

SHARING LIFE & THE GOSPEL

PERSONAL WORSHIP: DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

UPCOMING EVENTS

Learn more and/or sign up for events at graceb3.org/events

MEN'S MARCH MADNESS BRACKET PARTY March 16 11AM-11PM

Men, fill out your March Madness brackets, bring those brackets and your sons, coworkers, or friends and join us for a great time of hanging out talking, watching basketball, and eating wings. We will have an area reserved at Buffalo Wild Wings in Coralville from 11am - 11pm on Thursday, March 16. Come out and join us for lunch, appetizers, happy hour, dinner or evening snack, or join us for the whole event. (Yes, some of us are there for the whole 12 hours!) There will be a \$50 gift card prize for the winner of the bracket challenge!

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EASTER DINNER March 25 5-8PM

On Saturday, March 25, welcome an international student into your home and host a meal with them, or help co-host in someone else's home. Then accompany them to Grace North Liberty at 7pm to hear a pastor explain the cultural meaning of Easter, the Christian meaning of Easter, and why Easter is good news. After the message, enjoy fellowship and dessert with the international students and host families.

PARENTS ROUND TABLE SERIES April 2 8:30AM or 10:15AM

Parents, you've heard us say that "Grace partners with you to disciple your kids". What does it mean for you to disciple your kids? What might it look like? Come get encouraged and equipped to make disciples of the next generation in your own household! We are in this together! No sign up needed. Just come!

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Questions? Contact Cindy at cindys@graceb3.org

*no registration required



ur current sermon series studying characters in the Old Testament is entitled, "Living Stones." The sermons in this series all involve people in the Old Testament that God is using in his redemptive plan. Each person we are looking at does this in a unique way and is used by God individually. Yet, with each new person we read about, we can also see that God is doing something bigger than working with individuals.

While the sermon series is about people from the Old Testament, the name for this series comes from the New Testament book of 1 Peter, Chapter 2, where the apostle says this:

"As you come to [Jesus], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

The idea that Peter was trying to convey is that everyone who believes in Jesus is used by God to be the temple of God – the place where God lives on earth. The Holy Spirit accomplishes this by living in people individually when they have accepted Christ as their savior. Additionally, Christ uses all believers collectively, as the church, to accomplish his will. Individually we are stones, each person playing a unique role in the larger building. Collectively, we are to act as that people and place where God can be found in our broken world.

But, you might be thinking, in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God did not yet live in all people who believed. We read in the Old Testament accounts of Moses and Joshua, for example, that God dwelled in a tent that the Israelites set up in the middle of their camp. In the time of Solomon, God lived in the temple in Jerusalem. It is only after Jesus died and rose again that the Holy Spirit has made his home in the hearts of mankind.

This is true. The reality of God making his home in us is relatively new. But God's plan to build people into a spiritual house is an ancient plan. When God talked with Noah, he was preparing this plan. When God made a covenant with Abraham, he was establishing this plan. When God called Moses to lead Israel, he was confirming this plan. In fact, all of the Old Testament stories contribute to this understanding: the individuals are important, but God is using them all to do something bigger.

The bigger thing was not entirely clear to the men and women that God used in ages past. God did tell Abraham that all of the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's offspring. And God did tell Moses that the purpose of God's people was to become a kingdom of priests to the nations. But as Adam, Eve, Noah, Abram, Sarah, and others grappled with what it meant to be living stones in the hands of the Master Builder, it is unlikely that they fully understood God's plan to bring about salvation and redemption. They could see God was molding them in their own time, but it was not clear to them what he was doing next.

They could not see, but we can see. Today we see that all of the people in the Old Testament were being shaped to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. God was changing Noah, Abraham, and Moses, so that we who have come after them would have examples of faith and faithlessness. He worked in and through Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, so that we could see his plan unfolding. In the offering of Isaac, the elevation of Joseph, and the leadership of Moses, we can witness the first hints of the kind of king that Jesus would be.

