

**SPEND YOURSELF  
WEEK**

November 27–December 1



*better  
together*

# WHY CELEBRATE SPEND YOURSELF WEEK

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Welcome to Spend Yourself Week! We are so glad that you decided to join us. We hope the week of Nov. 27–Dec. 1 is filled with challenges and blessing for you and your family!

So ,why celebrate Spend Yourself Week? It's simple, really. The One Body One Hope theme passage begins with Isaiah 58:10.

“If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the darkness  
and your night will become like the noonday.”

If you read the verse carefully, you'll realize that it includes both a challenge and a blessing (for you theological types, an “if... then” clause). It's true that our salvation does not depend on our works, but we are also told that faith without works is dead. And scripture is pretty clear that often the place of God's blessing is also the place of sacrificial love. We are called to love one another--not just in word, but in deed, too. We are called to spend ourselves.

It's not always easy to spend ourselves. Sometimes we just don't want to do it. Sometimes we don't know how. But the Lord promises to “guide us always, satisfy our needs in a sun-scorched land, and strengthen our frame” (Isaiah 58:11) if only we will spend ourselves. It is our hope that you'll find great joy and connection with your Savior and His work in the world this week as you join us in finding ways to love and live sacrificially.

## HOW TO CELEBRATE SPEND YOURSELF WEEK

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So...what exactly are you supposed to do?

There are three simple steps that will enhance your Spend Yourself Week experience:

1. **Decide on a way to spend yourself.**

Ideally, this should be something that your entire family agrees to do together. It will be easier for you to hold each other accountable and stay strong in your conviction to stand in solidarity with those who are hurting.

2. **For five days (Monday, November 27 through Friday, December 1):  
SPEND YOURSELF!**

We've provided a devotional reflection for every day of Spend Yourself Week so you can truly focus on what it means to love and live sacrificially. We suggest setting aside family devotional time every day of Spend Yourself Week so that you can discuss what you're doing and talk about how God is speaking to you.

### 3. **Celebrate what God has done!**

Join us along with New Life Reformed Church for a screening of *Facing Darkness*! *Facing Darkness* is a Samaritan's Purse film about the Ebola pandemic in Liberia, West Africa. We hope to see you there!

*Event Details:*

Sunday, December 3

3:00pm

New Life Reformed Church in Sioux Center, IA

## WAYS TO SPEND YOURSELF

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We absolutely love having your family join us in spending yourself with us throughout SPEND YOURSELF week. We have some ideas for how your family can join together and stand in solidarity. Feel free to use this list as a starting point, but pick something that will be meaningful for your family to sacrifice for a week.

1. **Replace one meal a day with rice and beans.** Meat is a luxury in most countries, not only because it is expensive, but because it can be hard to come by. We often take for granted the well-stocked meat counters at our grocery stores.
2. **Drink nothing but water for the duration of Spend Yourself Week.** Replacing milk, juice, coffee, smoothies, alcohol can be a way to remind yourself that many families don't have clean, safe water to drink.
3. **Give up television for one week.** Celebrate your success by joining us on Sunday, December 3 for the screening of *Facing Darkness*!
4. **Fast from social media.** Facebook, Pinterest, or whatever app or technological item you're addicted to.
5. **Give up complaining.** Liquidate \$10 in quarters for each child, and have a stack of dollar bills for the adults. Anyone caught complaining has to put a quarter or dollar in the jar. This exercise not only raises awareness of all the good gifts we've been given (and how very little we have to complain about), but also that it cultivates a culture of gratitude.

**What else can you come up with? What sacrificial act of solidarity would be meaningful for your family?**

# DAY 1: THE POWER OF STORY

Written by: Nicole Baart

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## Matthew 9:16 & 17

**16** “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. **17** Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

## For Reflection

We had been waiting for low tide all week. As we walked barefoot from our guest house to the small bay where it was safe to swim, we realized that we finally had the timing just right. The waves had drawn away from the land, and stretched out before us was a wide swath of sand, perfect for beach-combing. Our family loves to swim in the ocean, but we also love to treasure hunt.

