Everyday Sayings

A Small Group Bible Study
Faith & Fellowship
Holy Trinity
Greek Orthodox Church
San Francisco
Fall 2023
It is neither unfair nor hyperbolic to describe American culture in 2023 as “post-Biblical.” It has long been recognized that western culture is decidedly post-Christian; as such, we have now reached the point in the Anglosphere wherein it is no longer commonplace to read Scripture regularly, allowing our lives to be shaped by its contents. A consequence of this biblical illiteracy is our ignorance of the contribution that the very words of the Bible have made to everyday spoken English. How many people recognize that when they say that someone “escaped by the skin of his teeth,” lament that “a leopard cannot change its spots,” or describe someone as being “as old as Methuselah,” they are quoting scripture!

This lack of understanding of the biblical origins of many English colloquialisms forms the impetus for this small-group Bible study. Each lesson of *Everyday Sayings* explores the origins, context, and application of an English idiom whose roots are found in Scripture, so that we might not only “learn our Bible better,” but, more importantly take to heart these words of the Bible.

Each lesson begins with a warm-up exercise intended both to bring the members of the small group closer together and to get them to be a little less “left-brained” in their study of the Bible. There will be a tendency to want to dwell on the warm-up. Be disciplined and move on after the allotted time, even if everyone has not had the opportunity to share all of his or her answers.

The next section of the lesson focuses on the Scriptural basis and context of the saying that is being studied. The groups should spend time together looking over this material.

The lesson itself consists of a series of questions designed to provide a springboard for group discussion. This is the main part of the lesson. The goal is not to simply “answer questions;” rather, groups are encouraged to discuss these questions with a degree of depth.

This curriculum is written for the fall 2023 semester of Holy Trinity’s Faith & Fellowship ministry, and you will find that each of the ten lessons corresponds to a particular date. At the same time, these lessons could easily be applied to any small group setting and can be studied out of order or treated as stand alone lessons.

May the Holy Trinity bless and guide all of us as we embark upon this study of *Everyday Sayings.*

Father Aris P. Metrakos  
San Francisco  
May 19, 2023
PRAYER BEFORE STUDY

Illumine our hearts, loving Master, with the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed Commandments, so that having conquered sinful desires we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to you. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we send up glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your All-Holy, Good, and Lifegiving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

PRAYER AFTER STUDY

Christ our God, You are the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. You have completed the divine plan of the Father. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.
Warm Up: I’m Just a Kid!* (12 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the following questions. When they have finished, go around the group and share your answers.

You are 11 years old. Who are you? What do you like to do? If the group could meet you as an 11-year-old-kid, what would you be like?

1. It’s your 11th birthday! What kind of birthday cake are you having? You blow out the candles easily. What did you wish for? What is your dream present?

2. Your parents or guardians are returning home from work. What do they do? What do you want to be when you grow up?

3. Today is a staff planning day at school and there are no classes. What are you going to do? Who do you want to do it with?

4. Who is your best friend? What is this person like? What do you like most about your best friend?

5. The recess bell has rung! What are you going to do?

6. Summer is here! Where is your family going on vacation? Are you getting there by car? What’s it like in the car? Where are you going? What’s your favorite thing about this place?

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely
Definition (2 minutes)

Young and inexperienced persons often can be remarkably wise, as in, “She's only six but she said, quite rightly, that Harry was afraid of the sitter – out of the mouths of babes,” Mother said. *

Scriptural Basis (8 minutes)

Most of us associate this expression with Jesus in Matthew 21:

6 So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. 8 And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

“Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’

Hosanna in the highest!”

10 And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, “Who is this?”

11 So the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.”

12 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

14 Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant 16 and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read,

‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have perfected praise’?”

17 Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.

But Jesus was quoting Psalm 8:

O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent is Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

*Dictionary.com
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scriptural Context (3 minutes)</th>
<th>The Bible Project provides a nice summary of Psalm 8:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After completing His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus proceeds to the Temple where He overturns the moneychangers’ tables. The people acclaim Him. The blind and lame are healed by Him. The chief priests and scribes are afraid of Him. It is within this context of division that Jesus quotes Psalm 8.</td>
<td>This Hebrew poem is all about God's majestic power in creating and ordering the cosmos. But despite his incredible power, he chooses to rule the world with his partners—lowly humans, or as they're called in the poem, babbling babies.</td>
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Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. Why could children see Jesus for who He was while the chief priests and scribes were indignant? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   
   A. They had not been jaded by years of adult living.
   B. They had no power to lose because of the ministry of Jesus.
   C. Childlike persons can see Jesus more clearly.
   D. The children were not involved in the money-changing.

2. “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou perfected praise, because of thine enemies; that though mightiest put down the enemy and avenger.” Who are the most dangerous enemies of God? (Choose one and explain your answer.)

   A. The evil one.
   B. Persons who deny the existence or power of God.
   D. Persons who persecute Christians and the Church.

3. What does perfected praise most look like? (Choose one and explain your answer.)

   A. It is free of ego.
   B. It is joyful.
   C. It places our hope in God.
   D. It is a response to having experienced God’s grace.

4. What is the chief reason that the praise of babes and sucklings is so powerful? (Choose one and explain your answer.)

   A. Children are meek and they implicitly know that power comes from faith in God.
   B. Childlike praise has a certain purity about it.
   C. It expects nothing in return.
   D. It is not pretentious.
5. What is the main reason that being childlike puts down the enemy and avenger? (*Choose one and explain your answer.*)
   A. Meekness allows the power of Christ to shine forth.
   B. Being childlike makes us a smaller target for people who want to attack or seek revenge.
   C. It takes us from wanting to win arguments by rational reasoning to winning over people by loving them.
   D. It makes it harder for guile to get the better of us.

