

Journeying Together

Shalom Mennonite Church

August 9, 2018

WORSHIP

Our relationship with God

Last Sunday, August 5:

We turned our attention to the spiritual discipline for August: meditation. Although we sometimes think of meditation as an "advanced" spiritual practice that is only reserved for very religious people, Brian explained that it is simple in its essence and really essential for anyone to have a healthy life, turning to Psalm 119:9-16 as a guiding text.

This Sunday, August 12:

We will focus on small groups. Brian will preach on the value of Christians gathering to meet together regularly, and the Community Life Commission will distribute a list of new small group options for people to consider joining in the Fall.

Next Sunday, August 19:

Frank Kandel will deliver the message.

Trip to Chicago/Goshen with Gemina:

Gemina's new attorneys (through the same agency that helped her get bond, Heartland) would like a face to face meeting. We are seeking a volunteer to drive Gemina to their office either in Chicago or Goshen. Please contact Laura Harms if you are able to help with this request. harms.laura@gmail.com

New Small Group Ideas:

The Community Life Commission hopes to see 2-4 new small groups emerge in September, and we invite you to consider joining one! If you are interested in exploring this possibility, please see the attached "New Small Group Ideas" document and then email Linda Kandel at lindakandel@gmail.com with a list of any of the small group ideas that interest you. All requests must be sent by Sunday, August 26.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Relationships at Shalom

Calendar

Sun. 9:30am Worship
11:00 am Sunday School

Aug 16 – Meal, 6:30 pm, Bible Study, 7-8 pm
Aug 22 – Morning Breakfast Group @ Ill. Food Emporium, 7am
Sept 6 – Meal, 6:30 pm, Bible Study, 7-8 pm
Sept 12 – Morning Breakfast Group @ Ill. Food Emporium, 7am
Sept 20 – Meal, 6:30 pm, Bible Study, 7-8 pm
Sept 26 – Morning Breakfast Group @ Ill. Food Emporium, 7am
Sept 30 – 5th Sunday Hymn Sing (ready for HWB #432), 6:30-8pm

DISCIPLING

Growing in our relationships

August Sunday School Schedule:

Regular classes for children age two and up will resume in August. We are open for new teachers starting in September. Please contact Martha Yoder Maust if you are interested.

Adult classes:

Theme: In this time of so much national conversation about keeping immigrants out, we will focus on stories of welcoming and being welcomed.

August 12: a panel of persons who have been immigrants will share stories. Moderated by Laura Harms. Youth are welcome.

August 19: Jeanne Smucker and Brad Yoder will share about their trip to Israel/Palestine and Greece.

August 27: Dan Hess will share stories about "The Other and me."

OUTREACH

Relationships beyond Shalom

Giving Corner:

We have exceeded our goal of 100 completed school kits! There are extra erasers, rulers and pencil sharpeners, if you have want to continue to donate the four spiral notebooks, two ball point pens, package of 12 colored pencils and eight regular pencils for additional kits.

My Coins Count:

Children will be collecting change from the congregation for Mennonite Central Committee's "My Coins Count" program, starting this Sunday. We have a large water jug to fill before the Relief Sale in September.

ADMINISTRATION

Congregational support systems

Pastors on Vacation:

Pastor Sabrina will be on vacation from Saturday, August 4 through Monday, August 13. Please direct any pastoral concerns to Brian Bither or Frank Kandel during that time.

Pastor Brian will be on vacation from Monday, August 13 through Sunday, August 19. Please direct any pastoral care concerns to Frank Kandel or Sabrina Falls during that time.

Milepost #493 – Meditation and Listening to God

Last week, when I preached about the spiritual discipline of meditation, I offered a slightly different definition of meditation than the one Richard Foster offers in the book,

Celebration of Discipline. Foster defines meditation as "the ability to hear God's voice and obey God's word." Although I believe that this is indeed an important goal of meditation, I decided not to use it as the definition of meditation. After all, no person – no matter how religious – can force God to speak to them, and thus our ability to hear God's voice is somewhat outside of our control. Meditation can create an ideal state of mind that makes us more receptive to God's voice, but it is up to God – and not to us – to decide whether or not to say anything.

That being said, there is an interesting and important connection between meditating and hearing from God. Many Christians throughout the ages have testified that God is most likely to speak to us when we meditate, even though we don't hear a clear word from God every time we do it. Why is that? I don't have a clear answer to that question, but here are some speculations:

First, meditation involves "quieting our minds." One of the biggest obstacles for modern people in hearing God's voice is that our minds are so filled with other voices that God's voice can easily get drowned out. We are constantly talking, texting, engaging social media, reading, watching videos, listening to music or speaking, or putting some voice in our head that distracts us from God. Even if we separate ourselves from all of these competing voices for a time by turning off our phones and entering a room by ourselves, we still hear these voices echoing in our thoughts. Meditation – which calls on us to focus on a spiritual truth – helps us turn down the noise of all of these anxious and distracted thoughts by focusing on something else. This seems to be a key aspect of hearing the "still, small voice" of God.

Second, even when we do hear a word from God, it is often difficult for us to tell if it really came from God or if it just came from our own thoughts. We may think that a spiritual insight or message we had came from God, but it's hard to be sure. One of the best ways to "test the spirits" is to consider whether the message we heard is in line with what we know about the character of God. And if we are already focusing on a spiritual truth or some aspect of God's character by meditating

on it, that helps us recognize more readily whether the message we hear is from God or not.

Third, I suspect that meditation helps pave a way for God to speak because it is a “nonjudgmental” way of thinking. In contrast to the discipline of study, which calls on us to bring all of our thoughts and questions to a topic, meditation just encourages us to hold those thoughts in our minds. This gives God the “creative license” to speak to us in a way that we may not have expected or even recognized if we were looking too narrowly through the lens of the questions and concerns that we bring to God.

We must always remember that God is God and we are not, and we cannot force God to speak. But if we practice meditation, we open ourselves up to the possibility that God may speak to us.

-Pastor Brian Bither

Do you have some thoughts to share about this month's spiritual discipline? The Pastoral Team invites you to share your thoughts as one of the weekly milepost entries. Please email Sabrina, Frank, or Brian to explore this further.

Journeying Together is a weekly email newsletter of Shalom Mennonite Church: 6100 E 32nd St, 46226; (317) 549-0577 shalommennonite.com

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Vision & Accountability Team: Brad Sommer, Jeanne Smucker, Wilma Bailey, Carl Rhine, Kim Johnson, Brian Bither

Please submit information by Thursday, 12pm, to Emily Fox: office@shalommennonite.com