



**Summer Worship Series**  
**Shalom Mennonite Fellowship**  
**Tucson, Arizona**

**“Roadside Stories from Family Vacations-  
Planning A Spiritual Trip With Our Shalom Family”**

(A Study in lessons on Church, Fellowship, Faith, and Community  
from the letters of the New Testament; see page 3 for “Worship Leader’s template)

**Overview**

by Carolyn Anderson

Remember each fall when returning to school we were asked to write the infamous essay: “What I did on my summer vacation?” Shalom’s summer series is going to challenge us to think back and share some of our roadside stories from family vacations.

We all come from a human family. Our families "of origin" may look and act different but no matter how diverse our backgrounds are- our human family relationships helped form who we are, what we believe, how we behave. We also belong to a larger spiritual family- the family of God. This summer series will explore our human family relationships, our spiritual family relationships, and how lessons from the New Testament Letters can teach us to grow together.

We all have lots of family memories and since it is summer, the worship commission chose to focus on summer stories. Summer time is when kids are off from school- families get together to travel, to go camp, visit the cabin, go on vacation, to bible school, and visit relatives. These activities help families grow, face challenges, and get to know each other better, and importantly they make memories and stories that we can share with each other.

Each Sunday we hope families, small groups, individuals, will take the opportunity to share a summer family memories, focus on Biblical lesson, and share how this can help us grow as a spiritual family, a fellowship of believers, and strengthen us a church community.

We've picked several different themes- our hope is by pondering and exploring the letters of the New Testament find how solutions, ideas, and inspiration to learn to live together, love together, and thrive as children of God!

We look forward to planning this spiritual summer vacation together with you!

**Overview of Sunday Themes**

(Members were invited to choose a theme from among those listed below that sparked a story for them, and to sign up for a Sunday when they would like to share it. Stories varied in length and sometimes we had multiple stories on the same Sunday’s theme.)

**1. Theme: Maps, Tickets, Boarding Passes, & Checking Our Emotional Baggage**

**Main Idea:** Preparing for the Journey Ahead

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** Psalm 121

**Story Idea/Suggestion-** Do you have a story about trying to prepare for a trip and had to decide what to bring and what not to bring, what is important and what can we leave behind? How have you prepared for a trip in the past? How can we prepare as a community for the journey ahead? For instance, being sure to pack the good things we’ve learned, and letting go some of the not

so helpful things we cling to go. Story ideas may include our journey to search for a new pastor, how we care for others as they prepare for their journeys, growing as a church, welcoming new members and lovingly letting others leave.

## **2. Theme: HOME ALONE! What happens when someone gets left behind?**

**Main Ideas:** Sometimes when someone isn't there, we realize the most how much we need them to function.

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 2:21-22

**Story Ideas-** Do you have a story about leaving something or someone important behind on a family summer trip? Or maybe you were the one to get left behind. How can stories about being left behind show how closely we are related to each other? A New Testament analogy compares the human body, the church as the body of Christ. Just as all the parts of our bodies (arms, legs, head, etc.) are diverse and consist of many members, so are the members of God's family, and our bodies wouldn't function right if we left out an important organ. Each part of the body carries out its own function, sometimes prominent, sometimes humble, and sometimes unseen. It was Paul's conviction that the Church should be like that. Each member has a task to do; and it is only when each contributes the help of his own task that the body of the Church functions as it ought. No individual believer can function effectively by himself. We need the help and love of other members of the body. We need encouragement, counsel, prayer, or physical help, depending on our particular needs at any given moment. Every believer is important and essential to the proper function of the church—how can we be sure to incorporate everyone and not leave anyone behind!

## **3. Theme: A Family of 6 in a Tent Made for 4**

**Main Ideas:** Getting Along Together Through Trials and Temptations in Close Quarters

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** James 1 1:9, Corinthians 13, And Galatians 5:14

**Story Ideas-** Do you have a story about being cooped up together in a small tent, cabin, or station wagon? How have trials and temptations made you stronger? Do you have stories about a family vacation struggle that brought you closer together in the end? How can becoming close together- like a large family in a small tent- moments of being uncomfortable, challenged, unhappy, teach us to develop the skill of loving each other. It's hard to learn to love when we are isolated from other people- sometimes it takes being around "challenging" people, irritating and frustrating people to grow- are we willing to be committed to loving our spiritual family even though- like us- not everyone is perfect.

## **4. Theme: Sibling Rivalry- "Mom, Bobby ALWAYS gets to sit in the front seat!"**

**Main Ideas:** Transformation through jealousy

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** Stories of Joseph Gen. 29:30 and/or Mary and Martha Luke 10:38-42, Ephesians 4:32

**Story Ideas-** Do you have a story about a time when you were jealous of a brother or sister and felt you were being treated unfairly? We are all brothers and sisters in Christ and how have times when we feel like God is "favoring" other people or we feel we aren't getting our "fair-share" caused us to struggle and how did we overcome this experience. In our church we may feel some people in the spotlight with certain gifts get all the credit and "glory". Shalom is a good place to discover, develop, use our gifts-to learn how to be servants: we all have a contribution to make- how can we figure out our gifts together- support others who may not always get to be in the spotlight, and realize that our gifts are important too.

