November 22nd 2026

WHEN MONDAY COMES

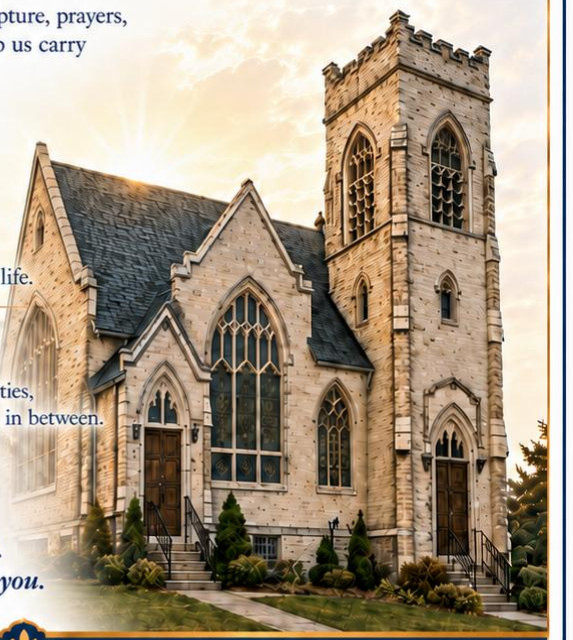
Faith for the Week Ahead

Please take this home and use it during the week.

Sunday worship is not meant to stay in the sanctuary.

Each week, When Monday Comes offers Scripture, prayers, reflections, and simple encouragement to help us carry faith into everyday life.

- Read it with your morning coffee.
- Use a prayer before bed.
- Think about the weekly question.
- Share a thought with someone else.
- Let God speak in the ordinary places of life.



Faith is not only for Sunday morning.
Faith is for Monday decisions, Tuesday worries, Wednesday conversations, Thursday responsibilities, Friday weariness, Saturday hopes, and every step in between.

So please take this home, keep it nearby, and when Monday comes, remember:

God is still with you.
Christ is still calling you.
The Spirit is still working in you.

United Presbyterian Church of Whitinsville

CONNECT WITH US

51 Cottage Street • Whitinsville, MA 01588
Sunday Worship at 10:30 a.m. • https://whitinpres.org

Another View
When Did We See You?
Scripture: Matthew 25:31–46; Ezekiel 34:11–16

Suppose someone came up to you this morning and asked, "Did you see Jesus this week?"

You might think about attending church, reading your Bible, or spending a few minutes in prayer.

But what if Jesus told us that we might have encountered Him while visiting someone in a nursing home, helping a neighbor, or talking with someone who was having a difficult day?

What if we were so busy looking for God in extraordinary places that we overlooked Him in the ordinary people right in front of us?

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a remarkable story. He describes the Son of Man coming in glory, sitting on His throne, and gathering the nations before Him.

Now, that's probably closer to the picture most of us have of a king. Power. Authority. Majesty.

But then Jesus says something unexpected.

He talks about being hungry, thirsty, a stranger, sick, and in prison.

And in His story, the people before Him are surprised. They ask, **"Lord, when did we see You?"** That's a question worth thinking about.

A King We Didn't Expect

When we picture a king, we usually imagine someone wearing a crown, surrounded by important people, and living in a palace.

Kings aren't generally expected to be standing in line at a food pantry or sitting alone in a hospital room.

But Jesus turns our expectations upside down. He identifies Himself with people who are suffering and in need.

And He tells His listeners that their treatment of those He calls the least of His brothers and sisters matters deeply to Him.

This isn't simply a story about being nice. It's a story about the kind of King Jesus is and what matters in His kingdom.

In Ezekiel 34, God describes Himself as a shepherd who searches for lost sheep, brings back those who have wandered, and cares for the injured and weak.

God doesn't describe a king who sits comfortably at a distance, waiting for somebody else to take care of His people. He describes a shepherd who goes looking for them.

Our God doesn't simply notice those who are struggling. He cares about what happens to them.

The Lady Who Knew Everyone

During my years in emergency services, we frequently responded to calls at a small nursing home.

There was an older woman who lived there whom I remember particularly well.

She seemed to know everybody. Whenever we arrived for a medical emergency, she was often standing nearby, offering help and answering questions.

She knew the residents, their personalities, and often what had been happening before we arrived. The facility had a fairly regular turnover of employees. Although the nurses were kind and helpful, they hadn't always been there long enough to know every resident as well as she did.

