

Synopsis of Spring Sunday School Class

"Falling Upward" and "Clash of Cultures"

We will have three chapters left in our book "Falling Upward – A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life."

Each chapter is a complete lesson so easy to pick up if new to this class. Beginning the fourth week of the spring semester, we will change gears and use a video study by Ray Vander Laan. Many classes at Covenant have used videos by Vander Laan in the past. Ray is a pastor, an historian, and gifted teacher. His specialty is teaching Bible lessons to small groups of Christians in Holy Land settings on location where the stories took place. Ray believes the context of Biblical stories is key to understanding deeper meanings embedded in each. We will use DVD videos from the long-running series called, "That the World May Know," Volumes 14 and 15. We will start with "A Clash of Cultures," followed by "The Mission of Jesus." Each volume has five 30-minute videos on-location by Vander Laan with a small group of adult students. The location for "A Clash of Cultures" is northern Greece (ancient Macedonia) and parts Eastern Turkey. This study follows Paul's second teaching journey. A teacher of long experience and many years in the Holy Land, Vander Laan leads his class on hikes and expeditions to ruins of cities and natural landmarks where Jesus and the Apostles walked; where Jews, gentiles and new followers of Jesus lived, struggled, suffered, prayed, celebrated while subject to a cruel oppressive Roman government.

Vander Laan says of Jesus, Paul, and the other Biblical characters: "... their stories were set in real times and places. Many had returned home from places such as the wilderness of the Negev desert, the ancient streets of Jerusalem, the springs of En Gedi, and the villages of Galilee with a greater hunger for God's Word."; "God had a unique purpose for communicating his message through these culturally familiar concepts and practices that made the point of his message strikingly clear and relevant."; "... the cultural setting in which (God) placed his revelation is useful for not merely knowing what words mean but for understanding the message and application of the Text."

Through these two DVD volumes (ten sessions), we will walk along with Ray Vander Laan. We will see where Paul walked and taught. Vander Laan and his students walk streets and roads historian believe were traveled by Christians during Biblical times. We will be able to imagine the passionate preaching of Paul as he tells his story of conversion and faith to Jews and non-Jews. We will gain appreciation for how new followers of "the Way" lived, prayed, received the Good News, were healed, and began to realize the deep love of God found in the person of Jesus Christ. Each lesson contains references to scriptures and interpretations based on cultural events that shaped how the early Christians came to believe. Vander Laan is inspirational as he helps his students (and us) find deeper meaning in the Bible. We expect lively discussions and sharing of the thoughts and insights of class members.

Thomas MacMichael

