

Editor's note: The following article first appeared in The Shenandoah Update on August 17, 2024 and is the second in an ongoing series of how the congregations in the Shenandoah District are rebounding after the challenges wrought by COVID-19. Congregations experiencing similar growth and resiliency after the previous two years are encouraged to contact Director of Communications Brenda Diehl to tell more of these exciting stories.

Reading the Owner's Manual Together: Valley Pike Bible Study Sparks Interest

"God has been speaking to me and our church through His Word," said Valley Pike Pastor Jonathan Fletcher, who is leading a new Bible study on the Book of Revelation. "As a minister, I feel we read the owner's manual for anything we buy so that we can get the most out of it. The same is true of the Bible; we need to read the owner's manual so we can get the most out of our life," Fletcher stated.

This is the second Bible study series that Pastor Fletcher has offered at Valley Pike. "I did a Bible study on the power of prayer in July last year and had about 20 attend. Then I discussed doing a Bible Study on Revelation, and I ordered about 35 study guides to work with alongside the Bible," he said. This was a 75% increase in participants in one year.

One of the congregation's members noted that the "whole church should study the Bible as a whole Church," and they are doing just that on Thursday nights from 7-8 p.m. Fletcher keeps the dismissal time firm so that older adults who do not drive well after dark can still attend. The goal is to conclude the study by November 3, the last Thursday before Daylight Savings Time ends.

When speaking about the Book of Revelation, Fletcher recognized that many of his members had questions. He chose the book because these things are on so many hearts and minds these days and he felt led to launch this new study. "In the early chapters of Revelation, God describes Jesus in-depth, so we are getting acquainted with His love," he noted.

The youngest member of the study is 13 years old, and the oldest member is in their 80s. There are singles, couples, and single parents in the group, representing their congregation's makeup.

Currently, the group is in the third chapter of the Book of Revelation and learning about the letters to the different churches. "I tell them to come with expectations of learning how Valley Pike can stay focused on what we need to stay focused on," said Fletcher.

"The participants prepare for the study outside of class, and questions are encouraged," Fletcher explained. The study guide for the program has questions to think about each week, but people formulate their questions to ask, too. These questions make it a "... wonderful time of conversation around the table," according to Fletcher.

Fletcher relayed one story about a discussion in the study, "One participant described Revelation like Swiss cheese: The holes challenge us because we do not have all of the answers." Indeed, the Book of Revelation can be an intense study, but Fletcher focuses on what is essential to learn. "The one thing I emphasize is we're not reading into scriptures what's not there," he said. "We continue to be open as a group, knowing that the things in Revelation are future things, and to stay focused on the here and now. We are not afraid to say we don't know the answer," he said.

Fletcher tells his congregation, "The focus is to get back to the Great Commission that God and Jesus called us to do," referring to the emphasis Valley Pike puts on their walk of faith in their community. "Whatever's going on in the world, we have to place it in God's hands, and Revelation reminds us in the end we win," he said.

"We continue to pray for God to guide us through His Word," Fletcher affirmed, "We know there will be some challenges along the way. Each time we meet, I remind the group of Revelation 1:3: Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it because the time is near."

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