But this woman knew. She was everybody's friend. In fact, sometimes we almost thought of her as another employee! And there was something particularly valuable about the help she provided.

As paramedics, we were trained to recognize and treat medical emergencies. We checked blood pressures, monitored heart rhythms, assessed symptoms, and provided whatever medical treatment was necessary.

But there's another part of caring for patients that isn't always visible on a monitor.

What's happening in their lives?

Are they frightened? Lonely? Grieving? Has something happened recently that's affecting how they're feeling or responding to their illness?

We can measure someone's blood pressure and examine their ECG, but those readings don't tell us everything about the person we're treating.

Sometimes understanding what's happening in someone's personal life is just as important to providing compassionate care as understanding their medical condition.

And this woman often knew those things.

She knew the residents as people, not simply as patients. She understood their personalities, their worries, and sometimes the little things that could make a frightening situation easier.

Our department also provided outreach programs at the facility, and she was frequently involved in helping with those activities. She was someone we could always count on.

Until one day, she wasn't there. We had responded to another emergency, and I noticed she hadn't come over to see what was happening.

I asked someone where she was. That's when I learned she had left the facility.

Apparently, she could no longer afford to live there. I eventually learned that the investments she had depended upon were no longer providing enough money to cover her expenses, and she had moved to another state to live with her daughter.

I was surprised. So were many of the residents. Some were upset because they hadn't even had an opportunity to say goodbye.

This woman had spent so much time helping others, listening to their problems, and looking after their needs. Yet apparently few people realized that she was facing a serious problem of her own.

I remember wondering how that could have happened. Now, perhaps she chose not to discuss her financial difficulties. They were certainly her private business.

And even if someone had known, there may not have been anything we could have done to change her circumstances.

But I couldn't help thinking about something: **We all knew how much she helped everyone else. But how much did we really know about her?**

I had grown so accustomed to seeing her at the nursing home that I simply expected her to be there.

I valued her help, appreciated her knowledge, and enjoyed seeing her. But looking back, I wonder whether I ever spent enough time asking how *she* was doing.

Not because I needed information about another resident.

Just because I cared about her. And I have to admit, I missed her, too.

The nursing home was never quite the same after she left. We continued responding to medical emergencies, and the staff continued caring for the residents. But something was missing.

We had lost someone who helped us understand the people behind the medical reports.

And the residents had lost a friend who seemed to understand what they were going through.

Here was someone who helped us see what was happening in everyone else's life, yet we hadn't really seen what was happening in hers.

The People We Don't Really See

That experience reminds me of something important about Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25.

Both groups in His story are surprised, but for very different reasons.

Those who helped others are surprised to learn that their acts of kindness were also acts of service to Christ. They hadn't recognized Him in the people they helped. They simply saw someone in need and responded.

Those who failed to help are surprised to learn that, in overlooking those people, they had also failed to respond to Christ.

Neither group had realized just how closely Jesus identified Himself with those He called the least of His brothers and sisters.

And perhaps that's the lesson. We don't need to recognize someone as important before deciding they're worthy of our compassion.

But there's another thought worth considering. Sometimes the people who need our attention aren't the ones who appear helpless. They may be the ones who are always helping everybody else.

The person who organizes everything.
The friend who always listens.
The neighbor who checks on everyone.
The church member who never seems to complain and is always willing to lend a hand.

We see their kindness, their abilities, and their willingness to serve. And sometimes we assume that because they're doing so much for others, they must be doing just fine themselves.

But we don't always know what's happening in their lives. And we shouldn't have to wait for someone to experience a crisis before taking an interest in how they're doing.

The Surprise in Jesus' Story

Matthew 25 contains a serious warning about judgment and how we respond to those Christ identifies with.

Jesus takes the way we treat people seriously. But this isn't a system where we earn God's love by accumulating enough good deeds.

God's grace isn't something we purchase.

The love we show others should grow out of the love and grace we've already received from Christ.

And perhaps one of the ways we demonstrate that love is by noticing people we sometimes take for granted. Not just asking what they can do for us. But asking how they're doing.

And taking the time to listen to the answer.

We can't solve everyone's problems. We can't know everything another person is experiencing. And we certainly shouldn't assume that someone is suffering simply because they haven't shared their private concerns.

But we can make sure they know somebody cares.

Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer isn't a solution. It's the assurance that someone notices, someone cares, and someone is willing to listen.

When Monday Comes

I still think about that woman from the nursing home. I hope she found happiness and security living with her daughter.

