



# The 4th Focus

## “Sharing the Gospel, Sharing Our Lives”

What does it mean to “share the gospel” with someone? Maybe it’s just me, but when I hear this phrase, I still flash back to the ‘tract rack’ my church had in the back foyer when I was growing up. We would use them as a kind of quick-strike evangelistic tool, where you could go door-to-door and leave them with people. Or they could be left in a public place—at a restaurant, in a grocery aisle—where someone would see it, read it, and maybe come to know something about Jesus.

Now, I don’t want to knock this method of sharing the gospel completely. There’s a time and place for a clear, short summary of the gospel to those who haven’t heard—the apostles do this frequently in Acts. But I’m struck by how Paul describes his sharing of the gospel in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. There he says, “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God *but our lives as well.*” I think what Paul is describing here is both more difficult and more effective than our attempts at quick-strike evangelism and discipleship. Why?

For starters, Paul doesn’t just *speak* the Gospel message; he *embodies* it. If the Gospel is the good news that Jesus comes to us, identifies with us, makes time for us, and rescues us from sin and death, can we communicate this well when we’re trying to race on to the next thing (even if it’s the next person we’re trying to evangelize)? Is our message “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, but I’ve only got the next 5 minutes to see if you’re worth talking to; otherwise, I’m moving on!” To make disciples of Jesus takes time and it takes more than just giving them ‘the gospel.’ True sharing of the gospel means that we will share our lives as well. Discipleship involves wisdom, knowing and showing what it means to follow Jesus in daily life in our time and place. You can’t teach that in one sitting. You probably can’t teach it in years! And you can’t pass on that wisdom solely by talking. You teach it by connecting word and deed, day in and day out.

This idea of sharing in life together is one of the driving forces behind connecting younger disciples of Jesus with more mature disciples of Jesus in the church. In the last couple of years, we have connected those in the process of making profession of faith with other members of the body, because being a disciple isn’t just about stating your beliefs, it’s about sharing our lives with each other as the body of Christ. I am grateful for the willingness of those who have been asked to commit to this sharing, and I would ask you to lift up in prayer members of our congregation who have committed to sharing life with younger disciples: Norma Boehm, Julie Schalk, Mike Berrevoets, Sam Dennis, Eric Schalk, Phyllis Berrevoets, Micah Meendering, and Jeni Wammack.

As we continue to grow in the gospel, we will be thinking about additional ways to be intentionally discipling one another, from the oldest to the youngest. So I would ask you to consider how God might be moving in your life to disciple someone by sharing more of your life with them. It takes time. It takes intentionality. It takes effort, and it can be awkward, difficult, and draining to share your life with others. But that’s what Jesus did for us. And it is because he shared his life with us that we can share our life with others. So where is God calling you to share the gospel by sharing your life?

- Dr. Branson Parler

# Men's Study

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In Hebrews 10:24-25, the author says something that I find fascinating. The author says "...let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...". This is a famous passage and often used to hammer into us the need to go to church every Sunday.

But, what might get lost in the guilt trip is the very interesting use of the plural in the verbs. He says "let *us* consider how we may spur one another on". The author isn't just telling us to go to church on Sunday. The author is showing us all that each and every one of us has a very crucial responsibility. What is that responsibility? To consider something. He says "consider how we may spur one another on." Have you ever thought about this? We are called to "consider" or to "contemplate", to actually think about how we can best love each other well and encourage each other.

It's also interesting that the author doesn't say, "go to church and let the pastor tell you how to think." He says, "go to Grand Coney on Wednesday mornings and engage in thinking and talking *with* each other." Please forgive my paraphrase. There weren't any Grand Coney restaurants in the ancient Near East. Which is sad.

If you are a guy who is looking for a way to connect with your call to enter into the lives of others and to learn how to encourage others (and maybe even get a little encouragement yourself), I warmly invite you to join us on Wednesday mornings from 6:30AM to 7:30AM to open our Bibles together and talk through Scripture. We meet at the Grand Coney on Michigan and Eastern.

We've been walking through various books of the Bible, asking questions and wondering about how these deep truths of Scripture can encourage us every day. We are nearing the end of the book of Hebrews, currently, but it's easy enough to jump in at any time. The prep work is minimal, but the time together eating good food and drinking bad coffee is a great way to be encouraged in your week as you live your life daily trying to serve and love those around you to whom God has called you.

If you're interested in joining us, please feel free to just show up. We'll welcome any guy to join us. If you'd like more information, I'll be happy to answer any questions.

- Aaron Wetzel

# GEMS

During the past 2 months, we have continued to learn about LOVE. We have learned that Love Listens (James 1:19), that we are to Love Each Other Deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22), and that Love Forgives (Colossians 3:13).