God began building his spiritual house in the Old Testament by clearing the ground for the firmest possible foundation. 1 Peter 2:6 says:

'For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

A cornerstone is a foundation-defining stone. It helps to support the weight of the building, and also directs the orientation of every other stone in the structure. Scripture tells us that the cornerstone of God's plan and house is Jesus. And if, as Peter says, the people who follow God's will are like living stones, then Jesus is the best and first living stone. He is, as Scripture describes, the cornerstone of God's spiritual house. But more than just being a cornerstone, Jesus is also the best example of what it means to be a living stone. He follows God's will perfectly. He relies on the power of the Holy Spirit completely. Jesus lays down his life freely so that all who believe in him will be saved.

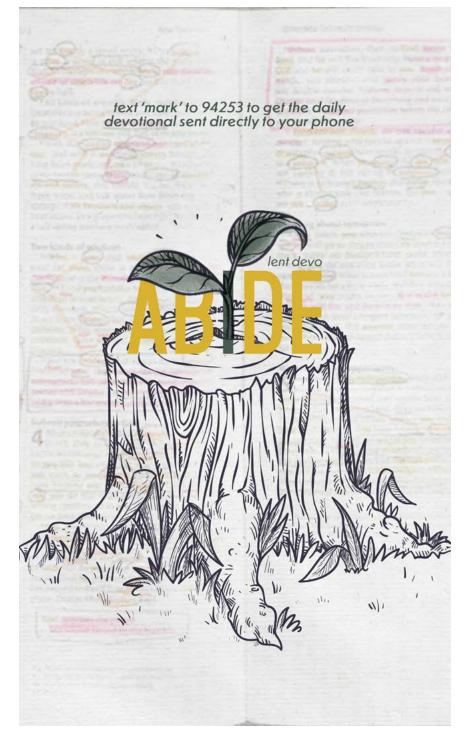
When Jesus walked this earth, most of his followers were intimately familiar with the men and women of the Old Testament that we have studied in this series. In Jesus' day, the only biblical text they had was the Old Testament. Leaders among the Jews were judged according to the standards set by Abraham, Moses, and Joshua. The calling and direction of God were understood by studying the lives of those living stones from the past.

But when Jesus died and rose again, he showed the world something new. Unlike Adam and Eve. Jesus rejected the devil's temptation. Unlike Noah, Jesus offered salvation for all who would believe. Abraham believed God, but made faithless decisions. Jesus believed God and remained faithful. Isaac was offered as a sacrifice by his father, and then replaced by a ram. Jesus took the position of the ram, and offered himself up to those he had power over. In his death, his burial, and especially his resurrection, Jesus shows the whole world that he is better than Adam, better than Abraham, and better than every other person. who has ever lived. He has conquered death. He offers life. He lives forevermorel

This Easter season, as you reflect on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, know that he is more than your savior, he is also the cornerstone. And if you have accepted Christ as your savior, you are more than saved; you are a living stone. Just like God was doing more than just leading Israel through the wilderness, he is also doing more than just saving you. He is building you up into a spiritual home for his Holy Spirit. He has given you the apostles, the prophets, and all of the living stones of the biblical past as a model of what that looks like. And he has also given you his Son who shows us how a living stone ought to live. #

EASTER SERVICE TIMES

NORTH LIBERTY CAMPUS Saturday • 5PM | Sunday • 8:30AM & 10:15AM **DOWNTOWN CAMPUS** Sunday • 5PM





By Worship Director Zack Stanton

n the November Insider, we began exploring "personal worship." Though we do worship on Sunday mornings, the Bible talks more frequently about worship as a daily practice. (If you haven't read that article, I encourage you to check it out.) This month we're going to look further into "personal worship" with the practices of Scripture meditation and prayer, how they connect to each other, and how they connect to corporate worship.

You may not think of devotional practices as worship; instead, you think of praying or spending time in Scripture as means to know God, to seek him, to grow in our faith. And they are! But they are not merely educational or therapeutic practices, and both are also important ways to worship him.

COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

Through the prophets, psalmists, historians, and apostles, God shows us his character, his ways, and his purposes. He shares his desire to bless his people and be in an intimate relationship with them, and shows how we should respond. God's word is an amazing revelation! We have a clear picture of who he is, who we are, why the world is the way it is, and how to be in a right relationship with him. And, we won't fully wrap our heads around his word this side of heaven.

MEDITATING ON HIS WORD

Pastor Tim Keller has helpfully called meditation "the bridge to prayer." He points out that the personal devotional life of many Christians consists of Bible study and prayer, but that "meditation is neither and both." Biblical meditation isn't the kind of meditation we typically think of – where the goal is to reduce stress, increase mindfulness, calm the soul, or focus the mind. No, when the Bible speaks of meditation, it means to chew on scripture, to turn it over in our minds, to speak it to ourselves, to pray it, to allow it to seep into our minds and hearts. It's a slow, intentional process.

WHY MEDITATE?

And it isn't the same as study. Bible study is important and we should study. But we don't stop there. Knowing what the Bible says and means doesn't necessarily engage our hearts. That's why we meditate on it. Puritan pastor Richard Baxter said that.

"meditation is distinguished from the study of the Word, wherein our principal aim is to learn the truth; and also from prayer, whereof God Himself is the immediate object. But meditation is the affecting of our own hearts and minds with love, delight and humility toward the things contained [in the Wordl."

Meditation is relational. When our approach to God's word is to allow it to slowly and intentionally envelop our hearts and minds, that is worship.

Meditation is a practice that demonstrates the infinite worth of what God has said, and leads to a greater awe of and love for him. As we know his word more, we know him more. As we know him more, we love him more. As we love him more, we will be more conformed to the

image of Jesus. That nurturing of our relationship with God is worship.

ALIGNING OUR HEARTS WITH HIS

Meditation is a beautiful way to warm and affect our hearts. before we speak with the Lord - as Keller called it, the bridge to prayer. If you're like me, there are times when prayer feels scattered and distracted. There are times when it feels like a venting session where I'm speaking to no one in particular rather than opening my heart to Christ. While prayer can (and should) happen at any time and any place, when we spend time meditating on God's word and affecting our hearts with love and delight, as Baxter says, then we are primed to come to the Lord in prayer. We are quicker to offer praise, quicker to confess our sin and need, quicker to give thanks to him, quicker to seek his grace to grow in obedience.

Speaking with the Lord to offer praise, thanks, confession, and devotion is surely worship.

Think about how these practices affect corporate worship. When we practice biblical meditation and prayer, our hearts are filled with the truth of God and love for God. Then when we gather with others who have spent their week doing the same, we are collectively ready to pour out our praise and seek his face with renewed energy. When we worship God the other six days, Sunday morning becomes much richer. Personal worship and corporate work in synergy, feeding each other. One worship leader put it this way:

"Worship scattered and worship gathered go hand in hand, shaping and informing one another in the life of the worshiper. One without the other will inevitably be weakened."

Do you find Sunday morning dry? Drink deeply of God Monday through Saturday; over time, you'll find Sunday morning to be a joyfully refreshing response to him. #

Free Tax Preparation Services

Feb 1 - Apr 13 (Mondays - Thursdays) 8:30am - 2:15pm • Iowa City Senior Center

Free tax preparation services will be offered by appointment at the Iowa City Senior Center (22 S Linn St) thru April. Low to moderate income taxpayers of any age, especially those age 50 and over, can receive this free service, provided by trained volunteers through a partnership with the AARP Foundation.

Three (3) counselors will be available by appointment on Mondays - Thursdays from 8:30am - 2:15pm.

Visit icgov.org/senior or call (319) 356-5220 to learn more or schedule an intake appointment.

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide provides in-person assistance to anyone, free of charge, with a special focus on taxpayers who are over 50 or have low to moderate income. Tax-Aide volunteers are located nationwide, and are trained and IRS-certified every year to make sure they know about and understand the latest changes and additions to the tax code.



By Scott Heemstra

Scott and Paige Heemstra serve as the Program Leads for Local and Campus Outreach on the Global Outreach Taskforce. They also are the Directors of the University of Iowa Navigators and serve as Grace Community Church College Ministry Coordinators.

