

**40**  
**YEARS**  
— OF —  
**FAITHFULNESS**

**HAPPY  
BIRTHDAY!**

Shepherd of the Valley has been in existence for 40 years. That means we have experienced 40 years of God's faithfulness toward this congregation.

We thought it would be helpful to look back at some of the basic lessons God has taught us along the way that will be helpful for us to hang onto for the next 40 years. That is what this Bible study is about. Each of the lessons will be used as the sermon text for the next few weekends.

We hope you will enjoy this study as much as we enjoyed preparing it for you.

Steve and Julie Kramer

# 40 YEARS OF FAITHFULNESS

# STUDY SCHEDULE

Sermon Date	Lesson Preached	Small Group Meeting Dates	Lesson Discussed*
October 28/29	The Message Matters	October 29 – November 4	Lesson 1
November 4/5	How I Say I Love You	November 5 - 11	Lesson 2
November 11/12	The Importance of Daring Faith	November 12 - 18	Lesson 3
November 18/19	The Importance of One Another	November 19 - 25	Lesson 4
November 25/26	The Way the Church has Fun	November 26 –December 2	Lesson 5
December 2/3	The Best is Yet to Come	December 3 - 10	Lesson 6

\*Small group lesson discussion will follow the sermon on that lesson.

## Resources

1. **Study Guide:** Use the study guide to prepare the lesson before your small group meeting.
2. **Scripture notes** related to the Bible text studied in the lesson.

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# LESSON 1

## THE MESSAGE MATTERS

**TEXT:** Romans 1:1-17

People are hungry for good news. We certainly hear enough of the other. Did you know that there are web-based news outlets that only deliver good news? They include Sunny Skyz, Happy News, Optimist World, and Good News Network to name a few. Here are some titles of articles from those websites.

“San Diego Hits Goal of Helping 1,000 Homeless Veterans Find Housing”

“Gabby Giffords Climbs the French Alps”

“Cub Fans Help Elderly Man with Cancer Enjoy Playoff Game”

“Mother’s Forgiveness Gives Convict Second Chance”

You see, the message matters, and people long for good news. Over the years, God has faithfully led Shepherd, showing us that the message matters. A church can do all the right programming and work with the latest trends in worship styles, but if the message is not based on Biblical truth and the gospel is absent, the church’s spiritual health will suffer.

**ICEBREAKER:** What is the best news you have heard this week?

### INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul knew from his experience with various congregations he had started that the message matters. Many of his letters in the New Testament are letters seeking to get congregations back on the right track. At one point in his ministry, he decided to visit a congregation he hadn’t started. It was in Rome. Before going, he wrote a letter of introduction. We find this letter in our New Testament. The purpose of the letter was to let them know he was coming to share the Gospel. Paul wanted to make sure they had the message right. He had good news!

- 1 In introducing himself to the Romans (v. 1-5), how does Paul describe himself?
- 2 He refers to preaching the gospel, which means “good news.” What would you tell someone who asks, “What is this good news?”
- 3 Paul points out that he “is not ashamed of the gospel.” Why would someone be ashamed? (Look at II Timothy 1:11-14; 4:2-4.) What makes you sometimes reluctant to share the gospel with someone outside the church?

- 4 What are some ways the gospel can get “watered down?” Why?
  
- 5 What power does the good news of Jesus have, according to Paul? How has the good news impacted your life? When have you seen that gospel power make a difference in someone’s life?
  
- 6 Salvation means “wholeness.” What kind of wholeness has the gospel given you in life?
  
- 7 What do you suppose Paul means when he says that the gospel reveals “the righteousness of God through faith for faith?”
  
- 8 What are the important things you look for when searching for a church to join?
  
- 9 The sermon theme this week is, “The Message Matters.” From your observations, what message has been the emphasis at Shepherd for 40 years?
  
- 10 What are some practical ways we can keep the gospel at the center of everything we do as a church?
  
- 11 Someone says to you, “I wish our church would spend more time talking about politics and how to raise kids better.” Respond.

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## LESSON 2

### HOW TO SAY "I LOVE YOU"

**TEXT:** 2 Corinthians 8:1-11

A marriage proposal is a big event in the life of a couple. Some people go to great lengths to come up with a proposal that will convince a loved one of their devotion. Read this true story about Sarah and her boyfriend, Chad, who lived on the other side of the country.

