

# *Straight from the "Heart"*

Worship Service from July 25, 2021



**Music (vv 1,2,5) How Firm a Foundation**

## **Intro to Series / Act of Centering**

That hymn introduces our theme for the day -- that we need a foundation on which to build our lives, a life that is, no matter how active or sedentary, is always on a journey, and there is no better undergirding for that journey than Jesus Christ. The visual you may have seen on the wall as you entered the sanctuary was an attempt to show that we may all come from many walks of life, many paths -- and while we may have various thoughts about that background -- filled with people and influences and events and actions and lifestyle choices, some negative and regretted, some positive and cherished -- what I sometimes call bad baggage and good luggage, they have all had a part in what has brought us to where we are right now in this room -- And as important that is, what is even more important is where we are headed -- our paths converge and merge as we follow and move toward Christ, even as he journeys with us right now, walking with us through our days, strengthening and moving us forward toward his kingdom. This little scenario raises some questions for us -- which may in the specific, be applied differently for each of us, but in general has some common answers -- If we are following Christ -- then where do we go from here? What are the primary directions of God's people? And knowing those directions, then how do I specifically apply that to my life and our life together? That's what this Compass Points series is about...



With that in mind, I invite you to relax and get comfortable in an open posture, Breathe deeply -- exhaling the stresses and schedules of the week, inhaling the strength and peace of Jesus -- and remember with me --- *your* life, your past --- and reflect on these questions, derived from some small excerpts from William J. Bennet's introduction to his anthology "The Moral Compass: Stories for Life's Journey". If you are comfortable, close your eyes. Think of your childhood home

and family life. We learn at home our first compass points, our sense of right and wrong, of what needs to be valued and what is not, developing our character traits -- What kind of value system was exemplified for you in your formative years?..... These early lessons, clear or cloudy, intentional or accidental, for good or for ill, tend to stay with us throughout our lives as we make our own way in the world. How are they guiding your life's journey even now?..... Are there some parts of that early value system that needs to be abandoned?..... Are there some parts of that early value system that need to be recovered -- because you have wandered away from them, but you now know they were right?..... Even more importantly, with whom are you surrounding yourself to move along your desired life's path?..... And most importantly, What foundation are you using to continue building your journey, to continue shaping the kind of character, the kind of person you are becoming?..... Think on these things while the music softly plays. SILENCE ... Lord, restore and revive our lives. Open before us the right path [the right direction] and lead us along in your footsteps of righteousness so that we can bring honor to your name. (Psalm 23:3 (TPT) Adapted into a prayer).

**Responsive Reading** (LR - Lay Reader **C: Congregation**)

The very early church was concerned about how they were going to build their future on the way of Christ. They developed some early methods and strategies to do so. Let's read responsively that overview.

LR: Every believer was faithfully devoted to following the teachings of the apostles. Their hearts were mutually linked to one another, sharing in meals, including communion, and coming together regularly for prayer.

**C: A deep sense of holy awe swept over everyone,**

LR: and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. All the believers met together in one place.

**C: They were in fellowship as one body, and they shared with one another everything they had.**

LR: *Out of generosity* they even sold their assets to distribute the proceeds to those who were in need among them. Daily they met together in the temple courts and in one another's homes to celebrate communion.

**C: They shared meals together with joyful hearts, with generosity, and tender humility.**

LR: They were continually filled with praises to God, enjoying the goodwill of all the people.

**C: And each day the Lord kept adding to their number those who were being saved and coming to life.** Acts 2:42-47 (NLT, TPT Blended)

**Theme** Through all of these strategies, the early church was convinced that together, they could fine-tune their life's journey's and their compass pointing toward Jesus. Of course, we also know from the letters written to the churches later, mostly from Paul; that the church was not as unified with each other or on the directions that would lead them forward with Christ, -- not as much as we would have hoped. Even with the best spirit and best intentions, we can be torn, not only with others, but even within ourselves on the best way to move forward, the next steps we may need to take to the spiritually blessed, mature life... as we hear from this abridged and adapted African folktale called "Spider's Two Feasts".

Once upon a time long ago, when animals could talk, Spider looked very different than he does now. Today, of course, he has a big, fat head and a big, fat body, with a tiny little waist in between where his 8 long legs stick out. In olden days, though, Spider did not have such a trim waistline. He was big and plump all over (like your pastor 😊). This is the story that tells us how his belly got so thin.

