

Why Bother?

A man walking along a beach saw a small girl scurrying from the sand to the water and back, over and over. As he neared, he saw that stretch of the beach covered with dozens of starfish that appeared newly washed ashore. The girl would stoop down, pick up one or two, run to the water's edge and toss them in. Then she returned for another starfish. The girl's mother started calling her, saying it was time to go home.

"You probably shouldn't have bothered," the man said as he looked around at all the starfish that remained stranded on the beach. "I guess you weren't able to make much of a difference for the starfish."

She tossed in one last starfish before running to join her mother. "I think I made a difference for that one," she called over her shoulder.

Once she got in her car the girl looked back at the beach. The man was still there. He stooped down, picked up a starfish, and walked to the water's edge.

Monday – Cultivation: building relationships

Cultivate: from the Latin word "colere" meaning "to care for."

1. Please read Matthew 22:34-39. Who is asking Jesus the question? Why?

Text Insight: To be "an expert in the law" meant this person knew the scriptures well. The phrase "the Law and the Prophets" refers to the entire Hebrew scripture, from Genesis through Malachi.

2. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9. How did Moses say we should prepare ourselves to love God always?
3. Now look at the other passage Jesus cited, Leviticus 19:9-18. How do we care for others according to this passage? How might this be applied in our current day?

Making it Personal: Are you in a growing relationship with God and others? Care for those around you in God's name, and they may start caring why you are doing so. What practical way can you express love to a co-worker, neighbor, or friend today?

Tuesday – Sowing: injecting your faith naturally

"The diligent farmer plants trees, of which he himself will never see the fruit." Marcus Tullius Cicero, 1st c. BC Roman Philosopher

1. Please read Colossians 4:5-6. How should you behave with those you meet each day? What would this look like in one of your typical days?
2. Why does Jesus say we are salt and light in Matthew 5:13-16? In Matthew 5:43-48, what attitude toward others does Jesus advise us to have in order to be salt and light?

Digging Deeper: How did Jesus live as salt and light? How did he treat his enemies?

Wednesday – Harvesting: inviting a response

"Talk unbelief, and you will have unbelief; but talk faith, and you will have faith. According to the seed sown will be the harvest." Ellen G. White, 19th-20th c. American writer

1. Please read 1 Peter 3:15-16. How are we to answer those who ask us why we believe in God? How would "setting apart Christ as Lord" help you maintain gentleness and respect for others?

Text Insight: Peter had suffered greatly for his faith, being imprisoned and beaten, driven from home. Even so, he stuck to it and resolved to answer respectfully and gently whenever anyone challenged his faith.

2. According to Jesus' teaching in Luke 12:11-12 and John 14:25-27, where does our confidence come from?
3. What responsibility does Jesus give his followers in Matthew 9:35-38?

Making it Personal: Pray that God will open up opportunities for you to talk about your relationship with him.

Thursday – Ready for Unlikely Relationships

"He who is not in readiness today, will be less prepared tomorrow." Delarivier Manley, *The Lost Lover* (1696)

1. Please read John 4:1-26. Why did the woman think it so unusual for Jesus to start talking to her?

Text Insight: The woman apparently was somewhat of an outcast in that village, probably because of her lifestyle. She went to the well in the heat of the day, long after most other people would have gathered water.

2. Who can you think of that is like this woman to you? When are you like her yourself?
3. How did the villagers respond to the woman in John 4:39-42? To Jesus? Why are these responses unlikely for those people?

Prayer Focus: Ask the Lord to enable our church to be known as a people who want to reach out to others, even those who are outcasts in our society.

Friday – Ready to Point the Way

"Be in readiness for favorable winds." Chinese proverb

1. Please read Mark 9:14-27. What did Jesus do for the man's son? What did he do for the man himself?
2. Now look at verses 28-29. What did the disciples learn about their own faith?
3. Jesus said that prayer was essential for effectively serving God. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, what else did Paul say a believer needs in order to be ready to do God's work?

Digging Deeper: In Acts 8:26-40, how was Philip prepared to point the way for the Ethiopian? (In regards to prayer, see verses 26 & 29; in regards to Scripture see verses 30-35; in regards to action, see verses 27-28, 36 & 38.)

For the Weekend: Re-read Matthew 22:34-39, Colossians 4:5-6 and 1 Peter 3:15-16, and identify where you are in your life when it comes to being ready to show others your relationship with Jesus.