On June 23 of this year, I got a fortune at a Chinese restaurant that said, "Remember three months from this day! Your lucky star is shining." I don't believe in luck, but I thought it was cute, so I sent Chad a picture of it. Being the planner that he is, that set into motion his entire proposal plan. He determined that three months from that date, September 23, was a Saturday, so he decided that would be the perfect date to propose. Soon after, he booked flights and bought a ring, completely unbeknownst to me. As the date approached, he told me to set aside that afternoon/evening for a birthday scavenger hunt. This didn't seem out of the ordinary for me, as it is totally something he would plan for my birthday. His scavenger hunt, using an app called Goose Chase, sent me around the Quad Cities to different places we had been together. The final stop was Vander Veer Park in Davenport. When I got to the spot I was told to go, I saw a video camera set up in front of a bench with a present and a vase of roses. The present was a book about our love story that he had made himself. As I was reading it, music was playing. The music eventually turned to "Marry Me," by Train. Chad walked around the corner from behind a bush and in that moment, I was fairly certain what was about to happen. And sure enough, he did eventually pop the question! The planning and level of thoughtfulness he put into the whole plan blew me away, and really reflects who he is as a person. I am beyond blessed that God placed Chad in my life and has given me the opportunity to marry him.

Wow! Now that's a proposal. There is no doubt that Chad loves Sarah. He went to great lengths to show her that.

How do we as Christians show our love for Jesus? Do we give to him with that kind of unbridled joy and enthusiasm?

**ICEBREAKER:** Describe one of the most enjoyable giving experiences you've ever had.

#### INTRODUCTION

This letter to the Corinthian Christians is Paul's attempt to mend fences with them after their relationship with him was put in jeopardy by an exchange of harsh words. They had questioned his authority and he responded emotionally to their criticisms. Tears were shed on both sides. The first chapters of this letter are an attempt to reestablish his credibility with them, reaffirm his sincere love for the congregation, and relay his confidence in their faith and ministry. In chapters 8 and 9, Paul moves into the subject of giving to the collection for the poor in the Jerusalem church and Judea. There had been a famine. Earlier on, the Corinthians had committed to participate, but so far, there had been no action on their part. He now invites them to join the other churches that are participating in this mission offering. Over the centuries, these two chapters have been foundational in the Christian church for addressing the subject of giving. One of the main things we learn from Paul is that giving is an expression of love for Christ.

Shepherd's summary statement on giving has been: "We give out of love to Christ in the area of our faith." It is based upon 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We are saying three things in this statement. Our giving is a gift of love, it is a gift to Christ, and we give in faith, trusting God.

- 1 What do you learn about the Macedonian Christians in this passage?
  
- 2 What words does Paul use to describe their attitude about giving to the collection for the Jerusalem church? What images come to mind as you hear Paul describing them?
  
- 3 What is the story behind the Macedonian's generous giving? (v. 1,5)?
  
- 4 Paul points out to the Corinthians, since there are so many things in which they excel, why not add generosity to their list of strengths (v. 7). In thinking of your Christian life, where do you excel? In what areas do you think Shepherd excels?
  
- 5 Paul says he is not commanding them in this appeal, but testing the genuineness of their love for Jesus. We talk about trusting Jesus, but what does it mean to "love" Jesus and what might it entail?
  
- 6 It has been said that you can test the quality of a person's faith by reading the stubs of their old checkbooks. Would you agree with that? Why or why not?
  
- 7 Paul points to Jesus as the ultimate giver (v. 9). How did Jesus give? What does Paul mean when he states that Jesus become poor?
  
- 8 Describe the ways your relationship with Christ has made you rich?
  
- 9 Paul is asking them to give to a mission. List as many missions as you can think of that Shepherd financially supports. What missions does Shepherd financially support that you're excited about?
  
- 10 What did you learn from your parents about giving?
  
- 11 In your home, how do you determine how much of your income you are going to invest in giving to Christ?