One day Spider was walking through the forest when he met Hare hopping down the path. The spider called out, "Good morning, why are you hopping so fast?"

"Don't you know? Upstream town is giving a wedding feast. They'll be eating soon. Everyone is invited." Spider was so happy he did a dance on his 8 long legs. "How lucky for me", he thought, patting his plump belly. There'll be yams and fish and rice and beans. I can eat all I want!" At once he started toward Upstream Town. On the way, he met Fox trotting the other way.

The spider called out, "Good morning, why are you trotting so fast?"

"Haven't you heard? Downstream town is giving a harvest feast. They'll be eating soon. Everyone is invited!" Spider was so happy he did a dance and flipped a little flip on his 8 long legs. "How lucky for me", he thought, patting his plump belly. Two feasts! I'll go to both! I'll go to Downstream Town and fill my stomach, and then go to Upstream Town and fill it again!"

And he started toward Downstream, but then he stopped in his tracks. "I wonder who will be serving food first? I must go to that town and eat as much as I can and then go to the other town for my second feast. But how can I know which village will eat first?!"

Spider pondered his problem, if he goes the wrong way, he might miss a whole feast. The thought made his stomach growl and his legs twitch and tremble. But then he had an idea. He went home and got two long ropes. He called his son and daughter to come with him and brought them to a place right between the two towns. He tied one end of both ropes to his waist, and gave the loose end of one to his son, and the other to his daughter. And he gave them these instructions: "Son you go upstream, daughter you go downstream; and attend those feasts, and when they begin to serve the food, tug on the rope really hard and then I will know to come to that town, and then I can eat at both feasts!"

Hour after hour passed but the ropes remained slack. His plump belly began to growl and he started to grow angry. But then, suddenly, he got a real surprise because both villages began their feasts at the exact same time and so his obedient, young, and strong children both began pulling on their ropes at the same time in opposite directions -- and when their father failed to come, they pulled harder and harder, not knowing that father Spider was being bobbed back and forth in one place, [not part of the folktale -- like a flag in the middle of an evenly matched tug of war contest]. The ropes knotted too tight too quickly, and the father couldn't untie them, but instead the ropes around him constricted tighter and tighter. He waved his 8 legs in the air for help, but no one saw because everyone was at one feast or the other. The feasts ended and both children stopped pulling and rushed back to their father to see why he had not come. They found him on the ground gasping for breath, for the ropes had squeezed his big, plump waist thinner than a stick. (that's a diet idea isn't it? No. 😊) When they finally got the ropes off of him, Spider stayed that way, and so to this day, he has a skinny little waist between his big fat head and his big fat body. And whenever people see him, they think of how he tried to have two feasts at once. (Adapted and Abridged from: "Spider's Two Feasts" in Bennett, William J. editor with commentary, *The Moral Compass: Stories' for Life's Journey*, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993.)

Tying yourself, committing yourself to two different paths at the same time makes it impossible for you to follow either path. But better than be paralyzed with indecision is to move forward and if we discover the path isn't quite right, or is wrong, then adjust, quit, reverse course if we need to -- whatever we have to do. We can continue to fine-tune our lives' direction, our focus, our compass point, toward Jesus if we start moving. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer as we turn our focus on him as he leads us, by singing

## **Prayer Music (2x) Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus**

**Pastoral Prayer** LORD, we come in awe of you, for when your holy people respect you and seek you; we have everything we truly need. We want to listen and understand what it means to revere you. We want to love life and live long to enjoy it. We speak and live with openness and honesty.