6. The money changers were very distracted with the conduct of “necessary” transactions that supported the Temple. The chief priests and scribes were distracted by the status quo. The children were not distracted and could see Jesus for who He was. What distraction most gets in the way of our church life? (*Choose one and explain your answer.*)
   A. Being busy with Parish duties.
   B. Wondering about what to wear to church.
   C. Helping to plan or execute an event.
   D. Being so focused on fasting that we forget why we fast.

7. Speaking of distractions, what most takes your focus away from your salvation? (*Choose one and explain your answer.*)
   A. Worries that predominate our thoughts.
   B. My “adult” responsibilities.
   C. Focusing on doing the “stuff” that Christians are supposed to do, rather than opening up my heart to God.
   D. Wanting to recover an idealized notion of the “good old days of the church.”

8. Some would say that the babes and sucklings admonition reminds us that persons who are new to an organization should be listened to because they are less biased, not having become part of “the system.” This notion is: (*Choose one and explain your answer.*)
   A. Ridiculous, because you can’t criticize an organization until you know its rules and rituals.
   B. Worthy of consideration.
   C. Could lead to anarchy if unchecked.
   D. Demonstrates great naivete about the way the world works.
**Warm Up: I An Somebody Who*** (15 minutes)**

Look over this list and mark five things which describe you. When everyone is finished, put your booklet in a stack in the middle of the group. After the booklets are piled up, take turns taking a booklet from the pile. Go around the group and take turns reading from the five things marked in your book and see if the group can guess who the booklet belongs to.

I am somebody who...

- __ blushes at a compliment
- __ enjoys a spa day
- __ sings in the shower
- __ will tell someone they have food in their teeth
- __ slurps hot drinks
- __ likes loud music
- __ likes to dance
- __ cries at movies
- __ stops to smell the flowers
- __ daydreams a lot
- __ likes thunderstorms
- __ enjoys romance novels
- __ watches a lot of HGTV
- __ hates flying
- __ goes to bed early
- __ sleeps until the last second
- __ will ask a stranger for directions
- __ lies about my age
- __ closes my eyes when watching horror movies
- __ makes a “to do” list each morning
- __ likes “stay-cations”
- __ has never had an operation
- __ likes to play practical jokes
- __ eats dessert first
- __ yells at the TV when watching sports
- __ hates crowds
- __ hates being late for something

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely*
**Definition (1 minutes)**

*The truth shall set you free* is used as a motto, a way of chiding someone to divulge information, and in many other ways, both serious and ironic. Many people have no idea that they are quoting Jesus!

**Scriptural Basis (4 minutes)**

*This saying comes from the words of Jesus found in John 8:*

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. **32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**”

33 They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?”

34 Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. **35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.** **36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.**

**Scriptural Context (5 minutes)**

Jesus identifies Himself as “the truth.” In fact later in the gospel (14:6) Jesus tells Thomas, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

To know Jesus is to know the truth, to know Jesus is to be free of the bondage of the law. Moreover, to know Jesus is to no longer be a slave to sin — to be free from sin.

To know Jesus is to know the truth, because He is the truth and the source of truth, and by embracing that truth we are no longer slaves in bondage, but sons and daughters of God who will abide in His house forever.
1. “Truth” is found throughout the New Testament. This is because: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Faith in Christ leads to a genuine relationship with God.
   B. We are not supposed to lie.
   C. Jesus was not a magician or trickster, but the Savior come to redeem us.
   D. Being a Christian means either being “all in” and therefore true to our vocation, or only committing partially to Christ and living a lie.

2. How did knowing the truth about Jesus make those who were listening to Him free? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. They were no longer enslaved to the Law.
   B. Sin no longer has dominion over those who join themselves to Christ.
   C. Worldly cares would no longer preoccupy their thoughts.
   D. Even under Roman occupation, those who followed Jesus could know interior liberation.

3. In John 14:6, Jesus says “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” By this He means: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Truth is not just a moral concept but a way of life that results from joining yourself to Me.
   B. There are lots of people who advocate for the religion that they practice. If you want to be sure that you are headed toward the Kingdom, then follow me.
   C. Commit to me. What I’m telling you isn’t a joke or just another set of teachings.
   D. Truth and life go hand in glove. If you live a lie you are partially dead.

4. Ignoring the truth keeps us from being free. Have you ever been held captive by: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Lying to yourself about your spiritual, emotional, or physical health?
   B. Harboring the recollection of a sin and not confessing it?
   C. Living in denial that you have been ignoring your responsibilities in your relationships with others.
   D. Not acknowledging that a “bad habit” is becoming an addiction?

Group Discussion (35 minutes)
Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.
5. In John 18:37 we read the following: “Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’” This can best be applied to my life my remembering that: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Following Jesus leads to living a life filled with truth.
   B. A desire to know the truth will lead to Jesus.
   C. The choice between Truth and Falsehood is binary, just like the decision to follow the Lord.
   D. When it was difficult for me to follow Jesus, it was because I was living a life in which I was lying to myself.

6. Pilate responds to John 18:37 in verse 38: Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” By this Pilate means: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. This concept it too big for me to get my head around, so I am going to punt.
   B. I have been in politics a long time. Truth is what you make it.
   C. There are no absolute truths in this world, especially when it comes to morality.
   D. Truth is the stuff of fables and fairy tales, not real life.

7. Sounding very much like Pilate, a former head of the CIA once said publicly, “Of course, lying is morally defensible. If you were standing on a street corner and a woman ran past you with a torn dress and a panicked look on your face, and then several minutes later a crazed man with a knife ran up to you and asked, ‘Did you see a woman run past here?’, wouldn’t you lie?” This statement shows that: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Pilate was right, there are no absolute truths.
   B. It’s OK to lie if you perceive that it is for a greater good.
   C. People shouldn’t be allowed to own knives.
   D. Responding to difficult situations requires moral excellence. (What are some possible answers to the knife-holder’s question could you give, other than “yes” or “no.”)
8. “Truth” and “disclosure” are not the same thing. It is always wrong to lie (except perhaps when preparing for a surprise party), but that doesn’t mean that we have to disclose everything that is on our mind. Very often in His earthly ministry, Jesus brings people along gradually as He teaches and preaches, not disclosing everything, neither about Himself, nor the sinful condition of His listeners. What is the problem with disclosing too much in a discussion with another person? *(Choose one and explain your answer.)*

A. We could hurt their feelings.
B. They might stop listening to us because they have become emotionally overwhelmed.
C. We could come across as unloving or uncaring.
D. There is nothing wrong with this. Everyone should know everything that we are thinking or feeling at all times.
Warm Up: The Jitters* (15 minutes)

Answer the questions below individually, and then go around the group sharing your answers.

