

# DECEMBER 2024

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 SUNDAY SCHOOL 9:30AM INQUIRERS CLASS MORNING WORSHIP 10:30 AM Sacrament of the Lord's Supper Evening Worship 6 pm	2 Joint Officer's Meeting 5:30 PM	3 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am WIC Christmas Party 7 pm	4 Adult Choir Practice 6:30 pm	5 Ladies' Book Study 1 pm WIC Prayer Time 7 pm	6 Readers Game Night 6 pm (Hill Home)	7
8 SUNDAY SCHOOL 9:30AM MORNING WORSHIP 10:30 AM Evening Worship 6 pm	9 Youth Christmas Party 6 pm	10 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am Christmas Caroling 5:30 pm	11 Adult Choir Practice 6:30 pm	12 Ladies' Book Study 1 pm	13 Parent's Night Out 6 pm	14 Christmas Gift Wrapping Outreach @ Bonita Lakes Mall 10am - 2pm
15 SUNDAY SCHOOL 9:30AM MORNING WORSHIP 10:30 AM Children's Choir Practice @noon Christmas Hymn Sing 6pm	16 Men's Book Study 7 pm	17 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am	18 Adult Choir Practice 6:30 pm	19 Ladies' Book Study 1 pm	20	21
22 Sunday School 9:30 am Morning Worship 10:30 am Adult and Kid Choir Practice 12 pm Evening Worship 6 pm	23	24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service 5 pm	25 Merry Christmas! 	26	27	28 No Men's Monthly Fellowship Breakfast
29 Sunday School 9:30am Morning Worship 10:30 am No Evening Service	30 Men's Book Study 7 pm	31 Men's Prayer Breakfast 6 am				

## NORTHPOINTE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



December 2024

### From the Pastor

#### The Parable of the Father and Two Sons: The Older Son

We come to our final newsletter studying the three characters of *The Parable of the Prodigal Son* in Luke 15:11-32. This month, we consider the older son. I will begin by making a few initial observations about him, followed by a closer study into his place within the parable. We are told to look for the older son in the parable's opening words: "There was a man who had *two sons*." The focus shifts immediately to the younger son and the father over vv. 12-24. Following this, in vv. 25-32, we come to the father's older son and his response to all that has occurred between his father and younger brother.

We observe that the older son has remained in the home and on the estate of the father. When we see him, we find him "in the field" (15:25). He is likely dirty and sweaty from his hard labors. His hands are likely calloused from his working the ground. No doubt he is well-aware of this consequence of the fall: "cursed is the ground because of you; ... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. ... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Gen 3:17-19). The older son is doing his duty, contributing to the success of the family business. He has "these many years" served faithfully the father and the family (Luke 15:29). When confronted by the lavish welcome offered the wayward, rebellious younger son, the older son feels compelled to say without qualification to his father, by way of comparison to the younger son: "I never disobeyed your command." And despite all this faithful obedience—near perfect, it would seem—the father never even offered him a goat with which to have a little fun with his friends. For all this, the older son becomes angry and refuses to join in celebrating the younger's return.

What are we meant to learn from the older son? In many ways, the older son functions as a foil to the younger son. The one has been hard at work spending and wasting while the other has been hard at work serving and cultivating. While the younger lives without regard for righteousness, the older has been the perfect picture of righteousness (though of what sort we shall see). Yet, there are also some striking similarities between the two. Most notably, both sons fail to recognize, in their own way, the far-reaching kindness of the father and their dependence upon him and his generosity. Both sons have failed to see the father who can say, "all that is mine is yours," and respond with humble gratitude (15:31). So both sons, in due course, must come to see the father (and themselves) with fresh eyes. The younger, it seems, comes to this sight. We are not told if the older ever does. His is a stark warning for us.

The problem of the older son is the problem of the Pharisees and scribes to whom Jesus directs the parable (15:2). They are grumbling because Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them." Tax collectors and sinners, among both Jews and Gentiles, are welcomed by Jesus and treated with the lavish kindness shown by the father to the younger son. Jesus enjoys table fellowship with them, and they find in him forgiveness and fresh life by faith in his Person and Work. But older sons grumble because they have too lofty a view of their own righteousness, nothing more than a self-righteousness based on keeping a standard (a law mostly constructed by man building upon and contorting God's moral law). They have no place for the grace of the father and cannot be satisfied by it because, at root, they already find satis-

faction in themselves— "these many years *I have served* you, and *I never disobeyed* your command." They have been hard at work in the field of good works, always serving God (they believe) by their near perfect goodness. Their entire identity is built upon their own loyal labors. It only follows, in their minds, that they be repaid in kind. Of course *they have earned* the best robe, the extravagant ring, and the fattened calf—they have served God these many years. Then, when wayward younger brothers and sisters come home to God lost and ruined by the fall—how dare they be greeted with abundant grace! The self-satisfied heart cannot fathom such a response from Christ.

And so, the older son shows us what our hearts look like when we rest in what we have done. How good we have been. He shows us our ugly tendency both to be satisfied in ourselves and to scoff at the undeserved desserts of grace offered to others who have heretofore lived so evidently as sinners. The problem of the older son can easily become our problem. Let us beware that such a tendency should infect us. J.C. Ryle writes that the infection "arises from a thorough misunderstanding of the true nature of gospel forgiveness. The man who really feels that we all stand by grace and are all debtors, and that the best of us has nothing to boast of, and has nothing which he has not received—such a man will not be found talking like the 'elder brother.'" Let us beware that we not misunderstand the true nature of gospel forgiveness, the lavish grace of Christ, for ourselves and for our lost brothers and sisters. Let us long and be ready to feast and dance along with Christ when those who were dead live, when those lost are found.