I wish we'd had an opportunity to say goodbye and tell her how much we appreciated everything she did.

But perhaps the greatest lesson she left me wasn't about what I could have done differently for her. Perhaps it was about paying a little more attention to the people who are always helping everyone else.

The people we assume will always be there. The people whose kindness has become such a familiar part of our lives that we sometimes forget they have needs of their own.

So, here's a question worth considering this week: **Is there someone in my life who is always looking after others, but whom I haven't taken the time to really ask, "How are YOU doing?"**

Perhaps it's time for a conversation.
Not because we expect them to have a problem.
Not because we believe we can fix everything.
But simply because they matter to us.

Christ the King Sunday reminds us that the Lord of all creation cares deeply about people the world may overlook. And perhaps following that King means learning to notice people a little more carefully ourselves.

Because sometimes the people who need our love and concern aren't strangers we've never met.

Sometimes they're the people we've been seeing every day but haven't really taken the time to see.

And someday, when we ask Jesus, "Lord, when did we see You?" Perhaps we'll discover that He was closer than we ever imagined.

Learning to See the People Around Us

Sometimes we become so accustomed to seeing someone that we forget to really notice them.

We recognize the people who always help, the friends who listen to our problems, and the neighbors who are quick to lend a hand. We appreciate what they do, but do we ever stop to wonder how they're doing?

In this week's *Another View*, we remembered a woman in a nursing home who spent much of her time helping other residents. She knew their concerns and often helped emergency crews understand the people they were treating. But when financial difficulties forced her to leave, many were surprised. Few had realized she was facing problems of her own.

In Matthew 25, Jesus reminds us that how we treat those He identifies with matters deeply to Him.

This week, as we approach Thanksgiving, let's consider how we can become more attentive to the people around us—not simply noticing what they do for us, but recognizing that they have lives, concerns, and needs of their own.

Prayer for the Week

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to the people You have placed in our lives. Forgive us when we become so occupied with our own concerns that we overlook the needs of others. Help us recognize the quiet kindness of those who serve, the loneliness of those who feel forgotten, and the burdens carried by people who seldom complain. Teach us to listen with patience, offer compassion without judgment, and remember that every person deserves dignity and respect. May our gratitude for Your love become visible through the way we treat one another. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Sunday, November 22 — When Did We See You?
Scripture: Matthew 25:31–46

In today's Gospel, Jesus describes the Son of Man coming in glory and separating the nations before Him.

What surprises His listeners is the way He identifies Himself with those in need.

The righteous ask when they ever saw Him hungry, thirsty, sick, or in prison and helped Him.

They hadn't recognized that their kindness toward those Jesus called the least of His brothers and sisters was also service to Him.

The people who failed to respond are equally surprised.

Jesus takes seriously the way we treat people, particularly those who are vulnerable.

But this isn't about earning God's love by collecting good deeds. Our compassion should grow out of the grace and love we've already received.

Sometimes we become so busy looking for extraordinary opportunities to serve God that we overlook the ordinary people right in front of us.

Perhaps we need to look a little more carefully.

Today's Faithful Step: Think of someone you encounter regularly but seldom take time to speak with. Make an effort to acknowledge them and show genuine interest in how they're doing.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me recognize the dignity of every person I meet. Open my eyes to opportunities to show Your love through ordinary acts of kindness. Amen.

Monday, November 23 — The Shepherd Who Notices
Scripture: Ezekiel 34:11–16

In Ezekiel, God describes Himself as a shepherd who searches for lost sheep, brings back those who have wandered, cares for the injured, and strengthens the weak.

Notice something important. The shepherd doesn't simply wait for the sheep to come asking for help.

He goes looking for them.

Sometimes we assume that if someone needs assistance, they'll ask.

But that isn't always true. Some people don't want to trouble others. Some are embarrassed by their circumstances. Others may not know where to turn.

And sometimes the person who needs encouragement is the very person everyone else depends upon.

We can't know every problem another person is facing, and we shouldn't invade someone's privacy.

But we can let people know we're available.

Sometimes simply asking, "How are things going?" creates an opportunity for someone to talk.

And sometimes knowing that somebody cares is a blessing in itself.

Today's Faithful Step: Reach out to someone you haven't checked on recently. Don't begin by asking for anything. Simply let them know you've been thinking about them.

Prayer: Father, help me become more attentive to the people around me. Give me the wisdom to recognize when someone might need encouragement and the patience to listen when they wish to talk. Amen.