1. When I enter a room full of people I don’t know very well, I usually feel…

2. When I am feeling anxious in a new situation, I usually…

3. When I am nervous, I feel…

4. Rules make me feel…

5. I am more likely to get involved in a group when…

6. Right now I am feeling…

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely
Definition (1 minutes)

Used to say that a person wants to do something but cannot from lack of strength or energy—often used humorously:
I try to get up early and exercise, though sometimes the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*

Scriptural Basis (5 minutes)

This saying comes from Matthew 26:

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.” 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

Scriptural Context (4 minutes)

As Jesus pours out His heart in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, His three closest friends cannot keep from sleeping. Chiding Peter, James, and John for their inability to keep vigil with Him in His greatest hour of need, Jesus sighs the words that have become a well known English idiom—even the title of a Count Basie tune!

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. Why did Jesus take Peter, James, and John with Him when He went to pray? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   - A. They had been with Jesus at the Transfiguration, so Jesus knew that they could handle themselves on another excursion.
   - B. They were the disciples who were closest to Jesus.
   - C. Jesus wanted a witness to His prayer.
   - D. Jesus needed their support.

2. The disciples fell asleep because: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   - A. It was late.
   - B. They had a full stomach.
   - C. They were fundamentally weak.
   - D. They couldn’t connect the dots with regard to what would happen next.

3. The inability of the Disciples to watch and pray one hour with Jesus reminds me: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   - A. Of my own inability to focus when I pray.
   - B. That there have been times when I did not live up to the expectations that God had for me.
   - C. That temptation can be greatest when I am most tired.
   - D. That it takes work to be vigilant.

4. Just like the Disciples, my spirit it willing to follow the Lord, but my good intentions often go unfulfilled. This is because: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   - A. I haven’t cultivated a prayer discipline.
   - B. I do not do prostrations when I pray.
   - C. I do not fast with attention and fervor.
   - D. I do not regard my salvation as something that requires constant and urgent attention.
5. The fact that the Disciples slept while Jesus addresses an impassioned plea to the Father reminds me: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. That it is impossible to appreciate what Jesus experienced in His earthly ministry for my salvation.
   B. That I need to emulate the attention and vigilance of Jesus when I pray.
   C. Showing up late and irregularly to worship services is not much different than sleeping at a time when Jesus asked the Disciples to be with Him.
   D. That being close to Jesus is no guarantee that we will not backslide if we are not vigilant.

6. Maybe the Disciples were sleeping because they assumed that they would wake up to “just another day” of traveling with the Master, having no idea that the first Holy Week was about to unfold before their eyes. This reminds me that: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. I should never forgo an opportunity or invitation to pray.
   B. There are no guarantees about what tomorrow will bring.
   C. If Jesus asks me to do something (either through a reading of a text or a stirring of the heart), then I should do it.
   D. We can take even our relationship with the Lord for granted.

7. What could the Disciples have done to keep from falling asleep? (Choose one and explain your answer)
   A. Paid closer attention to Jesus.
   B. Stayed closer to Jesus.
   C. Encouraged one another.
   D. Placed the needs of Jesus above their own.

8. Jesus asked His friends to be with Him while He prayed. If someone asked you to pray with him, would you: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Keep a distance on the periphery.
   B. Pray, but feel weird.
   C. Pray along and support the person who was praying.
   D. Pretend to pray, but fall asleep on the inside.
9. When Jesus was going through this most conflicting time, He asked His friends to pray with Him. If you were going through a difficult time, would you: *(Choose one and explain your answer.)*

A. Ask a friend to pray for you.
B. Ask a friend to pray with you.
C. Keep the problem to myself and act like nothing was wrong.
D. Make a dumb joke and act like nothing was wrong.
Warm Up: Inspiration* (10 minutes)

Answer the questions below individually, and then go around the group sharing your answers.

I get inspired by: (Please choose one)

- Reading the Bible.
- Being Outdoors.
- Brainstorming with others.
- Triumphant music.
- Being artistic.
- Cooking or baking.
- Reading an uplifting book.
- Worship at church.
- A gorgeous sunset.
- Taking a walk.
- Praying.

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely
**Definition (1 minutes)**

*Used to say that it is clear that something bad will probably happen soon*

*I haven't lost my job yet, but the writing is on the wall: my company just laid off 50 more people today.*

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**Scriptural Basis (13 minutes)**

_Here is the entire 5th chapter of Daniel:_

Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

5 In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. 7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.” 8 Now all the king’s wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, “O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. 11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. 12 Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.”

13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, “Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*
you. Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.”

Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

“But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

“And this is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN.

This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.
Scriptural Context *(1 minute)*

The author was a pious Jew living under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. The first half six chapters of the book are the so-called “court tales.” To encourage his suffering fellow-believers the author tells six stories, set in earlier days in Babylon, just before and just after the Persian conquest, which illustrate how faithful Jews, loyally practicing their religion, were enabled by divine aid to triumph over their enemies. *(New Oxford Annotated Study Bible)*
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. The writing on the wall was a warning to King Belshazzar. This warning was the result of:
   (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   - A. The King’s arrogance.
   - B. The King’s sinfulness.
   - C. God’s desire to keep people on their toes.
   - D. God’s desire to test the King Belshazzar’s ability to interpret signs.

