**GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE SPRING QUARTER:**

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In this quarter, we explore the fullness of faith as a response to God’s desire to be in relationship with us. To be faith-less is to turn away from God—to put trust in something, or someone, other than God. The lessons of this quarter ask: Is your faith steadfast? Are you contending for the faith? In Old and New Testaments, there are as many examples of spiritual fidelity as there are examples of spiritual infidelity. What can today’s Christians draw from these ancient accounts that will help us grow more deeply in faith? The lessons of this quarter guide the learner to a reaffirmation of their confidence in God, because without faith it is impossible to please God.

Unit II, “The Measure of Faith,” has four lessons drawn from Luke and Matthew to discuss the range of Christian faith. Luke cites four friends who went through various obstacles to get their sick friend to Jesus for healing, and when Jesus saw their faith he forgave and healed the paralytic; Luke looks at the faith of a centurion who amazed Jesus with his faith, and Jesus acknowledged he had not found such faith in all Israel; Luke identifies a sinful woman Jesus forgave because she had much faith; and Matthew identifies a Canaanite woman recognized by Jesus for her great faith.

April 7, 2024

Helping a Friend in Need or Faith of Four Friends

Luke 5:17-26

## Unifying Principle (Focus)

People need a support system when trying to overcome life’s obstacles. How can our friendships lend strength and support to others who are in crisis? Jesus celebrates the faith and tenacity of the four friends who helped a friend find healing and wholeness.

Goals For The Learners

1. To understand the importance of Christian friends in building up faith in Christ.

2. To value the encouragement and support that they can offer their friends in the faith.

3. To seek to create habits of compassionate and faith-filled action.

Challenges for the week

1. Search for information about what ordinary homes looked like in the time of Jesus, including the manner in which roofs were constructed.

2. Consider the faith of the four friends and what it compelled them to do on behalf of the man who was paralyzed. Notice that Jesus was impressed by their faith and responded to it.

3. What are the two ways in which Jesus acted to help the man in need: (a) he forgave his sins; (b) he healed his body. Which act was more important to the man who was paralyzed? to his friends? Why do the Pharisees and scribes criticize Jesus for his words and actions?

4. Identify people they know who may need to be “carried” to Jesus. What help might be needed in the situations you identify? To what lengths are you willing to go to bring your friends to Christ—the one who promises healing and forgiveness? What will you do when you are criticized or questioned?

5. What are some ways to express thanksgiving to God for faithful friends who help us in our need?

6. Recall a time when you were in need and friends, or family intervened on your behalf.

April 14, 2024

Healed From a Distance or Faith of a Centurion

Luke 7:1-10

Unifying Principle (Focus)

There are times when the enormity of our problems diminishes our capacity to move forward. How should or do we respond to seemingly impossible problems? When a centurion whose servant was close to death responded in great faith, Jesus was amazed and miraculously restored the man to full health.

Goals for the Learners

1. To discover the factors that influenced the centurion’s faith in Christ to heal the servant.

2. To confess our need for God in the face of feeling helplessness and hopelessness.

3. To engage a practice of prayer that can see us through helpless and hopeless circumstances.

Challenges for the Week

1. Investigate the relationship between Jesus and the village of Capernaum... Research Capernaum online or in a commentary.

2. Consider the connection between our prayers on behalf of the sick and suffering and the centurion’s plea to Jesus for help “from afar.”

3. Recall a time when they you felt helpless and hopeless when someone you loved and respected was in great need. Draw or write about your feelings regarding such an occasion. What did you do about your helplessness?

4. Name some people who are usually considered outside the bounds of our responsibility (persons of other religions, different racial ancestry, greater or lesser economic status, etc.). In what ways can we respond to their needs? How can we broaden our sense of responsibility? How can we direct them to the help that Christ offers?

April 21, 2024

How Much Do You Love Me? or Faith of a Woman Who Loved Jesus

Luke 7:36-39, 44-50

Unifying Principle (Focus)

The humiliation of our public failures can make it difficult for a fresh start. How do we overcome the weight of judgment and scrutiny from those who refuse to see past our mistakes? Luke teaches about a woman whose great faith helped her rise above the rejection of others so that she might express her gratitude for Jesus’ love and forgiveness.

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Goals For The Learners

1. To analyze how the sinful woman rises above her shame to give honor to Jesus.

2. To recognize Jesus’ acceptance and unconditional love of us as we are.

3. To celebrate the complete acceptance and forgiveness we receive from God’s unconditional love.

Challenges for the Week

1. Describe the respect widely accorded Pharisees in Jesus’ time and the rejection and humiliation of people considered hopeless sinners.

2. List ways in which the Pharisee failed to fulfill the customary acts of a host when a guest was in the home. How did the sinful woman fulfill those customs toward Jesus?

3. Consider what it cost the woman to approach Jesus. How did she even gain entrance to the Pharisee’s house? Why did she seem unconcerned about the value of the ointment she used? about the humiliation she risked by approaching a man in the company of others?

4. Think about the most humiliating circumstances you have experienced. What or who enabled or compelled you to see beyond their humiliation?

April 28, 2024

Help For an Outsider or Faith of a Canaanite Woman

Matthew 15:21-28

Universal Principle (Focus)

There are systemic problems in society that unfairly restrict access to resources for some while privileging others. How do we overcome the prejudice and hatred that denies some people equal access to resources that protect a decent standard of living? The Canaanite woman understood that Israel’s Messiah would one day bring God’s reign to all people and, by faith, pressed Jesus to extend that blessing to her even before he’d completed his work among the people of Israel.

Goals For the Learners

1. To wrestle with the interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman.

2. To persist in faith when there’s no assurance of a certain outcome.

3. To identify a person or group of people you have previously been reluctant to accept but could be persuaded to extend grace to.

Challenges for the Week

1. Research relationships between Jews and Canaanites (Gentiles) in the Roman world. Why was it unlikely that a Canaanite woman would approach a Jewish man under any circumstances?

2. Consider the woman’s knowledge of Jesus before he entered the Gentile region where she lived. How would she have heard of him? What did it mean for her to address him as “Son of David”? What did she know about the prophets who foretold the Messiah’s advent? How can we follow in her footsteps in acknowledging who Jesus is?

3. Identify the prejudices that exist among various social groups in the world today. Who are the people most likely to be rejected by the ruling majority? What is most unfair about such rejection?

4. Notice that it was rare for Jesus to be traveling in a Gentile region and unheard of for him to engage in a verbal exchange with a foreign woman. What led this woman to approach Jesus? Why did he respond to her with some hesitation? What seems to have convinced Jesus to help the child of the woman?

5. Notice the acts of courage shown by the woman in approaching and imploring Jesus and shown by Jesus in healing her daughter. How does one find courage to surmount cultural norms and rejection to make one’s voice heard and heeded?

6. List people who are not fully welcome in your community or church. Consider the barriers to their acceptance that exist. How might you extend welcome to those people?