

MESSENGER STUDYGUIDE

Food for thought, questions for discussion, and activities to help individuals, classes, and small groups use Messenger as a focus for study and reflection.

November 2007

Food for Thought: An Overview of the Issue

The cover feature for November tells the story of Indy Racing League driver and Church of the Brethren member **Sam Hornish Jr.**, in “Living a Dream” (pp. 8-11) by Walt Wiltschek.

“**Testimony Is an Integral Part of a Life in Christ,**” (pp. 12-13) by Christy J. Waltersdorff examines the importance of talking about our faith.

“Church Giving Lacks External Focus” (p. 16) by Matt Vande Bunte explores **church giving trends**, in an article from Religion News Service.

The Bible study on **Nahum and Habakkuk**, “Knock ‘Em Dead, O God!” (pp. 18-19) is by David M. Valeta.

Activities: Connecting with the Content

Read Proverbs 8:32-36. **Research the racing career of Sam Hornish Jr.**, either through *Sports Illustrated* articles, a review of newspaper archives at your local library, or online at sites such as www.samhornish.com, www.penskeracing.com, or www.autoracingdaily.com. Why is he considered one of the most accomplished American drivers in the Indy Racing League?

Read the story of the woman at the well, from John 4:1-42. Why was her testimony about Jesus so important? What barriers—social, religious, and political—stood in the way of her testimony?

Write a short story placing the experience of this woman in a modern-day context. Who might she be today...a single mother living in the projects? ...an illegal immigrant, or a farmworker? ...or perhaps a young urban professional in the fast-paced world of finance or advertising? ...or a twice-divorced middle-class soccer mom? In your short story, how does she meet Jesus, and how is her life and her community changed by that meeting?

Read Acts 4:32-35. **Request a copy** of your congregation’s annual budget from your church office. **Compare the priorities of your congregational budget** with the priorities of the trends in Christian giving today, as outlined in Bunte’s article. What types of things does your church spend the most money on, and what receives the least money? Then compare your church’s budget priorities with Bunte’s list of theoretical things US Christians could do to change the world if they tithed to the church. **Take some time to pray**, in response to what you have found.

Read the short books of Nahum and Habakkuk (three chapters each) in one sitting, if possible. **Jot down your first impressions** of these books: What emotions do you encounter here? How is God described, and how does God act? What do these two prophets care about the most? Who are they allied with, and who do they oppose? What do they fear? What do they want from God?

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe Sam Hornish Jr.'s faith, as reflected in Wiltschek's article. How is he connected with the Church of the Brethren, and what has been his experience of the church? How does he share his faith with others, through his personal life and his professional career?
2. From Wiltschek's article, can you get a feel for how Hornish deals with both the opportunities of his success, and the challenges posed by "the swirl of fame and fast cars"? How is Hornish a role model for Brethren youth? What lessons may we learn from how he lives his life?
3. Why is testimony such an important part of the Christian faith, according to Waltersdorff? What may hinder us from testifying to Christ, or what may keep us from speaking about God in our daily lives? What does Waltersdorff mean when she writes, "There is a lot of chatter these days about God. But not a lot of it is authentic talk"?
4. How could the phrase, "I know Christ is alive because he is alive in me," be a touchstone for giving our testimonies to others? Answer Waltersdorff's question for yourself: Do I believe in Christ enough to say so?
5. Why is US Christianity becoming a "maintenance organization," according to Bunte's report? How has giving to the church fallen, and why? Where is most Christian giving going, today? Where is it *not* going? Why is this a problem?
6. Compare your giving to the church, or your family's giving, to the average statistics of giving as shared by Bunte. On a large sheet of newsprint, copy down the list of theoretical things that Bunte says Christians could do to change the world, if they tithed to the church. Add your own "wish list" at the end of his list. How does this list enlarge your vision of the church as the body—the hands and feet—of Jesus Christ? Post the sheet of newsprint where it will catch your eye frequently this month.
7. What political situation is described in Nahum, according to Valeta? He writes that the prophet calls for brutal punishment in retribution against a brutal oppressor, Nineveh. Answer Valeta's fundamental question about the book: "Is there a way to read Nahum without dismissing this book as morally inferior?" What value does Valeta suggest may be found in Nahum? What value do you find in the book?
8. How does the political situation addressed by Habakkuk differ from that in Nahum? Why does Valeta describe Habakkuk as "not afraid to argue with God"? Describe Habakkuk's point of view in his dialogue with God, and then describe God's point of view. What is the overwhelming experience that finally silences Habakkuk's questioning, according to Valeta? What kind of personal relationship with God does this book encourage?

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