We leave the dangers of evil behind us and seek to do good, to pursue peace and to praise you. We ponder on and publicly celebrate all your lasting great works. You've designed your works so that we will remember what you have done in your gracious compassion. You remember your covenant with us forever. (Inspired in part by Psalms 34:9-14, 111) It encourages us to lift our requests to you --

**Intercession** We continue to pray for \* Pat Schleh's friends Sally and Hannah for recovery and healing from their surgeries. \* For James Steinacker's family and friends as he was recently memorialized, \* For Sherrie Rice's young sister Jennifer, as decisions are made as to how to treat her lymphocytic lymphoma \* for Vivian Lemon's son Denny who has moved to Henry Ford Hospital, \* and for her husband Gar who has left the hospital and is recovering. We renew our request \* for Jeff Walker's cousin Brent who continues to battle with a punctured lung, \* for the Lee Neidhart family, \* for the family and friends of Mary Jo Bell's friend Claire who passed away recently, \* for Pam Munro who is in hospice with cancer, and her son Will who has special needs, \* and for the family and friends of Jim Pennington who has passed away. (Prayer Chain has funeral details), and for Bill Wycoff, who is in the hospital with a foot infection, and there may be others who are on our heart and mind but they were not named out loud, but they are always with us, and we know you know who they are, Lord meet each need according to your timing and will, for those of us who aren't feeling well, we ask for strength, not only in body but also in heart. We just lift ourselves up to you, because, Lord, you have shown us your power, your faithfulness, and your justice. All of your instructions are trustworthy, and they are established for all time. You provide for us a way back to you and established an eternal covenant in your name. In following you with grateful praise, we discover wisdom and understanding -- even in the prayer that you taught us to pray. **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Song Intro** The Summer Singers are going to come now. While they do, let me tell you a bit about Philip Bliss. Last week we heard an instrumental version of *It is Well*. Many of us know that the words of that song were born out of a tragedy at sea. Philip Bliss composed the music for those words. He also wrote hymns

including "Almost Persuaded," "Dare to Be a Daniel," "Hallelujah, What a Savior," and "Wonderful Words of Life." He also wrote a song called "Pull for the Shore" which some Titanic survivors said they good naturedly sang in their lifeboat as they rowed, having no idea at the time what was really happening with the Titanic and how tragic that event was going to be).

Bliss himself was no stranger to tragedy. He died at the young age of 38 after a train wreck. According to one witness (unverified), although he survived the initial crash, he was killed when he went back in the burning wreckage to try and rescue his wife. Found in his trunk were the words for which he hadn't yet written a tune, but also became a well-known hymn -- "I Will Sing of my Redeemer".

Bliss once attended a service where "O How I Love Jesus" was sung. After, he said (paraphrased a little bit), "Have I not sung enough about my poor love for Jesus. Shall I not rather sing of His great love for me?" From this thought came the hymn we are going to sing for you now.

## **Special Music    Jesus Loves Even Me    Summer Singers**

### **Bible Reading and Reading**

Jesus loves us. The songwriter stated that that is made clear in the Bible he has given to us. Jesus' love for us is a reflection of our heavenly Father's love for us. The Father's love for us was well known among his people long before Jesus came on the scene. In one of the early descriptions of God's love, Moses reminded God's people how God had already delivered them from slavery in Egypt and how he promised to be their God and bless them -- if they would commit to being his people.

They may get away from him and be dispersed throughout the world, but then when the people will come to their senses and return to him with their hearts, he will gather them and bring them back to himself and the land he provided for them.

We pick up the Bible text where the people are reminded of their part of the agreement -- to love and live for God in response to his love and caring provision for them -- and that they should be able to fulfill their love for God, because God will make it possible... Listen to what Moses told the people...

The Lord your God will prepare you and your descendants to serve him. [That is, He will remove the desire to sin from your heart, so that] you will love him with your whole being. Then you will live [as a recipient of his blessing]. ...[And you shall again listen to and obey the voice of the Lord]... (ICB with [AMP]) The Lord will be happy to do good things for you, just as he did for your ancestors. But

you must decide once and for all to worship him with all your heart and soul and to [obey his commands and rules that are written in this Book of Teachings. You must follow the Lord your God with your whole being].

You know God's laws, and it isn't impossible to keep them. His commands aren't in heaven, so you can't excuse yourselves by saying, "How can we obey the LORD's commands? They are in heaven, and no one can go up to get them, then bring them down and explain them to us." And you can't say, "How can we obey the LORD's commands? They are across the sea, and someone must go across, then bring them back and explain them to us." [No, the word is very near you] and you know them by heart. All you have to do is obey! (CEV with [ICB])

(Deuteronomy 30:6,8a,9b,10-14)

## **Music (vv 1,3,4) Trust and Obey**

### **Sermon *The Teachings***

Our Bible reading ended, "All you have to do - is obey." The hymnwriter, especially skipping the verse we skipped, also 

<b>Listen and Heed</b>
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 makes it sound like a piece of cake that tastes great and adds no calories... A man named Edwin bought a car with a voice-warning system. (They don't make them like that anymore, maybe because of events like this). He was amused to hear the soft female voice gently remind him that his seat belt wasn't fastened. He affectionately called this voice, (it is antiquated, so be gentle 😊) "the little woman".