2. God gives us warnings of impending problems that stem from our sinful behavior. Which of the following have you observed in your life or the lives of others: (Choose as many as apply and explain.)
   - A. Health problems.
   - B. Work problems.
   - C. Relationship breakdowns.
   - D. Feelings of hopelessness, isolation, or desperation.

3. The King’s wise men could not interpret the writing on the wall. This was because: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   - A. They followed false deities.
   - B. They were afraid to give the King bad news.
   - C. They were afraid that they might make a wrong prediction.
   - D. They relied on their own intellect and not on God.

4. Sometimes we ignore the handwriting on the wall in our own lives. This is because: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   - A. We prefer to live in a state of denial.
   - B. It is too much work to change or repent.
   - C. The eyes of our heart have been clouded by sin.
   - D. We think that we are the exception to the rule, and that there will not be adverse consequences for us because of our bad choices.
5. The King’s reaction to the handwriting on the wall was: *(Choose one and explain your answer.)*
   A. To ignore it.
   B. Anger.
   C. Depression.
   D. Fear.

6. When I see warning signs in my life, I become: *(Choose one and explain your answer.)*
   A. Afraid.
   B. Angry.
   C. Bitter.
   D. Inclined to blame others.
   E. Hopeless, because after all it is too late to change.

7. When you start to see warnings of impending problems, to whom do you usually turn for advice? *(Choose as many as apply and explain.)*
   A. Friends.
   B. Self-help books.
   C. The Internet.
   D. Medical or mental health professionals.
   E. Clergy.

8. Daniel was able to interpret the writing on the wall because: *(Choose one and explain your answer.)*
   A. He lived a life of holiness.
   B. He trusted in God.
   C. He knew from experience that he could rely on God.
   D. He thought that the King’s wise men were losers.

9. If I want to be able to be more like Daniel and read more clearly the handwriting on the wall in my own life the change I should make right now is: *(Choose one and explain your answer.)*
   A. Pray more.
   B. Spend more time reading Scripture.
   C. Unplug from media.
   D. Admit my own selfishness and arrogance.
   E. Confront, by the grace of God, my habitual sins.
10. What is God writing on the wall of your heart right now? (*Choose one and explain your answer.*)
   A. Stop holding onto grudges before you drown in bitterness.
   B. Pray more so that you can start making better decisions.
   C. Go to Confession and own up to my sinfulness.
   D. Stop taking the many gifts of this life for granted.
   E. Turn loose of my arrogance and self reliance.
**Warm Up: A Bunch’a Bests** *(15 minutes)*

Answer the questions below individually, and then go around the group sharing your answers.

The best friend I had as a kid…

The best teacher I ever had…

The best job I ever had…

The best boss I ever had…

The best toy I ever had…

The best class I ever took in school…

The best book I ever read…

The best movie I ever saw…

The best vacation I’ve ever taken…

The best birthday present I ever had…

The best car I ever had…

The best neighbor I ever had…

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely*
Definition (1 minutes)
A single thing or person that is spoiling a situation that could have been very positive or enjoyable: I'm looking forward to Sunday, the only fly in the ointment being the fact that I'll have to sit next to my mother-in-law.*

Scriptural Basis (2 minutes)
This saying comes from Ecclesiastes 10:1:

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment,
And cause it to give off a foul odor;
So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.

Scriptural Context (7 minutes)
The title “Ecclesiastes” comes from a Greek word indicating a person who calls an assembly, so it makes sense that the author identified himself in Ecclesiastes 1:1 by the Hebrew word qoheleth, translated as “Preacher.” Despite leaving only this rather mysterious name to indicate his identity, evidence in the book, along with most Jewish and Christian tradition, suggests that King Solomon authored Ecclesiastes.

The Preacher went on to call himself “the son of David, king in Jerusalem,” one who has increased in “wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me,” and one who has collected many proverbs (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 16; 12:9). Solomon followed David on the throne in Jerusalem as the only Davidic son to rule over all Israel from that city (1:12). He was the wisest man in the world during his time (1 Kings 4:29–30) and wrote most of the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1).

With Solomon as the author of the book, we know it had to have been written sometime before his death in 931 BC. The content of Ecclesiastes reflects someone looking back on a life that was long on experience but short on lasting rewards. As king, he had the opportunity and resources to pursue the rewards of wisdom, pleasure, and work in and of themselves. Yet the world-weary tone of the writing suggests that late in life, he looked back on his folly with regret, pointing us to a better, simpler life lived in light of God’s direction (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).+

*Cambridge Dictionary, +Insight for Living
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. How much sin is acceptable in your life? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. An occasional cuss word.
   B. Watching movies with gratuitous intimacy and violence.
   C. Having more than a couple of alcoholic drinks if I have a designated driver.
   D. Having seconds of something that tastes really good, even though I am full.
   E. Muttering under my breath at another driver, even though he or she can’t hear me.

2. Why do I kid myself about the consequence of small sins? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Everybody does it.
   B. One bad apple doesn’t spoil the whole barrel.
   C. I have plenty of time to repent.
   D. Only Christ is perfect.

3. What false reasoning is associated with each of the answers in Question Two? (Give everyone a chance to consider his or her own answers and then discuss this question as a group.)

4. The path to Theosis (union with God/deification) has been analogized with an oil vigil lamp. The oil is our virtues, the wick is our orientation toward God, and the lighting of the candle a manifestation of Divine Grace. Why is it that theosis seems so out of reach for so many of us? (Choose one and explain your answer)
   A. Our oil used to be pure when we were young, but we have slowly polluted it.
   B. We have burned through all of our virtues.
   C. We are burning an inferior grade of oil.
   D. We allowed our wick to turn upside down.
5. Removing the fly in my ointment would require me to: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Grow closer to God so that I can see my sins more clearly.
   B. Own up to transgressions from years ago that I have never confessed.
   C. Be more discerning about how I use my free time.
   D. Set boundaries with people whose presence in my life makes it easier for me to sin.