For the next hour or more, we waded through the water, searching for shells and sea glass, our favorite. Whenever one of us found a piece of sea glass, we would all gather around and admire it. I think the reason we love sea glass so much is because it tells a story. We started wondering where each piece came from and we began to make up stories to go along with each one. A big, white piece of glass was from a wedding celebration. A shard of green glass from a post-soccer game 7-Up. Several small pieces were from a family picnicking in another country. Each small fragment of glass held an entire history, an epic journey, a tale filled with adventure and hope and love.

The passage we read today is Jesus’ first recorded parable. Those two verses don’t sound like much, but they were the beginning of one of the most powerful aspects of Jesus ministry. Did you know he told 46 parables in the new testament? In fact, teaching by story was arguably his favorite method. Clearly Jesus believes in the power of story!

Just like those little bits of sea glass, we all have stories to share. Sometimes our stories are beautiful and hope-filled, they tell a tale of courage and strength. Other times our stories are full of pain or suffering, a broken hallelujah. But we believe that the God of all creation is the author and finisher of our stories. And He believes in happy endings.

## **For Discussion**

1. Jesus told 46 parables (or stories). Look some of them up—they are scattered all throughout the gospels! Which one is your favorite. Why?
2. Tell your family a story about yourself. It doesn't have to be long or have a moral at the end, just share something with them! Maybe you want to tell them about an experience you had or a memory that is precious to you. No matter what you decide to share, know that your story matters!

## **Prayer**

Father, thank you so much that you are the author of our story! We trust you and we place our lives in your hands. Help us to use our stories to encourage and bless others. We know that we are better together and that you have called us to love one another as you have loved us. May we be brave, bold, beautiful story-tellers. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Dig Deeper**

Before words were written down, stories were passed on through oral tradition. People sat around and told each other the stories that were meaningful to them! Seek out an older friend (maybe a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or a neighbor) and read your favorite parable to them. Then, ask them to tell you a story about their life!

# DAY 2: CONTENT IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Written by: Michael Gallagher

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## Philippians 4:10-12

**10** I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. **11** I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

**12** I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

## For Reflection

As I walked through the aisle at a fabric store with my expecting wife, we searched through different rolls of baby fabric. I picked up a roll that said, "Dream Big, Little One." At an early age, children are encouraged to 'dream big' and 'shoot for the stars.' Alongside our big dreams are ideals or suitable situations that we expect will always come to fulfillment. Just one week before that trip to the fabric store, my wife and I realized that the ideals we had set for our pregnancy were shattered. A hiccup in the development of our child turned an ideal pregnancy into a different journey, not ideal.

Earlier this year, dreams were getting bigger and bigger as the goat herd on the Harbel Farm in Liberia grew to about 30 head. It has been a dream of the workers that one day they would raise hundreds of sheep on the hills in Liberia. Things were going well and vaccines were given to the goats to try to continue the good health. A few weeks after, the goats started to suffer, due to something from the vaccine. Losing almost every one of those 30 goats was not ideal nor was it the most desirable outcome. Our dreams get big and we look forward to such great things in this world, like a perfect birth of a baby or rapid growth in a goat herd. When there is a small shift from our idea plans, we quickly realize we are not in control. It's difficult to experience heartache and setbacks but Paul - who was writing today's passage as a prisoner - encourages us to be content in the Lord, no matter what the situation or circumstance.

It's hard to find contentment in such difficult situations. But being discontent denies the right of God to do with us as he wills. We must realize that our contentment cannot be defined by the kind of circumstances we experience.

Rather, it must be defined by the satisfaction that we have through the gospel of Jesus, no matter what situation we find ourselves in. We are called to trust Jesus, demonstrated by our actions – especially our actions in situations that are not ideal – in a world where people often reject Jesus.

## **For Discussion**

1. Can you think of a time where you were not content because of certain circumstances?
2. Why did you respond the way you did in that situation? How could have you responded differently, in light of what Paul says in Philippians?

## **Prayer**

Father, thank you for encouraging us to be content. Why should we fear? Help us to find our contentment in these great truths that we might live lives that demonstrate to the world what a great Savior You are to give such peace and contentment in such a discontented world. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **Dig Deeper**

What are specific situations that Paul was faced with in scripture that would have made it hard for him to find contentment? I encourage you to dig deeper by reading Philippians 1:16-18, Philippians 1:27-30 and Matthew 6:25.