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# LESSON 3

## IMPORTANCE OF DARING FAITH

**TEXT:** **Matthew 14:22-33**

It's not the critic who counts; not the person who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena...who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of great achievement and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. So that his place will never be with those cold timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

- Theodore Roosevelt

**ICEBREAKER:** Share with the group one of the riskiest things you have ever done.

### INTRODUCTION

To be a disciple of Jesus means we're always learning. The disciples have been with Jesus for quite some time. They have seen him do miraculous things and show his authority over all kinds of powers such as demons, nature, sickness, and even death. In this episode, we find them in the midst of a sea storm without Jesus in the boat. Jesus that day had fed 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes and now he is up on the mountain praying while they're crossing the sea of Galilee. A storm suddenly comes up and they're trying hard to keep afloat. Jesus shocks them by walking to them on the water. Peter jumps out of the boat to go to Jesus. He soon sinks. Jesus saves him. The storm stops. In all of this, they learn some important things. One lesson was if you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat.

Shepherd has experienced that lesson along the way as God has called us to get out of the boat in daring faith to take on a number of new ministry opportunities, as well as a relocation and a number of building programs. God has been faithful each time.

- 1 Matthew says that Jesus immediately "made" the disciples get into the boat while he dismissed the crowds and stayed behind to pray. Why do you suppose he did that?
- 2 Have you ever had a time where you sensed God had put you into a situation for a reason?
- 3 Why would the disciples think Jesus was a ghost when he came to them?



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# LESSON 4

## IMPORTANCE OF ONE ANOTHER

**TEXT:** Acts 2:42-47

The huge redwood trees in California are amazing. They are the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are 300 feet high and more than 2,500 years old. You would think that trees that large would have a tremendous root system, reaching down hundreds of feet into the earth. But that is not the case. Redwoods have a very shallow root system. The roots of these trees are, however, intertwined. They are tied in with each other: interlocked.

With an interlocking root system, they support and sustain each other. They need one another to survive. So do we!

Hence, God has given us His Church which is the body of Christ on earth. When one is baptized into Christ, one is baptized into the body of Christ. Through Christ we are bound together in a community of faith. Belonging to Christ we belong to each other. Fellowship with Christ means fellowship with each other. Through Christ, God has made us a family, a community of faith. This is our God-given support system. As such, it is intended to meet some crucial needs in our lives.

**ICEBREAKER:** What do you like most about your church?

### INTRODUCTION

It is the evening of Pentecost. Peter has preached the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and 3,000 people from various nations have repented and been baptized for the forgiveness of sins. The disciples of Jesus must have wondered, "What now? What will be the next step for these new followers who are the church of Jesus Christ?" Our text for today tells us what those disciples did. Their story gives us the basics of building a strong, healthy church.

- 1 What three things did these new converts devote themselves to?
- 2 What word best describes the atmosphere in this passage?
- 3 Who did they submit to according to verse 42? What authority do we submit to as today's church?

- 4 The Bible says they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. What does that look like today?
- 5 Define "fellowship." What images come to mind when you think of that word?
- 6 What does fellowship look like in this passage?
- 7 Where do you suppose the early church got the idea that being together and taking care of one another was important? Look at John 13:34-35.
- 8 Describe their worship life.
- 9 Verse 47 says they grew. What made the early church so appealing to others?
- 10 What are some of the obstacles that keep Christians from having an experience like this in their faith journey?
- 11 From personal experience, what would you say is the value of belonging and participating in the church community?

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# LESSON 5

## HOW THE CHURCH HAS FUN

**TEXT:** **Matthew 5:13-16**

The famous writer, Robert Louis Stevenson, who was very ill as a child, recorded a childhood incident in his diary. He was sitting by a window at nightfall, watching a lamplighter light the streets below. His nurse came into the room and asked him what he was doing. "I'm watching a man make holes in the darkness," he replied.

This world needs lamp-lighting individuals and communities who will punch holes in the darkness. In fact, that is a good description of the church's mission. Shepherd of the Valley has done a lot of "hole punching" during our 40 years. We have discovered the joy of touching peoples' lives in the name of Jesus through acts of service and displaying Christ's love. It is not always easy to serve and witness in the community around us, but it is exciting, and more often than not, it's fun. People and organizations always have more fun when they are doing what they are created to do.

**ICEBREAKER:** Sing "This Little Light of Mine" as a group.

### INTRODUCTION

Where did we get the idea of shining our light for Jesus in the darkness of the world? From Jesus! In his Sermon on the Mount, he is describing the values of his Kingdom and what our ultimate purpose is as his people – to attract others to worship and serve God.