## **5. Theme: Radishes, Relishes, and Family Reunions- Visiting Relatives**

**Main Ideas:** Learning from our Elders

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** Ruth 1:11-14 or other appropriate verse

**Story Idea-** Do you have a memory/story of visiting a relative, spending a summer with a grandparent, or a trip to see a family member that had a profound effect on your spirituality or your walk with God that you'd like to share? This is an opportunity to honor that individual and to remind our fellowship to honor those to have taken the time to teach us.

## **6. Theme: The B-I-B-L-E yes that's the book for me! Singing the Praises of Summer Bible Camp**

**Main Ideas:** Your faith will help me, my faith will help you

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** Homework assignment\*

**Story Ideas-** Did you attend summer bible camp as a child, adult, or family. Did you ever work as a camp counselor? Was there a favorite Bible lesson you took away from that experience? There are several ways to present this theme- one for those gifted in the area of music- focus the service around fun camp songs to teach the congregation and make it a worship service through song, another would be to a present camp skit or "talent show", another to share stories from campfires, canoes, and other camp activities. Maybe even teach the congregation a craft that can be learned quickly (in 15 minutes or so) for instance meditation while doing macramé. \*There is not a scripture assigned to this Sunday so you'll be responsible to find a passage that fits with your lesson.

## **7. Theme: Sticking Together- Stay with Your Travel Buddy**

**Main Ideas:** What does it mean to be a committed church member?

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** Romans 15:5-6; 2 Corinthians 13:11;

**Story Ideas-** Do you have a story about taking the plunge- buying a plane ticket or making a commitment to go on a trip with another person, maybe not knowing them so well? Did you have some reservations about your travel reservations? How could this story relate to taking the plunge and joining a church fellowship, showing our commitment to our spiritual brothers and sisters in reality not just in theory? One idea might be that being part of fellowship is not only a commitment to Christ but also a commitment to each other. We can always bail out, leave, join another church- but what are the benefits of sticking it out together- just as if we set off on a trip together and half-way through abandoned or were abandoned by our travel buddy. When are there times where we should leave?

#### **8. Theme: Habitat for Humility: Service Vacations That Put Faith into Action**

**Main Ideas:** We came to do good and we did well.

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** 1 James 2:18, 2:23-26

**Story Ideas:** Do you have a story about a “service” trip you took with MVS, MCC, a Mission, Habitat for Humanity, Peace Corps or other working vacation. What did you take away from that experience that brought you closer together to your spiritual brothers and sisters? Sometimes we go into situations to help others and we end up being the ones who are transformed.

#### **9. Theme: Vacation Bible School Talent Show Extravaganza!**

**Main Ideas:** Vacation Bible School Memories

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** Homework Assignment\*

**Story Ideas:** Did you go to VBS or teach VBS? Remember those great productions at the conclusion with all the arts, crafts, and singing? Some ideas for this Sunday would be to share a lesson you learned from Vacation Bible School as a student, teacher, or parent. It could include singing songs you learned, making crafts like sand candles or leather bracelets together, kickball, creativity is welcomed! There is no scripture assigned to this Sunday so your homework will be to find a correlating scripture to your project and a goal would be to relate it to building fellowship and community life together.

#### **10. Theme: Are We There Yet?**

**Main Ideas:** Learning to have patience with others who may not travel at the same pace

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** 1 Corinthians 8

**Story Ideas:** Have you ever been on a hike or traveling with someone who just didn’t move as fast, wanted to see different things, or just had different expectations of what would happen? One story idea would be to share your experience and relate it to how we as a community can recognize and honor that on our spiritual journeys our brothers and sisters travel at a different pace. How can scripture and experience guide us when to gently push people to get “moving” on the path, and when to lovingly let people be where they are.

#### **11. Theme: These Boots Were Made For Walking...But NOT This Much!**

**Main Ideas:** What to do when we get weary, supporting each other when the trip doesn’t go quite as planned

**Supporting Scriptural Readings:** Joshua 9:12; Hebrews 12:3

**Story Ideas:** Do you have a story about ‘sandals worn out from the very long journey’? A memory about despite very good planning thing did not turn out as expected? How did others comfort and help you? How did this experience shape your faith? One idea would be to share how this experience can guide us to recognize when those around us are feeling weary, and how we can grow together by upholding each, and also sharing when we are in need and asking for help.

#### **12. Theme: Hitch-Hikers, Picnic Ants, Uncle Fred and Other Uninvited Guests**

**Main Ideas:** Welcoming Strangers, Entertaining Angels Unawares

**Supporting Scriptures:** Genesis 18:1-15

**Story Ideas:** Do you have a story about an uninvited guest, or a relative, that just wouldn’t leave? God sometimes surprises us through unexpected guests. Do you have stories of being transformed through welcoming strangers and other unexpected visitors?