During Bible Challenge the girls are eager to find the Scriptures and many of them are excited to read the Scriptures out loud. Laura O. encourages the girls to read the same verse from different translations. These verses have been about love, but more specifically about how God's command is for us to love one another (1 John 3:23, John 13:34 & more!).

During Bible Memorization the girls continue to learn that if our actions are not accompanied by love, then those actions have no lasting meaning (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

February 13 was a Special Friends Event. A student from Kuiper College came to church to lead us in worship. Kristi spoke to us about Love being a Chain Reaction (John 13: 14-15). She shared the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet and how Jesus told his disciples to "go and do likewise." Then Kristi gave us the opportunity to do so... Adults were able to wash the hands of their Special Friend. Then everyone worked together to decorate lunch bags for Kids Food Basket. Kids Food Basket makes sack meals for kiddos who have little to no food at home. Our hope is that a child who receives a specially decorated lunch bag will feel special and loved.

Mark your calendar on March 19 for GEMS Sunday!!!

- Laura Montalvo

# Yoga

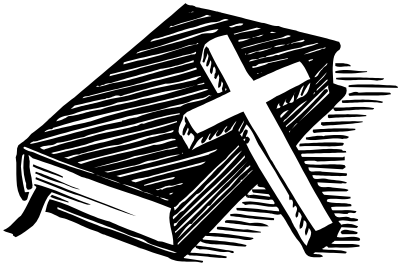
I enjoy the physical practice of yoga. I used to not be able to touch my toes; now I can. That's cool. But if all that yoga did was make me more flexible, I don't think I would continue to do it. What really makes yoga work for me is the space that it creates in my head. Through moving your body and focusing on your breath, you create space to clear out everyday thoughts and bring a clear mind before God. This allows you to bring a mind less cluttered with the day to day and makes it that much easier (granted, only sometimes) to hear the still small voice of God. Yoga practice also provides tools to help you to filter your thoughts, noticing which ones are negative and do not reflect the idea that you are made in the image of God.

For me, God uses yoga as a means of transformation, of becoming every day more and more like Christ. And I think that is possible for everyone who practices. Although this is why I teach and practice, there are many other benefits to yoga. Feel free to figure out what makes yoga work for you: come to class on Wednesdays at 6:45p.m. in the fellowship hall.

- Nick Dobkowski

# Reformed Church - Annville Institute

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The role of women has been vital in the history of Reformed Church missions. Between 1819 and 2000, a total of 1,209 women ministered on foreign and domestic fields. Beginning in 1875, RCA women organized their own foreign and domestic mission boards. After providing generous material and personal support for the work among Native Americans, they turned their attention to a second North American field.

In 1899, the Women's Board of Domestic Missions proposed beginning a mission to Jackson County, Kentucky. The following year, two New York women, nurse Cora A. Smith and teacher Nora L. Gaut, braved a rugged journey by wagon and horseback over the Boone Trail to McKee. Looking backward, in an article titled *Our Kentucky Mountain Work* published in the RCA's *Christian Intelligencer* magazine of April 12, 1911, the author described the progress that had been made over a decade.

*"Most of the readers of the Intelligencer are aware that our own Women's Board has for ten years carried on an extremely successful mission work in Jackson county, Kentucky where we have three missions, at McKee, at Gray Hawk, and at Annville...We are the only organization working in Jackson County, and we have a parish of ten thousand souls...There is no school work but our own...except the little public schools which are opened only a few months in the fall and are inadequate to provide even a good elementary education."*

At Annville, the RCA purchased 75 acres of land for a boarding school. Sitting under an oak tree on the highest part of the property in 1909, Rev. William A. Worthington drew out a campus plan on a sheet of meat-wrapping paper. At its center would be a building he named Lincoln Hall. The school's purpose would be to provide *Complete Living for the Mountain people...to give the mountain people the best possible opportunity for the largest development for service in home, Church and state.* Worthington's leadership continued at Annville until his death in 1941.

In this isolated region with little opportunity, there was a great need for formal education. An elementary school was started in 1910 with a high school added by 1924. There was also a wide variety of vocational training, including agriculture for boys and home economics for girls. There was also a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. Above all else was evangelism and religious training.

A thriving timber industry brought temporary prosperity to the area. Enrollment increased for a few years beginning about 1914, reaching a high of around 300 students. The Great Depression brought reductions in staff, enrollment and programs. In 1936, an RCA pastor, B.T. VanderWoude, offered to donate 1% of his salary to the mission. Longstanding concerns were addressed for many years, including administrative leadership, updated vocational training, budget and the Reformed Church's focus in the region. Declining enrollment and other factors led the RCA General Program Council in 1978 to vote to provide only a bare maintenance budget, making it fiscally impossible to reopen the school.