# DAY 3: FALSE MOTIVES

Written by: Austin Lindemulder

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## John 6:24-27, 35

**24** Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. **25** When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

**26** Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. **27** Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”...**35** Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

## For Reflection

On one of my trips to Liberia, I asked Pastor Emmanuel about some of the difficulties the church in Liberia faces. He indicated that they often find people going to church expecting to be blessed by God; that if they do certain things, their lives will be easier, and that God will have favor on them. I jumped to conclusions and immediately said, “Oh yeah! We have that too. We call it the ‘prosperity gospel.’” As we continued, I realized that the ‘prosperity gospel’ in the U.S. and what he was talking about were not quite the same, and that I was guilty of some of the things he described.

While we may not identify ourselves with the ‘prosperity gospel’, we have our own version and still have false motives for seeking Jesus. We pray for healing, for financial independency, for ease of pain. When things get tough in life, we pray for relief from them. None of these prayer requests are necessarily bad, but when they are our priority, we miss the point of what the gospel is about at the core: eternal life. This is what Jesus was talking about in this passage. The people he is talking to had followed him after he fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. They were amazed by what they saw, and naturally pursued Jesus (see verse 24). They wanted to be with Jesus, but not for the right reasons. In verse 25, Jesus calls them out when he says, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” In other words, he is saying to them, ‘I satisfied your earthly desires, and now that is the only reason you seek me. You have a false motive for seeking me.’

How often do we do exactly that—search for God to satisfy our earthly desires, the desires of our flesh, and stop there? The gospel is about so much more! He is here to give us food that endures to eternal life. He is the Bread of Life.

I recently read an article\* about the number one prayer request from persecuted Christians. I figured it would be that the persecution would ease (admittedly, that would probably be mine). It wasn't. "Persecuted believers ask us to pray with them that they will stand strong and witness with faithfulness." This life is not their priority, but rather the eternal life. May we focus our lives on the Bread of eternal Life, not the 'bread' of this world.

\*Source: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/no-1-prayer-request-persecuted-believers/>)

## **For Discussion**

1. What do you ask God for in your prayers?
2. Do you ask for more earthly things or eternal things in your prayers?
3. What ways can you focus more on eternal things and not this life?

## **Prayer**

Father, thank you so much for giving us a way to experience eternity with you! We trust in You to provide what we need on earth. Help us to stand strong together and witness in faithfulness. Thank you for giving us the great gift of eternal life with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Dig Deeper**

Consider removing an earthly distraction for one day. What draws your focus away from God or how He is working in your life? Maybe it's social media, your favorite TV show, or checking your phone before bed. Instead of doing that one thing, spend some extra time in personal devotions and prayer.

# DAY 4: STRENGTH FOR THE WEARY

Written by: Nicole Baart

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## Isaiah 40:28-31

**28** Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

**29** He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

**30** Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

**31** but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

## For Reflection

I'm sure that today's passage is very familiar to many of us. We have seen it printed on t-shirts and embroidered on pillows. It was even painted on the wall of my high school gym! We love the idea of soaring on wings like eagles. Who wouldn't? It's an exciting, even *powerful* thought. But did you catch the verses that come before this famous passage? The ones who get to soar on wings like eagles are not the strong—they are the weak. It is when we are weak and weary, tired and at the very end of our rope that God steps in and gives us His strength. We can run and not grow weary or walk and not be faint only through His power.

We were recently in Liberia chasing down a bunch of paperwork. We had been back and forth to different government agencies trying to collect all the documents we needed. But we kept hitting road block after road block. Each door we approached was slammed in our faces, and we were in desperate need of a miracle. After trying to do it our way (after exhausting all of our resources and power), we collapsed on the bed in our guesthouse one night and wept. There was nothing more we could do. And that's when God showed up.

At the end of our rope, God stepped in and worked in a way that only He could. We

marveled at His glory and His might! His power was truly miraculous in the face of our weakness, and as we watched Him clearing the path before us we knew that all honor was His. Yes, we soared, but only through His power.

It's difficult to admit that we are weak and weary, that we are at the end of our own power. But it is truly a blessed place to be! God loves to meet us in our weakness—and when He does, He brings the strength of heaven with Him.

