

## I Can Read You Like A Book

1. Warm-up Question: Tell us about something interesting you've read lately or something you hope to read soon.
  
2. There's an old saying that says, "You may be the only Bible someone ever reads." Another common expression is: "I can read you like a book." The point of both statements is that people are constantly "reading" us. The Apostle Paul picks up on this point in this week's Scripture passage. Read II Corinthians 3:1-18, as printed on p. 3. (Paul's writing is difficult to read. His sentence structure is complex. We'll take the time to dissect some of his key statements in the conversation that follows.)
  - a. In the ancient world, books were rare and had to be hand copied. So Paul knew most people would never have the chance to read one of his books. But Paul wasn't worried. He knew that many people were, in fact, "reading" the lives of individual Christians in Corinth and elsewhere. In verse 3 Paul says, "You are a letter of Christ . . . , written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." Most of us became followers of Jesus not from reading the Bible, but from "reading" the life of an inspiring Christian. Who was that person for you? What did you find so compelling about how they lived and moved in the world?
  
  - b. Imagine someone "reading" your life right now. If they were to give the book a title, what would it be? ☺ Explain your title. Here are some options to choose from or you can create your own original title.

Pilgrim's Progress	The Scarlet Letter	Alice In Wonderland
Heart of Darkness	Surprised by Joy	Red Badge of Courage
Vanity Fair	Under The Volcano	The Power of a Humble Life
Call of the Wild	A Separate Peace	Go Tell It on the Mountain
  
  - c. Of course, none of us is perfect. We all have our ups and downs. Tell us something beautiful someone would see when looking into your life right now, and also something not so good they would see.
  
3. The idea that we're supposed to be positive examples of a life of faith goes all the way back to Jesus who said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16. Paul elaborates on what God hopes people will see in us. He says, "God . . . has made us . . . to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." II Corinthians 3:6.
  - a. In verse 6, Paul is referring to the "letter of the law," i.e., the Old Testament Mosaic Code which consists of page after page of rule upon rule. The old approach was religion as rule keeping. The New Covenant is very different. It's about religion as relationship. Jesus taught that if we're open to it, the Spirit of

God will dwell with us, speak to us, and be our constant companion and real-time guide. When God is right there with us, we don't need to carry a rulebook around all the time. The Gospel of Mark offers us an excellent example of the stark contrast between this old and new approach. Read Mark 3:1-6, as printed on p. 3.

- b. Abstaining from work on the Sabbath was one of the ten most important commandments in the Old Covenant. Exodus 20:9-10. In the story we just read, Jesus' broke that commandment in order to heal the man with a withered hand because Jesus knew in his heart that's what God wanted him to do. Why do you think Jesus' approach made the Pharisees so angry?
  - c. What makes Jesus' approach so attractive and desirable?
  - d. Were the churches of your past more oriented toward the Old Covenant or the New Covenant? And how did that affect you?
  - e. In II Corinthians 3:17, Paul says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." What do you think he means?
4. In our reading, Paul refers to an Old Testament story where Moses' face began to glow after spending lots of time in the presence of the Spirit of God atop Mt. Saini. When he came down the mountain, the glow of his face frightened the people, so he began wearing a veil. Paul challenges us to take off the veil and let God shine through us.
- a. Think about an event or situation where you really saw God shining through someone else. What happened?
  - b. What are some of the negative things Christians are known for in our culture today? What are the kinds of positive things we should be known for?
  - c. Do you feel it's important for people to see God shining through you? Why or why not?
  - d. On Monday, we remembered and celebrated the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Shortly before his death, Dr. King said that, when his time came to die, he hoped his eulogizer wouldn't dwell on his honors and awards. Instead he said, "I'd like [them to simply] mention that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody." Jeff said he feels that those of us who are white have a sacred obligation to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our sisters and brothers of color because that's what love would do. He said we should stand against prejudice and discrimination and in favor of voting rights, workplace equality, and criminal justice reform. Do you agree that that vigorous opposition to racism and discrimination is an important part of our witness as Christians? If so, why? And what are some practical ways we, as individual and as a church, can oppose racism and promote equality?



## **II Corinthians 3:1-18**

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? <sup>2</sup>You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; <sup>3</sup>and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

<sup>4</sup>Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, <sup>6</sup>who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

<sup>12</sup>Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, <sup>13</sup>not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. <sup>14</sup>But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; <sup>16</sup>but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. <sup>18</sup>And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

## **Mark 3:1-6**

Again Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup>They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

<sup>3</sup>And Jesus said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." <sup>4</sup>Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.

<sup>5</sup>He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. <sup>6</sup>The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.