After the closing of Annville Institute, five ministries now operate in the former location. The Annville Christian Academy is an elementary school. At-risk youth are served through Beth's Blessing for girls and Barnabas Home for boys. The High Mountain Equine Outreach ministers through horseback riding. Historic buildings remain on the site. Lincoln Hall (1923) has fallen into disrepair, but there is a movement to restore it as a cultural center. Hacker Gym (1930) is a busy center of activity.

In 1979, Jackson County Ministries was established. It offers a wide variety of programs for youth and veterans, as well as house renovation and two thrift stores. In 2016, its name was changed to Grace Covenant Ministries. Three area Reformed Churches minister at McKee (organized 1910), Annville (1911) and Gray Hawk (1928).

POSTSCRIPT In 1963, the Fourth Reformed Church RCYF (Reformed Church Youth Fellowship) set a goal to raise \$300.00 of its own support for Mr. Dick Doeden, who taught science classes and managed the campus farm at Annville Institute. For six years, the Doedens were missionaries regularly supported by our congregation.

- Eric O'Brock  
Next - Reformed Church Media

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For Christian education teachers, church starts much earlier than 9:30am on Sundays. It usually begins sometime on Monday with reviewing the week's lesson plan. This continues until the Saturday night scramble for props - blankets, dishes, bathrobes, or anything else that could transform a small classroom into Mount Sinai, the Red Sea, or Mary and Martha's house. We then haul the mish-mash seemingly random items through the crowded church hallway, laughing at ourselves for how ridiculous we look, in order to prepare the classroom to be filled with rambunctious laughter, glue stick messes, and the Holy Spirit.

When everything is in place, my class begins with my favorite part: sharing highs and lows of the week. It warms my heart to see my students so eager to share the events in their lives. Then, I am blessed by the opportunity to help these precious girls memorize God's Word. We work through our memory verse together, trying to remember and understand the words. When students are successful at memorizing a verse, they get a surprise the next week. Afterwards, we move into story time, seeking to bring God's Word to life through acting, drawing, or simply listening (although listening is sometimes a challenge!). Then we do an activity or craft to help them remember the story, and the kids help clean before their parents pick them up.

A Christian education teacher is someone who tries to do three things: invest in the children of our church, commit to learn more about one's own faith, and lead by example. I felt called to this role not because I do all of these things perfectly, but because God was telling me to use my spiritual gift of teaching to benefit the Body of Christ. Little did I know that God would use it to bless me.

Through this wonderful and sometimes difficult experience, God has taught me patience, humility, and how to delve deeper into understanding my own faith. Additionally, I now feel connected to Fourth in a way that I hadn't before. It has given me a real sense of belonging. When one of my students runs up to me at church just to say "Hi" and give me a hug, my heart overflows. This is truly a gift that I do not deserve.

Our church needs teachers. We need people who will do the challenging work of investing in our children. This is part of living as a community; each person must work for Christ in the way that He has gifted them. If you feel that you have been gifted with an ability to teach, or if you are patient and creative, please consider becoming a Christian education teacher, co-teacher, or substitute. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it.

- Taylor Eising

Our Camp Geneva retreat was a great time with our Youth Group! 9-Square, crafts, laser tag, worship, dodgeball, and pranks were all a large part of the weekend. It was wonderful to spend so much time with the students doing things that we don't normally have the ability to do! Thank you so much, Fourth family, for all of your support - monetary and all of the prayers.

For the rest of the semester we will be studying II Corinthians 4. This discussion will lead us to some of the deeper questions about why following Christ can be hard, go against the culture, and how it can lead us to wrestle with some big questions about evil in our lives. We covet your prayers for these discussions. It can be difficult to challenge how we live to better align with our calling and to recognize that what is eternal is the unseen, not the seen.



In our early planning for next year, we are hoping to get some small groups going that the youth will be heavily involved in picking the topics for. Many of our students have expressed interest in studying in small group settings different topics and more than we are able to get to in the normal Youth Group meetings. These groups are still a very fluid concept, but would ideally meet regularly at a time of the groups choice: possibly 6:30am, maybe a 4:00pm, maybe a brunch date on Saturdays, anything! We would like to have some other members of the Fourth family be a part of those groups to study with and perhaps help lead the groups. Please prayerfully consider what you might be willing to do to be involved with this new avenue of ministry to connect with our youth - or even study new topics alongside us!

- Sam & Kristi Dennis