- 1 Jesus tells us that as his followers, we are the light of the world. Make a list of the positive things light does for us.
- 2 How does it make you feel to have "the light of the world" call you "the light of the world?"
- 3 What kind of darkness is there in the world today? Give examples.
- 4 When Jesus calls us light, he is basically calling us to be different from the world around us. Light stands out. It gets attention. It is different from darkness. What does being different look like?

- 5 What can be challenging about being Christ's light in the darkness? See John 3:19-21.
  
- 6 Jesus says being light for him means doing good works. What does Jesus mean by good works?
  
- 7 What is the ultimate purpose of these good works?
  
- 8 What are some of the good works that you have done in Christ's name that have made a difference in someone else's life and been fun for you?
  
- 9 The "you" in you are the light of the world is plural. He is talking to a group, his disciples. What are some ways the community of faith can be a light in the darkness, a city on a hill?
  
- 10 What fun mission do you sense God is calling you, your group, or our church to now in this area? Nationally? Globally? Discuss and take a next step toward Kingdom building fun!

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# LESSON 6

## THE BEST IS YET TO COME

**TEXT:** **Philippians 1:1-11**

A behavioral scientist conducted an experiment on optimism and pessimism. He recruited two boys for his experiment. The first boy was a real pessimistic kid. The scientist placed him in a room with all kinds of toys, video games, candy, and all the things kids love. He told him, "all this is yours to enjoy, I'll be back in a couple hours to check on you." When the scientist returned he was surprised to find the little guy just sitting there looking forlorn. Not a single thing had been touched. "Why didn't you play with the games?" the researcher asked. "Oh, I'd probably break them." The scientist asked, "What about the candy, surely you must like candy?" "Yes, but I'd probably eat too much and get sick on it." When asked about the toys, the boy shrugged his shoulders and said, "They didn't look that fun to play with." Quite a pessimist!

The other boy was known to be a raving optimist. The scientist placed him in a room full of manure and told him, "All this is yours to enjoy. I'll be back to check on you in a couple hours." When the researcher returned he was amazed to find the kid gleefully digging in the manure and whistling. "What in the world are you doing?" the scientist asked. The boy looked up with a big grin and said, "I figure with all this manure there's got to be a pony in here somewhere!" The optimist!

What do you consider yourself? We find Paul playing the optimist about the future in the passage for today. But it wasn't an optimism based upon wishful thinking. It was based upon the greatness and faithfulness of God.

**ICEBREAKER:** Who was the Apostle Paul in your life who introduced you to Jesus Christ and cared about your spiritual growth?

### INTRODUCTION

You can tell early on that Paul had a special fondness for this Philippian congregation. He started the congregation on one of his missionary journeys. They had been very supportive of his missionary work and Paul describes them elsewhere (II Corinthians 8,9) as a model congregation when it came to generous giving to the cause of Christ. As he writes to them in this opening passage, he tells them that he is confident about their future as a church. The best years lay ahead of them.

- 1** Paul begins his letter by identifying the Philippian Christians as "saints in Christ Jesus." What does it mean to be "saints?"
- 2** What words would you use to describe Paul's feeling towards the Philippians (v. 5,7,8)? What is behind Paul's positive vibes? What words would best describe your feelings towards your church? Explain.

- 3 What kind of a future does Paul envision for them (v. 6)?
  
- 4 What good work had God begun in them?
  
- 5 In what ways do you see God at work in our congregation? In your own life?
  
- 6 Where does Paul's confidence come from as he makes this prediction?
  
- 7 Read Paul's prayer in v. 9-11. List the things which Paul asks God to grant them. What do each of those things mean?
  
- 8 Paul is sounding like a spiritual cheerleader for the Philippian congregation in this section of his letter. Who would you say has been a spiritual cheerleader in your life in the past years?
  
- 9 Our pastor has often said, "Shepherd's best years lie ahead." Do you believe that? Explain.

## SUMMARY THOUGHTS

As Paul lays out his vision for the Philippian church in his prayer, we know he does so confident that their future is in God's hands (v. 6). Even so, God is at work in Shepherd of the Valley. The future is bright. What do you envision for our congregation? How can we move boldly toward that vision?