



This month's Four Keys focus...family devotions

It's summer...a precious time in Central Minnesota. It comes too slowly and leaves too early. We race around for three months trying to get in all the activities we want to. There are summer camps, family reunions, vacations, house painting, gardening and golf. Just a few of the things that we cram into our weeks, days and minutes.

How can we slow down when we know it will soon end? What can we let go of? What are we forgetting to do? *are we doing with devotional life?*

Let's look at our devotion time as an adventure. Search for new places to have devotions. Before bedtime go out in the backyard, lay in the grass and viewed God's majestic heavens. Look for the Big Dipper...it's usually the easiest to find. Talk about the creation story as you are star gazing.



Trekking through the mountains this summer? When you stop and rest talk about what it was like for the people of Israel as they trekked through the wilderness on their way to the Promise Land. What did they do when they were thirsty and hungry?

who were fishermen. They may not have baited a hook but they threw mighty nets into the waters to catch fish. Who were these men that Jesus sought out? Why were they selected to follow him? Talk about how we are all called by Jesus to be fishers of men. Reflect on how your family has carried out this call.



Some of you may have cabins or lake homes. Take the opportunity to share devotions while you are out on the water. Talk about the disciples

just a few ideas. Remember that devotions can be a simple conversation about God's magnificent love for us. Have fun and make your devotional time a special time for your family.

Have a safe and great summer!



"Your faith has made you well."

Luke 17:19



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Four Keys to Nurturing Faith

- *Caring conversations*
- *Family devotions*
- *Family service projects*
- *Building and celebrating family traditions and rituals*



What's Grace Got To Do With It?

Tina Turner, in one of her hit songs, asks, "What's love got to do with it?" In relation to our faith, the answer is, everything. Central to the teachings of the church, is the understanding of grace. Understanding what grace is and how it is that we live it, could be the most transforming teaching we do for the church as a whole. For years, we have been taught that the definition of grace is:

- God's
- Redemption
- At
- Christ's
- Expense

While there is some helpful truth in this, it doesn't convey the active and alive nature of grace. What if grace were a verb, instead of a noun? What if that single word could be understood in terms of not only who we are, but also how we journey as Christians?

A deeper understanding of the power and the privilege of walking, living and extending the gift of grace every minute of every day can change the way we, and the youth we work with, journey in our faith.

Grace is something you cannot "get".

Grace is a free gift with no strings attached. It is not imparted in varying degrees to those who are most worthy. It is given in the same measure to all, equally. God loves us so much that he wants to be in relationship with us. So much so, that God sent his only Son, to live, love, laugh, and cry with us, and to suffer death on the cross so that we could be reconciled to God. God wanted us to know that he understands the messes we can sometimes get ourselves into and both the joy and pain of living. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have the gift of God's grace. God created us, understands all the parts of us, and forgives us unconditionally. We can never fall beyond the love and grace of God. (see [Ephesians 2:1-10](#))

Grace is something that is "given".

The grace of God means, "Here's your life!" Your life is, because God is. We are created in God's image and God's plan would not be complete without you and me. A helpful way to begin thinking of grace as "gift" is to ask youth to think about what is the best gift they have ever received, and then challenging them to think about what they did with that gift. When given a gift we really want, we are thankful and excited to enjoy what we've received. What single gift could be bigger than unconditional love and the promise of living forever? Grace is truly the most valuable gift that could be given to anyone at any time. The question then is how will we respond to that gift of grace? How can our lives be a reflection of that gift? Where do we begin?

Grace is the way we "journey".

Grace can mean here is your world—good and bad, happy and sad. Horrible things can and will happen, but God is with us through it all, helping us along the way so that we do not have to be afraid or without hope. There is an old saying, "What you are is God's gift to you; what you make of your life is your gift to God." We are grace in the world, literally and figuratively. What would happen if we challenged youth and ourselves to walk, live, and extend grace every minute of every day? How would the world be impacted if we began to live grace by:

- Loving ALL people, without condition (there would be no loneliness).
- Forgiving ALL for how they may hurt us (there would be no violence or anger).
- Accepting ALL people as unique creations of God's plan (there would be no racism or hate in the world).
- Serving ALL people according to their needs (there would be no poverty or people starving; all people would have a place to call "home").

We are "grace-driven" people.