"I feel like such a failure." John* told me as we were talking about reaching our friends for Christ. Do you relate? Do you ever feel like a failure in reaching out to others?

*Name changed for privacy.

When I asked him why, he told me he wasn't doing enough because he hadn't led anyone to Christ. John was a senior accounting student at the University of Iowa. As he shared with me about feeling like a failure, I asked questions and learned that he spent most of his time with a fellow

classmate who was a non-believer. They had class together, saw each other almost daily, and would often study, eat, and watch sports together. John was praying for his friend frequently and even gave him a ride to the airport. One day, John and his friend were studying, and John realized he hadn't spent time reading the Bible that day. So he paused studying, pulled out his Bible, read it, and then went back to studying. His friend then asked him, "Why do you read the Bible?" John was able to share with him his reason and the gospel.

CALLED TO BE A FAITHFUL SERVANT

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 about his time with the Thessalonians and he says "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." Paul loved the Thessalonians so much he not only shared the gospel of God with them, but also his life. God doesn't promise us specific fruit as we reach out to others, but he asks his people to be faithful.

This is what John was doing. He wasn't a failure. Although John felt like a failure because he hadn't led anyone to Christ, he was a faithful witness, trusting God in his everyday rhythms of life as he cared deeply about his friend. John loved others and lived out 1 Thessalonians 2:8 by sharing his life and the gospel.

Here at Grace, we know we aren't perfect and won't always see the results we want, but we are trusting God to be his witnesses as we faithfully B.L.E.S.S. others and share our lives and the gospel in our everyday rhythms by Beginning with prayer, Listening, Eating, Serving, and Sharing the gospel to those around us.



WHO CAN YOU B.L.E.S.S.?

Local outreach begins by sharing your life and gospel right where you are. A simple next step is to cross the street, the yard, the hallway, or the cubicle to intentionally B.L.E.S.S. others. Over the next week, try to B.L.E.S.S. someone by sharing your life and the gospel right where you are.

We have a unique opportunity here at Grace to impact thousands of college students at the University of Iowa. We partner with staff from the Navigators, Athletes in Action, and International Intervarsity in order to see college students reached with the gospel. God is at work on the University of lowa campus in the lives of students and through our campus ministry partners. In the Navigators over the last 3 semesters, we have seen 30 students pray to receive Jesus and have trained dozens of students to share their faith. Athletes in Action is relaunching a coaches/administrators Bible study and are challenging 25 athletes to a 10-week training to equip them to share their faith and disciple others. Through International Intervarsity, 110 international students have been welcomed and blessed through monthly events and 43 international students experienced a Thanksgiving meal in an American home while hearing about the true meaning of Thanksgiving and why people of faith give thanks.

In order to B.L.E.S.S. and better connect with college students, Grace North Liberty will begin hosting a monthly college lunch for students during the school year on the first Sunday of the month after the 2nd service. If you are a college student, come and enjoy free food! If you are not a college student and are interested in sharing your life and the gospel with college students, consider connecting with one of our campus ministry partner organizations or serving with the monthly college lunch team. Contact Scott Heemstra for more information on serving with college students at scott.heemstra@navigators.org.#



3 WAYS TO REACH THE NATIONS



Share a meal with an international student in your home.



Can't host? Lend a helping hand by being a co-host.



Unable to host? Bring a dessert to Grace.

MARCH 25 • 7PM • GRACE NORTH LIBERTY

Gather at Grace after dinner for dessert and a special message on the true meaning of Easter.

REGISTER NOW AT GRACEB3.ORG/ISE

But I don't know any international students!

Fear not, contact Wade at wades@graceb3.org to be connected with one!

But my house is not guest-worthy!

Hospitality is not about having a perfect house but about opening the door to your heart.

But I'm too busy to host! I'm out of town!

Fear not, you can still participate by bringing a dessert to the event.

SERMON NOTES		DATE:	
MAIN IDEA:	NOTES:		