#### **13. Theme: There’s No Place like Home, There’s No Place like Home!**

**Main Ideas:** Shalom is our Spiritual Home, A place to Belong

**Supporting Scripture:** Ephesians 2:19; I Timothy 3:15

**Story Ideas:** How have you felt after traveling a long time when you are finally “home” in your own bed? Do you feel that way at Shalom? The Bible tells us the church isn’t a building or organization, just as your “home” isn’t just a few walls. How can we make Shalom feel like home for others and for ourselves? Belonging and being committed to church gives us the opportunity to practice real fellowship and to practice relationships with other and be part of a connected community depended on each other.

## *Worship Leader Template*

### **“Roadside Stories from Family Vacations- Planning A Spiritual Trip With Our Shalom Family”**

(A Study in lessons on Church, Fellowship, Faith, and Community)



## The Big Picture...

As you lead the service, it's often easy to get lost in the details and forget the big picture. Remember: as the sub theme suggests, this is a study in lessons on Church, Fellowship, Faith, and Community. The congregation will be hearing stories both from scripture and of people's summer experiences, family vacations, misadventures etc. But the underlying invitation for the congregation is to search out the connections between the Biblical story and our stories, and to distill the lessons they hold for us a church family on this "road trip" together. The challenge for the worship leader is to keep the congregation pointed in this direction! Without those connections, the danger is that the stories we hear become more anecdotal in nature, mere curiosities. They lose any real power to transform us and speak to our life together on a deeper level. This is one pitfall we can do our best to avoid.

## The details...

Summer worship tends to have a more informal feel. We face each other in a circle. Worship and song leaders can lead while seated in the midst of the congregation. The Bible is passed and read from among the congregation, as opposed to being read from the front, etc. Below please find a suggested flow for the summer order of worship. Feel free to make thoughtful and creative adjustments if needed. However, during the time of hearing God's story and our story, the worship commission would suggest keeping the flow of events consistent throughout the season.

### *Suggested worship flow*

#### **GATHERING: Celebrating with songs and offerings**

Plan for one major block of songs around 15 minutes or so in length to open the service. This probably comes out to 4-6 songs, depending on length. The congregation can be invited to bring offerings forward during one of the opening songs. The worship candles can also be lit sometime during the opening songs. In keeping with the summer theme, try to have at least one song be a camp-type song. You might allow the congregation to choose 1-2 songs, that is, if the accompanist is open to playing whatever gets selected!

#### **COMMUNITY LIFE:**

-Welcome visitors

-Announcements and introduction of the morning's theme

After the announcements, you might include a brief, overall description of the summer series for the benefit of visitors, then introduce the specific sub theme of the morning.

-Community prayer time for joys and concerns

## HEARING GOD'S STORY AND OUR STORY:

### -Preparation in silence

Directed silence gives the congregation time to “center” before moving into receiving the word.

### -Reflection Statement (1)

The purpose of the first reflection statement is to begin to engage the congregation's thinking around the theme. It describes the focus of the morning and sets forth some of the questions that might be explored. To help you write the reflection statement, you can lift ideas from the list of Sunday themes. Each Sunday has a paragraph describing possible directions the theme might take. Feel free to use ideas from here and to add your own ideas and questions based on your conversation with the storyteller(s) for your week. We would suggest that you read the reflection statement aloud, but also have it printed in the bulletin so those who are more visually oriented can follow along.

### -Hearing God's story

The list of themes also suggests scriptures to use with each Sunday, although you should feel free to be creative if you think of others that would fit well. Usually it's a good idea to list these in the bulletin so those who wish can refer to them. Feel free to choose your readers ahead of time, and you can simply pass the Bible to them when it's time to read.

### -Hearing our family stories

You may well want to check with your storytellers ahead of time and talk through the service together as needed.

### -Returning to God's story (reflection statement [2] and scripture)

As you move into the time for the congregation to respond, this is the time to keep “the big picture” in mind. Early on in the summer, it's especially important to guide the congregation into the habit of searching out the connections between the stories and distilling their meaning for the community. While you can't force this to happen, you can certainly help to guide and set the stage for meaningful reflection.

In addition to any spoken words of guidance you want to offer, consider reading and having printed in the bulletin a second, more focused reflection statement. This can help “prime the pump” and focus the direction of the congregation's reflections a bit further after hearing the stories. Again, feel free to take ideas from the overview paragraph, add your own, or call Carolyn for help.

Then, return to one scripture to have it read a second time. This may help the congregation hear it in a new way.

### -Open Congregational response:

At this point, it is up to the congregation to draw their own meaningful connections from everything that they have heard. People may also have spontaneous stories to share. It's often good to say that you welcome both silent and spoken reflection.

## SENDING

### -Sending Song and Benediction

You can move from the open response time into sending people out when the time seems right. Choose any sending song you wish and any benediction you like, either a reading from the hymnal, one you write yourself, or a simple prayer or blessing. The order of these two elements is easily interchangeable.