

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 2 Peter 1:5-9

May 25, 2010

Dear Members & Friends of Immanuel,

Lasting change requires long effort. Effort...now there is a word that has fallen by the wayside when it comes to the spiritual life. Somehow we have become convinced that with God everything should be easy, effortless. After speaking of the glorious power given to us when Christ saves us, the apostle Peter exhorts us: "For this very reason, make every effort to add..." (2 Peter 1:5).

I am truly thankful for the recent wilderness experience through which the Lord escorted me. While the 'near-death' episode in Indonesia was the pinnacle moment, the journey still had a few miles to go. Thank you for your prayers, your concern and your understanding. *(If you are unaware of my testimony regarding this wilderness experience, please go to [www.ibcwausau.org](http://www.ibcwausau.org) and listen to the April 4 Easter sermon entitled "What God Has Joined Together, Let Man Not Separate, Part 2". The testimony begins twenty minutes into the message and lasts about eighteen minutes.)*

Looking back (hindsight tends to be more 20/20 than foresight might provide), I am attempting to understand my role in this whole process. I have no doubt regarding the sovereign and providential activity of God in this episode. I do not question His wisdom or wonder about His tactics. He knows what He is doing. However, I do question and analyze myself, attempting to learn and grow. What did I do that may have caused this? What pathway did I take leading into the wilderness? For God and His actions I am not responsible. For me and my actions I am responsible.

While my journey with the Lord, and the lessons being learned, will not be complete until I reach heaven, I have identified three areas that crept into my spiritual life that will always lead to a spiritual wilderness.

First, I was putting my work for the Lord ahead of my worship of the Lord. This occupational hazard of ministry has been around for a long time. While multi-tasking is the craze of our generation, it is dangerous when applied to worship. It is easy for a pastor to rationalize that while working on Bible studies for fulfilling professional duties, personal worship is taking place simultaneously. I have to maintain a clear line of demarcation between my personal worship and my pastoral work.

Second, I was coasting in my personal spiritual disciplines. The routine was turning into a rut. The privileges of being a follower of Christ were giving way to performing perfunctory duties. When this happens, joy is elusive and contentment seems very distant. I am again discovering that grace-driven effort yields marvelous spiritual dividends.

Third, I was spending too much time in commentaries, thereby investing less time in Bible reading and study as I prepared my sermons. Any course in homiletics (preaching) warns pastors of this danger. I was succumbing to the dangerous mindset that, having read the Bible so many times, I can back off reading it as much. When I took remedial action, the results were instantaneous. First, I read and/or listen to the passage that I will be preaching at least twenty-five times. So, for instance, this week, I am reading Exodus 17 twenty-five times (yes, I do keep a count) before I ever take out a pen and paper to begin the note taking process. During this time there are no word studies and no checking of cross references. The second action is to keep ALL of my commentaries closed until Thursday. Since my day off is Friday, Thursday is the final day in my sermon preparation process. When I leave my office on Thursday, it is my goal to have all of my Bible study and sermon preparation complete. When I finally open my commentaries on Thursday, my sermon outline and content are pretty well completed. Therefore, commentaries are not establishing my content. Rather, they are used for discovering additional cross-references, helpful phrases for effective communication and further clarification of the theology in the passage.

My personal and pastoral joy and contentment have been revived. I have a renewed sense of awe and responsibility for the call the Lord has upon my life for pastoral ministry. It is a privilege to serve as the Senior Pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church.

## SCHEDULE CHANGE

Memorial Day weekend is upon us. Please take note of the schedule change for this Sunday, May 30. There is no Sunday School and no Evening Bible Study Hour. The Worship Service, which is the only activity on the schedule, is at the regular 10:15 AM time.

## SUMMER MINISTRIES

While the summer months do have an impact on schedules, I am grateful that at Immanuel the tradition has always been to remain active in ministries. Here are a few summer highlights:

**Family Bible Week** - I hope that you will make it a priority to take advantage of this annual conference at Immanuel. The enclosed flyer provides the details and information about Family Bible Week.

**Pastor's Forum** - Membership in a local church is an important commitment to make, especially in a culture where commitment and responsibility are waning. If you are newer to Immanuel and would like to learn more about us and our ministry, this is the Forum to attend. If the Lord is leading you to make Immanuel your church home, this Forum is a necessary step in the membership process. The Pastor's Forum will be held on Saturday, June 19 from 8:30 AM until noon. You can sign up for the Forum on the "R" Card in the coming weeks.

**Baptism** - After a person receives Christ as Savior and Lord, being baptized is an important step. We will have a baptism service during the morning worship on Sunday, June 27. The Baptism Class will take place during the Sunday School hour on Sunday, June 20. You can sign up for this important step of obedience on the "R" Card in the coming weeks.

**Equipping for Effective Evangelism (E3)** - We have been commissioned and commanded to be actively involved in sharing the Gospel with people in our lives. While I am grateful for the growing number of people at Immanuel who are doing this, I continue to wonder why so many are remaining silent about Jesus to family members and friends who are still spiritually dead and headed for a Christless eternity. E3 addresses the two major reasons people do not witness: fear and not knowing how. This seven week training course begins for the summer on Tuesday, June 29. The additional six dates are: July 6, 20, 27 and August 3, 17, 31. You can sign up on the "R" Card in the coming weeks.

**Deepening Discipleship & Devotion (D3)** - This important small group Bible study ministry is a great option for your involvement. It is difficult to describe it in a brief paragraph, so be on the lookout for the letter coming from Pastor Mike which will provide more details and information on getting involved.

**Wednesday Evening Prayer & Bible Study** - This weekly meeting is at 7 PM in the south end of the Fireside Room. The Deacons rotate in providing leadership for this gathering. Half the time is invested in Bible study the other half is invested into prayer. This summer's leadership includes Bruce Trueblood, Ben McEvoy, John Kruit and me.

**Summer Sermon Series** - We will take a break from our Exodus study. I am working on a series entitled "Spiritual Vital Signs." This eight part series will study the Scriptures regarding the spiritual vital signs of the heart, mind, will, tongue, eyes, ears, hands and feet. The series will begin June 13.

The one ministry that we would like to cancel for the summer, or better permanently, is the G3 ministry. So, the Grumbling, Groaning & Gripping ministry is officially cancelled.

Summer can provide breaks in the routine and occasions for vacations. I hope that your summer will offer some time for relaxation and refreshment. During these times it would be good to make a greater investment into your personal spiritual disciplines. My prayer for all of us is that this summer will prove to be spiritually renewing and rewarding. As we seek first the Lord's Kingdom and His righteousness, we will discover that He provides everything that we need for life and godliness.

Serving with you in the ministry of the Gospel,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.  
Romans 12:1-2