy graces now outpoured
On each believer’s mind and heart;
Thy fervent love to them impart.
Lord, by the brightness of Thy light,
Though in the faith doest men unite,
Of every lad and every tongue;
This to Thy praise, O Lord, our God, be sung.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Saturday – October 14

Approaching God Today we enter a mysterious and daunting place, the place where the mind of God executes layer upon layer of His unknowable plan by directing human steps with His Holy Spirit. As you read these Scriptures, think of all that we *can't* know about God, and all that we *can* know with great certainty.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.” (Isaiah 55:8)

Listening to God Our always good and always loving God delights in pouring out His power upon us and inviting us into His work of redemption. And yet there are times that His Holy Spirit says “No” to our best ideas and efforts, without explanation:

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So, they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” (Acts 16:6-10)

This passage begs a staggering number of questions. *How did Paul get the plan wrong? How did the Holy Spirit re-direct Paul? If Paul set off in a wrong direction, what hope do I have? Why would the Holy Spirit deny these people of His Good News?* Through every question runs this constant: God continued to use Paul mightily, He did bring His Good News to the people of Asia and Bithynia and Macedonia in a way and time of His choosing, and it was all good.

Talking to God Is there someplace that the Holy Spirit is saying “No” to you? Are you able to trust that God knows what you do not? Trust that He is good all the time? Even in that place? Can you open your heart and your mind’s eye to a fresh vision and a new task? Are there any barriers that keep you from sensing the Holy Spirit’s guidance in your life? Anything you need to confess?

Responding to God When we’re having difficulty with the Holy Spirit’s guidance—either wishing it were different, or struggling to sense it at all—we need to be reassured of His great love, wisdom, and generosity toward us. Who is more able to provide this reassurance than God, Himself? Carve out some extra minutes this week to be alone and quiet in His presence, soaking in some of that reassurance.

Surrendering to God “Good Shepherd, refresh my soul and hold me fast with your Right Hand. Lead and guide me along the right paths for the sake of your Holy Name, and not mine. You are my Savior God, and my hope is in you all day long.”

By Dawn Peterson

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

The Reformers upheld the traditionally Western concept of the “double-procession” of the Holy Spirit. Also known as the filioque (Latin: “and the Son”), it teaches that the Holy Spirit is sent (or proceeds) from the Father and the Son. Reformers like John Calvin and Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) held to this view because of John 15:26. This helps to distinguish the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as separate persons without dividing them into three Gods.

Week 3 – “The Walk”

Sunday – October 15

Approaching God Do we realize who we serve? We serve the Lord of the universe. We serve the one who has *all* authority in heaven and on earth. We serve the King! Let that sink in and humble yourself and praise this King of Kings.

“Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Listening to God Now consider this truth, the King has given His authority in heaven and earth to His disciples.

“Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” (Matthew 10:1)

Have we ever truly considered the authority we have been given? Have we taken it to heart? Have we taken it seriously? Have we acted on it as true?

Talking to God Jesus has given us authority and sent us out. But authority, like any gift, is only effective when it is exercised and used. Ask God to show you where you have authority but are not using it. Confess your unbelief or your fear or whatever God reveals that has been hindering your use of this gift.

Responding to God If we have listened we now have a renewed sense of the authority we have and where God wants us to use it. Ask His help to be aware of when you can use that authority to battle the enemy and bring God’s kingdom. As He shows you begin to act on it. As you see the results praise God for His goodness and power. Give Him all the credit.

Surrendering to God “I am in awe of and wonder at the authority you have bestowed on me. I believe it is mine, help me in my unbelief. Help me to be bold in using it. Lord, I praise you as my King. Help me to give you all the praise as you work your wonders in and through me.

By Bob Boersma

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Christian unity and the breaking of such unity was a serious point of emphasis for many Reformers. They did not leave the Roman church willingly or quickly; rather, they left reluctantly and many times were forced out. The Colloquy of Regensburg (1541) was the final attempt at compromise between the Protestants and Catholics. Sadly, it failed. As time went on, the Reformers began to see the separation differently. As one modern writer puts it, “It was not the Reformers who had departed from the true church. It was Rome that had departed from the true gospel.” It was in the gospel – as the gospel of Jesus Christ – that the Reformers found their true unity.

Monday – October 16

Approaching God You are about to enter a holy place, the presence of the Triune God. Allow yourself to be enveloped by the mystery, majesty, and glory that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit as He reveals to Abraham His plan.

“Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

Listening to God Our generous, giving, loving God delights in telling His chosen ones His redemptive plan. The Holy Spirit directs us regarding the divine plan for our lives. The Spirit told Philip which road to take, and then,

“The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.... Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:29-31,35-39)

The Spirit desires that we walk so closely to God that we will hear Him tell us when to go, who to talk to and what to say. Hearing God's voice requires an ever-increasing level of discipleship. Find the time and place where you and God can carry on personal conversation.

Talking to God God desires to speak to you. Are there any barriers keeping you from hearing His voice and therefore limiting the power of the Holy Spirit within you? What do you need to confess and repent of? Are there words of praise and thanksgiving that you can offer to Him?

Responding to God Commit to opening your mind and heart to the working of the Holy Spirit, inviting the Triune God into your mind and life. Doing so, you will invite the Spirit to work through you to continue to reform this world and bring God’s kingdom.

Surrendering to God “God, with heartfelt gratitude and humility I willingly take up my cross to follow you, desiring to be a vessel through which the power of the Holy Spirit can work first in me, but also through me to bless the nations for your glory and honor. Please, Father, bless those who bless me. Help me to grow in my understanding of your will for your world. And thank you for creating me in your holy image and for restoring me to that image through Jesus Christ. Use me to continue to build your kingdom through love and grace.”

By Evan Heerema

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Although Reformed theology places a healthy emphasis on doctrine (or theology), the aim of Reformed doctrine was the heart and soul. John Calvin taught that the gospel, and discipleship, “is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but it is fully understood when it possesses the whole soul and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart.” Discipleship is a way of life and not merely a way of thinking. For the Reformers, doctrine was meant to affect the heart as it challenged people to follow and imitate Jesus in every area of life.

Tuesday – October 17

Approaching God We are followers/disciples of Jesus. We are committed to become just like Him. It is a high and holy calling with great responsibility and great honor and blessing. We get to follow and become like the Son of God. Allow yourself to ponder the wonder of that! Feel the challenge of that!

“After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.” (Luke 5:27-28)

Listening to God His call to follow is not a simple one. It is full of blessing but also full of cost. Listen to Jesus’ challenge:

“As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57-62)

Can we hear and feel the urgency of Jesus mission? Can we feel the call to commitment? Can we see how quick we are to make excuses?

Talking to God We have heard Jesus call us to follow Him. We have heard the good but unacceptable excuses. Ask God to show you your excuses. Ask Him to show you where you refuse to follow. Confess them as what they are—excuses.

Responding to God If we have listened to the call and confessed our excuses, God is ready to help us overcome them. He is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse. We cannot overcome them on our own. We need His help in many forms. Ask Him to help you to see and then to seek what you need to take away the power these excuses have in your life. Ask Him to show you who you can confess them to and who can hold you accountable for overcoming them.

Surrendering to God “Lord, thank you for the grace of a new life and the call to follow you and help others do the same. I know your grace will be sufficient and your power will be perfected in my weakness. Help me to become weak so you can make me strong.”

By Bob Boersma

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Many of the Reformers emphasized the doctrine of justification by faith (alone), but many also highlighted the importance of sanctification (being made holy). If “good works” do not save us – we are justified (declared righteous) in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone – then what role do they play in discipleship? According to the Heidelberg Catechism, we do good works because “Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit to be His image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for His benefits, and He may be praised by us.”

Wednesday – October 18

Approaching God Ask God to open your heart to the possibility of being a disciple in a new way. Reflect on James 4:10 and remember the immense sacrifices the first disciples made.

“Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.”

Listening to God Being a disciple of Christ does not always produce the outcomes that we would have hoped. In fact, Christians are called to lifestyles that go against cultural norms and consequently face suffering and adversity. What might God be saying to you through the Word in Titus 1:7-9?

“Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

Talking to God Are there ways that you have set aside your title of *disciple* in the past week or month for a more culturally accepted title? Is there a quality you are exhibiting that doesn’t match up with pure discipleship? Ask God to help you focus your efforts on exhibiting the qualities of a true disciple and leader listed in Titus. Is there one quality He is revealing to you that stands out among the rest?

Responding to God What did God reveal to you about your walk as a disciple of Christ? Boldly ask Him to assist you in replacing a quality of this world with a quality of true discipleship. What might be a small action step you can take today to live into that characteristic of discipleship?

