

Highlights *From the Heights*

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | NORTHMINSTER EPC | SEPTEMBER 2024 – VOLUME 9

PASTOR'S CORNER — Did He Really Mean That?

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." — Matthew 5:17-20 ESV

Arguably the greatest sermon of all time is also the most famous, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5-7. It is an incredible message that outlines the nature and character of the Kingdom of God, and just how different it is from the powers and kingdoms of the world. It is a fairly straightforward and simple message, but it has generated enormous controversy in terms of how to interpret and apply it.

There are those who believe that the Sermon on the Mount is meant to show just how impossible it is for a person to live up to the standards of God's Law. As Jesus says in Matthew 5:20, *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* Perfect perfection is what it takes to make it into heaven, and the only perfectly perfect person was Jesus Christ. Our salvation is by faith in him alone, not through our works, and just in case you think you can work your way into heaven, Jesus makes it clear in this sermon that we never can. It's not just the act of murder that's wrong, it's even calling someone an idiot. It's not enough to love your neighbor, you have to love your enemy also. According to this view, the purpose of the sermon is to illustrate our depravity and need for a Savior.



Others see Jesus describing the ideal nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. It's a Utopian vision of what could be and what will be when Jesus returns and consummates the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. It's certainly not the way the world works right now, but it's what we can aspire and hope to experience one day. After all, *"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* (Matt. 7:14 ESV) According to this view, the sermon was meant to inspire us to look forward to the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven... eventually.

But what if Jesus meant what he said? Not some of it, but all of it? Not eventually, but right now? Not to say what we have to do to earn our salvation, but to show how to live *because of* our salvation? What if, because of the salvation made possible by and given to us through Jesus Christ, we set aside anger and lust, forgiving others as we've been forgiven, loving our enemies as much as our neighbors, followed Jesus sincerely instead of ostentatiously, trusted in the provision of the Lord instead of what we gain by our own hands? What if we followed the narrow path into depths of living of which we can only dream, the path along which Jesus invites us to follow him?

After all, the key to "unlocking" the Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 7:24: *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* The solid rock that secures our faith isn't just believing in Jesus, it comes in doing what he said, and what he said was the message of the Sermon on the Mount. If we truly want to change the world, it starts by taking Jesus seriously and doing what he said.

Join us this fall as we walk through the Sermon on the Mount and follow Jesus along the narrow path that leads to more and better life than we've ever dreamed of.

Blessings,
Rev. David Garrison

Matthew 7:24-27

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB

Thursday, September 19, 10 AM @ Sharon Bryant's Home

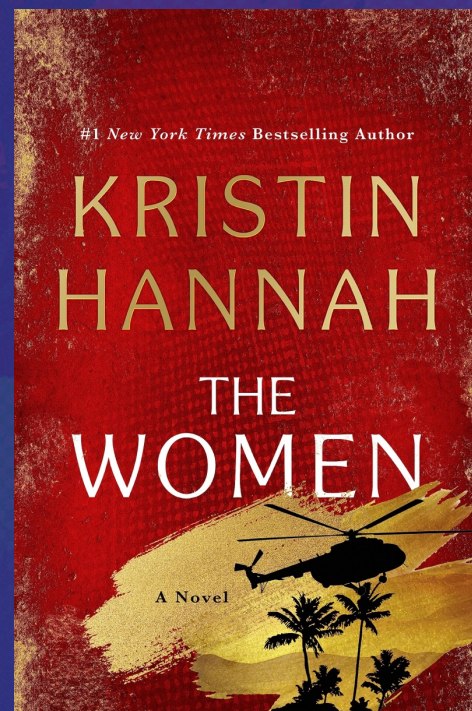
Please join the book club on Thursday, September 19th at 10:00 a.m. at the home of Sharon Bryant. We will be discussing the September book, which is The Women by Kristin Hannah.

Frances "Frankie" McGrath is inspired when a friend of her older brother, about to leave for duty in Vietnam says to her, "Women can be heroes." In spite of the lack of support from her family, Frankie enlists and becomes an army nurse - fresh out of nursing school and totally unprepared for what she will face in Vietnam.

According to Kristin Hannah, the author, there is no actual real-life Frankie, but

Frankie's character does come from 5 or 6 nurses whom she read about. She is representative of them in so many ways. Most of the women came from patriotic families and were really young when they went over there - just like Frankie. Most of them had very little nurse training and so it was just Kristin creating the nurse who would tell the story best and would represent the change that occurred in America during that 10 - 15 year period.

Read the book and join us for a lively discussion at Sharon's home at 145 Adrian Street! Any questions, call Sharon at 434-942-8566.



