

Sharing in God's Love

Proverbs 3:1-5

First of all I need to say a huge “Thank You” to my church family for your prayers, calls, visits and general well wishes during my recent time away. As of today, I am doing great and am once again ready to serve you and this community.

Our Scripture for today comes from the Old Testament Book of Proverbs, Chapter 3: 1-5.

This is from The Message Subtitled “**Don't Assume You Know It All**”

*¹⁻² Good friend, don't forget all I've taught you; take to heart my commands.
They'll help you live a long, long time,
a long life lived full and well.*

*³⁻⁴ Don't lose your grip on Love and Loyalty.
Tie them around your neck; carve their initials on your heart.
Earn a reputation for living well
in God's eyes and the eyes of the people.*

*⁵⁻¹² Trust God from the bottom of your heart;
don't try to figure out everything on your own.*

Each year at Christmas my parents give me a calendar that has a daily Scripture reading on it. Some years the scriptures are written using the New International Version, sometimes the New Living Translation and one year it was the King James Version. It doesn't matter though what translation or version the calendar is written in, what matters to me is that I get to have the blessing everyday of reading from “The Word”. And as many of you know from experience, the passage usually fits with what was or is happening in everyday life. Sometimes it fits with what others I know are dealing with so I type it out in an e-mail and send it to them. Passing on the Word of God...that is a real blessing. And getting to share with others what I truly believe, that is an added joy.

Unless you have experienced The Bible's comfort, its peace and its understanding for yourself, it is very hard to explain. However, when you do experience the Scriptures coming to life, there really is a burning desire to share with others. And we all need to

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share with each other how God is working in our lives by using His Words.

As has been the tradition of this church we use Christian Education Weekend to give a new Bible to our third grade Sunday School students. And in most cases, they are usually pretty excited to receive their very own Bible.

Just this past Wednesday evening during my time with the children a current third grade student said, after I reminded her that she would be receiving her own Bible this Sunday, “really now I can have my own Bible in my house.” She understood that having her own Bible in her house was an opportunity to read from it every night. Another child who received their Bible last year, responded, “and if you bring it to Sunday School five weeks in a row, you get a prize!” My response to that was, “Whatever it takes to motivate”. As Christians though, I believe our motivation for being in the Word is not a prize but the Gift of being in a closer relationship with God through Jesus.

As I prepared for this message about “Sharing in God's Love”, and using the Bible as a blueprint on how to do that, I honestly struggled with what scripture to focus on. There are just so many good ones but I needed to narrow it down because reading the whole Bible in the time given well that is just not an option.

So, how and why did I pick Proverbs 3:1-5 as the scripture for today's message? Well, I took a look at the options in the Lectionary for this weekend and they really didn't fit with what I wanted to share so I prayed and prayed for direction and a passage that would give a real sense of what I believe God wants me to pass onto you and well, this is the one that popped into my mind.

Actually, the truth is I wrestled with so many passages that may have worked that it was hard to discern which one to use. Just ask my friend Sue Harris. She was kind

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enough to listen to my babbling about which passage to focus on that she even got out her own Bible and made a few suggestions. Some of which I will use to support my theme that We All Need to be Sharing In God's Love and We All need to look for ways to Pass It On.

Sue commented that although she appreciates all that we (this Community & The Christian Education Department) has to offer through Sunday School, the Pre-School, weekly Bible Studies, Youth Groups, Small Groups, Music, Outreach, etc, all of us have a responsibility to LOOK for ways to grow in our own faith and dependence on God, then pass what we have learned and / or experienced onto others.

As most of you know (since I mentioned it earlier), I had an unexpected medical situation over the summer that lead to an operation just over 5 weeks ago.

The timing of the operation was very inconvenient in that it was scheduled just 4 days before the start of our Vacation Bible School program. The doctor told me that I needed the surgery "sooner rather than later" even though I told him I really wasn't available until the 23rd of August which would have been much more doable with my schedule. Well, that doctor won that battle and I had the surgery on August 13th.

Due to the swiftness of everything, I had only 10 days to put together the most important aspects of VBS, Sunday School and to organize our Soup & Study program before being out 4 -6 weeks. Well, of course, the first thing I did was pray and then I went into 'over-drive'. I worked diligently on class placements for over 190 VBS children, on recruiting and communicating with teachers and volunteers for Sunday School, on seeking assistance with Soup & Study and on getting prepared for our Thursday Children's Youth Program. I am sure that in that time and leading up to my

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surgery I was a bit crazy (just ask my husband) but in all of it, and I truly mean ALL of IT, I knew that God would put all the right people in place, that folks would come together and that through it all He would be glorified.