6. Our relationships with other people can be polluted by “flies in the ointment.” In my own relationships I need to: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Start carrying my share of the responsibility for maintaining these relationships.
   B. Stop being so hard on other people and start examining myself more closely.
   C. Stop hanging on to small annoyances that become amplified because of my own selfishness.
   D. Place the needs of others above my own.

7. The “fly in the ointment” quote from Ecclesiastes 10:1 says that a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor gives off a foul smell. I guess this means that: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. People who assume high visibility positions should pay extra close attention to their behavior.
   B. It is dangerous to seek honor, because more will be expected of us.
   C. Even wise people have to guard against sinning.
   D. Christians who sin should be judged more harshly than non-believers who do something hurtful to another.
Warm Up: Story Sharing (10 minutes)

Please share with the group one of the following.

A “Good Samaritan story” in which you were the beneficiary.

A “Good Samaritan story” in which you helped someone.

A “Good Samaritan story” which you heard about second hand, either from the news or another person.
**Definition (1 minutes)**

One who is compassionate and helpful to a person in distress.*

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**Scriptural Basis (10 minutes)**

*Even many non-believers know that the term “Good Samaritan” comes from a story, even if they do not know that it was Jesus who told the story. Orthodox Christians read this parable of Jesus from Luke 10 annually in their lectionary on the 25th Sunday after Pentecost.*

25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”

27 So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”

28 And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ 36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”

37 And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”
Scriptural Context (4 minutes)

This parable is among the best known and most loved of Christendom. It has many levels of understanding and application and has been the source of many different sermon themes. It is found in the Gospel of St. Luke, sometimes called the “Sweet Jesus” gospel, because it contains so many parables and narratives of compassion. Since Luke was a physician (and probably an artist), it is not surprising that he would be keen to write his gospel emphasizing the mercy that is demanded of Christians by the Lord Himself.

As we prepare for this lesson, remember the story (apocryphal?) of the seminary preaching class that was being asked to deliver their final exam sermon. They were instructed to wait in a classroom until it was their turn, at which time they would be dismissed to walk to the seminary chapel. Between the classroom and the chapel was an actor playing the part of an injured man. As the story goes, only a few of the students actually stopped to help the man, either because they were so distracted that they did not notice him, or placed a higher priority on their sermon grade than on helping someone in distress.
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. The Good Samaritan stories that we shared in the Warm-Up or the Parable itself make me feel:
   
   (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   
   A. Hopeful about humanity.
   B. Ashamed, because there have been times when I avoided assuming this role.
   C. Grateful for a time when we have benefited from the unsolicited kindness of others.

2. The man who fell victim to robbers: (Choose one and explain your answer.)

   A. Should have known better than to travel alone.
   B. Should be grateful that wasn’t murdered outright.
   C. Should have had more situational awareness and avoided the threat.
   D. Did not deserve what happened to him.

3. Why do you think that the priest and Levite passed by on the other side? (Choose one and explain your answer.)

   A. They wanted to avoid someone who was unclean.
   B. They were late for worship and didn’t have time to stop.
   C. They were busy praying.
   D. They assumed that the man would be dead soon.

4. Why do you think that the Samaritan stopped to help? (Choose one and explain your answer.)

   A. He wasn’t selfish.
   B. Someone once helped the Samaritan when he was down and out.
   C. He felt comfortable with people who were injured.
   D. He wanted to make the priest and Levite look bad.
5. The Samaritan gave the man first aid, transported him to an inn, and ensured that the victim would be housed at the inn. All of this reminds us that: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Helping people can be messy.
   B. Helping people can mean sacrificing time and money.
   C. Helping people can be physically demanding.
   D. Helping people can mean altering our plans.

6. The fact that a priest and a Levite avoided helping the victim makes me feel: (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Embarrassed for them.
   B. More motivated to help other people in need.
   C. Afraid that sometimes I am a hypocrite when it comes to helping others.
   D. Frustrated that there are so many religious people who do not put their faith into action.

7. An ancient interpretation of this Parable is that it describes the path to salvation. In this case, who or what in the Parable represents: (Answer A through E individually, and then discuss your answers as a group)
   A. Us?
   B. The evil one?
   C. False religious belief?
   D. Christ?
   E. The Church?

8. How can I better apply this parable to my daily life? (Use this question as a prompt for a group discussion.)
**Warm Up: My Roles** *(15 minutes)*

*We all have many roles in our lives. From the list below, please share the group the roles that describe you.*

I am a…

|___ Parent                     | ___ Boss                  | ___ Student          |
|___ Sibling                    | ___ Landlord              | ___ Homeowner        |
|___ Spouse                     | ___ Tenant                | ___ Volunteer        |
|___ Pet Owner                 | ___ Political Activist    | ___ Hobbyist         |
|___ Employe                   | ___ Church Member         | ___ Automobile Operator |

Which of these roles is…

...the most fun?
...the most challenging?
...the most rewarding?
...the most frustrating?

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely*
**Definition (1 minutes)**

The principle of having too much pride or confidence that will lead to foolish mistakes. Said after something bad has happened in someone’s life as a result of thinking too much of oneself.

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**Scriptural Basis (2 minutes)**

*This saying comes from Proverbs 16:18. Here it is in context:*

How much better to get wisdom than gold!
And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

17 The highway of the upright is to depart from evil;

He who keeps his way preserves his soul.

18 Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.

19 Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly,
Than to divide the spoil with the proud.

20 He who heeds the word wisely will find good,
And whoever trusts in the L ORD, happy is he.

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**Scriptural Context (7 minutes)**

Solomon’s proverbs were penned around 900 B.C. During his reign as king, the nation of Israel reached its pinnacle spiritually, politically, culturally, and economically. As Israel’s reputation soared, so did King Solomon’s. Foreign dignitaries from the far reaches of the known world traveled great distances to hear the wise monarch speak (1 Kings 4:34).

