

Dedicated Discipleship

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

~ 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

Several years ago, I injured my knee, and my daughter helped with physical rehabilitation. Joy is a certified fitness specialist and developed an exercise regimen to strengthen my knee.

Each week I visited her worksite, a professional center with polished equipment. The place was abuzz with swarming clients expecting to receive expert instruction.

Joy guided me from one piece of equipment to the next, explaining the correct usage. If I whined about the difficulty of an exercise, she would matter-of-factly say, “Mom, you will be challenged, but not to the point of pain. This will strengthen you.” Ugh. But when the session ended, even though my legs wobbled like partially-set gelatin, my heart smiled because my knee was improving.

My daughter successfully strengthened my knee because she had studied health science. Her years in college equipped her to rehabilitate clients. She provided individualized attention without a cookie-cutter approach.

Joy studied the medical textbooks and professional journals to learn the skills she needed. In the same way, the Bible is our handbook to instruct us on how to live sanctified lives. When we read God’s Word, we protect ourselves from false teachings that could lead us astray, and we bolster ourselves for a lifestyle of godliness (1 Timothy 4:1-2, 7). We’re assured the Bible provides sound teachings, as all Scripture is Holy Spirit inspired (2 Timothy 3:16). Because God’s Word is personal, practical, and profitable, we can consult it and count on its integrity to rehabilitate our fallen natures!

Father, may you be glorified as we devote our time and heart to committed study, deeper reflection, and practice of your Word.

Christine Strittmatter
Fairton Christian Center

Slowly Fading

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap. ~ *Galatians 6:7 (NASB)*

Our lives are like a fallow field. Left unattended, the weeds of the world grow into us a little at a time. Some go unnoticed, as they do not even resemble weeds, but they are there to choke out the real life. Silently, unknowingly, they work their way into our lives, covering up the once-fertile soil, until we can't remember what the good soil even looked like. By that time, the "bushes and trees" of the world have taken root and are growing well.

Maybe you've stopped reading your Bible because you've gotten too busy. Maybe you just don't have time for church altogether — and you wonder how this could have happened. A church sign once said, "If you are not as close to God as you used to be, you are the one who moved." Did you?

A song by Mark Hall of Casting Crowns, "Slow Fade," describes how wrong choices, even minor compromises in our lives, can bring us down. It is those compromises (e.g., video games, social media, music, movies, books) that take us farther away from our walk with God and closer to becoming one with the world. The song cautions us about not being led astray from our faith and urges us to make the right choices in this life.

Will you carefully tend the godly values you are trying to instill in yourself or your family? I know I want to.

Slow Fade by Mark Hall

Be careful little eyes what you see
It's the second glance that ties your hands as darkness pulls the strings.
Be careful little feet where you go
For it's the little feet behind you that are sure to follow.
It's a slow fade when you give yourself away,
It's a slow fade when black and white are turned to gray,
And thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid.
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day,
Daddies never crumble in a day,
Families never crumble in a day ... It's a slow fade.

Father God, keep us ever mindful of what we allow to creep into our lives, and fill our minds always with seeking you.

Judy Frett

Pitman Church of the Nazarene

Walking with a Friend

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

~ Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

After reading *Sensible Shoes* by Sharon Garlough Brown in our book club, a few friends and I were inspired to visit a prayer labyrinth. I found one in Longport, New Jersey.

The labyrinth's design represents life's journey with a winding path that leads from the entrance to the center and back out. There is only one way in and out. The purpose of a prayer labyrinth is for meditation, prayer, spiritual reflection, quiet time, and connection to God. As I walked the labyrinth, I felt like I was walking and talking with God like a friend.

The weather that day was spectacular! It was the middle of September, the sky was bright blue, and we were greeted with soft ocean breezes and the sound of seagulls. We were in awe of God's creation.

We all had various reasons that day for coming to the labyrinth. As I walked the path and passed my friends, I thanked God for each one and how blessed I was to have them in my life. As I continued my walk, I reflected on God's presence in my life and wondered what plans He had for me (I constantly question my purpose). I have this desire to know what's next (okay, impatience — I'm working on that). Knowing He has always provided for me in all circumstances (pleasant and unpleasant), I know His plans and timing are always better.

After my walk that day in September, I may not have received the answers I wanted immediately, but I am sure God's timing and plans are perfect.

Father God, you are good and gracious. Thank you for your constant presence in my life. Your way is always better. I ask for patience and strength to wait on your plan for me.

Terri Ganderton

First United Methodist Church of Glassboro

God Equips the Called

Through the Holy Spirit Christ offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice, freeing us from all those dead-end efforts to make ourselves respectable, so we can live all out for God. ~ *Hebrews 9:15 (MSG)*

How do we live “all out for God”? What is Scripture saying to us? Jesus gives us His roadmap on how to live a life freed from the dead-end efforts to prove our worthiness. He shows us how to reach out and gather in those we meet along our life’s journey. Jesus did not go it alone. He gathered His disciples. They in turn gathered more around them. How do we breathe in their energy and amazement on our Christian journey?