Pastor Kevin Vollema

## MISSIONS MINUTE

### Update from the Stewart Family - MTW, Japan

Dear Friends,

#### *First Quarter of 2024-2025 School Year at Nagoya Christian School Update*

We attended the MTW Japan Asia area retreat in July in Bali. During this time, we went through the assessment process with MTW for Robert to become a team leader, and he was approved!

He became the assistant team leader for the Nagoya Church Planting Team in September.

Here is most of our Nagoya Church Planting Team! NCS teachers are a part of this team, and so far, we have Nancy Olivares and Kristal McCranie here to teach with Robert and me. Nancy's husband, Oscar, is an ordained pastor doing other church-planting ministry with our team. Kristal's husband, Stephan, and their two children are also in the photo. The McCranies are here through the MTW Community Arts Team, as Stephan is an artist. The picture also includes Heather May Jordan. She, Alex, and their four children will arrive in March 2025. Alex will be teaching at NCS full-time.



#### *Prayer Requests*

Praise God with us as we start our 2nd year at NCS!

Please pray for Nagoya Christian School and our current teachers and families. We are asking the Lord to lead more students to our school for the 2025-2026 school year! We currently have ten students, grades 1 through 8. We have three full-time teachers and two part-time teachers, as well as three part-time Japanese teachers.

Please pray for our teachers, those who arrived recently, and for the teacher (and his family) preparing and raising support to come in March 2025. Ask God to call and begin preparing other teachers and/or interns for our school as we grow.

Pray for NCS's Japanese teachers who love our students and want to help them learn the language and love Japan. Pray that God would lead another Japanese teacher to join our staff.

Please pray for Nisshin Christ Church and our outreach as we approach the holiday season.

Pray for our family time with William and Isabel as they will be in Japan during the Christmas break.

Please pray for Isabel as she prepares to study abroad next semester in Italy. Pray for William as he seeks a summer internship.

Praise God that Lisa was able to attend MTW's Global Missions Conference this past weekend. Pray for those she talked to about serving as teachers for one of MTW Japan's two schools for missionary kids (CCSI and NCS). We are asking God to continue to lead them to the mission field.

Please pray for our end-of-the-year support to be strong. We rely on special gifts at the end of each year to make up for monthly support shortfalls.

*Robert and Lisa Stewart*  
stewartjapan@gmail.com

## CHRISTMAS COMMUNITY GIFT WRAPPING OUTREACH

On Saturday, **December 14** from 10 until 2, Northpointe will once again be offering free Christmas gift wrapping services at Bonita Lakes Mall for the community. Please consider donating tape, tissue paper, boxes or other gift wrapping items and join us for a sweet time of fellowship and service.

## CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT COMMUNION SERVICE

There will be a Christmas Eve Communion service on Tuesday, **December 24**, at 5 pm. We hope you will come join us for this special time of worship.

## REMINDERS

- ◆ The *Lord's Supper* will be observed during morning worship on Sunday, **December 1**.
- ◆ The *Joint Officer's Meeting* will be **Monday, December 2** beginning at 5:30 pm. Dinner will be served. Please be praying for your elders and deacons.
- ◆ The next *Readers Game Night* is **December 6**, at 6 pm [Hill Home].
- ◆ *Women's Prayer Group* will meet once on **December 5** only at 7 pm, in the home of Carmel Madeja [420 Eastwood Street].
- ◆ *Men's Prayer Breakfast* dates for this month are **December 3, 10, 17 and 31**, at 6 am.
- ◆ The *Men's Book Study* dates are **December 16 and 30**, at 7 pm [Madeja Home].
- ◆ *Parents' Night Out* will be **December 13**, from 6-9 pm. Please make sure to pick up your children by 9 pm.

## WOMEN IN THE CHURCH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

Northpointe women: Please join us for our annual Christmas party on Tuesday, **December 3**, at 7 pm in the home of Beth Whitehead [906 Beechwood Dr, Meridian]. Please bring an appetizer and/or dessert along with a White Elephant gift between \$15-\$20 to exchange.

## YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY

Northpointe Youth! We'll be meeting **December 9**, at 6pm, for supper, Christmas games, and gift exchange (no more than \$15 and no gift cards). There will be prizes for the most festively dressed person! It will be a wonderful time remembering and celebrating Christ's birth. Hope you can come (5323 Linmoor Drive)!

## CHRISTMAS CAROLING OPPORTUNITY

Please join us for caroling, Tuesday, **December 10** at 5:30 p.m. We will visit the Preserves and Aldersgate as well as visit our members who are not able to attend services regularly. We plan to meet at the church and caravan or carpool together.

## ANNUAL CHRISTMAS HYMN SING

Mark your calendars! We will gather together for a Christmas Hymn Sing on Sunday, **December 15** at 6 pm.

## CHRISTMAS CHOIR PRACTICE SCHEDULE

Choir rehearsals for the upcoming Christmas Eve Service will be as follows: Wednesdays for Adult Choir **December 4, 11 & 18** from 6:30 - 7:15 pm. Sundays after morning service for kids and teens on **December 15** from 12 to 12:30pm. ALL CALLED **December 22** to run through all three pieces, 12-12:45pm after morning service.

## YEAR-END GIVING

If you plan to make a year-end gift to the church, please make sure it is in the church office or **postmarked by December 31**. According to the IRS regulations, any contributions received after that date must be credited to 2024.

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

5	Rachel Thaggard
6	Isaac James Titus Wadley
7	Elli Ausbrooks
8	Gary James
14	Emily Elliott
19	Stacey Joransen Constance Wadley
20	Todd Kiefer Bo Gunn William Russel Phillips
21	David Goldman
27	John McEachin Dotty Graham
29	Brett Rushing James Ethridge
30	Lee Thaggard Wyatt Gunn

*happy birthday*