Surrendering to God “Leader God, I humbly recognize that as a Christian, I often exhibit qualities that do not reflect my discipleship with you. Surround me with the support and encouragement that I need to actively pursue a life of discipleship so that others may know the power of your love. Amen.”

By Ashley Zuverink

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

For John Calvin, discipleship can be described this way: “almost forgetful of ourselves, surely subordinating our self-concern, we try faithfully to devote our zeal to God and his commandments. . . .

Accordingly, the Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he has to deal throughout his life. . . . For he who has learned to look to God in all things that he must do, at the same time avoids all vain thoughts. This, then, is that denial of self which Christ enjoins with such great earnestness upon his disciples at the outset of their service [cf. Matt. 16:24].”

Thursday – October 19

Approaching God Read the passage below several times and let the truth inspire and empower you.

“All paths of the Lord are loving and faithful.” (Psalm 25:10)

Listening to God: Amy Carmichael put it this way: "All does not mean ‘all—except the paths I am walking in now,’ or ‘nearly all—except this especially difficult and painful path.’ All must mean all. So, your path with its unexplained sorrow or turmoil, and mine with its sharp flints and briars—and both our paths, with their unexplained perplexity, their sheer mystery—they are His paths, on which He will show Himself loving and faithful. Nothing else; nothing less."

Talking to God: It is no secret that God walks with us. Maybe not the path we had in mind. Probably not the comfortable way. Not the fair, expected, or reasonable way. Not the particularly safe way.

He doesn't promise a map. There is no projected ETA. He doesn't promise a toll-free road, or even that we'll be on a road at all. He probably won't spit out verbal commands as timely and conveniently as our GPS. Sometimes the signs will be clear and obvious, while other times they will seem cryptic or non-existent. There will be extensive rerouting when we get in our own way and make a wrong turn. I don't mean to spoil this for anyone, but I suspect we're all in for a road block or two—or twelve. When we face these roadblocks and detours, when we are all out of hope, and faith, and fight, He hasn't promised answers, or clarity, or understanding. He has promised Himself. His presence. His hand. He has promised to walk with us.

What kind of path is God walking with you at the moment? What are some of the roadblocks or detours you've faced together? How has He shown you signs of His presence along the way?

Responding to God: How do we respond to our mysterious, ever-changing, complicated paths? We follow Him so closely that we run right into Him when He stops, and keep stepping on the back of His heel. We remember that for everything He doesn't tell us, He has told us the one thing we need to know: Don't be afraid. It ends well. All paths of the Lord are loving and faithful. Learn that trust has nothing to do with understanding, that the path we least want to travel might be the one we need the most, and that the paths of grief and pain and suffering will not be dead ends. Learn how to be a light even in deep, dark places. Learn that keeping track of where we are and where we've been matters. Telling our stories matters. Sharing our hope matters. Because on our paths, if we keep our eyes open, even in unexplained darkness or pain or grief—we will always find Him, loving and faithful still.

Surrendering to God: This may be one of the instances when God is not-so-interested in our good ideas, when He pries our hands off the steering wheel and holds onto us the way a parent holds onto a child while crossing a busy street. He pulls us along when necessary, even drags us a bit if we are being especially stubborn, and finally carries us when we just can't go on anymore. He patiently waits while we get stuck and then pulls us out of the mud. He doesn't leave us behind. He doesn't let us stay where we were before. Without this, we wouldn't stand a chance.

"Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily carries us." (Psalm 68:19)

By Kristen Struyk

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

“We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ [Acts 4:12]. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is ‘of him’ [1 Cor 1:30]. If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing” (John Calvin). Many Reformers taught that Jesus is not only the source of our justification (being declared righteous) but also our sanctification (being made holy). Discipleship, or following Jesus, is done through faith alone, by grace alone, and in Christ alone.

Friday – October 20

Approaching God As you seek to unite with the Triune God, stilling your heart, your mind and your soul to hear God's voice, reflect on these words concerning the posture and spirit of Jesus:

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.” (Philippians 2:6-7a)

Listening to God The Lord God Almighty, the one true God who owns all power and strength, comes to us with humility. He shares His true power in the ultimate act of sacrifice at the cross. God tells us to share in that spirit of humility and submission. Breathe in the words of Jesus to His disciples:

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” (Matthew 20:26)

Talking to God In response to Jesus' example of submission, humility and love, what words of praise and thanksgiving will you give to Him? Is there anything you need to confess? What stands in the way of your own attitude of submission and posture of humility before God?