God equips the called. We are called to serve God by serving one another. The church is our Jesus community. The tools have been provided: prayer, compassion, love, acceptance, inclusiveness, and courage. The call is clear. Share God’s love. We live in a fractured world with many suffering from loneliness. We can make a difference by reaching out in love.

Jesus tells us to love our neighbor. Who is our neighbor? The person next door, the hungry child, the grieving widow, and the cashier at your local store. The people we meet daily are our neighbors.

In my pocket, I carry with me little Jesus figures. I hand them out to those I meet along my way. This simple gesture has opened meaningful conversations about joy, fear, discouragement, illness, and loneliness. We are called to reach out and offer hope in unexpected ways — perhaps a smile, a thank you, a word of encouragement, or whatever it takes to share God’s loving presence. Jesus is our roadmap. As with the disciples and then their followers, the call is the same for us. Share the news of the resurrected Jesus and His life-changing love for each of us.

Lord, we want to live all out for you. Help us to follow your roadmap to love our neighbors.

Mary Perrin Scott
Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Of Green Pastures and Still Waters

The Lord is my shepherd; ...He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul ~ *Psalm 23:1-3a (NKJV)*

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. ~ *Luke 5:16 (NIV)*

On a trip to Ireland this past year, our tour included a stop at Glendalough, known for a monastic settlement founded there by St. Kevin in the 6th century. Long out of use, today it is a tranquil area on a rolling hillside in the valley between two mountains and bordered by two lakes. On the grounds stand the remnants of stone buildings that were once part of the monastic community. And over the hillside are paths that meander in solitary places or along running waters. It is a beautiful, secluded place to get away from the bustle of life and calm one's spirit.

It recalls the words of Psalm 23: "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul." What an inviting picture that summons us.

The Bible tells us that Jesus "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." The truth is that while we may not be able to go off to a tranquil setting with green pastures and still waters to restore our soul, we do need to have a quiet time in our lives every day where, in the presence of Jesus, our soul can be nurtured and restored. We need that time and place and space where in solitude we withdraw from people, noise, cell phones, and all the stimulations of life just to be alone with God, to read His Word, to listen for His voice, and to speak to Him in prayer. If Jesus felt the necessity of regular solitude and prayer, how much more essential it is for us!

Lent calls us away from the "business as usual" or the "daily grind" in our daily lives — to commit to a time and place when and where we can shut out the world and enter a quiet time with the Lord.

C. Austin Miles describes it this way in his beautiful hymn:

I come to the garden alone, While the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me ...

We experience the "green pastures" and "still waters" that restore our soul when we take time to be with God, in His Word and in prayer.

Heavenly Father, forgive us when we are lax in our relationship with you. May we not see spending time with you as an incursion into our lives, but rather as the heartbeat of our living. This we pray in Jesus' name.

Pastor Gary Turk, Retired
Mount Royal, NJ

How and When to Pray

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come, Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
~*Matthew 6:9-10 (NKJV)*

Years ago when I was in my early teens, I asked one of the senior members of my little country church if he would give me some suggestions on how to pray.

He said to tell the Lord how much you love Him, thank Him for something, and ask Him for something.

He also said to establish a regular daily time for prayer and Bible reading, timed with a regular daily event such as meals or bedtime or when getting up in the morning.

Something that worked well for Jane and me at night was kneeling at our bedside and taking turns on alternate nights to pray out loud. Hearing the other's prayers helped build a spiritual foundation for our marriage.

Lord you already know our wishes, but your will be done. Help us to graciously be able to accept your will.

Jackie Bowers
Illuminate Church

Share Your Prayer Requests

Nothing is impossible for God. ~ *Luke 1:37 (CEB)*

Many times when things happen, I ask God, "Why is this happening? What are you trying to teach me?" Over the years, I have learned I need this lesson so I can help someone else. God gives me situations to handle so I can encourage others.

This past year I have had plenty of prayer requests to share with our prayer warriors. Everyone is going through something. What we need is our friends to remind us that prayer works.

People are behind us when we need them if we just ask!

Lord, thank you for my friends who trust me enough to ask me to pray for them.

Judy Ferguson
Trinity United Methodist Church

Living God's Word

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.
~ *Romans 7:18-19 (NIV)*

The dictionary explains Lent as a period of repentance and fasting. As we examine our hearts this season and ask God's forgiveness, His Word assures us that He is always with us and is our sure help. Satan wants to destroy us, but God's Word builds us up and increases our faith. In Jeremiah 29:11 we find encouragement when it states: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

I am so thankful for the saints who have gone before us, prayed for us, and guided our lives. Their sharing of God's Word and examples of how to live God's Word have provided a foundation that God builds on as we continue our faith journey throughout our whole life.

At the beginning of 2025, I began reading straight through the Bible. On December 31, 2025, I ended the year in Luke. I will continue reading and finish to the end, but I will also then start anew. I learned to enjoy the Old Testament, and now I frequently refer to Isaiah and Jeremiah for peace, joy, wisdom, correction, and more — all tools to use for living God's way.

God of love, forgive and cleanse our hearts today, that our lives may be pleasing in your sight.

Betty Little

Zion United Methodist Church