And of course, that is what happened. VBS went off without any major snafus, Sunday School began last Sunday. They had their curriculum and every class was covered. Soup and Study started this past Wednesday and Thursday Youth group was great. All of these “activities” occurred not because of anything that I really did but because the faithful people in this community who followed the Lord’s tugging on their heart, took the message of the Bible seriously and answered the call to serve.

Allow me give you a real example of what I mean by saying this was God’s doing and I was just blessed to be used as His ‘organizer’.

It was August 3rd and we already had over 160 VBS registrations with most of the children being around the age of 4 to 5. I knew I didn’t have enough teachers for that group or enough space, to be honest, but I figured that that is where faith comes in and that God would work it out. I just had to be patient. Using my cell phone, I called Melissa O’Donnell who is the current Education Chairperson and shared my concern. Of course what added to my anxiety was the fact that I had just found out that I wasn’t even going to be around for the week and this stuff had to get done.

I hung up the phone from Melissa after we agreed we would continue to pray that more volunteers would be available. Then, and I mean then just as I closed my cell phone and sat in my office chair, my office phone rang and it was a woman who volunteers yearly as a VBS teacher but whom I hadn’t heard from. She called and said, “Hi Karen, this is Joy. I am so sorry I haven’t called you sooner. I got your letter requesting help for

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VBS and I put it on the refrigerator and forgot to send it back. Do you still need any teachers?" Well, as you can guess my heart started beating faster and a sense of amazement went through my body. After I practically screamed "YES...Thank you so much!", I told her about my conversation with Melissa and that we were just praying for another teacher and how happy I was that she called. She then added "Oh and by the way, Amanda my daughter would love to help too." Amanda was a teen helper last year so I knew she would be great. Again after I said "Thank You" and gave her a few details for the week, I hung up the phone and started dancing in my office. I immediately called Melissa right back so she could share in this Good News! God's timing, God's grace, our responsibility to listen!

For me the time away was difficult. I am use to being here, working, serving and helping and instead I was forced to stay home and rest. I was blessed though to receive so much care from all of you through your prayers, your calls, your food, your gifts and your cards. Just look at all these cards filled with "Get Well" wishes. I had no choice but to hurray up and get well with all these prayers! Every one of these cards and every act of love was so special because they came from this community of love. This wonderful community that God has so graciously provided and a place where I know I am loved and where I can share that love in return.

We do have terrific programming, fabulous teachers, enthusiastic helpers and excited children but mostly we have love and we need to take the sharing of that love very seriously. We must remember though that we cannot and should not become complacent in that love. We need to keep it growing, feeding it through education with wisdom and knowledge and nurturing it in Worship and service to others.

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It is easy to get so comfortable with our lives that we begin to take for granted the things of God, His peace, His grace, His mercy, His kindness and His comfort.

So how do we take on the challenge of staying connected and growing in our relationship with God so that that doesn't happen?

King David in Psalm 86:11 writes; "Teach me your ways, O Lord that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart so that I may honor you."

Sounds like we need to be active in learning.

Jesus in the Gospels called regular people and said, "Come be my disciples, and I will SHOW you how to fish for people." (Matt. 4:19)

Sounds like we need to be an active witness.

Paul gave these final instructions to the Church in Corinth, "I close my letter with these last words: Rejoice. Change your ways. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet each other in Christian love." 2 Cor. 13:11-12a.

Sounds like we need to seek better ways of living.

1 John 4:7-16, "Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

¹³ And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. ¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love.

God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them."

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Sounds like we can remain growing, living and learning in that love by claiming Jesus as our own, believing that He is the Son of God and witnessing to all He has done in our lives. Telling of his redeeming love, telling the stories of the Bible and showing how far we've come because of his grace, kindness, mercy and compassion.

Each week I receive an e-mail from a company called DiscipleLand. This week's just happened to be on "Invigorating Your Volunteers" it reads..."Contrary to popular belief, every Christian is eager to serve Christ-some just need a "holy nudge" to stir up their passion for ministry."

Are you serving Christ in some way? Are you volunteering your time to further God's kingdom? Are you taking responsibility for your own growth in your relationship with God?

Are you..."Sharing in God's Love"? I hope so because God wants you to trust Him from the bottom of your heart and to not try to figure everything out on your own.

Accept, Receive and share in God's amazing love and His beautiful family.
AMEN.