Responding to God In following Christ, God calls us to let go of our desires for greatness and to be noticed and to embrace a life dedicated to loving God and neighbor with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Who is God calling you to love today? Where does an attitude of submission to following God lead you today?

Surrendering to God In humble submission to God, surrender your spirit as you share in this prayer of St. Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope:
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

By Laurie Zuverink

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Huldrych Zwingli wrote this prayer/poem while the Black Death broke out in Zurich in 1519:

Help me, O Lord, My strength
and rock; Lo, at the door I hear
death's knock

Uplift shine arm, Once pierced
for me, That conquered death.
And set me free.

Yet, if thy voice, In life's
middy. Recalls my soul, Then I
obey.

In faith and hope, Earth I resign.
Secure of heaven. For I am
Thine.

Lo! Satan strains To snatch his
prey; I feel his grasp; Must I
give way?

He harms me not, I fear no loss,
For here I lie Beneath thy cross.

My God! My Lord! Healed by
the hand. Upon the earth Once
more I stand.

Let sin no more Rule over me;
My mouth shall sing Alone to
thee.

Though now delayed, My hour
will come. Involved, perchance.
In deeper gloom.

But, let it come; With joy I'll
rise, And bear my yoke Straight
to the skies.

Saturday – October 21

Approaching God As you prepare to enter the presence of God in prayer and meditation, accept this invitation to join every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea in singing this praise to God: (Repeat it multiple times and sing with your whole being)

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13)

Listening to God As we walk the road of discipleship, it is important that we strive to walk where and how Jesus walked. The verse below gives us instruction on the manner in which we are to walk.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Spend time contemplating what that looks like for you in the context of your daily life. How can you be the light that pierces the darkness that is so pervasive in our culture today? At the recent Inspire 2017 gathering, Rev. Carey of Detroit challenged us to consider that perhaps the reason the darkness is so prevalent is because we, as the church, are not being the light. Darkness *must* flee when the light comes.

Talking to God Ask the Holy Spirit to bless you with creative thought about how you can walk in the light in your daily life. Confess times when you missed a chance to be light in a dark place. Ask God to show you people who need you to walk beside them and help them walk in the light. Thank Him for sending Jesus into the world as the light of the world.

Responding to God If we are going to walk in the light as He is in the light, we need to spend more time with Him. No matter how much time you spend in the word and in prayer, commit to increasing that time. As we do so, His light grows brighter within us for all to see.

Surrendering to God “Dear Father, thank you for sending Jesus to be the light of the world. Thank you for placing that light within us through the Holy Spirit. Thank you for opportunities to be the light. I offer myself to you daily as an agent of light in a dark, pain-filled world.”

By Jolene DeHeer

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Martin Luther saw the Christian life of discipleship as a paradox. In 1520 he wrote: “A Christian is an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, subject to all.” This was Luther’s summary of Christian freedom and he believed it was based on the life of Jesus Christ, our true Lord and humble Servant. Our faith in Jesus sets us free in Christ, yet our love for God and others binds us to each as servants. Faith and love, freedom and servanthood, should characterize the life of each disciple who surrenders all to follow Jesus.

Sunday – October 22

Approaching God The essence of true Salvation is the foundational understanding that God so loved because we so needed. The verse, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friend” (John 15:13), is only grasped by the human heart when we understand that our life started out in a direction that was leading us eternally away from God. Nothing we could do or say would change that direction. But God did! God changed the direction! God moved, His Son died and arose, and we are saved!

Listening to God Our hearts are moved by the passion of the heart of God to save His precious creation.

“Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?” (Proverbs 24:11-12)

God, through Jesus Christ, entrusted us with bringing the Good News to the World. Few mainline churches in America are actually carrying out the Great Commission. In a very dark America, it is time for the church to repent and return to the call to “go and make disciples.”

Talking to God If it is true that God knows exactly what we have or have not done, then is it time for a revival in our hearts! Confess to God the times that you knew He had opened a door for the Gospel and you were afraid to speak. He knows it already; agree with His heart so that your heart can be always reforming and changing to be in submission to His.

Responding to God The very greatest thing I know about faith in God is that it is all about the very next decision out of my heart. I don’t have to dwell in my past decisions. I can respond by making my next decision in obedience to Him. I can pray: “Lord, you open the door for me today to share the Good News with someone at work and I will follow through!”