Tuesday, November 24 — More Than a Medical Report
Scripture: Luke 8:43–48

Luke tells us about a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years. She approached Jesus through a crowd and touched His clothing, believing she might be healed.

Jesus stopped.

He didn't simply continue walking after her physical condition changed. He spoke with her and acknowledged her faith, telling her to go in peace.

There was a person behind the illness.

During my years as a paramedic, I learned that a patient's blood pressure, heart rhythm, and medical symptoms were extremely important.

But they didn't tell us everything.

Was the person frightened? Lonely? Worried about a family member? Had something happened that was making an already difficult situation worse?

Understanding those things could help us provide more compassionate care. And that's true outside the medical profession, too.

We sometimes see a person's problem before we see the person. Someone may be struggling financially, living with an illness, or facing a difficult family situation.

But those circumstances don't define everything about who they are.

Today's Faithful Step: When someone shares a difficulty with you, resist the temptation to immediately offer a solution. Listen first. Try to understand what the experience means to them.

Prayer: Lord, help me remember that every person has a story I may not fully understand. Teach me to offer compassion that recognizes their dignity as well as their needs. Amen.

Wednesday, November 25 — Who Checks on the Helper?

Scripture: Philippians 2:3–4

Paul encourages believers to look beyond their own interests and consider the interests of others.

That sounds simple enough. But sometimes the people whose needs we overlook are the ones who spend most of their time caring for everybody else.

Think about the person who organizes church activities, prepares meals, visits those who are sick, or always seems ready to help.

We become accustomed to depending on them.

And because they're so capable and willing, we may assume they're doing just fine.

But helpers have difficult days, too.

They become tired. They worry about their families. They experience disappointment, illness, and grief.

Sometimes the person who is always asking everyone else, "How can I help?" would appreciate someone asking the same question of them.

We don't have to assume they're struggling or try to solve problems they haven't shared.

We can simply take an interest in their lives.

And perhaps we can occasionally give them an opportunity to be the one receiving kindness.

Today's Faithful Step: Think of someone who regularly helps others. Contact them, thank them for what they do, and ask how they're doing. Then take time to listen.

Prayer: Father, thank You for the people who quietly serve others. Help me appreciate them not only for what they do, but for who they are. Amen.

Thursday, November 26 — Thanksgiving Is More Than Saying Thank You

Scripture: Psalm 100:1–5

Today is Thanksgiving Day. For many of us, that means gathering with family, sharing a meal, remembering blessings, and perhaps eating considerably more than we should.

And if Bird Dog has anything to say about it, somebody had better remember to share the turkey!

But Thanksgiving offers us something more important than a good meal.

Psalm 100 reminds us to give thanks to God and remember His enduring love and faithfulness.

We have many reasons to be grateful.

And some of those blessings have names.

The person who helped when we were sick.
The friend who called when we were discouraged.
The neighbor who offered assistance without being asked.
The family member who quietly takes care of things we sometimes don't even notice.

Often, we appreciate those people but forget to tell them.

Perhaps today is a good opportunity to change that. And maybe gratitude shouldn't end with words. Perhaps it should encourage us to become a blessing in someone else's life.

Today's Faithful Step: Thank at least one person for something specific they've done for you. If possible, extend a kindness to someone who may be spending Thanksgiving alone or facing a difficult day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love and the many people through whom we experience kindness and care. Help me express my gratitude through words and actions, not only today but throughout the year. Amen.

Friday, November 27 — Do You Have a Minute?
Scripture: James 1:19

James encourages believers to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. That's good advice, although I suspect most of us have occasionally managed to reverse that order!

Listening seems like such a simple thing. But genuine listening requires attention.

We may hear someone's words while thinking about our next appointment, our own problems, or what we're going to say in response.

Sometimes we start offering advice before the other person has finished explaining what happened.

And sometimes we miss what they're really trying to tell us.

A person who says they're tired might be exhausted from caring for someone they love.

Someone who seems unusually quiet may be carrying a worry they aren't ready to share.

We shouldn't assume we know what's happening.

But we can make room for conversation.

And when someone does open up, we can listen without immediately judging, correcting, or trying to fix everything.

Sometimes the most meaningful gift we can offer is our undivided attention.

Today's Faithful Step: During one conversation today, put aside distractions and give the other person your full attention. Ask a thoughtful question, then listen to the answer.

