

Nurturing Faith Ideas 2018

January 7: Baptism of the Lord — In Acts 19, Paul asks people in Ephesus, “Then what baptism did you receive?” Reflect on this verse, then ask yourself and family members what baptism meant as a child and now as an adult.

January 14: Now that the New Year is in full swing, in what ways will this year be different for you spiritually from other years? How will you accomplish this?

January 21: The Psalmist in Chapter 62 says about God, “He is my rock and my salvation.” How do you describe God to others? Has your viewpoint changed through your spiritual journey in life?

January 28: In 1 Corinthians 8:2-3, we learn “Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known by God.” How would you explain these verses to someone new to God?

February 4: This week show the care and compassion Jesus demonstrated by sharing a smile, your seat on a bus, a hug, or maybe a hot meal with a stranger or a neighbor. This may be just what they need to make their day.

February 11: Our transformation may not be as dramatic as Jesus’, but take time this week to transform something in your life. Consider improving your prayer life, changing your attitude, or maybe just smiling more often.

February 18: As the Lenten season begins, take time to revisit your own baptism and what it means to you. This season begins with baptism and ends with resurrection and salvation: a time to reflect and celebrate.

February 25: As you proceed through the Lenten season, share with others what Jesus’ sacrifice means to you and what you do to remember that gift throughout the year. If you don’t want to share with another, write it down to review throughout the year.

March 4: Psalm 19:1 reads, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” Are you able to find the North Star or the Big Dipper in our night sky? How about Orion’s Belt to the Dog Constellation? If not, find out where these or other constellations may be found, then go outside at night. Look up at the wonder that is God’s firmament. Try to count the stars. Think about the power of God the Creator. If it's cloudy, remember all the many secrets of God that we won’t know about God until God reveals God’s glory to us.

March 11: Read John 3:14-21: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Who do you love? List them on a piece of paper with friends or family and share your lists. Is your list long? Think about God listing everyone God loves. Every creature of the world would be on God’s list for

God loves the world and all God's creatures. God asks us to love as God loves. Think about your list again and who you may need to add so that your list includes all that God loves.

March 18: Read Psalm 119. Verse 10 says, "With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments." What does Jesus remind us is the greatest commandment? "Love the Lord, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Write one way to love God with all your heart, one way to love God with all your soul, and one way to love God with all your mind. Share this with someone else.

March 25: Read John 12:12-16. The people shouted, "Hosanna!" What about Jesus makes you want to shout, "Hosanna!" Write down five things about Jesus that you love and may make you want to shout, "Hosanna!" Write "Hosanna!" and put it where you will read it every day of this week until Easter.

April 1: Today we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord. In John 20:1-18, we are reminded that on that first Easter morning, there was no one that would be considered a Christian. One had denied Jesus publicly, some faded away to save themselves, and some were left wondering what they had missed. Even when Mary saw Jesus in the garden and he spoke to her, she did not believe until he called her by name. Even today, we often struggle to recognize Jesus in the world; even when he speaks to us, we fail to recognize it. He is calling to us. If we are willing to listen, we might just find him. Practice your listening this week.

April 8: In Acts 4:32-35, we read of the early days of the Church. At that time, the believers did without many of the things we take for granted, including a church building and the ability to practice their faith. What they did have was each other, and as they came together, the Body of Christ grew exponentially. Anything they did have they gave to the disciples to share as it was needed. Take some time this week to find ways to give back to others.

April 15: In Luke 24: 36b-48, Jesus appeared in the midst of the disciples and greeted them saying, "Peace be with you," to which the disciples responded with terror and doubt. How often do we respond with our own feelings of terror and doubt when we hear Jesus calling to us? Take some time this week to list the doubts, fears, and shortcomings that prevent you from doing what you know to be right.

April 22: In 1 John 3:16-24, John writes of love, specifically the love of Jesus and how it models the love we are called to have for our neighbors, and asks, "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help?" He then calls us to love in "truth and action" not in "word or speech." This week, when you consider telling someone you will pray for them, pray with them on the spot. When you recognize a need, fulfill it in the moment (when feasible). Do for the one what you wish you could do for the many.