Surrendering to God “Lord, today I hear your voice saying, ‘Come, let us return to the Lord,’ and I am coming to you. I need revival in my heart. Yes, I acknowledge that in my disobedience I have felt torn apart and injured, but I believe that you will bind up these wounds. You promised, Lord, that you would revive and restore us if we call on your great name and so here I am calling on you. I need the closeness of your presence. I need to acknowledge that I will press on for that closeness and invite others to come close to you. Lord, open the doors and I will walk through. Show me the way and I will walk on your path! Let your name be made great through my life!”

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

In 1552 John Calvin wrote to Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556; leader of the English Reformation): “Amongst the greatest evils of our century must be counted the fact that the churches are so divided one from another that there is scarcely even a human relationship between us; at all events there is not the shining light of that holy fellowship of the members of Christ, of which many boast in word, but which few seek sincerely indeed. In consequence, because the members are torn apart, the body of the church lies wounded and bleeding. So far as I have it in my power, if I am thought to be of any service, I shall not be afraid to cross ten seas for this purpose, if that should be necessary.”

Monday – October 23

Approaching God As we think about the concept of “Always Reforming,” of living a life that continues to change because we are in step with the Spirit, we have to ask, “How do we live in that kind of fluidity?” How do our human hearts stay soft in the face of animosity and relational separation? Paul reveals an answer in his battle in the Corinthian church when he says:

“So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?” (2 Corinthians 12:15)

Love that always being reformed is not limited by the human response to that love. We are to love for the sake of the One who loved us first.

Listening to God God’s love has never been based on the response of His creation. He created because He is love. He watched us fall to sin because He is love. He paved the way back to Him, through Jesus Christ’s work on the cross, because He is love. It is true:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

We cannot do anything *for* God that will make Him love us more. But we also cannot do anything *against* God that will make Him love us less. He loves because it is His nature!

Talking to God To turn from a game stopper with a hardened and bitter heart to a game changer who is living in the everlasting love of God, we must believe in and receive the unchanging, unfailing love of God that is only acquired through the gift of faith given to us by God. This gift of faith opens our eyes to see that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; He is the only way to the Father. We can be supernaturally transformed from “stone hearted” to “heart of flesh” (see Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Responding to God So how does God’s reforming love change a person? In a world that is growing darker, angrier, and more bitter, God’s love becomes even more important. Ask yourself: “Am I growing more and more in love with God and people?” God’s love can transform you. Amid the greatest difficulties, the world is amazed at the response of love that comes from those who truly have received God’s love.

Surrendering to God “Lord, I see the world around me becoming more angry, hateful, and bitter. I see the struggle in my own heart because of the things that I am going through. You once said that I must become like a little child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Here am I, a little child hurt and bruised. Please come and minister to my heart so that I may turn around and minister to others who are hurting.”

By Wayne Andersma

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

During the 16th century the city of Geneva became an important refugee center for persecuted Protestants throughout Europe. This caused Geneva’s population to double in the 1550s. Many of the refugees came from France since Geneva was a French-speaking city. Emboldened by the ministry of the Reformed churches, many received training from John Calvin in theology, preaching, and moral character and returned to France and other countries to share the gospel. Ministry was happening in Geneva so that it could continue to happen in other European cities.

Tuesday – October 24

Approaching God Our God is a covenantal God who makes faithful promises to us. As you prepare to spend time with God today, read this promise of assurance:

“Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.”
(Deuteronomy 7:9)

Listening to God Consider this covenant (promise) that God made with Jacob. As you read, think about what implications this has for the global mission of the church.

“At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants.’” (Genesis 28:13-14)

There are many times in the Old Testament when, in the context of making a covenant, God says that His people are blessed so that they can be a blessing to others. The greatest blessing we have from God is a relationship with Him through the grace given to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. How do we share that blessing with others throughout the entire earth?

Talking to God We have the joy of knowing that our salvation is through grace alone; it is not something we have to earn from God. Yet sometimes we still try to earn our salvation. Talk with God about this and ask for His assurance of grace. Ask God to use us to bring this truth to people around the world.

Responding to God How is God asking you to partner with the worldwide mission of God through the church? Is there a missionary you are called to support through prayers and/or resources? Could you invest time in learning about a particular country and their needs so that you could pray for their social and spiritual transformation? Is God calling you to short or long-term missions away from home?