Knowledge is nothing more than an accumulation of raw facts, but wisdom is the ability to see people, events, and situations as God sees them. In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon reveals the mind of God in matters high and lofty and in common, ordinary, everyday situations, too. It appears that no topic escaped King Solomon’s attention. Matters pertaining to personal conduct, sexual relations, business, wealth, charity, ambition, discipline, debt, child-rearing, character, alcohol, politics, revenge, and godliness are among the many topics covered in this rich collection of wise sayings.

There is an undeniable practicality found in this book, for sound and sensible answers to all manner of complex difficulties are found within its thirty-one chapters. Certainly, Proverbs is the greatest "how-to" book ever written, and those who have the good sense to take Solomon’s lessons to heart will quickly discover godliness, prosperity, and contentment are theirs for the asking.

The recurring principle of the Book of Proverbs is that those who choose wisdom and follow God will be blessed in numerous ways: with long life (9:11); prosperity (2:20-22); joy (3:13-18); and the goodness of God (12:21). Those who reject Him, on the other hand, suffer shame and death (3:35; 10:21). To reject God is to choose folly over wisdom and is to separate ourselves from God, His Word, His wisdom, and His blessings. *

*gotquestions.org*
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. If a student studies hard for an exam and makes a good grade: (Choose one and share your answer.)
   A. It is OK for the student to feel a sense of accomplishment.
   B. The student should give all credit to God.
   C. The student should remember that “pride goes before the fall.”
   D. The student shouldn’t feel any emotion: You reap what you sow, after all.

2. If you are certain that you are absolutely correct about something: (Choose one and share your answer.)
   A. Then you should express your opinion as clearly as possible.
   B. You should express your opinion taking other people’s feelings into consideration.
   C. You should express your opinion while being willing to accept other people’s point of view.
   D. You should keep silent so that you do not hurt other people’s feelings.

3. If I regard others as being too prideful, it probably means that: (Choose one and share your answer.)
   A. I am an exceptional judge of character.
   B. I have been hurt by prideful people before and am a bit gun shy.
   C. I see in that person something that I despise in myself.
   D. I am justified in my assessment of that person because as no one likes a show-off.

4. Comparing myself to others: (Choose one and share your answer.)
   A. Is good, because it helps me measure my own level of pridefulness.
   B. Is OK, if the other people are better than I am.
   C. Can aggravate my own tendencies to be prideful.
   D. Is what I am supposed to do in order to improve myself.
5. Being competitive: *(Choose one and share your answer.)*
   A. Is a natural trait in all humans.
   B. Keeps my pride in check when I lose a competition.
   C. Can lead me to viewing the world through an us/them prism.
   D. Can cause me to objectify others by regarding them as “the competition.”

6. Rate the following antidotes to pride from easiest to hardest: *(Do this on your own, and then share your ranking and the reason for that ranking with the group.)*
   A. Try to minimize the competition in my life.
   B. Compare myself to the Saints.
   C. Be sincerely interested in the needs of others.
   D. Consider my brother/sister as above me
   E. Attribute my virtuous actions to God.
   F. Accept the reproof of others.
   G. Keep in mind my own falls.

7. The battle against pride is a battle against the evil one. Rate the following statements from most to least important in the struggle to overcome this sin. *(Do this on your own, and then share your ranking and the reason for that ranking with the group.)*
   A. The evil one allows us to beat down other sins, so that the resulting sense of accomplishment can help pride gain more power in our life.
   B. Even though Christ’s victory is complete, the evil one has so much pride that he will never relinquish.
   C. As time goes on, the evil one is becoming worse: more malicious and more jealous of the Lord.
   D. The evil one rejects the virtues of love and humility.
   E. The evil one wants to gain more followers so that in the end God will be forced to have mercy on all his creatures, including the evil one.
Warm Up: Boxing Match (15 minutes)

In a boxing match there are different kinds of participants:

- The defending champion
- The challenger
- The favorite
- The underdog
- The referee
- The cornerman (administers first-aid and encouragement between rounds)
- The trainer (provides insight and advice)
- The judges (observe and critique dispassionately)
- The fan (cheers wildly)
- The doctor (looks for major problems that will stop a fight)
- The round-card carrier (looks interested but could care less about the fight)
- The announcer (sets the stage and motivates the crowd)

In the boxing match of life, which kind of participant are you? Why?

Which kind of participant would you prefer to be?
**Definition (1 minutes)**
An encouragement to persist and overcome any difficulties, by doing what is right.

**Scriptural Basis (2 minutes)**
This saying comes from 1 Timothy 6. Here it is in context:

11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, 15 which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.

**Scriptural Context (7 minutes)**
The Book of 1 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul in A.D. 62-66.

Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him in his responsibility for overseeing the work of the Ephesian church and possibly the other churches in the province of Asia (1 Timothy 1:3). This letter lays the foundation for ordaining elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7), and provides guidance for ordaining people into offices of the church (1 Timothy 3:8-13). In essence, 1 Timothy is a leadership manual for church organization and administration.

This is the first letter Paul wrote to Timothy, a young pastor who had been a help to Paul in his work. Timothy was a Greek. His mother was a Jewess and his father was Greek. Paul was more than just a mentor and leader to Timothy, he was like a father to him, and Timothy was like a son to Paul (1 Timothy 1:2). Paul begins the letter by urging Timothy to be on guard for false teachers and false doctrine. However, much of the letter deals with pastoral conduct. Paul instructs Timothy in worship (chapter 2) and developing mature leaders for the church (chapter 3). Most of the letter deals with pastoral conduct, warnings about false teachers, and the church’s responsibility toward single members, widows, elders, and slaves. All throughout the letter, Paul encourages Timothy to stand firm, to persevere, and to remain true to his calling.