LIFE TOGETHER

Keeping in touch with one another

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS:

10 Dot Stinnett
11 Ian Moore I
16 Ray Vandall
19 Sharon Bryant
27 Tim Wright



SEPTEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

1 Anne & Vance Wilkins, 2007
5 Janet & Ray Vandall, 1956
10 Mickie & George Brine, 1977
10 Linda & George Sievwright, 1977
13 Kristin & David Kidd, 2014
18 Karey & David Garrison, 1999
21 Beverly & George O'Brien, 1974

PRAYER REQUESTS

*I sought the Lord, and He answered me;
He delivered me from all my fears.*
– Psalm 34:4

Several members have asked for prayers for needs that they'd prefer not to share publicly. Please lift up these prayers, knowing that God knows for whom you pray and what they need.

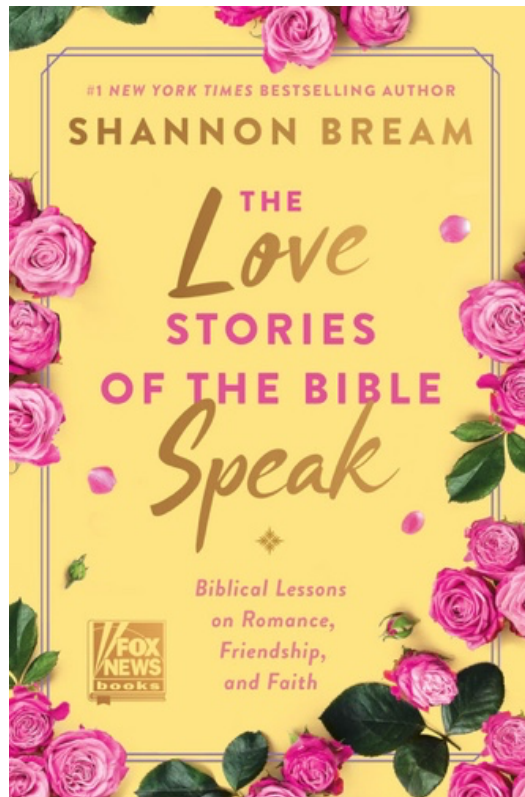
Jimmy Wright is healing from ear surgery.

Anne Wilkins asks prayers for her sister, **Beatrice Oyler**, who has been diagnosed with stage IV gall bladder cancer.

Remember others who cannot be with us in church: **Pat Callahan, Arlene Horton, Margie Seal, Dot Stinnett, and Dolores Wright.**

All active servicemen and women, law enforcement personnel, first responders.

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY RESUMES MONDAY, SEPT. 9



The Women's Bible Study will have its first meeting of the new year on Monday, September 9 at 7:00 p.m. at the church. We will still be studying, "The Love Stories of the Bible Speak" by Shannon Bream. This month's chapter is "The Rebel and the Peacemaker" - David and Abigail.

Barbara Baker will be the facilitator and the hostess. We will sign up at this meeting to be the hostess and facilitator for the rest of the book.

Ladies, read your book and complete your workbook, but remember, if you don't get it all done, come anyway. And bring a friend. Looking forward to seeing everyone on the 9th.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP REPORT 2024 GENERAL FUND

	July	Year To Date
Income	\$9,356	\$74,946
Expenses	\$9,826	\$78,141
Balance	\$ -469	\$ -3,194

THAT'S A REALLY GOOD QUESTION

By Rev. Bob Mills

The phrase is now so widely used that it's almost a cliché. It's become the reflexive response of almost any public figures to almost any interrogative, much like the involuntary extension of your lower leg when your knee is tapped in just the right place.

"So, what about _____?"

"That's a really good question!"

Perhaps I'm simply saturated by the downpour of rhetoric that's been squeezed out between the two major parties' nominating conventions. Place your current favorite in either of the following roles then imagine an intrepid reporter asking an earnest politician questions like: Where's the economy heading? How will you stop global warming? or, What's your plan for peace in the Middle East? Insert a dramatic pause for a moment of intense – not to mention photogenic – contemplation, then brace yourself for the inevitable reply, "That's a really good question!"

Of course, politicians aren't the only ones who rely on this device. Picture an author on a nationally syndicated talk show who's been given the opportunity to promote her new book. The host serves up a softball: "So, what lead you to such an insightful and provocative conclusion?" "That's a really good question," the overeager guest quickly responds, as if her conversational mode was stuck on auto-reply. Then, if you listen carefully, you can almost hear the steady progress of her mental apparatus – CLICK – as she dutifully lists the bullet points – CLICK – that have led to her 15 – CLICK – seconds of fame.

Admittedly, it can be fun to sit on the sidelines and pick apart such verbal foibles. But clichés tend to achieve that status because they contain at least a kernel of truth. And please, don't let the overwhelming number of bad questions blind you to the truth that there are such things as really good questions.

One of the best ever asked from within the Christian tradition came from Tertullian (ca. 160-220). Tertullian learned both Greek and Latin, studied rhetoric and law, and likely practiced law in Rome for several years. After he converted to Christianity, Tertullian became a prolific writer and a masterful defender of Christian faith and doctrine.