Surrendering to God Sing the children’s song “He’s got the whole world in His hands” as your statement of faith today that God will use us to share His truth throughout the world.

By Amy Schenkel

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

By 1555, there were 5 underground Protestant churches in France. However, by 1559, the number of these Protestant churches jumped to more than 100. Some scholars estimate that by 1562 there were more than 2,150 churches established in France with approximately three-million Protestants in attendance. This is an indirect result of the vast missionary activity tied to the Reformation and is a direct result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church.

Wednesday – October 25

Approaching God As you settle your hearts and minds from the world around you, consider the immensity of God’s story and how each detail tells of God’s power and majesty.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.” (Psalm 19:1-4)

Listening to God We each play a special part in God’s story. Do you ever feel like your story doesn’t measure up to someone else’s story? This is a feeling all of us have probably been familiar with at some point or another in our lives. What is God telling you about the story you’re currently living? Does God want something to change in your story?

Talking to God Our personal stories testify to God’s promises of faithfulness, love, forgiveness, and compassion. Ask God to remind you of a chapter in your story that points to God’s omnipresence and promises. Express your gratitude to God for those times, whether filled with joy or suffering.

Responding to God Scripture tell us that as disciples, we have an *obligation* to share the story of God’s providence in our lives. After reading the verses below from Romans, how might God be calling you to live more fully into your story? How can you share the story of God with others by how you live into your own story?

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:14-15)

Surrendering to God “Creator God, I praise you for your dominion and your story that is full of vibrant promises. Reveal to me the opportunities you desire for your story to ring true in the ways I live out my story. Guide me in ways that demonstrate how truly powerful your story is. Amen.”

By Ashley Zuverink

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

The Reformation may have begun with Luther’s posting of the Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517. Yet, the Reformation spread through the missions and ministry of other Reformers. Huldrych Zwingli helped expand Protestantism in Zurich, and John Calvin was influential in Geneva. Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker were influential in England, while John Knox made significant contributions in Scotland and continued to grow in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and throughout Europe.

Thursday – October 26

Approaching God As you approach the Lord God Almighty, be reminded of God's words to Moses when the Lord passed in front of Him, proclaiming His name.

“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Exodus 34: 6-7)

Listening to God The Lord is gracious, abounding in love and faithfulness. The Lord is also just, in that He will not stand for the destructive power of sin in this world. Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome:

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12: 9-21)

Throughout the scriptures, imagery of “burning coals” or fire represents the presence of God (2 Chronicles 7:3, Isaiah 6:6). To radically love another—especially an enemy—is not only counter cultural, but Paul also seems to say that it is a way to bring the presence of God into our lives. It seems it is God's desire for we who follow Jesus Christ to represent His grace and abounding love and faithfulness to the world in order that they might experience the Lord Himself.

Talking to God Spend some time in prayer pouring out your heart to the Lord who loves you. What words of praise and thanksgiving come to mind when you consider God's character in Exodus 34? What questions or concerns come to mind? How do God's words today lead you toward confession?

Responding to God What does it look like for you to radically love your neighbor in such a way that you would be bringing the presence of the living God? Spend time today discerning how God is calling you to show the compassionate and gracious love of God to someone specific in your life.

Surrendering to God “Lord God, thank you for showing me the greatest example of radical love in your Son, Jesus Christ. Reveal to me how I might love my neighbor in a way that reflects the same compassionate, abounding love and faithfulness that you have shown to me.”

By JB Wernlund

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

One of the reasons the Protestant churches continued to expand is because of their belief in the presence of Jesus in the Word of God. Both Jesus and Scripture are referred to as God's Word and words. In the Spirit-inspired human words of Scripture, we encounter the Word, Jesus – the two are linked. Yet, many Reformers went further, teaching that in the preaching of God's Word, the Word of God (Jesus, through Scripture) is proclaimed. As Luther stated, “Even if Christ were given for us and crucified a thousand times, it would all be vain if the Word of God were absent and were not distributed and given to me with the bidding.” Preaching distributes God's Word by the Spirit, and this is one way the Protestant churches grew.

Friday – October 27

Approaching God Take a moment to ask God to help you focus. Ask God to silence the schedule you have for this week. Ask God to silence your never-ending to-do list of today. Ask God to silence all the things that may distract you from Him.

