

McCabe United Methodist Church
Family Link (part 2): "Family Reading"
Deuteronomy 6:1-9, II Timothy 3:16-17
September 15 & 16, 2012
Pastor Ray Baker

The good thing about my sons move to Fargo is it gives me permission to tell you stories about them without having to worry about how they will react.

A few months ago, on a beautiful summer's night, our son Mike came into our bedroom and he reached down and touched me on the shoulder. It was about 3:00 a.m. He said: "Dad, I need your help." I asked him to wait in the kitchen. While I slipped into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt my mind raced with the possibilities. Did he have a car accident? Was he out of gas or have a flat tire? Did one of his friends get hurt...again?

When I met him in the kitchen he said: "Do you know if we have a flashlight?" I lost my car key. It's a single key without a lanyard or a ring. He went on to tell me that he and his friends were at the Capital. They had lain down and were talking as they watched the stars in the night's sky. When he stood up and went to his car he reached for his key...but his pocket was empty. He and his friends had spent over a half hour crawling around on the ground looking for it, but to no avail. They just couldn't find the key.

Mike thought if he had a flashlight he would be able to find it, but he had looked all over the house and couldn't find a flashlight. So, together we searched the cupboards and the closet and after our second trip around the house we found a single flashlight. He said I could go back to bed, but I offered to help him.

I drove my car to the capital and parked with my front tires against the curb so we could use my headlights to help in the search. But, you know what? My headlights were no help at all. They only showed light across the top blades of the grass and not at ground level, where we needed to search.

Together we walked into the grass and he showed me where we should search, one with the flashlight and the other on his hands and knees. We looked where we could see the grass was trampled...and then we moved a little to the left...and then a little to the right...and then a little closer to the car...and then a little farther away. We took turns with the flashlight. We took turns crawling on the ground.

Finally, we stumbled upon the key. We never would have found the key if it hadn't been for the beam of the flashlight. Without the light we never would have found our way through the darkness. We would have been lost in a sea of sameness...unable to find the key among all those blades of grass.

Here at McCabe we are asking our members and families to join together to find the light. We believe that by joining together in the activities of the McCabe Family Link we will discover the light God offer to our lives.

We have defined a family as the place where you lay your head on your pillow. You may be in a family of five. You may be in a family of one. There are traditional families, blended families, extended families, singles, widows, and widowers. But you are all in a family. If you're single, a widow or widower; then we encourage you to call a friend, a neighbor, or one of your children and ask them to partner with you in these five simple steps.

1. The first step is to share. Ask each other: How was your day? If someone answers, Fine. Then ask them: What was the best part of your day? What was the worst part of your day?
2. Second, read a scripture verse. It will be the same scripture verse that everyone else is reading.
3. Third, talk about the verse. What did it say? What did you hear? What do you think?
4. Fourth, say a prayer. Offer your thanks to God. Ask for assistance or assurance.
5. Fifth, offer a blessing to each person gathered.

We believe reading scripture is essential to our faith. We need to hear the words of those who have gone before us in order to understand what God is telling us today. The scriptures will tell us who God is and who God intends us to be. The words of the Bible are powerful and they will change our lives.

Have most of you heard about St. Augustine? He lived from 354 to 430 CE. Did you know that for years he was an unbeliever who mocked our sacred scriptures? I read the following information about him this past week.

Augustine is perhaps the most famous example of an unbeliever who found faith through direct interaction with Scripture. Sitting in a garden one afternoon, he heard the voice of a child on the other side of the wall say, "take up and read." One author notes that as Augustine picked up the book of Romans: "Instantly, as if before a peaceful light streaming into his heart, dark shadows of doubt fled. The man of unconquerable will was conquered by words from a book he had once dismissed as a mere fable."

—"Loving God's Word," October 7, 2002, *InterVarsity Web Site*, InterVarsity.org.

It's amazing to me that the Bible is the most published book in the world. It's published in over 2,000 languages. It's a book given to people on special occasions like birthdays and graduations.

