

## **SLIDE 1. 2025 Summer Series**

Teaching: *Summer Series Wrap Up: Time to Reflect*

Sunday August 31, 2025

This summer – we've had a # of people from our community share – what I asked of them: a discipleship challenge or message – that if they had only one thing to say to us - what they would consider of greatest importance – right now – what would it be?

I want to thank each of them publicly for their effort and their contribution.

In order of appearance: thank you, Emmie Stanley, thank you, Karis Smith, thank you, Josh Smith, thank you, Shirley Loewen, thank you, Terry Veer, and thank you, Tracey Stobbe.

I will also thank them privately at our dessert wrap-up meeting on October 7.

Here's what I'd like to do this morning. I'd like to look back to each of these teachings – very briefly – to reflect on their main points (at least as they hit me!) and to give us a little time to pause and reflect.

I began our summer series with a look at the James' text - *that faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead* (Jas. 2:17) – and then onto a gospel text - Matthew chp. 25 vv. 34-40 – which outlines how we can put shoe leather to our faith – by feeding the hungry, quenching the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, providing clothing for those who need clothing, taking care of the sick, and visiting people in prison.

This is how we "Go following Jesus every day." This is how we "Help people know and follow Jesus." Active, embodied faith – without which – is a dead faith – or, we might say, no faith at all!

It is certainly undeveloped discipleship.

Even as it relates to our discipleship pathway: KNOW / GROW / GIVE / GO.

GO – love your neighbor.

**SLIDE 2. Take a moment to pray for a neighbor** (a family member or a friend or a literal neighbor) **who does not yet KNOW Jesus** (pray that they would!) **and ask God to give you an opportunity to serve them.**

Then Emmie reminded us that we can *choose* a well-lived life through the Holy Spirit. But it is a battle: a battle between good and evil, an enemy who tempts us to do evil and who undermines our choices, a battle waged in our minds.

What we think and then what we choose! A battle we win when rely on the Holy Spirit... day by day, moment by moment.

Emmie said, "Everything happens for a reason!"

That reason being the choices we make based on what we think.

For the follower of Jesus – with the help of the Holy Spirit!

**SLIDE 3. Take a moment to think about something you're deciding. Choose to surrender to the person and way of the Spirit and ask the Spirit for wisdom to choose well. Then choose! Win that battle!**

Karis invited us to think about the divides between US and THEM: whether they be physical, social, economic, moral, theological. Walls of indifference or skepticism or judgment or ignorance.

Walls that can be simply (if not easily) dismantled by *cultivating curiosity*.

Be gentle as you explore – painful things can surface. Be o.k. with imperfection – things are often grey and messy. Be forgiving – of your failings and the failings of others.

It might begin with something as simple as knowing their name.

A Christian friend of mine told me a story this week.

He was at some networking conference some time ago at a hotel. They met around tables, took notes and had homework each day - about how to connect with others to know them, serve them, and share the gospel.

The organizers told them that they'd have just one question for them at the end of the conference.

As the conference was closing, one of the leaders stood to ask the question.

The question was, "How many of you know the name of the person who served you?"

**SLIDE 4. Take a moment to think about who is a "them" in your life. Think about what questions you might ask them. Ask the Spirit to help/invite you ask those questions.**

And then, as if they planned it, because they did, Josh (Karis' husband) talked about *belonging* – how we can "hold space" for others – to walk alongside them without judgment – to leave space for them to grow within their particular context and perspective – to let the Spirit of God do what only the Spirit can do - in the same way God holds space for us.

God loves us with an everlasting love; with unfailing love He has drawn us to Himself (Jer. 31:3 – as if it were written to us as Israel).

But we are not God. Some people are tough to be around: the talker, the mute, the know-it-all. Some people challenge our assumptions. Some people even disagree with us! Some are critical of the things we do or say.

It's tough to hold space for others sometimes. How can we do it?

LISTEN – or rearranging the letters – be SILENT. Be curious. Pray and depend on the Holy Spirit to speak if need be.

**SLIDE 5. Take a moment to wonder who, in your life, needs you to hold space for them this week. Who in your life is aching to be seen and not fixed? Pray for them. Look for a chance to be with them and listen. Maybe even just hold them!**

Then came Shirley Loewen – who shared her tale of woe at the Northlander Hotel and the lessons it taught her: that there are no little people – not in God's eyes and not in God's plans; that there are no little places – that we can partner with God wherever we are to bring about good things; that there is no letting go – that God sees us and loves us – no matter what!

She left us thinking...

You are important to God, regardless of age, gender, talents, or abilities.  
God has a plan for your life; where you are is the place God wants you to be.  
God will not let you go.

**SLIDE 6. Take a moment to reflect on these truths: that you are important, that God has plans for you where you are, and that He will not let you go!**

Then Terry threaded content and texts from the O.T. to the N.T. to illustrate how God has been working His plan to redeem humanity through imperfect, human ancestral lines.

From Adam and Eve to their son, Seth to Noah: a righteous man in God's eyes. From the tower of Babel to the call of Abraham to be a blessing to all nations. From Joseph to Moses and Israel's escape from Egypt. From the fall of Jericho to the story of Rahab, a non-Israelite who recognizes God's plan and puts her trust in Him.

From the time of the Judges to the time of the Kings. From King David to his son, Solomon, who built the temple in Jerusalem. From Solomon to the division of Israel into 2 kingdoms. From despairing Elijah to Zerubbabel (a descendant of King David) who rebuilt the fallen temple.

Then to Mary and Joseph.

All this to say that the bible – f. O.T. to N.T. – is a record of God making a first covenant of laws with humans and humans proving unable to keep them - such that – out of grace and love – our God intervenes on our behalf through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – from Abraham to David, from David to the exile to Babylon, and then from exile to the Christ (Mt. 1:17).

**SLIDE 7. Take a moment to reflect on the faithfulness of God to humankind, and then, to you. Meditate on stories of his faithfulness to you and be reminded of his grace and love.**

Speaking of grace, Tracey invited us to think about grace a little bit differently – as a moral hazard – the degree to which we bear the costs of our actions.

I am oversimplifying it to say it this way, I'm sure, but we take more seriously the decisions we make when the cost to us is high and less seriously the decisions we make where the cost to us is lower.

Either way – there is a cost to bear.

My takeaway from Tracey's sermon was this: that our everyday sins are costly – even when we don't recognize or bear the cost of them – they hurt us, they can hurt others, and they hurt the heart of God who wants better for us.

And it's easy to forget this! And it's easy to take our forgiveness of sin through Christ by the grace of God - for granted.

It gave us pause to turn to God and be grateful and to wonder with the Psalmist, "Who am I that you are mindful of me?" (Ps. 8:4).

**SLIDE 8. Take a moment to put your sins and what they cost in perspective, imagine Christ on the cross, let that image sober you, and then, without any condemnation, rejoice in your forgiveness.**

I book-ended our summer teaching series last Sunday with a message about *change*. How hard it can be. But how necessary it is to grow.

It's easier to look back and not change.

We briefly looked at a verse from the book of Ecclesiastes: *Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions* (Ecc. 7:10).

And we paused to wonder, "Why isn't it wise?" Because times change.

And so we asked, "Will we change with them?" NOT the gospel itself but how we embody it and talk about it!

Do we pray for people who don't follow Jesus? Do we listen to them? Do we eat with them? Do we serve them? Do we share the gospel through our stories?

**SLIDE 9. Take a moment to think about how you react to change. What keeps you from making changes? What helps you? Any changes to make?**

Thanks, again, to Emmie and Karis and Josh and Shirley and Terry and Tracey for sharing from their hearts the Word of God