April 29: How often do you share the Word of God? The good word of Jesus? How many times in your life have you faced a moment where you had the opportunity to share the greatest gift the world has ever received? Did you? In Acts 8:26-40, Luke tells of the time Philip listened to the Spirit and by doing so was able to share the story of Jesus, even bringing the Ethiopian Eunuch

to baptism. As you pray this week, consider asking God to give you the opportunity to share your faith. Be ready to do so when God does.

May 6: In John 5, we read about Jesus' interaction with a man who had been disabled for 38 years. The man tells Jesus he had no one to care for him or help him in his life. Jesus immediately tends to the man and heals him. Jesus teaches us here by actions, not words. This week, act out Jesus' teaching in your life when you see someone in need.

May 13: On this Mother's Day or some day this week, remember and share the memories of the women who have influenced you in your life with your family and friends. Reach out to those women and thank them for all they have done.

May 20: On Pentecost Sunday, we remember the day the disciples received the Holy Spirit in a unique way. Did you know red is the color of Pentecost? Red symbolizes the Holy Spirit's arrival as tongues of fire. Make a bold fashion statement this week by wearing as much red as possible! Be a disciple of Jesus by explaining to people why you are wearing so much red!

May 27: In John 3:16, Jesus tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Reach out to congregation members and friends who have been absent from Sunday School or worship for a time, check in with them, share the good news of the church and let them know they are missed.

June 3: June is National Children's Awareness Month. Children are important to God and a blessing and gift to us. Hannah knew this and entrusted her son, Samuel, to God. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10, the story of the priest Eli helping Samuel understand God's call to him. Adults, consider the children in your life. Talk with them about how God might be calling them to serve God. Children, talk with an adult you trust about where you think God is calling you to serve God.

June 10: Read 1 Samuel 8:4-20, which tells the story of the people of Israel telling Samuel, the priest/prophet of God, that they wanted a king so they would be like other nations. Samuel warned them against a king, but the people insisted. Following God's instructions, Samuel anointed Saul as King of Israel. When have you insisted on your own way, despite others urging you to do differently? How did things turn out for you? Pray and ask God to help you make choices that are good for you.

June 17: On this Father's Day or some day this week, remember and share the memories of the men who have been a positive influence for you in your life with your family and friends. Write one or more of them a note to thank them for what they have done and how they have helped you.

June 24: This week is Helen Keller Deaf-Blindness Awareness Week, with Sunday being Celebration of the Senses Day. Read Mark 4:35-41. What might the disciples have felt, heard, smelled, seen, and/or tasted in the boat with Jesus? Give thanks to God for the different ways your senses help you experience the world around you.

July 1: Mark 5:21-43 invites us to see the incredible journey (requiring both determination and hope) that happens as Jesus crosses the other side of the lake, meets Jairus, whose daughter was ill, and the woman who has suffered from a blood hemorrhage for 12 years. Caring for one person doesn't prevent Jesus from being present to the other. Our passage invites us to see in these strangers God's care for each of them. Jesus didn't have to recognize this woman, and he certainly didn't need to be present with one of the synagogue leaders, who we know as a collective group have been very critical of him. And yet, God cares for all of them. God cares for all of us. Consider who you are in the story. Are you Jairus? Are you Jairus' little girl? Are you the unnamed and yet healed woman? Thank God for God's presence of healing in your life.

July 8: Psalm 48:12 reads, "Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers, consider well its ramparts; go through its citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. The Lord will be our guide forever." This week, think about the way in which God offers you refuge and guidance. Using the words from this psalm, take a prayer walk around your community. If you cannot walk far, you can take a prayer walk in your backyard or imagine yourself taking a walk in the comfort of your living room chair. As you walk, notice what you see. What are memories from these places? Where do you see God's presence in these places? Thank God for this presence and pray for all those who will pass by or be in these places, that they too will experience God's care and guidance.

July 15: Read aloud Ephesians 1:3-14. The first verse (v. 3) says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." How long has it been since you counted your blessings? Take time to list some of your blessings and share them with someone this week. Conclude your time of prayer by singing the chorus of the song "Count Your Blessings": Count your blessings, name them one by one, count your blessings, see what God has done! Count your blessings, name them one by one, count your many blessings, see what God has done.

