

{ week one }

Clear Communication

Scripture Focus:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.” — Romans 8:26 (NIV)

I received a much anticipated letter and could hardly wait to read the response to my request. I read and reread the letter. I put it aside for a few days and then I read it again. The passage of time did not help. I could not interpret the sender’s response although it was written in perfectly good English. He had responded in such a vague way that his words left me guessing.

The father of our communication has no such problems. His knowledge about us and love for us is so complete that he can interpret our groanings. When I do not know how to pray or what to pray for, The Holy Spirit prays for me. When my own spirit is overwhelmed by uncertainty, I take comfort in knowing that the creator of the universe is acutely aware of my needs and longings. God knows the depths of my agony and the heights of my joy. There is never any miscommunication. My thoughts are known before they are framed in my mind.

It is useless to use weasel words with God or to try to mask our true intent. What a blessing just to know that our prayers will be heard and that our words will never be misinterpreted.

Prayer Focus:

Dear God, help me use my words to build up and never to tear down what you have created. Amen.



{ week two }

Encourage One Another

Scripture Focus:

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” — 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

My friend has been unable to have full use of his right arm since having open heart surgery a few months ago. On the way back from lunch he said to me, “I can complain about all the things I can’t do with my right arm or I can be grateful for all the things I can do with my left arm. I choose to be thankful.” Wow! These words came from a man who has just lost his only daughter to a rare lung disease.

His faith and courage under such circumstances gave me courage to walk back into my own house where my wonderful wife is plagued with Alzheimer’s disease. Carol taught in the public schools for twenty-eight years. She holds a Master’s degree plus thirty more graduate hours. She is the only person I have known who received more money on a grant request than she asked for. Five years ago she helped me edit my book, *Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. She loved singing in the Sanctuary Choir.

When our faith grows weak we can lean into the faith of someone’s whose faith is stronger. Peter Gomes said it best in his sermon for Christmas Day, “The House of Bread,” “The miracle of Christmas is that God cared enough to send the very best and that he continues to do so in the gifts now given to us in one another.”

God has blessed me with friends whose faith helps me strengthen my own.

Prayer Focus:

Dear God, thank you for all the wonderful people you have sent into my life. You have blessed me beyond measure. Amen



{ week three }

Fear Not

Scripture Focus:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. — 2 Timothy 1:7 (KJV)

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” is one of the most memorable statements in American history. President Franklin Roosevelt endured daunting hardships after being stricken with polio. Little was known about the disease when he contracted it. The mere mention of it spread panic among parents. His great courage in the face of such a burden inspired a nation ravaged by the Great Depression.

As memorable and as important as those words are, Roosevelt was not the first to utter them. The Bible makes that same statement in a variety of ways more than one hundred times beginning in the Old Testament and continuing in the New. Fear is one of our most inhibiting emotions. We fear change. We fear the unknown. We fear strangers. It is a controlling factor in many lives, but it cannot survive in a life of faith. That does not mean that our faith gives us license to be reckless or fool-hearted. It does mean that we are to live with the assurance of where our strength comes from.

When Carol was involved in a serious automobile accident, she said one Bible verse kept playing in her mind. “Perfect love cast out fear.” Even though the Jaws of Life were required to get her out of our mangled car, she emerged relatively unscathed.

Prayer Focus:

Thank you God that your love does cast out fear. Regardless of the circumstances your love upholds us. Amen



{ week four }

House of God

Scripture Focus:

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. — Psalm 122.1 (KJV)

When I was in elementary school I helped Mr. Hughes, the custodian, every Friday night get our church ready for Sunday services. In the beginning I was more of a hindrance than a help. He had great patience and slowly I learned. Nevertheless I could not resist the temptation to arrange the seating in the social hall as if it were seating on a train. Somehow this amused this no-nonsense but kind mentor. Unfortunately he would not allow me to shovel coal into the box that fed the huge furnace. I was not yet tall enough to reach the chain to ring the deep throated bell. I loved working with Mr. Hughes and being in the church.

Perhaps these early experiences explain why I feel at home in churches of all sizes grand and small and without regard for denominational or faith identity. They are all sanctuaries. For me they are all holy ground.