Practically every American home (93% percent) has a copy of the Bible, and one in five adults (21 percent) in this country report reading it at least once daily

When asked about why they read the Bible, the top reason given by Americans is, “it helps me feel closer to God.” Other top responses (in order of popularity) include, “helps me feel at peace,” “helps me find meaning in life,” and “strengthens me to stand up against wrongs in society.”

—D. Michael Lindsay, “A lived-out faith,” *Rev.*, May-June 2004, 84. Reprinted with permission *Rev. Magazine*.(c)2004.Group Publishing, Inc., Box 481, Loveland, Colorado 80539.

A few years ago Pastor Kenrad Pederson and I were working with elementary kids at Wesley Acres Camp. We had about eighty (80) kids in camp that week, so we decided to offer a number of activities to the kids in the afternoon. Kenrad is a good editor, so he decided to work with kids to write a camp newspaper. I taught kids to canoe. The counselors taught kids camping skills, volleyball, and swimming.

The camp newspaper included articles about what we had been learning in Bible study and our large group events. There was also a sports section and a gossip section...just to keep things interesting. The kids also did an interview each day with someone at the camp.

One afternoon our junior reporters came running up to me for the daily interview. They asked me a few questions that I can't remember and then they asked: How many Bibles do you own. Well, I thought I had quite a few Bibles. I told them I had a Good News Bible that I received in High School; the Living Bible I received when I graduated; a Revised Standard version I bought in college; a New International Version; and a New Revised Stand Version I had purchased a few years earlier. They responded: “That's all? Pastor Kenrad has three times as many Bibles as you do.” Then they ran off and my interview never showed up in the newspaper.

Today was a very special day. As we handed out the Bibles to the first and third graders we gave them the light they will need to find their way. This is a tremendous gift to the children and their families. It reminds them of the importance of reading the scriptures on a regular basis, but more than that it reminds “all of us” that it's important to read the Bible. It doesn't matter if we are young or old...we are called to read the scriptures.

The great thing about reading the Bible is that it's a book of books. It's an entire library. You don't need to start reading at Genesis 1:1 through Revelation. That's a daunting task. There are other methods. For example, if you like reading history, it's in there. If you like reading stories or parables you're in luck. If you enjoy dram...well, the Bible is filled with drama. If you like poetry there is an entire book of poetry. Just call pastor Rick or me and we will help you find what you're looking for.

When I was growing up my family gathered at night to read the Upper Room devotional. We would begin by brushing our teeth and putting on our pajamas. Then we would race to the living room to see who could get a chair and who would have to sit on the floor. Once we were all in place dad would hand someone the Upper Room. The first person would read the thought for the day, the second a scripture, the third a short story, and the last would read the prayer.

One of the things we all know about the health of the Christian Church in America is that it's in decline. The membership is declining. Church attendance is declining. The number of kids in Sunday School is declining. We also know there is a major decline in Christian Spirituality. That's why we are calling on all of you to participate in the McCabe Family Link: Share, Read, Discuss, Pray, and Bless.

Every time there has been a revival in the life of the church it has happened because the laity has become "Spiritually Energized." It happens when the laity take serious steps to Grow in their Spirituality. Then they have been able to claim their faith and take responsibility for the ministry of the church. Revival may begin because of strong preaching, but it happens because of strong laity.

This past week I read a short story about falling stars and I was reminded it takes generations for the light of a star to reach the planet earth. So, when I see a falling star I need to remember that it burned out generations ago. It's also a reminder that if I'm lying in the grass on a warm summer's night I don't know if the stars I'm looking at are still burning bright.

In order for the light of scripture to burn brightly from one generation to another everyone, both young and old needs to read the scriptures and bring them to life in our minds and in our lives. We hold the key to our faith in our hands. Will the light of scripture burn brightly or will it be lost in the darkness?

I believe the people of McCabe will heed God's call to read the scriptures...one verse at a time. I believe we will take hold of the Family Link and the light of the scriptures will lead us to spiritual growth. Amen.