July 22: Read 2 Samuel 7:1-14a. God and the prophet Nathan discuss King David. God talks about how it will be God who will establish the house for the people, and that the Lord has not asked David to build him a house out of cedar. The reading ends with a promise, which we remember at Advent (as we think of Christ's birth), at Easter (as we celebrate the Kingdom established by Jesus through his resurrection) and in every season of the church year, as we are invited to live in the light of this kingdom rather than the lesser kingdoms that surround us. Read 2 Samuel 7:13-14 again. Pray today concerning what thing God would have you add or take away from your daily living so that you can live in the light of God's Kingdom.

July 29: Read John 6:1-21, the story of the loaves and fish – the miracle story repeated in each of the gospels. I participated in the annual leaf raking community service project of the Fellowship of Christian Students at our local high school. As an adult chaperone, I asked the coordinator if we needed to bring rakes, etc., and she said that she had told all the students to bring rakes, but there was no way to know how many would appear. We decided it would be a "loaves and fish" experience – because we would all bring what we had. We had plenty of rakes – even a few to spare. What about in your life? How have you seen this miraculous story unfold? Draw a picture of your experience. Write a poem about this experience. Tell your story with a

friend, fellow church member, or neighbor. Whatever you do, thank God for the gift of “enough.” By the way, you are enough, too!

August 5: In Ephesians 4:1-16, we are reminded that we are called to unity in the one body of Christ. Unity, however, doesn't mean that we are all alike, for we have different gifts to share with others in the body so that we can all grow in faith and discipleship together. What gifts do you have to share with the church, the body of Christ, where you worship? Share with someone else.

August 12: In Ephesians 4:25-5:2, we find a description of how we are to live together in the body of Christ – tell the truth; let go of anger; do honest work; use words that build others up, not tear them down; put aside bitterness; don't lose your temper; use your inside voice. In addition, be kind, compassionate and forgiving. Reflect on how these instructions guide you at school, work or home. Which ones do you need to work on this week? Share.

August 19: Imagine you are responsible for a country and all the people who lived there. What would you pray for? In 1 Kings 3:3-14, Solomon, the new King of Israel, prayed for an “understanding mind,” so he would know the difference between good and evil and he could govern the people well, according to God's ways. What do you need to understand better to be a better servant of God and disciple of Jesus? Pray that God would give you a mind that understands what God desires of you.

August 26: Ephesians 6:10-20 encourages us to put on “the whole armor of God.” We don't use armor much here today, but we might still think of what the items represent as tools God has given us to stand up for our faith. So, as you dress each morning, think of putting on truth, righteousness, faith, peace, salvation, God's word, and prayer as you put your clothes on. Share with a friend or family member how putting these things on helps you live as a child of God.

September 2: James 1:17-27 says we should be doers of the word and not just hearers. If we act, then we will be blessed. What are some ways you can be a doer this week? What are some ways you can live out your life as a Christian?

September 9: In James 2:1-10 (11-13) 14-17, we are told that we are not supposed to treat people differently. It doesn't matter if people have money and nice clothes or if they do not have much, they are the same and should be treated with compassion and respect. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. What are ways you can “love your neighbor as yourself?”

September 16: James 3:1-12 is a warning about our tongues. Words can make people feel good, and words can also make people feel very bad. This week, make a point of using your words to help people feel good.

September 23: In James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a, we are told to live our lives wisely. Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live your life, not the way you talk, that is important. Part of living wisely, according to James, means getting along with everyone. Sometimes that's hard work, but God wants us to treat each other with dignity and honor. How can you live wisely this week?

September 30: Christians pray a lot. James 5:13-20 tells us we should pray for everything. If you are suffering – pray. If you are cheerful – sing songs of praise. If you are sick – the members of the church should pray for you. We need to pray for one another. “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective,” the author of James says. Who needs your prayers this week? Offer prayers each day for those in need.

October 7: In Mark 10:13-16, the disciples try to stop parents from bringing their children to see Jesus. They didn’t want to bother Jesus with children, but Jesus loves people of all ages, especially children. What is something you can do to make sure everyone, even children, know they are loved by Jesus? If possible, do it this week.