Listening to God We come to God recognizing that we cannot hear anything unless He reveals it to us. We are not affected by His Word unless He affects us. Ask God to speak to you through His Word. Hear the Word of God from the book of John:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)

This is God’s command for your life! People will not know you are one of Christ’s disciples by how often you go to church or by how much you give to charities or the church. They will know that you are a follower of Jesus Christ by how you love those around you.

Talking to God Have you been loving others well? Have you been loving others like Jesus has loved you? Toleration is not the same as love. Jesus calls us to love others how He loved us—unconditionally. Who are you simply tolerating and not loving? Take a few moments to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal where you have fallen short in love. Take a few moments to confess your lack of love for others to our loving God.

Responding to God We know that we are not perfect and that we need help to love one another. Our sinful desires want us to be selfish and prideful. We want to put ourselves first, but we know that’s not what God did. We respond to God in thanksgiving for the way that He has loved us. He did not put Himself first, but thought of us while we were still sinners on the cross. Take a moment to thank God for the unconditional love that He has shown you by saving you from the punishment that you deserve for your sins. “Thank you, loving God, for the amazing love that you have shown me. I can’t thank you enough or repay you for the grace and mercy you have given me.”

Surrendering to God “Gracious Father, thank you for the love that You have shown me. You have lavished upon me mercy and grace that I do not deserve through the Son. Help me to show that same kind of love towards those whom I do not want to love. Soften my heart. Holy Spirit, move in me to love those around me. Use me to bring others to You. In the loving name of Jesus, Amen.”

By Shannon Baker

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

David Brainerd (1718–1747) was an American missionary who sought to reach Native Americans with the gospel. His life and ministry is known because of the book by Reformed theologian, Jonathan Edwards, titled: *The Life of David Brainerd* (1749). Brainerd was dying from tuberculosis and spent his remaining months in Edwards home. Yet, this was not his only form of suffering. The book recounts his perseverance to spread the gospel in the face of much suffering. This caused John Wesley to remark: “Let every preacher [and person] read carefully over the *Life of David Brainerd*.”

Saturday – October 28

Approaching God Our God is an incarnate God who took on a human nature. *The Message* writes John 1 this way:

“The Word was first,
the Word present to God,
God present to the Word.
The Word was God,
in readiness for God from day one....

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.” (John 1:1-2,14a)

As you prepare for this time with God, prayerfully consider how God is present in your neighborhood today.

Listening to God The apostle Paul was wandering around Athens, noticing all the idols set up for worshipping other gods. Among them was one with the inscription “To an unknown god.” Paul used this opportunity to share this truth with the people:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man, he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

“Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:24-31)

Talking to God Paul noticed both the ungodly things in this community (the idols) and how God was planting seeds of truth and wonder (through the poets). Talk with God today about the sin and brokenness you see in your neighborhood and ask Him to bring healing and truth into these situations.

Responding to God What are you learning about your neighborhood? What are the idols that people serve in your community? What are they searching for? How is God working among them already? Take a walk through your neighborhood today and bring your neighbors to God in prayer.

Surrendering to God Does your own life reflect the truth of God’s grace or are you also distracted by idols? What is getting in the way of following God with your whole heart, mind, and strength? Surrender these things to God today and ask for His help and His strength.

By Amy Schenkel

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

William Carey (1761–1834), an English Calvinist and missionary to India, is considered by some to be the “father of modern missions” as we understand it today. While in India, he contracted malaria, lost his 5 year old son to dysentery, and watched his wife’s mental health quickly deteriorate. Carey quickly realized: missions if often not easy, and often very difficult. “This is indeed the valley of the shadow of death to me . . . But I rejoice that I am here notwithstanding; and God is here.” He later became known for a famous phrase – “expect great things; attempt great things” – an expression that roughly summarizes the approach to modern missions.

Sunday – October 29

Approaching God As you enter God’s presence once more, be assured of your salvation. With so many competing denominations and worldviews, we can become anxious when we consider our eternal destiny. God has given us the confidence we need to approach Him in His Word.

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)

Listening to God While the Reformation is a great cause for celebration, one of the faults we Reformed Christians often find ourselves guilty of is finding our bonds of unity in places other than Christ. We are united because we have Christ, plain and simple. The apostle Paul tells us this much.

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

God wants you to know that before you are Reformed or not, male or female, Christian schooled or public schooled, black or white—you are in Christ. We must never lose sight of that!

Talking to God Christ did not make one set of His children more important than another. God shows no favoritism; we are all one under Christ. Have you experienced the blessing of this oneness? Are there any words of praise or blessing that come to mind? Have you treated brothers and sisters in Christ with favoritism? Any instances where you’ve abandoned unity that you need to repent of?

