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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Who's the Hero in Your Story?
Judges 6-7
November 26, 2017, Jeff Germo

For those of you who have just joined us in this series, what we are doing over the next year or so is travelling through the Biblical narrative from the beginning in Genesis all the way to the end in Revelation. We are following some threads that weave their way through history. We see them very clearly in Biblical history and in extra-biblical history.

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- 1. God is up to something.**
- 2. Satan is up to something.**
- 3. We most naturally move away from God.**

Here is a quick synopsis of where we have travelled thus far. We started in Genesis where we saw God created the heavens and the earth. He created Adam and Eve and put them in The Garden of Eden where there was perfect peace and harmony. God gave them only one rule, that they were not to eat from a certain tree called The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He told them very clearly that if they ate from that tree they would die. The trust relationship they had with their Creator would be broken and things would spiral down hill.

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Satan came along and tempted them with the idea that they could break free of God and find satisfaction and reach their full potential without him. They could, he said, "be like gods." They believed the lie and things spiralled out of control. All humankind went from bad to worse to plain evil.

Lots of drama happened in Genesis. Things got so bad that God sent a flood to wipe out all living things and started over with Noah and his family. It got bad again after Noah and his family repopulated the earth, so God called Abraham and Sarah out of a pagan idol worshipping family to be the start of a new nation. He told them he would use them to bless every nation on the earth. He also promised them land on the west side of the Jordan River.

Several generations passed and the family grew to about seventy people who ended up in Egypt because of a famine in the land where they were living. Again, there is a whole bunch of drama that happened. The Israelites, as they became known, grew in number so quickly that the Egyptian government feared them and consequently forced them into slavery for over four hundred years. They cried out to God and he raised up Moses to deliver them. More drama ensued. Moses, through a whole bunch of miracles that God performed, led over two million of them out of Egypt.

Because of their hard hearts and their propensity to whine and complain and distrust God, they ended up wandering in the wilderness for over forty years. They camped near the foot of Mount Sinai for almost a year where God gave Moses the Law, including the Ten Commandments so they would know how to get along with each other when they settled in the land.

Two weeks ago I preached a sermon on the conquest of the land of Canaan. If you were not here for that sermon, I highly recommitted that you go back and watch it or read the manuscript online because there are some things that happened that are difficult to understand and will distract you from the message if you are not clear on them. We need to keep in mind when we read the Old Testament that God wanted to save everybody, and as we saw, everyone who takes refuge in him, he saves.

That was evidenced very much in Pastor Adrian's sermon from last week with the Gibeonites who God saved, even though they used trickery to get the Israelites to spare them. They threw themselves at the mercy of God and God saved them. That is God's modus operandi. He is above all a God who delivers, who saves.

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Psalm 34:22 (NLT)

22 But the Lord will redeem those who serve him. No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

No one who takes refuge in the Lord will be condemned. No one. Paul said the same thing to the Roman Jesus followers:

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Romans 10:13 (NLT)

13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Today we are jumping into another book, the Judges.

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And again, we are zipping through the narrative, just stopping at some highlights along the way. Have any of you ever been on a bus tour where you go from place to place and get off the bus to experience different viewpoints, or places of historical significance so you can get a sort of big picture view of whatever place you are visiting? That is what we are doing in this series. Consequently, we are missing a whole lot of landscape, so it's imperative that you read along so you can fill in the blanks yourself.

I was chatting with Pastor Adrian last week about this series and he suggested it would be great to do the series again, but hit on different points along the way. I had been thinking the same thing, so we may just do that.

Today we are in the book of Judges, the seventh book in the Old Testament. Judges is named after a very interesting, eclectic collection of individuals who led Israel after Joshua's death until Israel asked God for a king, over one thousand years before Jesus.

This era was a time of extreme national decline for Israel. You might remember the many times the Israelites promised to keep their covenant with God (Josh. 24:16–18). They didn't keep those promises. They began to worship other gods, gods that were made of wood, and stone, or other created things. There is a phrase often repeated in Judges, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25).

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There is a pattern that is repeated throughout the book.

1. The people abandoned the Lord;
2. God punished them by raising up a foreign power to oppress them;
3. The people cried out to God for deliverance; and
4. God raised up a deliverer, or judge, for them.

We see this over and over in the book. The people did what was right in their own eyes, meaning, that they gave no thought to God and what he would desire of them. That caused them to move away from him. A foreign power would then rise up and oppress them. They would consequently call out to God. God would raise up a deliverer to rescue them. Over and over again this is what happened, which fits in with the three threads we see weaved throughout all history.