October 14: In Mark 10:17-31, Jesus told the man before him, “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” The man went away grieving and shocked for he had too many possessions and couldn’t give them up. Not everyone is blessed to have everything they need. Too many people lack good food, water, even a place to live. If you are blessed to have enough and a little to share, choose a charity to give to this week. You may take some cans of food to a food pantry or clean out your closet and take clothes to a clothes closet.

October 21: Mark 10:35-45 tells the story of two disciples of Jesus, James and John, who ask Jesus if when they die they will be able to sit on each side of Jesus in heaven because they thought that would make them great. Jesus said he is not able to make that decision, and Jesus said that is not the way to become great. To become great, you must be a servant. What are ways you can be a servant to others? How can you be a helper?

October 28: All Saints Day is November 1, an opportunity to celebrate Christian heroes and heroines. A saint is a person who shows us about God. Some famous people were Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa. All God’s people are saints, and each saint shows us a different part of God. Who do you know that you see God in them? Name a saint you know in your congregation.

November 4: Read Ruth 1:1-18. The story of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, is a wonderful story of family, faith, and determination. When Naomi encourages Ruth to go back to her own family, Ruth refuses to leave. “Where you go, I will go...your people shall be my people, and your God my God,” she tells Naomi. What is something you can do for one of your family members this week that will make them feel special?

November 11: In Mark 12:38-44, Jesus points out to his disciples a poor widow who has put two small copper coins (worth about a penny) into the church’s offering. Jesus says she has put in more money than those people who put in much because she gave all that she had. As Thanksgiving gets closer, it’s important to remember those who are less fortunate than we are. At the grocery store this week, pick up a few extra cans of food and take them to a food pantry. Maybe a family will have a happier Thanksgiving with your help.

November 18: Thanksgiving Week is a special opportunity to consider how God has blessed us with so much and how we have much to be thankful for. As you gather with family and friends this week for dinner on Thanksgiving Day, go around the table and share blessings in your life. Encourage everyone to share the things they are thankful for this year.

November 25: Christ the King Sunday is the end of the Christian/church year, when we celebrate Christ as King of All. We don't have kings in the United States so it may be hard to think of Jesus as a king. What do you know about kings? What would it mean if Jesus was a King?

December 2: Read Luke 21:25-36. We have now entered another season of Advent. Advent means "coming" and refers to the coming of God among us in Jesus, the baby of Bethlehem, and the second coming of Christ, for which we continue to wait. Jesus tells his disciples to be alert for when he returns. What are some ways you can be waiting, watching and alert to welcome Jesus? Share these with someone, and ask them the same question.

December 9: In Luke 3:1-6, John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age, is all grown up and travels around the region of the Jordan River, "calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins" (v. 3 CEB). The purple candles of Advent are a reminder of repentance, turning back to God. As you prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus this year, what are some changes you need to make in your heart and/or life, so you are focused on God? For what do you need to ask God to forgive you? Pray and ask; God waits with grace.

December 16: The third Sunday in Advent is called "Gaudete" Sunday, which means Joy Sunday. Often, the Advent candle on this day is pink for joy. The prophet Isaiah calls for the people of God to "shout aloud and sing for joy" (12:6a) for God is great among God's people. Share with others what God has done for you that gives you joy or where, in this season of preparation, you especially find joy.

December 23: Luke 1:39-46 tells the story of the angel Gabriel telling the girl Mary that God had chosen her to be the mother of God's Son. Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word." God chose Mary, in a particular time and place, to give birth to God's Son in the world. What would you have said to God if God had chosen you? How might you "bear" God's Son in the world today, even if you don't actually give birth to a baby to do so?

December 30: This week, we celebrate the beginning of a new year in the secular, non-church calendar. Many people make New Year's resolutions to change a behavior, reach a goal or improve their life; it may be they decide to exercise, go on a diet, keep their room/office cleaner or study/work harder. Colossians 3:12-17 says, "Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... be tolerant...forgive one another...put on love... let the peace of Christ control your hearts...and be thankful...and sing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (CEB). What about adopting these as your New Year's resolutions? What would your list of resolutions be? List specific things you can do throughout the year.