He discovered his little woman was programmed to warn him about gasoline too. "Your fuel level is low" she said sweetly. Edwin nodded his head and thanked her. He figured he could go another fifty miles, so he kept driving. A few minutes later, her voice interrupted his thoughts again with the same sweet warning. And so it went every few minutes. And even though he knew it was the same recording, Edwin was sure her voice sounded harsher with each nag.

She was irritating him so much that he finally stopped his car, crawled underneath the dash, found the right wires and yanked them out. So much for the little woman! He was still smiling to himself a few miles later when the car sputtered, coughed, and coasted to the side of the road out of gas. And from somewhere inside the dashboard, Edwin was sure he could hear the little woman - laughing.

In Proverbs (1:20-23 ff), wisdom calls out in the busy marketplace street -- trying to be heard. But they would not listen -- and then they began to suffer the consequences, and then they begged wisdom to help -- but it was too late.

We know God knows what is best for us and guides us into that best in this life and the next. Yet for some reason we disconnect from his counsel. Perhaps one reason why is illustrated by one couple who lost their life savings in a business scheme that had been elaborately planned by a swindler. When the investment disappeared, and their dreams shattered, they went to the Better Business Bureau.

As they were discussing their situation with them, the official asked, "Why didn't you come to us first? Didn't you know about us?" They replied sadly, "Yes, we knew about you – but we didn't come to you because we were afraid you'd tell us not to do it."

The answers lie in God's word – but we don't turn there for fear that it might say what we don't want to hear – even though it may save us from disastrous choices.

The reading (Deuteronomy 30:6,10-14) reminded us that God's will is not some mysterious thing that only someone with special knowledge or training can understand. It is not residing with God out there in the heavens somewhere beyond our telescopes. Nor is it impractical, like some dreamland across the seas. It can be known, and it can be done. It is near us. And those were the words said in the Old Testament by Moses!

How much more clear it is made in the New Testament. John tells us (John 7:14-18, 14:23-26, 16:13-14) how the people were amazed at the teachings of Jesus (well all the gospels say this), and Jesus said that his teaching was not his own but from God who sent him and for that reason, there is nothing false about him. He is the example of truth... and everyone who loves Jesus will do what Jesus teaches, and God will love and live with them, and then just as Jesus spoke the Father's Words, the Spirit will speak Jesus' words...

So, the question isn't so much in the figuring out what God is telling us as much as it is – will I really act in trust that what I know of God is truly best for me? Do I really want what is best for me?

I haven't been able to verify the truth of the story, but it does make a great analogy. After Hurricane Andrew hit in Florida, a news crew filmed the destruction, and in one scene they came across a neighborhood that was completely destroyed except for one house that remained on its foundation. The owner was cleaning up the front yard. The reporter approached, "Why is your house the only one still standing in the middle of all this damage?"

He replied, "I built this house myself, and I built it to code. When the code called for 2x6 roof trusses, that is what I used. I was told a house built to code would



withstand a hurricane. I did build it that way, and it withstood the hurricane. I guess no one else around here followed the code.”

When the sun is shining, and the skies are blue, building our lives on something other than the guidelines in God's Word can be tempting, and sometimes we can get away with it for a while. (See Matthew 7:14-28) But sooner or later, in many different forms, some sort of storm will hit us all. And Jesus' “code” to loving and living is not mysterious, irrelevant, or outdated. It is God's revelation of Himself to us as he inspired people to write in the culture of their time, and if we look at it and understand it -- we will find eternal truths that apply to us in our situation right here in Livingston County area in 2021 and beyond (both in location and in time).

After Jesus left, our Bible reading recorded that God's people devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles (which they had learned from Christ), and that devoted learning led to fellowship, and eating together, and praying together, and sharing resources with those in need, and meeting together daily – in awe of God and in joy with each other. It was very attractive, and people joined constantly in this praise of God. (See Acts 2:42-47).