Jesus Christ is presented by Paul as the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Savior to all who believe in Him. He is Lord of the church, and Timothy serves Him by pastoring His church. Thus, we find the main application of Paul’s first letter to his “son in the
faith.” Paul instructs Timothy on matters of church doctrine, church leadership, and church administration. We can use those same instructions in governing our local assembly today. Likewise, the work and ministry of a pastor, the qualifications for an elder, and the qualifications of a deacon are just as important and pertinent today as they were in Timothy’s day. Paul’s first letter to Timothy amounts to an instruction book on leading, administrating, and pastoring the local church. The instructions in this letter apply to any leader or prospective leader of Christ’s church and are equally relevant today as they were in Paul’s day. For those not called into leadership roles in their church, the book is still practical. Every follower must contend for the faith and avoid false teaching. Every follower must stand firm and persevere.*
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant an opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. With which statement do you agree most? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Persistence is overrated. Success usually happens because of circumstances beyond our control.
   B. Sometimes it is wrong to persist. If we are trying to fit a square peg in a round hole, it is better to move on to a different task.
   C. Without persistence and perseverance, we cannot fulfill our duties and responsibilities to our loved ones.
   D. Progress in life comes directly from how much we have persevered in pursuit of our goals.

2. We are called to fight the good fight. How do we know if we are struggling to achieve something that is just? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Our objectives are governed by a fundamental teaching of the Faith (e.g., bear on another’s burdens, forgive 70 times seven, live by the golden rule, etc.)
   B. Our goals in life make us feel good about ourselves.
   C. Our friends and relatives approve of our actions.
   D. We feel confident that our desires reflect God’s will.

3. “Fight” seems like a non-Christian word. With which statement do you agree most? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. This is correct. Christianity is a religion of peace and fighting has no place in our lexicon.
   B. There were times when Jesus Himself fought for what was right.
   C. Fighting on an intellectual level is OK, but physical fighting is never appropriate.
   D. Committing oneself to fight for something must be the product of great discernment.

4. When we think of fighting, boxing comes to mind. What do you think about this analogy? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. It is silly. Boxing is a brutal sport.
   B. Sometimes I feel like a boxer who keeps getting pummeled, no matter what he does.
   C. Sometimes the best that I can do is keep my hands up (to keep from suffering a knockout blow) and wait for the round to end.
   D. When the final bell of a boxing match rings, fighters who have gone the distance feel an extraordinary sense of fulfillment.
5. Sometimes other people try to motivate us to engage in a struggle by appealing to our emotions. With which statement do you agree most? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. I never let my emotions dictate my behavior.
   B. It’s OK—everyone does this.
   C. We should check our emotions by trying to objectively identify the issues surrounding the cause we are being asked to back.
   D. We should embrace our emotions. They motivate us to fight harder.

6. In our daily activities, “fighting the good fight” can take on a rather non-romantic quality. Carrying out the responsibilities of life can seem like being in the fifth round of a ten round title-bout. In which area have you found yourself fighting the good fight lately. (List as many as you care to.)
   A. Phoning a relative to check-in, even when you didn’t feel like doing it.
   B. Saying morning and evening prayers.
   C. Grocery shopping.
   D. Folding laundry.
   E. Doing the dishes.
   F. Doing housework.
   G. Getting up to go to work.

7. What is most important to you in life? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. To fight rather than do nothing, even if I am not sure what I am fighting for.
   B. To wait things out until I am sure that I know what I am doing.
   C. To work hard at doing the right thing, even when it might cost me personally.
   D. To be loved and appreciated by the persons on whose behalf I am fighting the good fight.

8. Ultimately, the admonition to fight the good fight is a call to live out our Christianity as fully and earnestly as possible. Comparing the end of life to the last round of a boxing match, how do I expect that I will feel in my last days? Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. Beat down and looking anxiously toward the final bell.
   B. Wishing that my cornerman would throw in the towel, but feeling like no one is paying attention to me.
   C. A little battered and bruised but ready to go another 10 rounds.
   D. Fulfilled and grateful for the opportunity to have competed.
Warm Up: What Time Is It?* (15 minutes)

Answer this question by drawing in the hands on this clock. What time is it in your life? Why? Then answer the questions at the bottom of the page. When everyone has finished, share your answers with the group.

It’s almost time for:

It is too late for:

When it is _______ o’clock I will:

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely
Definition (1 minutes)
To decide not to do anything to hurt someone who has hurt you.*

Scriptural Basis (2 minutes)
The admonition to turn the other cheek is found in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, specifically Mt. 5:39. Here are verses 38 and 39:

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Scriptural Context (7 minutes)
The “slap” in Matthew 5:39 could be regarded as contempt for a variety of personal rights, not simply the physical slap. It included insults and offenses against a person’s personal dignity. In Jesus’ day, Israel was Roman occupied territory. If the Jews, as subjects of Rome, did not comply with a Roman soldier’s requests for anything from a drink of water to handing over personal property, a swift backhand to the right cheek was common. But why would Jesus instruct His followers to offer the left cheek as well?

Paul T. Penley explains in “Turning the Other Cheek’: Jesus’ Peaceful Plan to Challenge Injustice,” “Roman soldiers tended to be right-handed. When they struck an equal with a fist, it came from the right and made contact with the left side of the face. When they struck an inferior person, they swung with the back of their right hand making contact with the right cheek. In a Mediterranean culture that made clear distinctions between classes, Roman soldiers backhanded their subjects to make a point. Jews were second-class.” The Roman slap was an insult to the Jews’ personal dignity.*

It is difficult for a right-handed person to backhand someone’s left cheek. By turning the other cheek, the person striking has two options, hit the other person in a way that one would hit a peer (right hand to left side of the face), thereby raising that person up from being an inferior, or not strike at all.

*biblestudytools.com
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. What do you think about the exegesis of Mt. 5:39 on the preceding page? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. This is ridiculous. Christians are supposed to accept persecution with no strings attached.
   B. Even this understanding of “turn the other cheek” is unreasonable. If someone hits me, I have the right to protect myself.
   C. It reminds me that I need to put in the time to learn more about the context of biblical teachings.
   D. It makes me think that there might be more constructive ways to handle conflict than retaliation.

2. Which is a greater act of courage in the face of adversity? Why? Which requires more faith? Explain your answer.
   A. Standing up and “fighting like a man.”
   B. Accepting temporary pain in order to de-escalate a confrontational situation.