## **For Discussion**

1. Can you think of a time that you felt utterly exhausted, weak, and weary? Did God show up? How?
2. It's hard to admit weakness, especially in our culture. What's one way you can be an encouragement to someone? What's one small way you can let them know that they don't always have to be strong?

## **Prayer**

Father, you promise that there is strength in our sorrow and beauty in our tears. You are working in our waiting, finding ways to draw us closer to each other and closer to you. Help us to cling to you when we feel weak instead of relying on our own power. Help us to trust you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Dig Deeper**

Read II Corinthians 12:1-10. This passage is about the "thorn" in Paul's flesh. No one knows for sure what Paul suffered from, but we do know that this affliction drew him closer to God. He says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong!" This is so countercultural. Read the story as a family and talk about what it means to you!

# DAY 5: INTENDED FOR GOOD

Written by: Nicole Baart

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## Genesis 50:19-21

**19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

## For Reflection

When the child was born, he was named Hallie according to Kissi tradition. Hallie means "last born son," and as the youngest of two boys, it was an appropriate name. Unfortunately, Hallie and his brother were orphaned when Hallie was just two years old. For the next four years he lived with a distant relative, and often wondered where his next meal would come from—or if it would come at all. But when Hallie was six, his life took an unexpected turn. An uncle came for him and his brother, and took the boys to Monrovia where they joined the Christ Our Hope Children's Home family. The very first Sunday that the boys were at Christ Our Hope, they attended Sunday school. And the very first story they heard was the story of Joseph.

We all know the story of Joseph. How he was his father's favorite and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He was persecuted and thrown in jail in Egypt, but his character and integrity earned him the admiration of Pharaoh. Soon, he was in charge of Egypt, and his visions from God helped the entire country prepare for a horrible famine. Years later, his starving brothers came in search of food and found instead their long lost brother.

Hallie loved this story so much that he decided in that moment he would no longer be called Hallie. Instead, he took on the name Joseph and refused to answer to anything other than the name he had chosen. The reason why the name Joseph was so meaningful to him was because of some of Joseph's final words to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..." Joseph believed that his life, though hard and heartbreaking, was being written for God's glory.

Sometimes we encounter things in life that could break our hearts and snuff out our joy. But what man intends for evil, God intends for the good of those who love him. Take heart, friends. Your life is a beautiful story in the hands of a loving Father and Lord.

## For Discussion

1. Can you recall a time in your life when something terrible happened—but God used that experience for good?
2. If you could choose any name for yourself, what would it be? Why is that name meaningful to you?

## Prayer

Father, we know that you love us. We know that you are fighting for us even when we feel lost and alone. Help us to find our strength and our meaning in you and you alone. Help us to believe that the story you are writing for us is far greater than anything we could ever imagine for ourselves. We love you so much. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Dig Deeper

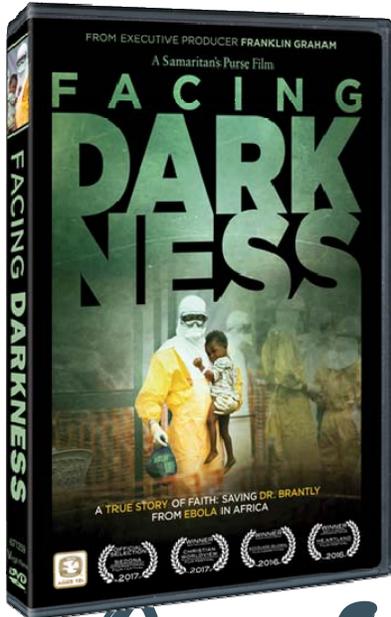
Read Joseph's story. It begins in Genesis 37 and is finished at the end of the book of Genesis (chapter 50:26). His life was truly a roller coaster! As you read, take note of things that are often overlooked in the Sunday school version of the story. You might be surprised by what you read!

# JOIN US

## FOR A SCREENING OF *FACING DARKNESS*

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In *Facing Darkness*, a Christian relief organization, Samaritan's Purse, faces the challenge of fighting the Ebola epidemic in Liberia, West Africa while simultaneously trying to raise world awareness of the deadly virus.



**When:** Saturday, December 3

**Time:** 3:00 PM

**Where:**

New Life Christian Reformed Church  
232 16th Street SE

Sioux Center, Iowa 51250

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together