Prayer: Lord, help me become a better listener. Give me patience with others, wisdom in my words, and a willingness to understand before I respond. Amen.

Saturday, November 28 — Love That Doesn't End on Sunday
Scripture: 1 John 3:16–18

John reminds believers that love should be demonstrated through actions and truth, not merely through words.

It's easy to talk about kindness. It's another thing to practice it when we're tired, busy, frustrated, or dealing with difficulties of our own.

But that's where our faith becomes part of everyday life. We've spent this week thinking about the people we sometimes overlook.

The faithful helper.
The lonely neighbor.
The frightened patient.
The friend whose concerns we haven't taken time to hear.

We cannot solve every problem. We cannot always provide the assistance someone needs. And we certainly cannot know everything happening in another person's life.

But we can treat people with compassion. We can acknowledge their dignity.

We can offer encouragement, share what we're able, and help them find assistance when appropriate.

Tomorrow begins Advent, a season when Christians prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ. Perhaps one way to prepare our hearts is to become more attentive to the people He loves.

Today's Faithful Step: Look back over this week. Was there someone you noticed differently? Choose one act of kindness you can carry into the coming Advent season.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me put my faith into action. May my words, choices, and relationships reflect the love You have shown me. Prepare my heart to welcome You by teaching me to care more faithfully for others. Amen.

A Prayer to Carry into the Coming Week

Heavenly Father, as this week comes to an end, we thank You for the people who have touched our lives through their kindness, friendship, and service.

Some have helped us through difficult times. Others have quietly encouraged us without ever realizing how much their words or actions meant.

Forgive us when we become so accustomed to receiving their kindness that we forget to thank them or ask how they're doing. Teach us to look beyond appearances and recognize that everyone carries a story we may not fully understand.

Help us remember that those who appear strong sometimes grow weary, those who help others sometimes need help themselves, and those who seem cheerful may still have concerns they haven't shared.

Give us the patience to listen without judgment, the wisdom to respect another person's privacy, and the courage to offer kindness even when we're uncertain what to say.

Lord, we know we cannot solve every problem or remove every burden. But perhaps we can make someone's burden a little lighter.

As we enter Advent, prepare our hearts to recognize Your presence, not only in worship and prayer but also in the opportunities You give us to care for one another.

May our gratitude become generosity, our faith become compassion, and our love become visible through our actions. And when we encounter someone who needs encouragement, help us remember that we don't have to accomplish something extraordinary.

Sometimes we simply need to notice that they matter.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A Thought to Carry into Monday

Sometimes the person who is always there for everyone else is quietly hoping that someone will be there for them.

Take time to notice. Take time to listen. And never underestimate the difference it makes when someone knows they matter.

From the Pew

The Recipe I Couldn't Leave Alone

Scripture: James 1:22–25; Proverbs 3:5–6; Romans 12:3

After retiring from emergency management, I decided it was time to pursue another career.

I was going to become a chef! I had always enjoyed cooking, and perhaps even more importantly, I enjoyed eating what I cooked. So why not turn something I loved into another profession?

Besides, I figured I had a pretty good background for handling whatever challenges cooking school might present. I'd fought fires, treated medical emergencies, landed airplanes, and responded to more disasters than I care to remember.

How hard could cooking possibly be? Looking back, I have to admit I was approaching the whole thing with a rather cocky attitude.

After all, if I could manage a major emergency, surely I could manage a pot of soup!

Well, I was about to learn that those experiences had very little to do with becoming a good cook. Although I suppose my firefighting experience did come in handy when I had a grease fire on my own stove.

Not exactly the kitchen skill I had hoped to demonstrate!

A Little Trouble Following Directions

I enrolled in cooking school and took classes covering everything from preparing eggs and making crepes to baking, sauces, and different kinds of soups.

I enjoyed learning the science behind cooking and did fairly well with the classroom instruction. I'd even mastered preparing clear consommé and cream soups.

But apparently, I had one serious problem.

I had difficulty leaving a perfectly good recipe alone.

I'd begin with the best intentions. I'd gather the ingredients, read the instructions, and start preparing the dish as the instructor wanted.

But then I'd taste it.

And that's usually when things started going wrong.

Perhaps it needed more seasoning. Maybe another ingredient would improve the flavor. Or perhaps I could substitute something I thought would taste better.

Before long, I wasn't preparing the instructor's recipe anymore.

I was preparing my own version! And that brings me to a particularly memorable assignment.