3. How could this Christian response to abuse and attack be applied in the following work settings? Describe specific scenarios.
   A. Customer service rep.
   B. Restaurateur.
   C. Police officer.
   D. School teacher.

4. How could we apply turning the other cheek to family life in the following examples?
   A. Two small children fighting over a toy.
   B. Adolescent mouthing-off to a parent.
   C. Middle-aged adult taking care of a parent.
   D. One spouse snapping at the other after a difficult day.

5. Why is it so difficult to turn the other cheek? (Choose one and explain your answer.)
   A. We lack practice in doing this.
   B. We don’t have enough faith.
   C. It requires too much intellectual energy.
   D. Retaliating against someone brings a lot of personal satisfaction.
6. Do the following teachings of Jesus conform or conflict with this understanding of “turn the other cheek?” Why or why not?
   A. Blessed are the peacemakers.
   B. Blessed are the meek.
   C. Love your enemies.
   D. You shall not make my Father’s house…(overturning of moneychangers’ tables)
   E. Forgive seventy times seven…

7. In a disagreement or a fight, turning the other cheek, means choosing de-escalation over “being right.” What do you think about the following statements?
   A. It is more important to bring peace than to be proven right.
   B. You can stand up for what is right and de-escalate a situation at the same time.
   C. There are certain times when you have to stop turning the other cheek and instead put your foot down, because “right is right.”
   D. After I have turned the other cheek and been dwelt a second blow, it is OK to retaliate.

8. The Civil Rights movement of the ‘60’s employed public protest to raise awareness throughout the United States of the abuses of Jim Crow. How were these protests examples of turning the other cheek?

9. Consider other protests that have taken place in America since the Civil Rights movement. Which protests have adhered to this biblical principle? Which have been the polar opposite? How “successful” have these protests been? Are there broader lessons that Americans can learn from these episodes?

10. Is there anyone in your life who turned the other cheek for your benefit? Please explain.
Warm Up: Rearview Mirror?* (10 minutes)

After this lesson, Faith & Fellowship will not meet again until after Theophany. Take some time to write down what you have gained from this semester and what you will miss about small groups during the break, and then share what you have written with the group.

*Heart-Breakers and Heart-Warmers, Steve Sheely
A shibboleth is a custom or word that distinguishes one group of people from another. It can refer to a mode of dress or speech. It can also be used in a metaphorical sense, describing an attitude or belief confirms a persons bona fides in a particular group. Introducing oneself with his or her pronouns is a shibboleth for the political left, while advocating for tax cuts a shibboleth for the right.

It could be legitimately asked, how is shibboleth an everyday saying? Two generations ago, people knew what this word meant and where it came from. People with a strong command of English continue to use this word.

Why not recover this word in our everyday speech? Using it keeps us in touch with our Old Testament roots, and takes us beyond trendy expressions such as “dog whistle.” Who knows? Perhaps using this word will become a Shibboleth for those persons who come to Faith & Fellowship!

Scriptural Basis (10 minutes)

Jephthah ruled over Israel for 6 years. He rose to leadership when the people of Ammon threatened the people of Israel, and he led Israel to victory. (Judges 11).

In Judges 12, Jephthah finds himself in conflict with the Ephraimites:

Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!”

2 And Jephthah said to them, “My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. 3 So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon; and the LORD delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?” 4 Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites.” 5 The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived. And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead would say to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he said, “No,” 6 then they would say to him, “Then say, ‘Shibboleth!’” And he would say, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites.
Scriptural Context *(2 minutes)*

Judges tells the story of Israel after the death of Joshua. Judges were raised up to lead the people. Jephthah is one of the latter judges. One cannot help but read the Old Testament and exclaim, “So much violence!” The middle-east of that era was a place of violence and clannish retribution. This behavior was the social currency of the day. God is at work, but within the confines of societal norms.
Group Discussion (35 minutes)

Give everyone in the group a chance to answer the questions, and then go around the group, giving each participant the opportunity to share and explain his or her answers.

1. Virtually every aspect of life has shibboleths. For instance a football fan is able to identify another fan with terms such as “sack,” “pick-six,” and “fair catch.” What are some shibboleths of:
   A. Tech?
   B. Restaurant workers?
   C. The music industry?
   D. Driving?

2. The use of shibboleths in the Church can be beneficial or harmful. Please consider the following “shibboleths” of Greek Orthodoxy and discuss whether they help or hinder.
   A. Greeting a visitor to the Parish with a hearty “Kalimera!”
   B. Wearing a Cross around one’s neck.
   C. Being able to recite the Creed.
   D. Using theological jargon in sermons.
   E. Referring to Pascha as “Pascha” instead of “Easter” when talking to non-Orthodox.
   F. Saying “Christ is Born” instead of “Merry Christmas” to your next door neighbor.

3. Parishes can create a culture of CFU (Church for Us) or CFO (Church for Others). CFU’s look inward, maintain the status quo, and prioritize meeting the needs of the existing constituency over ministering to and attracting non-members. In essence, they employ implicit and explicit exclusionary shibboleths. What are some of the behaviors (shibboleths) of Church for Us?

4. It has been said that the Church exists not so much for the benefit of her existing members but for the salvation of those who are outside the Church. This is the goal of an outwardly focused Church for Others. What shibboleths can a CFU expunge from its culture in order to become a CFO?

5. Not all shibboleths are bad. There are elements of Church Tradition that we would want to impart to potential and new members, as well as perpetuate in our existing culture. What are some of the essential shibboleths that define Orthodox Christianity?
6. When it comes to the essential shibboleths of the Church, do you consider yourself more of a Gileadite (an insider who knows his or her way around), or an Ephraimite (an outsider who doesn’t feel accepted)? Please explain.

7. The Gileadites used “shibboleth” as a way of guarding the fords of the Jordan. Are there shibboleths that should be used to preserve the sanctity of the Church? If so, what are they?