

New Life Family Matters September 2007

“What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” Rev 3:7-9 NIV

September is the month where America gets back to work and school after the summer months of vacations from the normal patterns of life which surround the school calendar. In areas where agriculture is a more prominent part of life, September is known as the month when the crops start to ripen unto harvest. Harvest time is exciting because it is a time of “seeing” the promise of seeds sown in the spring, bring forth their fruit - waiting and working is over and the experience of harvest is at hand. With that same spirit of anticipation, the month of September is when we here at New Life return to a full schedule of discipleship offerings. We begin our **LIFE Training** during the 9:00 time slot in our Sunday schedule with classes for all ages, and our network of small groups (called **LIFE Groups**) begins to meet during their regular time slots again after a less formal schedule throughout the summer months.

September is also the time when I will begin a new teaching series on Sunday mornings. As in the past, the content of this series will also be the topic of discussion during our **LIFE Group** meetings. Just so you know, our youth will also be studying along with the adults during Sunday mornings and also on Wednesday nights. On September 9th, I will begin a series on the call by God to experience His grace through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The series will be based on the book, **Going Deeper**, by Pastor Ted Roberts.

I believe we live in a time where there is a sense deep within us that all humanity is breathlessly awaiting some world-wide event sparked by something in the hotspot of the world - the Middle East. The current war in Iraq, the continuing conflict between the Arab nations with Israel, and the continued threat of terrorism fuels this sense of “could this be the beginning of the end time events as delineated in the scriptures?” As followers of Jesus, we are given directives from His eternal word about how to live in times when the prevailing atmosphere is one of fear and hopelessness whether His return is 5 days, 5 months, 5 years, or 5 decades from now. His directives focus our attention and our actions upon pursuing a consistent daily relationship with Him by taking the posture of a life-long learner “at His feet” and in small group fellowship with other Christ followers. Our Sunday morning discipleship classes called, **LIFE Training**, are offered at 9:00 am, and run concurrently with the worship celebration in the auditorium. We also offer a mini-church experience in small groups called **LIFE Groups**, which are held on different days throughout the area. The 9:00am **LIFE Training** during our Sunday morning format is an interactive “classroom” setting providing

a place where the New Life family can study along side others in a small group setting. Studying in small groups provides a powerful environment for learning the teachings of our Master. I want you to consider making the 9:00 am study time part of your Sabbath day practice. **FYI** - For those of you with children from nursery age to 5th grade, we offer two different programs for the older children during the 9:00 and 11:00am time slots so that their experience won't be one of having to endure three hours of the same teaching and activities twice.

LIFE Groups provide the environment where we can learn to love others and be loved. Small groups of a dozen or less participants provide a great place for discussion in God's Word, for the ministry of the Spirit, and for a safe environment to invite friends to meet other believers and to be introduced to Jesus. Again, I want to encourage you to consider being part of our small group network in response to Jesus' directives about the necessity and the benefits of fellowship. Both our **LIFE Training Classes** and our **LIFE Group** meetings are opportunities for you to pursue the posture of being a life-long learner of our Master Jesus Christ and through the fellowship and the teachings to be equipped to stand strong in the face of whatever our days hold for us. I'd like to share a brief illustration as to why I believe structured study and small groups are essential for living out our faith in today's world.

In the movie, ***Facing the Giants***, Coach Grant's life was one "giant" challenge after another. He faced, dwindling parental support for his role as coach; players who were not giving their best; a decrepit automobile; the lack of finances, and on top of all that; the disappointment of infertility problems. The day when the load of his problems was crushing him to the point of exhaustion and despair, the Lord sent another teacher to him with a message. After quoting the passage I wrote above, Mr. Bridges told Coach Grant that God is not yet through with him at Shiloh Christian School, that he was to bloom where we was planted. In response to this hope-filled word from the Lord, Coach Grant transparently expressed how "down" he was and how pressed he felt. To this, Mr. Bridges told him a story about two farmers who were in the business of raising crops, but desperately needed rain. Although they both prayed for rain, only one went and planted his fields; preparing for the rain and harvest time. Coach Grant responded to the "word" from the Lord by faith and began to prepare for the "harvest" in his own life that God promised. From that moment forward in the movie, Coach Grant began to sow seeds of faith in God. He radically altered how he coached, how he related to his wife and their many problems. He sought God with the earnestness of a farmer needing rain.

The autumn season offers the promise of another harvest. Our season in life may be one of drought; a time when the promised harvest looks bleak. As Christ's followers, the "word" to Coach Grant is prophetic; our God is not though with us yet, and the promise of harvest awaits our "planting of faith seeds." In practical terms, this means that we see the challenges to us as opportunities to sow seeds of faith in our God. It means breaking out of the patterns of life we

currently live in - and sow seeds of faith by preparing our hearts through study, fellowship and commitment to yield our lives to Him.

I want to close my letter to you with a quote from the introduction of the book, *Going Deeper*.

“...there are numerous accounts in the Bible, and throughout history, where Christian men and women have had experiential encounters with the Spirit of God that radically changed their lives. These divine encounters ushered them into deeper intimacy with God, led them to make drastic life changes that glorified Christ, and paved the way for exponential increases in their effectiveness for the kingdom of God.

This is what we, as the writers of this book, personally cry out for. We hunger to be so consumed by the person of the Holy Spirit that we are compelled to seek an ever-deepening, experiential knowledge of the fullness of God; a fullness which transforms us from the inside out and spills over onto others in eternally significant ways.” (pg .10)

As Coach Taylor said as he challenged his team to give God their best, “I have determined to give God my best and to leave the outcome up to him. I want to know, will you join me?”

Will you join me in pursuing the heart of our Master for us and for a world that is longing and looking for the hope we have in Christ. Let’s determine to give God our best.

Pastor Dave