Responding to God Since you are one in Christ with your brothers and sisters in the faith, seek to find even more unity. While we were enemies with God, He still sought unity with us. Just as Christ did, seek unity with someone today who you may not usually try and seek unity with. Show that you are one with every brother and sister in Christ and experience the blessing of unity under Christ.

Surrendering to God “God, too often I forget that each person who declares Jesus Christ is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead has the same standing before God. Too often I take comfort in how I am different from my brothers and sisters in faith. Strengthen me, O God, to rejoice in the bonds of unity I share with my brothers and sisters in the faith by your blood alone.”

By Arek O’Connell

A HISTORICAL SIDEBAR

Reflecting on the “catholicity” (universal nature) of the church during his time, the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck wrote in 1888: “No one church, no matter how pure, is identical with the universal church. In the same way no confession, no matter how refined by the Word of God, is identical with the whole of Christian truth. Each sect that considers its own circle as the only church of Christ and makes exclusive claims to truth will wither and die like a branch severed from its vine. The one, holy, universal church that is presently an object of faith, will not come into being until the body of Christ reaches full maturity. Only then will the church achieve the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, and only then will she know as she is known.”

October 30 — The Unity of Friends

Approaching God Our God is the one who spoke existence into being, who brought light into the dark, and brought order to chaos. Before our God created Earth, animals, humans and you, He had a plan in place. Think about the God who created you and His plan for you as you look at this verse.

“Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psalm 139:16)

In Daniel chapter 1, Daniel was stripped from his home, family, language, literature, and name. He was taught the Babylonian language and literature and was given a Babylonian name. This happened to him rather quickly. It would’ve been easy to question whether God was in control.

Listening to God But everything God created was with purpose. Some we have discovered and some we have yet to discover. Listen as Paul articulates part of your purpose:

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” (Ephesians 1:4-5)

Our God is one who is in control. We are not left to ourselves to make sense of this world or find our purpose.

Talking to God We have seen that God numbered our days even before one began, and that He chose us to be holy and blameless. But how do we respond when it feels like everything is against us? King Nebuchadnezzar wanted an interpretation of his dream and was going to kill all the wise men if no one could deliver one.

“Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.” (Daniel 2:16-19a)

Responding to God Daniel went to his friends for support, encouragement—and mostly prayer. Together they pleaded with God to give them wisdom. Have you ever experienced the power of God’s presence in the unity of other believers through prayer? Think about what you might be up against right now, you know God is control and has a purpose for you, but what if you unified with other believers to plead together for His wisdom?

Surrendering to God “God, I know you are in control and that you have numbered my days and given me a purpose. I am trying to find joy amidst this trial that I am facing, and I know that your word promises that if any lack wisdom let them ask you and you are faithful and willing to give it to them. Will you give me wisdom now? Help me to trust that you are in control.”

By Kirk Kingsley?

Tuesday – October 31

Approaching God Ever wonder, “Who am I? Why am I here?” As you enter this time, focus on the words of Psalm 139: 13-16:

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

Listening to God As humans, we are consumed by creating our ideal identity and reputation. We spend so much time on how we wish to *appear* to be that we often lose the sense of who God has *created* us to be. Our true identity is in Christ. Our whole essence and being relies on the fact that we have unity in Christ. Galatians 3:26-29 says,

“So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Because of Christ, not only do we as Christian believers have unity, but also everyone who believes has their own unity with Jesus Christ. Because of Christ we are no longer just doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, or parents. We are made *new*. Our sins are wiped clean, our relationship with our Father is restored, and we have no reason to fear because of the power of salvation. Just as Christ is in us, we are in Christ.

Talking with God - After listening to what God says about unity in Christ, take the time to thank Him and praise Him for the power of that union and what it means in our own lives.

Responding to God Because we know that our identity lies in unity with Christ, we can find who our God really created us to be. Take the time now to ask yourself: “Who am I? Why am I here?” Remember that you are defined by the union you have in Jesus Christ!

Surrendering to God “Lord, thank you for the union we have in your son, Jesus Christ, and for the sacrifice He made so that we may be one. I pray that I can continually find my identity in Christ and not in worldly things. Remind me daily of the unity I have in Christ and the significance that it has in my daily life. Amen.”

By Hannah Dykema