Two of the judges in the book would be very familiar to many of you. Samson is one of the most famous. The account of Samson is very colourful. He was the long haired hippie to whom God gave supernatural strength. He fell in love with beautiful Delilah who deceived him into the hands of their enemies. It would be good to read all of Judges to fill in some of the blanks. Today we are going to look at some of the account of Gideon.

Gideon has always been one of my favourite Biblical characters. I can relate to him in many ways. Gideon's story starts in Judges 6.

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Judges 6 (NLT)

1 The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. 2 The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds.

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3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel, 4 camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. 5 These enemy hordes, coming with their livestock and tents, were as thick as locusts; they arrived on droves of camels too numerous to count. And they stayed until the land was stripped bare.

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6 So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help. 7 When they cried out to the Lord because of Midian, 8 the Lord sent a prophet to the Israelites. He said, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of slavery in Egypt. 9 I rescued you from the Egyptians and from all who oppressed you. I drove out your enemies and gave you their land.

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10 I told you, 'I am the Lord your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you now live.' But you have not listened to me." 11 Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!"

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13 “Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The Lord brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.” 14 Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”

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15 “But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!” 16 The Lord said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.” 17 Gideon replied, “If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. 18 Don’t go away until I come back and bring my offering to you.” He answered, “I will stay here until you return.”

So, Gideon went home and prepared a young goat to sacrifice to the Lord, as the angel told him. He was also told to sacrifice a bull. He was to tear down his father’s altar to Baal, a false god, and then build an altar to Yahweh, the true God, and use the wood from the shrine for fuel for the sacrifice. Gideon did as the angel told him, but under the cover of darkness because he was afraid of the people.

In the morning when everyone woke up they saw that their shrine to Baal had been destroyed. When they found out that it was Gideon who did the deed they called for him to be killed. His father pleaded for him saying,

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31...“If Baal truly is a god, let him defend himself and destroy the one who broke down his altar!” 32 From then on Gideon was called Jerub-baal, which means “Let Baal defend himself,” because he broke down Baal’s altar.

After this, the surrounding nations of Midian, Amalek, and the people from the east formed an alliance against Israel. Gideon, with some newly found strength and courage from the Lord blew his shofar, or ram’s horn, as a call to war and he sent messengers throughout the other tribes of Israel and all the warriors showed up.

Gideon wanted assurance from Yahweh that he was with them in this.

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36 ...“If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, 37 prove it to me in this way. I will put a wool fleece on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help me rescue Israel as you promised.” 38 And that is just what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water.

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39 Then Gideon said to God, “Please don’t be angry with me, but let me make one more request. Let me use the fleece for one more test. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew.” 40 So that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew.

How many of you have ever been at a crossroads in your life where you needed to make some sort of pivotal decision and you desperately wanted to hear from God so you would know what the best decision was? I think we have all been there. That is where Gideon was at this point.

God had called him to be a part of his story and Gideon wanted there to be no doubt in his mind that God was in the plan. Once he knew that, he could confidently move forward. How many of you can relate to that? If we only knew that God was in a thing, we would feel confident to move forward, wouldn't we?

I told this story a few years ago, but it's a good one so I'll tell it again. About twenty years ago I felt called by God to accept a position as the executive director of a youth drop-in centre in Calgary. The only problem was that the position didn't come with a salary, which meant that we would have to depend on God to meet our needs. Through a long series of events that I don't have time to go into now, both Ruth and I felt very clearly that this was God's call for us.

There was a couple in our church who were going to move to the States for four years and they said we could house sit for them without paying any rent or utilities. We saw that God was in this so we confidently moved forward.

We sold our house, which some would say was not very smart, and used what little equity we had to live off for a while. A few months into their stay in the US, however, their plans changed and they had to move back to Canada.

I can remember very vividly receiving that email and wondering if we had somehow made a mistake. I had a prayer team that met monthly to pray for the ministry. I called them for an emergency meeting and they all came to the drop in centre. I shared with them that in a month's time we would have no place to live. We all prayed about it together that evening asking God to be our rescuer.

After we prayed everyone went home. That same night, one of the ladies, named Carol, took her dog out for a walk at about 9:00. It was about -25 degrees out and she ran into someone else walking a dog whom she hadn't previously met. They stopped to chat about dogs and cold weather and the lady, out of the blue, said, "Do you know anyone who needs a place to live?" Carol told our story and the lady said, "Great! They can stay in my son's house. He is in Asia for a few months."