In one of his books *Against Heresies*, he asked the really good question: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"

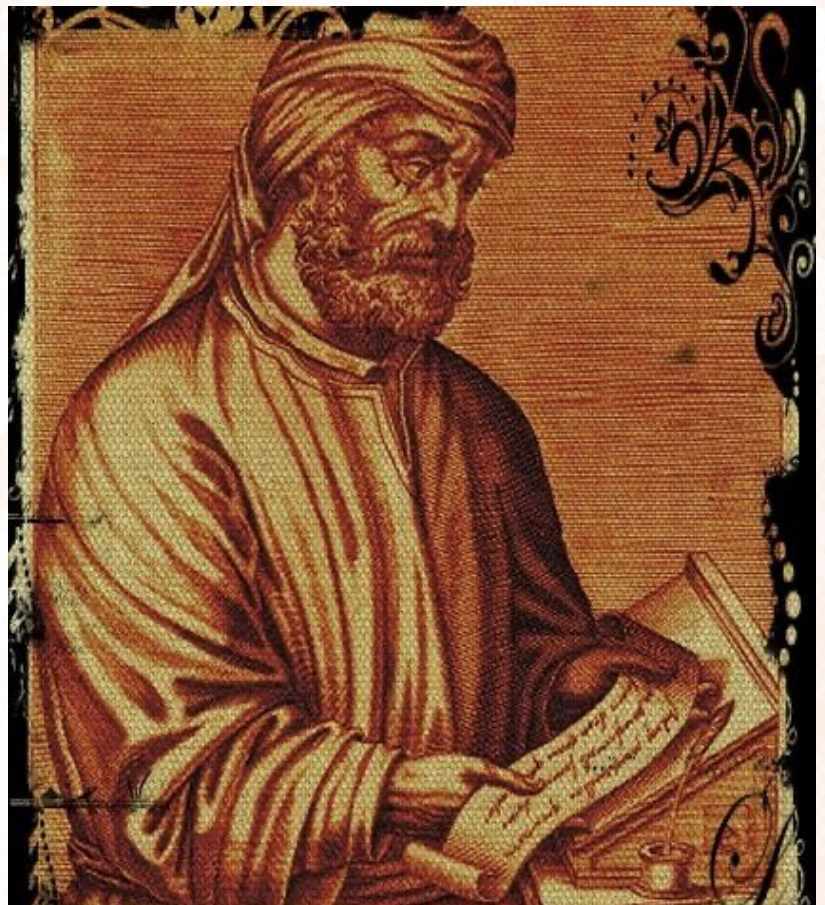
At this point, I can almost hear you quoting the title of a sermon I heard recently, "Wait ... what?" What does that question even mean? Its meaning is in part explained by the two questions that immediately follow: "What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? Between heretics and Christians?"

Athens was the home of Plato's Academy, a school the great philosopher established to disseminate his teachings, a school that remained in operation for nearly 1,000 years. Jerusalem was the first headquarters of the Christian church. Tertullian was rhetorically asking his readers, "What is the relationship between secular philosophy and Christian doctrine?"

That, I submit, is still a really good question. Its quality is why we're still discussing it some 1,800 years after it was raised by Tertullian. Ultimately, it's a question about authority. Are philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and their intellectual disciples the ultimate arbiters of what Christians believe and how we behave? Or is God the final authority?

For Christians, now as then, the obvious answer is: God. Human reason is a wonderful gift we can use to explore what God has revealed. But reason is only a tool. It's not God.

In the coming weeks and months, when we hear politicians and authors make grandiose claims, I pray that all of us will take a moment to ponder Tertullian's question, What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?





SEPTEMBER 2024 MISSION FOCUS: Amherst County Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity is a non-governmental and non-profit Christian organization whose vision is of a world where everyone has a decent place to live. Work is done to perpetuate this vision in all 50 states in the U.S. and approximately 70 other countries. This goal is accomplished by building strength, stability and self-reliance in partnership with families in need of decent and affordable housing. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage.

By partnering with Habitat, families and communities transform their lives with the incredible effects of safe and affordable shelter, including improvements in health, safety, child development, economic opportunity and educational achievement.

Northminster Church had been a long-time supporter of this organization. In past years our members have helped with the actual building of homes. We have donated money and we continue to provide meeting space for the monthly meetings of the Amherst Habitat Board of Directors, for which our Pastor David is acting President.

Last year we took up collections for a specific home in memory of Sue and Larry Irvine's son, Chris.

In June this year we helped serve lunch to builders and visitors at a building on Coolwell Road. This was a new type of construction and the techniques were fascinating to witness.

Habitat for Humanity is alive and well in Amherst County and can use our help with volunteer time and with donations.





Happy Fall y'all

Northminster Evangelical Presbyterian Church
106 Clearview Rd
Madison Heights, VA 24572



First-
Class
Postage
Here