I feel that same joy on Sunday mornings as I stand at the door of our historic church welcoming members and visitors from around the world. The smiles on their faces confirm that they are also happy to be in God's house. When the choir sings, *Surley the Lord Is in This Place*, I am warmed by its message. I am reminded of the thousands of saints who have worshipped here and found sanctuary in the house of a loving God.

Prayer Focus:

Creator God, thank You for all of the houses of worship around the world. Remind us that we are family and that the church is not a building but a body of believers. Amen.



{ why? }

Why Have a Say Something Nice Sunday?

The simple answer is that words are powerful. Words have the power to build or destroy. Words have the power to heal or wound. With our words we have the power to build up a Christian community or to destroy it.

Nowhere are words more powerful than within the church. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Words take on a life unto themselves. Once they are given life they are on their way for good or evil.

This special day is an opportunity to build the community of faith, strengthen relationships and heal old wounds. Our national discourse has become so strident and even in religious circles the rhetoric is often far from Christ-like. In Philippians 1:27 we read, “Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.”

This is a day to say thank you to those who make our lives better just by being a part of them. This is a day to recognize those who contribute to our lives in specific ways. This is a day to apologize for words spoken in frustration, anger or disappointment.

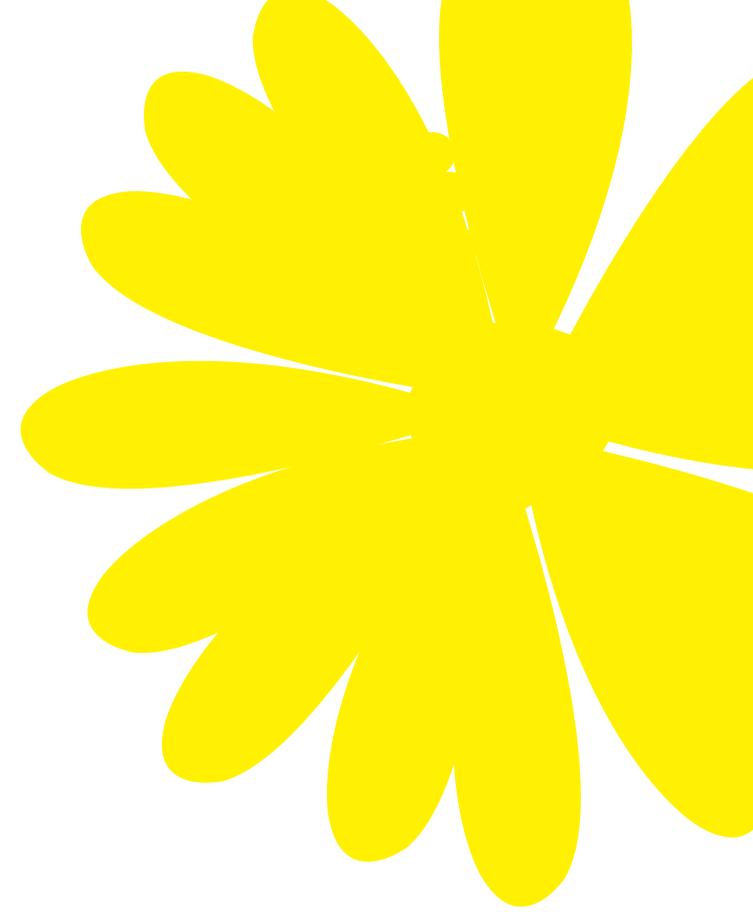
One day is one day, but perhaps we can stretch it to two days and then just maybe if we encourage one another and ask for God's help, we might change the world!

June Is Effective Communications Month

In coordination with Say Something Nice Sunday, First Baptist member Mitch Carnell has written devotions for each week during the month of June. Although Effective Communications Month is a secular observation, these devotions will help apply a Christian worldview to ways we can communicate with Christ-like character.

What can we do today?

Help spread a word of kindness by giving out a symbol of gentleness and friendship — daisies! First Baptist will provide flowers in the foyer following the morning worship services. We encourage members and guests to take a flower and pass it along with a positive message to someone you don't know (i.e. a waiter or waitress), a neighbor or friend, or someone with whom you wish to mend a relationship. If you personally wish to take part in promoting positive dialogue, log on to www.fbcharleston.org: (click “ministires” tab, then the “ministry reources” tab to find the link to Say Something Nice Sunday).



say something
nice sunday

June 7, 2015

{ weekly devotionals written by
Mitch Carnell }