We stayed there for several months until just before her son came home and then felt the Lord leading us into pastoral ministry so we packed up our things and moved west to Vancouver. That is the first part of the story in how we ended up here at CRBC ten years later.

We saw so clearly that God was leading us, which gave us the courage to take some pretty big leaps of faith. We have other stories just as crazy.

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If God is in something, he will make a way. I believe that with all my heart.

Let's continue on with Gideon's story. What happens next shows how much Gideon had changed. He moved from being afraid of his enemies, and hiding out, to moving courageously, and some would say foolishly, forward.

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But, **what looks like foolishness is sometimes the wisdom and power of God — if God is in it.** So, Gideon, clothed now with new courage, moves forward in faith.

This is one of the crazy stories that if you didn't know God was in it, you would think that Gideon was either presumptuous, in thinking that God should fulfill his fantasies, or that he was stupid.

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Judges 7 (NLT)

1 So Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. 2 The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength.

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3 Therefore, tell the people, "Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home." So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight. 4 But the Lord told Gideon, "There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not."

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5 When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the Lord told him, "Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream." 6 Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream.

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7 The Lord told Gideon, "With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home."

This text doesn't tell us this, but if you read chapter 8:10 you can see that the Midianite army that they would go against with their three hundred men, was 135,000 strong. That seems like a suicide mission -- unless God is in it.

8 So Gideon collected the provisions and rams' horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him. The Midianite camp was in the valley just below Gideon. 9 That night the Lord said, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them!

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10 But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah. 11 Listen to what the Midianites are saying, and you will be greatly encouraged. Then you will be eager to attack." So Gideon took Purah and went down to the edge of the enemy camp. 12 The armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east had settled in the valley like a swarm of locusts. Their camels were like grains of sand on the seashore—too many to count!

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13 Gideon crept up just as a man was telling his companion about a dream. The man said, "I had this dream, and in my dream a loaf of barley bread came tumbling down into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, turned it over, and knocked it flat!" 14 His companion answered, "Your dream can mean only one thing—God has given Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite, victory over Midian and all its allies!"

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15 When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship before the Lord. Then he returned to the Israelite camp and shouted, "Get up! For the Lord has given you victory over the Midianite hordes!" 16 He divided the 300 men into three groups and gave each man a ram's horn and a clay jar with a torch in it.

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17 Then he said to them, "Keep your eyes on me. When I come to the edge of the camp, do just as I do. 18 As soon as I and those with me blow the rams' horns, blow your horns, too, all around the entire camp, and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon!' "

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19 It was just after midnight, after the changing of the guard, when Gideon and the 100 men with him reached the edge of the Midianite camp. Suddenly, they blew the rams' horns and broke their clay jars. 20 Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands, and they all shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"

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21 Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran to escape. 22 When the 300 Israelites blew their rams' horns, the Lord caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords.

When you read this narrative, what would you say the main point is? What was the writer saying to the reader?

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This is one of the clearest statements about who the hero of the story is. The hero of the story is God. He was going to make sure that there would be no doubt whatsoever that he was the hero in the story. After God was done whittling Gideon's army down to a pittance of what it was nobody would be able to say that it was Gideon's ingenuity or his army's military might that defeated their enemy.

If we saw someone trying to whittle someone else down to make themselves the hero in the story, what would we think of them? We would say they were insecure, or arrogant, or proud and very small. Or when we draw attention to ourselves and *our* accomplishments, why do we do that? It's our insecurities that cause us to want to get the glory for our achievements.

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Not so with God. **God is the hero in every story.** When someone else tries to take glory for themselves, they are trying to usurp power, authority, and glory from God. When God tries to protect his Name and his reputation he does so because it is in his character to do so. He is the only one who can do that with integrity.

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He is God and we are not.

Five or six hundred years after Gideon, and many generations of the Israelites wandering away from God, and continually defaming his holy name, he sent them into exile to Babylon. God promised them through his prophets that he would one day bring them back home, that he would give them a heart that would be filled with love to replace their hard stubborn hearts. But, he said, he wasn't going to do it because they deserved it.

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Ezekiel 36:21–23 (NLT)

21 ...I was concerned for my holy name, on which my people brought shame among the nations. 22 “Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign Lord: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations.

