



## **God's story....Our Story**

***Weaving our lives into the life of God ~ Weaving God's life into ours***

### **5 simple steps to 'doing devotions' at your meeting**

1. Pick a devotion from those provided here.
2. Become familiar with the Bible passage.
3. Read through the suggestions, and answer the questions for yourself, so you can lead others through the process.
4. Take a deep breath; pray for God's guidance.
5. Don't hurry. Plan to take about 10 -15 minutes.

#### **NOTE:**

Because God's story IS our story, it's important that we use every occasion possible to hear it, talk about it and work it into the work we do and the lives we lead.

These are not intended to be Bible studies, but brief opportunities to connect scripture with our own lives in simple, non-threatening ways.

No forced sharing. If someone is uncomfortable, let them pass. But do encourage those who want to talk. We learn from each other's lives!

Keep the conversation moving; don't get pulled into extraneous conversations.

Remember to make your question simple and to the point. When one person seems to be done, say "thank you" and then, "anyone else?"

Claim your role, whether as the group leader, or the designated "devotion giver" boldly. You don't have to know more than you already know, or do more than you already can!

These devotions will continue to be available on Immanuel's website. More will be added as we move forward.

## **Galatians 5: 19 – 26 Fruits of the Spirit**

Read the passage out loud, slowly. It's best if you use an actual Bible. Emphasize the 9 fruits described – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Read the passage twice if you think you should. Review the nine fruits when you're done reading.

Talk briefly about how the Spirit lives within us, and that “bearing fruit” is the natural result of living according to God's direction. Encourage them to think about how they bearing fruit every day – the really are!

Ask each to name a small (or big) way that they see these fruits in their everyday lives. Tell them they're not bragging, but giving glory to God! (Examples I've heard include patience with a special needs child, self-control in not returning sarcasm for sarcasm.)

If they really are shy, you could ask them to share how and when others are bearing fruit.

After each person who is willing has shared, just say thank you. Try to avoid extraneous conversations!

Close with this prayer – or one with your own words:

*Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of your Spirit in each of us, and for using us to bear fruit for your kingdom. Help us to continue to stay close to you, to listen and to respond to your direction in all that we do. May all that is done and said at this meeting bring glory to you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

## **Luke 4: 14 – 24 Jesus' Sermon at Nazareth**

Read the passage out loud, slowly. It's best if you use an actual Bible. Emphasize the actions - the “signs” - that Jesus says God is doing through him: bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Note also verse 21 where Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of this prophecy. Read the passage twice if you think it good.

Talk briefly about how Jesus is in his hometown, delivering his first sermon there. Think about the “signs” he offers of what God is and will be doing through him. Remember that these signs characterized Jesus' earthly ministry. Note that these “signs” still serve as evidence of God's work in the world.

Ask the group to think of specific places in the community, the nation, or the world where good news is being proclaimed to the poor, release to the captives, etc. (For example: the removal of the Confederate flag, Doctors with Borders, Immanuel's feeding programs, etc.)

Close with this prayer – or one with your own words:

*Holy God, what joy it is for us to continue to see your Spirit at work in the world and in our lives. Help us to watch for and celebrate all the places this Good News breaks through, and give us courage and grace to let your Spirit shine in our own lives. May all that done and said at this meeting bring glory to you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

## **Exodus 1: 8 – 22 Subversive Midwives**

Read the passage out loud, slowly. It's best if you use an actual Bible. Verses 16 – 19 describe the actions of Shiphrah and Puah. Read it twice if you think you should. This story takes place hundreds of years after Genesis. Exodus is the book about God leading God's people out of Egypt.

Talk briefly about the oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians, and the threat of the Israelites becoming "too many". Think together about what it might have meant if the midwives had obeyed Pharaoh. Wonder together about the unlikelihood of these two women being heroes of the nation. (Have you heard of them? I hope so!)

Ask the group to consider where there are "subversives" at work in God's name, in the world today. Or where unlikely people are behaving heroically. What risks are being taken for the sake of the small and innocent? Refer to a newspaper or newsmagazine if you can't think of any.

Close with this prayer – or one with your own words.

*God, the deliverer of the innocent, thank you for the examples of Shiphrah and Puah, for their courage on behalf of the babies and the future of their nation. Help us to honor those unheralded heroines among us, and to be as bold as they were. May all that done and said at this meeting bring glory to you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

## **Exodus 32:1 -14 The Golden Calf**

Read the passage out loud, slowly. It's best if you use an actual Bible. For context, note that the Israelites are wandering the desert and Moses has been "absent" – up on the mountain, alone with God – for some time. Aaron was Moses' nephew and second-in-command. Read it twice if necessary.