Because of the gift of grace, we can experience true freedom. God does not ask of us perfection, only that we love God and love others in that same way. Perfect grace is given because of our imperfections. We are in need daily of God's love and forgiveness, and it's provided daily. This flies in the face of the belief that, if we work hard enough or are good enough, we will get to heaven. The truth is, we will never be able to be "good enough" or climb the ladder high enough to deserve God's love and forgiveness in our lives. Instead, grace challenges us to be transformed daily in the light of God's love for us, and through that transformation, respond to others with that same love. We are "grace-driven" people when we can put aside our doubts that God could truly love us so perfectly that nothing we can do will separate us from God's love. We are free then, to experience all of the blessings of life on earth, knowing that God is with us every step of the way. (see [Romans 8:31-39](#))

"What's love got to do with it?" In a word, everything! Everything we are or ever will be, all the blessings of living are because of God's grace. In this way we look at the world in a different way. In youth ministry we can draw attention to and make connections with both the simplest or most amazing blessings experienced in daily life. Tears are grace. The forgiving look between people is grace. The smell of rain is grace. The lonesome cry of a loon is grace. The smile on a child's face is grace. A pizza shared between youth is grace. The way we are loved by others is grace. We are assured of God's all-encompassing love through the "grace of God, which passes all understanding," and "keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

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FamilyLife Milestone for July...Marriage

The FaithLife Milestone celebrated in July will be marriage. On Saturday, July 16th and Sunday, July 17th we will be honoring all married couples. Couples who have or will be celebrating 50 years of marriage in 2005 will be recognized in worship and presented with a small memento. Are you celebrating a

50th anniversary this year? These couples are: Bill & Dawn Bard and Bill & LouAnn Garner. If you are and your name is not listed here please let the Church Office know so that we may celebrate with you!



Marriage: Trust is the start of it, joy is a part of it and love is the heart of it.

FaithLife Exercise: Bright Campfire Prayer

How as the
? Whatever
write and can
ou will need a
r fireplace.
a supply of
ks. The num-
sticks will de-
how safe you

want your fire to be! Invite individuals to lay a stick on the fire as they share their prayer petitions. Begin with a small fire and let it burn brighter as prayer is offered and added.



Book of the Month

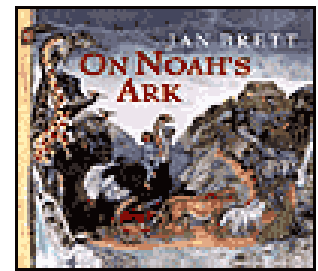
On Noah's Ark By Jan Brett

Many of you may be familiar with Jan Brett's work. Some of her more well known books are *The Mitten* and *The Christmas Trolls*.

In this book, the author tells the Bible story of the flood but it is the narrative of a story that is unusual. This time Noah's grand-

daughter tells the story of how her grandfather prepared for the rain. She becomes the peacekeeper among the animals, tiptoeing around as they sleep, untangling necks and tails, wings and paws. It is her dove Noah sends out to find land.

This is truly a remarkable version of this favorite Bible story.



Coming Events...

July 16 & 17 - Marriage Milestone

July 23-31 - Senior High Youth to Washington, D.C.

August 3 - Lutheran Night at the Dome

August 24 - National Youth Gathering Information Meeting

September 10 & 11 - Mission & Ministry Fair

November 4-5 - Girls of Faith REVOLVE Tour in Minneapolis



July Family Page



Make Your Own Flag

A flag is more than colored cloth. A flag contains symbols that mean something to people. The United State's flag has thirteen red and white stripes that stand for the thirteen original states. It also has fifty stars, with each representing (or standing for) one of our fifty states. Try making a flag that would mean something to you by using symbols to stand for important things in your life.

What You Need

- 12 x 18 (or poster board)
- Markers
- Scissors
- Tape
- 1/4 " dowel (optional)
- Clear Con-Tact paper (optional)



How To Make It

1. Write your name (really big) in the middle of the paper. Decide what things in your life are important to you. It could be your hobbies, team sports, pets, church, or anything else.
2. Pick a symbol to stand for each activity and draw them on the flag. (Or you could cut the symbols from construction paper and use glue to place them on the flag.) Try to think of as many things as you can that remind you of yourself so that the flag will be bright and colorful and really represent your life.
3. If you have clear Con-Tact paper, cover your flag so that it will be more durable (it will last longer.)
4. If you have a dowel (these are wooden sticks you can buy at the hardware store or craft store), now is the time to give your flag its flagpole. Put several pieces of tape on the left (short) edge and wrap this around your dowel so that your flag will be able to stand up.
5. Put it someplace special!

You could also do a "family flag" where all of your members put on symbols that are important to them. Cover it with Con-Tact paper and put it someplace where everyone will see it, like the refrigerator. That way your family will see it often and be reminded of how much fun it is to be together.

Independence Day was first observed in Philadelphia on July 8, 1776, at which time the Declaration of Independence was read aloud. July 4th was set as a national holiday to celebrate freedom.

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. This is a time to celebrate our freedom.

A Bible Verse to Remember

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5: 13-14

A Blessing

May we treasure the freedoms we have been given, using them always as gifts for the common good. Amen