The French Onion Soup Incident

One day, we were assigned to prepare French onion soup.

Now, I'd already learned how to make several kinds of soup, so I was feeling reasonably confident. How difficult could French onion soup be?

Apparently, it is considerably more difficult than I'd thought.

First, I didn't caramelize the onions properly. I suspect I simply didn't cook them long enough.

Then there was the cognac. The assigned recipe called for it, but since I didn't drink, I wasn't about to purchase a bottle just to make soup. So, I left it out.

I could have asked the instructor how to adapt the recipe properly, but apparently I was still convinced I knew what I was doing.

Then came the cheese. French onion soup traditionally has a topping of melted cheese, often Gruyère.

But I decided feta cheese might taste better. So that's what I used.

By the time I finished, I had created something rather interesting.

The broth was thin, almost watery. The onions hadn't developed the flavor they were supposed to have.

And my brilliant idea of using feta cheese?

It sank to the bottom of the bowl.

Instead of a beautiful topping of melted cheese, I had something resembling an underwater cheese exhibit.

When the instructor examined my creation, he asked whether I was conducting a chemistry experiment or preparing the recipe I'd been assigned.

That was a fair question. But then he asked whether I was trying to duplicate one of my hazardous-materials incidents!

At that point, I began to wonder whether I was actually going to pass the soup course.

And there was one more surprise. The instructor tasted my soup and informed me that it was sweet. Sweet!

Now, French onion soup can have some natural sweetness from properly caramelized onions, but this wasn't the result the instructor expected.

I'd followed just enough of the recipe to call it French onion soup, but I'd changed so much that I hadn't really learned to prepare the dish I was supposed to make.

I remembered something another instructor had once told me:

"If you put enough sugar on almost anything, people will eat it."

I've thought about that statement over the years.

Because sometimes I wonder whether we approach God's Word the same way I approached those cooking-school recipes.

A Little More Sugar, Please

We open our Bibles with the best intentions.

We want to learn about God, understand what Jesus taught, and become better Christians.

But then we encounter something that doesn't quite suit our taste.

Love your enemies.
Forgive those who have hurt you.
Care for people who cannot repay you.
Don't judge others by appearances.
Put the needs of others ahead of your own.

Those are wonderful teachings when we're discussing them in Sunday school or listening to a sermon. But actually, putting them into practice? That's where things become more difficult.

And sometimes we begin adjusting the recipe.

We agree that loving our neighbors is important, but surely Jesus wasn't talking about that particularly difficult neighbor.

We believe forgiveness matters, but perhaps the person who hurt us is an exception.

We believe in helping people in need, but sometimes we find reasons why someone else ought to take responsibility.

A little adjustment here. A substitution there.

And perhaps a generous helping of sugar to make the parts we don't particularly like easier to swallow. Before long, we may have created a version of Christianity that suits our preferences but doesn't quite resemble what Jesus was teaching.

But I've Handled Worse Than This!

There was another lesson I learned in cooking school. I had walked into those classes with considerable confidence because of everything I'd accomplished in other parts of my life.

And there's nothing wrong with confidence in our abilities. **But being experienced at one thing doesn't automatically make us wise about everything else.**

My years in emergency management didn't teach me how long to caramelize onions.

And knowing how to land an airplane certainly didn't help me keep feta cheese on top of French onion soup!

Sometimes I think we approach our relationship with God with that same confidence.

We've managed careers, raised families, solved problems, and handled emergencies.
We know how to make decisions.
We know how to get things done.

And without realizing it, we begin believing we have everything under control.

We may still pray and attend church, but sometimes we treat God's guidance as something we'll need only if our own plans don't work out.

Then something happens.

An unexpected illness.
A relationship that falls apart.
A financial problem we never anticipated.

Suddenly, we discover that our experience, knowledge, and determination aren't enough to control everything – **and the cookies are burning in the oven.**

Proverbs 3 reminds us to trust in the Lord rather than relying entirely on our own understanding. That doesn't mean we should stop thinking, planning, or accepting responsibility.

God has given us abilities and expects us to use them. But perhaps it means remembering that we don't know everything, we can't control everything, and sometimes we need to admit that we still have something to learn.

What the Instructors Were Really Teaching Me

I never did become a professional chef. But I came away from cooking school with something I hadn't expected: a much greater respect for the people who are.

I discovered that being a chef was a little like being an emergency manager, except that in a busy restaurant, something requiring immediate attention seems to happen every day!