Talk about what might have tempted the Israelites to be unfaithful (Moses was gone, they were used to 'other gods', gods you could see, peer pressure...). Talk about what kind of leader Aaron turned out to be.

Ask what God planned according to verse 9-10. Note how Moses talks God out of destroying the people. What reasoning does he use? Does this shock/surprise you?

Ask what "idols" do people worship today? Why are we so tempted? Encourage, but don't force, everyone to participate. If you need help getting started, here are some examples: power, wealth, popularity, etc.

Close with prayer – this one, or one of your own words.

*Holy God, in our busy lives, we are aware of the many temptations that draw us away from you. Be with us and in us, so that we might be strong enough to resist, and to always put you first in our lives. May everything that we do and say in this meeting bring glory to you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

## **John 15: 1 – 9 Abide with Me**

Read the passage out loud, slowly. If possible, read from an actual Bible. Read it twice if necessary for comprehension. This chapter is part of Jesus' teaching time with his disciples, just before he goes to the cross. "Abide" is a word that means "to remain, to stay, to dwell with."

Talk about the image of the vine and the branches. Sketch a picture if you like. Think together about how lifeless the branches become once they become disconnected from the vine. Think about how life flows through the vine and into the branch. Give examples from the garden!

Ask people how they "abide" in Christ. Or how others they know do so. What works to keep the connection strong? (Examples: worship, prayer, etc.) Encourage a wide variety of personal responses, since this is a good way to encourage one another.

Ask if they ever feel disconnected from Jesus, the vine. What's that like? How do they reestablish connection?

Close with prayer – or by singing all or part of "Abide with Me" ELW #629

*Dear Jesus, thank you for inviting us to abide in you, so that we can be fully alive and bear fruit in your name. Draw us ever closer to you, especially when life gets so busy. Show us what we need to do to feel your nearness and to rest securely in your presence. Bless this meeting with your Spirit, and lead us in the way you would have us go. Amen.*

## **Mark 10: 46 – 52 The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus**

Read the passage out loud, slowly. Read it twice if you want. If possible, read from an actual Bible, not just a printout. This story comes towards the end of Jesus' earthly ministry in Mark's gospel.

Talk For this story, it's really helpful if you can encourage people to "put themselves" into the scene. Imagine the road and the crowd. Imagine you are Bartimaeus and what it's like to sit begging alongside the road, day after day. Pretend it's you that Jesus invites to come closer. Hear his question: *what do you want me to do for you?* Be silent for a few minutes while you contemplate your answer.

Ask people to reply to Jesus' question. At first, you are likely to get pretty superficial answers. After once around, invite them to a deeper answer, without pushing them into uncomfortable territory. Gather these answers and repeat them in summary.

Close in prayer. Use your words or this prayer:

*Healing God, we give you thanks for the power you gave Jesus to heal and restore people to wholeness. We pray for all our own needs and the places we need our vision restored, and we ask for all those who are suffering in our homes, our communities and our world. Pour your power now on this gathering, lead us in the way you would have us go. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## **Deuteronomy 31: 1 – 8 Moses Passes his Authority to Joshua**

Read the passage out loud slowly. It's best to read from an actual Bible. This story happens just at the end of the 40 years in the wilderness and before the Israelites go into the Promised Land. God has told Moses that he, Moses, will not be going with them into the new land, but that Joshua will now take over leadership. Pay attention to the words Moses says to Joshua.

Talk briefly about how Joshua might have felt about taking over from Moses. Would he have been eager? Intimidated? What might have Moses' encouraging words have meant to him?

Ask people to tell about someone who has encouraged them? What did they say? What was helpful? What difference did it make for them? If time, then ask them to tell about someone they have or are currently encouraging.

Close with prayer. Use these words or your own.

*Thank you, Lord, for the gift of encouragement, for those who have encouraged us and the opportunity to encourage others. Keep us mindful of our need for good words from one another. May we tend carefully to your Spirit tonight, so that all that we do and say may glorify you. Amen*

## **John 14: 25 – 27 The Peace of Christ**

Read the passage through, one or twice. It's good to read out of an actual Bible. The context of this passage is the long teaching and prayer that Jesus has with his disciples before he goes to the cross.

Talk briefly about the original setting of this passage: Jesus is "leaving" them. Perhaps the disciples are confused? Worried? How might they have heard Jesus' words?

Ask people to tell about a place, time or circumstance when they have experienced the peace of Christ. How is this peace different from "the peace the world gives"?

Close with a few moments (30 – 60 seconds) of silence to reflect on the peace of God that is available to us. Then offer this prayer or one with your own words:

*Holy Jesus, you are source of true peace. Forgive when we seek that peace elsewhere. Draw us closer so that we may know the benefits of your Spirit within us and reject fear and worry. Speak to each of us now and unite our hearts as we do the work you have given us to do. Amen.*