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23 I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign Lord, then the nations will know that I am the Lord.

God, rightly so, wants to be the hero of every story. That is how God designed the world to work best. The reason we have so much hate and evil in the world is because we try to take the glory that belongs to God.

Look at what is happening in Zimbabwe right now. Mugabe is worth billions of dollars while his country is destitute. Or what about North Korea. All that craziness is because of a power delusion. The same power delusion happens in the US and in Canada.

That same power delusion happens in the church. It happens in the workplace. And it happens in the home.

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The downward spiral started in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve believed the lie of Satan that they could find satisfaction and reach their full potential without God. That lie is at the core of every evil that happens all over the world.

God, rightly wants to be the hero of your story, and mine, and when we feel the neurotic need to draw attention to ourselves in any way, things go bad with our relationships, because God designed things so that nobody deserves glory except him.

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Just imagine how things would be different if nobody cared whether or not they received credit or glory for their accomplishments. What if the concern of every person in the world was that God would get the glory? How would things be different? We would all allow God to be God. We would recognize that he is God and we are not. He is in charge and we are not.

When we have an unhealthy need to receive credit we take glory away from God, and put him on the sidelines. God is not going to force us to love him. He will allow us to go our own way, just like he allowed Adam and Eve to go their own way, just like he allowed Israel to go their own way.

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But, when we choose to go our own way, we forfeit the opportunity to see God at work, and to partner with him.

The times when I have seen God do the most amazing things are when I have come to the end of myself and have given up what I thought was my right to be in charge of my life. Some of you may be at that place right now. The best thing you can do, no matter what your situation is, is to realize that God really does love you, more than you could ever imagine, and because of that he is jealous for you.

He wants our greatest affections to turn to him. That is how life works best. It is counterintuitive to us, however. We naturally believe that life goes better when we think about ourselves first. It doesn't.

Remember, God is up to something. It is his story.

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He is the hero we are not. He is God. We are not. We will never be fully satisfied until we let go and surrender control to him. Who's the hero in your story? Is it you, or is it God?

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You may be at a difficult crossroads in your life right now and you need to hear from God. You can know with certainty that he loves you with an infinite, unconditional kind of love, and he is able to deliver you. The timing will likely not be as you would have planned it, but that is where we need to give up control to him. Just imagine how Gideon would have felt when God whittled down his army to a mere three hundred men to go against an army of 135,000. God is big enough. If he is in it, he will supply what you need at the time you need it.

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Psalm 33:13–22 (NLT)

¹³ The Lord looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. ¹⁴ From his throne he observes all who live on the earth. ¹⁵ He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do. ¹⁶ The best-equipped army cannot save a king, nor is great strength enough to save a warrior. ¹⁷ Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory— for all its strength, it cannot save you.

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¹⁸ But the Lord watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love. ¹⁹ He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine. ²⁰ We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield. ²¹ In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. ²² Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone.



***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Who's the Hero in Your Story
Judges 6-6
Week of November 26, 2017***

Objective of this study:

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 33:13-22** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

Who were some of your heroes when you were growing up?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word/Work (45-60 minutes)

1. Read Judges 6-7.
2. In these 2 chapters, what are ways God showed himself to be the hero? (both through what he caused to happen, and through his interactions with people).
3. If you were Gideon, how would you have felt at different stages of this story?
4. a) How would remembering that God is the hero affect you BEFORE doing something hard that he gives you to do?
b) How would it affect you AFTER doing something hard that he gives you to do?
5. Have you had Gideon type experiences, where God took away what you were relying on, and then he came through and was your hero?
6. How do you need to allow God to be the hero in your story this week?
7. What do you need/want to remind yourself of this week? Consider things from this study and also what stood out for you from the sermon.

Prayer

1. Spend some time in prayer. Start by worshipping God for who he is and what he has done.
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
 - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
 - B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus

C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.

D. Our church finances. We are about \$20,000 behind. One of our finance goals is to raise a **Self-Funded-Line-Of-Credit** of \$250,000 to help us with operating costs throughout the year. Pray that God would supply our needs so the mission can be carried on in Campbell River and around the world.

E. **Our missionary of the month:** - Jim & Kristi Miller with NAIM - check them out on our website and on the big chalkboard in the foyer. Pray about how you might be a part of supporting them.

F. **Our missionary of the week:** Sandy Ewan in South Sudan

G. **Local CR church:** Pastor Blair and Angela Phibbs