There are schedules, supplies, equipment, personnel, safety concerns, and customers expecting everything to come together at just the right moment. And when something goes wrong, the chef has to figure out what to do about it.

I walked into cooking school thinking my emergency management experience would make cooking easy. I left realizing that professional chefs had knowledge, skills, and responsibilities I had seriously underestimated.

Humility isn't simply admitting we don't know everything. It's recognizing that we still have something to learn—and being willing to listen.

Romans 12:3 cautions us against thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought.

And James 1 reminds us that hearing God's Word isn't enough. We're called to put it into practice.

Now, studying the Bible isn't exactly like following a recipe. Scripture requires thoughtful reading, an understanding of context, and sometimes a willingness to reconsider what we've previously believed.

Asking questions isn't a failure of faith. But there's a difference between trying to understand what God is teaching us and trying to make Scripture say what we've already decided we want to hear.

Sometimes the problem isn't that we don't understand God's instructions. Sometimes the problem is that we think we have a better idea.

When Monday Comes

I did eventually pass the soup course. Now, I certainly wasn't at the top of the class.

I was probably closer to what I like to call *summa cum bottom*! But I passed. And I will say this in my defense: I never poisoned anybody or made anyone sick. At least nobody ever told me I had!

I still enjoy cooking and experimenting with recipes. Sometimes my changes even turn out pretty well.

There's nothing wrong with being creative in the kitchen.

But cooking school taught me something more important than how to make soup.

Being willing to learn sometimes means being willing to admit that we don't already know everything.

That's certainly true in our relationship with God.

His love isn't something we earn by following every instruction perfectly. God's grace is available even when we make mistakes, become overconfident, or discover that our plans haven't worked out.

But that grace also invites us to grow.

So, here's a question worth considering this week: **When God's Word challenges something I believe or the way I'm living, am I willing to listen and learn? Or do I immediately start looking for a way to make it agree with me?**

And perhaps there's another question worth asking: When life seems to be going well, am I remembering to seek God's guidance?

Or am I waiting until the cookies start burning before I ask Him for help?

The instructor wasn't trying to prevent me from becoming a creative cook. He was trying to teach me something I hadn't yet learned.

Perhaps that's worth remembering when God's Word challenges us. After all, the purpose of studying Scripture isn't simply to make it agree with our lives.

It's to allow God's Word to help shape the way we live.

And maybe, just maybe, before deciding how to improve the recipe, we ought to understand what the instructor is trying to teach us.

As for my French onion soup? I'm grateful the instructor was willing to taste it. I'm just glad he didn't call in the hazmat team!

A Thought from the Pew

When God's Word challenges us, perhaps the answer isn't to change the recipe. Perhaps it's to let God change the cook.

"Have something from your pew? A story, question, observation, or moment when faith showed up during the week? We'd love to hear it."

Wisdom From Bird Dog

The Best Wrong Turn We Ever Made

Scripture: James 1:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18



Wait a minute! That's MY name on the sign. Shouldn't I get free ice cream for life?

During one of our trips to New Hampshire, Becca and I decided to visit a quilting store we'd heard about.

Now, finding a quilting store shouldn't be particularly difficult. After all, I'd spent years as a pilot finding airports all over the globe. Surely, I could find a quilt shop in New Hampshire!

Well, apparently not. Somewhere along the way, we made a wrong turn or two and ended up completely lost in a small village called Rumney Village.

And when I say little, I mean LITTLE!

The kind of town where the library might have two books, and both are checked out. The kind of place where the "Welcome to Town" and "You Are Now Leaving Town" signs could practically be printed on opposite sides of the same post.

Now, there's nothing wrong with small towns. Some of the nicest places we've visited have been communities just like that. But at that moment, Becca and I weren't interested in sightseeing. We wanted to find that quilting store!

Meanwhile, Bird Dog had been dragged all over New Hampshire, visiting unfamiliar places and participating in adventures she hadn't volunteered for. I'm fairly certain she would have preferred more treats and considerably less sightseeing.

Then, as we drove through the village, we spotted a sign: **BIRD DOG CAFÉ!**

Well, would you look at that! Here we were, miles from home, completely lost, and we'd stumbled upon a café with the same name as our dog.

Naturally, we had to stop. After all, how often do you discover that your dog apparently has a restaurant franchise?

Finally, Someone Recognized the Important Guest!

The Bird Dog Café turned out to be more than a café. It was also a local general store and gathering place for the community.