Just as the Law (when at its best) pointed not to the Law, but to God, and Jesus pointed not to himself, but to the Father, and the Spirit points not to the Spirit, but leads us to Jesus and the Father; so too, the apostle's teaching (that we read in the Bible) does not point us to the apostle's teaching, but to Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit – to God himself.

**Teaching points to God**

Look at this way: A girl captures a young man's heart, and he is in love. He carries her photo in his wallet. At times, distance separates them. He takes the photo out of his wallet as a tangible reminder of their love. Sometimes, when no one is looking, he even kisses the picture. The picture is powerful, but it is not the same, is it? as being with his beloved.

The Bible is the powerful, tangible reminding picture that points us to the Living Word, to Jesus. We devote ourselves to reading and studying the Bible because it shows us God and His will. Strong spiritual lives require both the Word, and the Spirit of Christ that the Word points to, that the Bible points to -- an intimate relationship with Christ himself.

There is no trick to knowing God's will – to Bible study. You just read – or listen if you prefer to listen to audio)

**Find your method(s)**

-- in whatever form or medium works for you, and in whatever style works for you. Did you know Twelve minutes a day reading out loud at a slow, understandable pace, (slower than I am talking now) will get you through the Bible in one year?

Some people like to study in broad strokes, in a quantity of verses, others like to spend a quantity of study on only a few verses at a time. (So it is not necessary to get through the Bible in a year, that is not a *needful* goal). Some people develop a single style of study that lasts them for a lifetime, others (like me) need to have variety, changing approaches to their study. Every person's way of devoting themselves to the teachings can look different -- but each person needs to develop a way or ways of devoting themselves to the study that will work for them.

But remember that the goal is not to study an end in itself, ("okay I studied, check it off, I'm done") but to go beyond that, it is to discover (more of) the Person behind the book -- the Person who authored creation, who brings us salvation and hope, who comes to love us and be loved by us.

A man was madly in love and engaged to be married. But duty called, and he went off to war. While he was away, he wrote a long love letter to his girl. He said, "This battle is serious. When it is done, and freedom is won, I'm going to come back for a brief visit, but then I am going to go and build us the house of our dreams, and while I am building that house, here is what I want you to do." And he listed instructions of what he needed her to do until that dream was accomplished.

The woman was as deeply in love with her lover as he was with her. Do you think she glanced through the letter once and tossed it in a box never to look at it again? [Thank you, one audible response and a few head shakes] No. She read it over and over, reminding herself of his love for her, re-sparking her love for him, and making sure she did everything her lover desired, because everything he was doing, he was doing for her.

Jesus came and lived among us for three years, and said, "I have a terrible war to fight, and it will cost me my life, but I will rise again, and after a brief visit I am going to go a prepare a place for you, and after I am done, I am going to come for you, so you can be where I am. In the meantime - do what I have instructed in the letter I am leaving with you, and my friend, the Holy Spirit will guide you in all of this." (See John 14:1 ff) So do we read the Bible once and throw it in the box

for it to collect dust? [Ah, that is a much better response.]

And if we believe in God's love for us, and our love for him, we study the instructions he has given us until he comes back to bring us to our dream home. Sure, the love letter is old, originally written in a different language and in a different culture, and there is plenty of things that we don't yet fully understand, or think we do and don't. But that is not a reason to put God's love letter on the shelf, it is why we study it all the more, and in the process, perhaps we will find not just words on an ancient page – but a fresh experience of the love of the Father through Christ's Spirit.

**Prayer** Let's pray. Lord, we know you have written your great love to us, yet we have, from time to time, neglected your word, afraid of what we might hear you say. Yet when we turn again to your Word, we find that you are using the words to faithfully reveal your love for us through Jesus, offering us not words of an angry overseer, but the compassionate, accepting words of devoted lover. Offering words and instructions that give us abundant life as we turn our eyes toward you -- and offer our lives to you. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Our closing hymn that reminds us that his words to us are not undoable or burdensome, but freeing and life-giving.

**Music** **Wonderful Words of Life**

**Blessing**

Now study [his wonderful words] so as to move "true north" to Jesus, drawing near to God so he will come near to you in his love, and you will find [as you turn your eyes upon him] full life in his direction.