The owners were delighted to meet Bird Dog, and Bird Dog was equally delighted to discover people who understood her importance!

They welcomed her, gave her free treats, and made her feel right at home.

Becca and I enjoyed a wonderful lunch. The food was fantastic. And Bird Dog? **She even got ice cream!**

Quite a change from being dragged around New Hampshire looking at things she wasn't particularly interested in.

And here's the funny part: **We never did go back to looking for that quilting store!**

Somehow, finding the Bird Dog Café had completely changed our day. We'd gone from being frustrated about getting lost to laughing about our unexpected discovery.

All because of a little café, some friendly people, and a dog who was suddenly being treated like visiting royalty.

The Blessings We Never Planned

I've thought about that experience many times. It really wasn't anything extraordinary.

We got lost, found a café named after our dog, enjoyed a good meal, and met some wonderful people. Yet somehow, it became one of our favorite memories of the trip.

And it made me wonder how often we overlook the small blessings in our lives.

We spend so much time thinking about bills, medical concerns, family problems, and everything else that needs our attention. Those worries are real, but along the way, there are also little moments of joy.

A beautiful sunset. An unexpected call from an old friend. A neighbor offering help. Someone remembering our birthday. A stranger who makes us smile.

Or, occasionally, a café named after your dog!

James 1:17 reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from above.

Now, I'm not suggesting God deliberately arranged for us to get lost so Bird Dog could receive free ice cream. Although I'm certain she would consider that a perfectly reasonable use of divine intervention!

But I do believe God has given us a world filled with opportunities to experience kindness, beauty, friendship, and joy.

Sometimes we're so worried about where we intended to go that we overlook what we're discovering along the way.

Being Thankful When Life Isn't Perfect

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul encourages us to give thanks in all circumstances. That's not always easy. Illness, financial difficulties, family problems, and uncertainty about tomorrow can make gratitude difficult.

But being thankful doesn't mean pretending those problems aren't real.

There's a difference between being thankful for every difficulty and finding something to be thankful for while facing those difficulties.

Sometimes the blessing isn't that our problems disappear. It's discovering someone willing to help us carry them.

Sometimes it's a kind word on a difficult day or an unexpected experience that reminds us life still has reasons to smile.

Our little adventure in Rumney Village didn't solve any of the world's problems, but it gave us a wonderful memory we hadn't planned on making, and I'm grateful for that.

We Can Be Someone Else's Unexpected Blessing

There's something else about that experience I don't want to forget.

The café's name got our attention, but **the people who welcomed us made the experience special.**

They didn't have to give Bird Dog treats or ice cream. They could have simply served us lunch and sent us on our way. But they chose to make us feel welcome.

And because of their kindness, an ordinary stop in a little New Hampshire village became something we'll remember for years.

That makes me wonder how often we have opportunities to do something similar for others.

We may not be able to solve someone's problems, but perhaps we can make their day a little brighter.

Offer a sincere compliment. Thank someone who rarely receives recognition. Listen to someone who's lonely. Help a neighbor. Or simply give somebody a reason to smile.

Sometimes the smallest act of kindness becomes the brightest part of someone else's day.

And we don't have to own a café or give away ice cream to make that happen!

A Little Wisdom from Bird Dog

I suspect Bird Dog would tell you that our New Hampshire trip turned out pretty well.

Yes, she endured unfamiliar places and more sightseeing than she wanted. But eventually, she discovered a café with her name on it, friendly people who welcomed her, free treats, **and ice cream!**

As far as Bird Dog was concerned, the journey was worth every wrong turn.

So, as Thanksgiving approaches, perhaps we can remember something from her adventure.

Life won't always take us where we planned to go. Some days will be difficult, and some wrong turns will be frustrating. But even when things don't go according to plan, we can remain open to the little blessings along the way.

And perhaps, instead of simply hoping for a pleasant surprise for ourselves, **we can become one for someone else.**

Because sometimes the best part of the journey isn't arriving where we intended to go. It's discovering the kindness, joy, and unexpected blessings we encounter along the way.

And as for that quilting store? I still don't know where it was. But I can tell you where to find the Bird Dog Café!

I'm sure Bird Dog would happily give you directions, especially if you're buying the ice cream. After all, if you find free ice cream, you probably weren't that lost!

Bird Dog's Wisdom

Sometimes the best things in life happen when you take a wrong turn. Don't become so worried about where you meant to go that you miss something wonderful along the way.

