



BETHANY CHURCH

# NEWSLETTER ♦ January '26

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A few years ago a lady from our Wisconsin church texted me this quote:

*"Church must not be the goal of the gospel anymore. Church should not be the focus of our efforts or the banner we hold up to explain what we're about. Church should be what ends up happening as a natural response to people wanting to follow us, be with us, and be like us as we are following the way of Christ."*

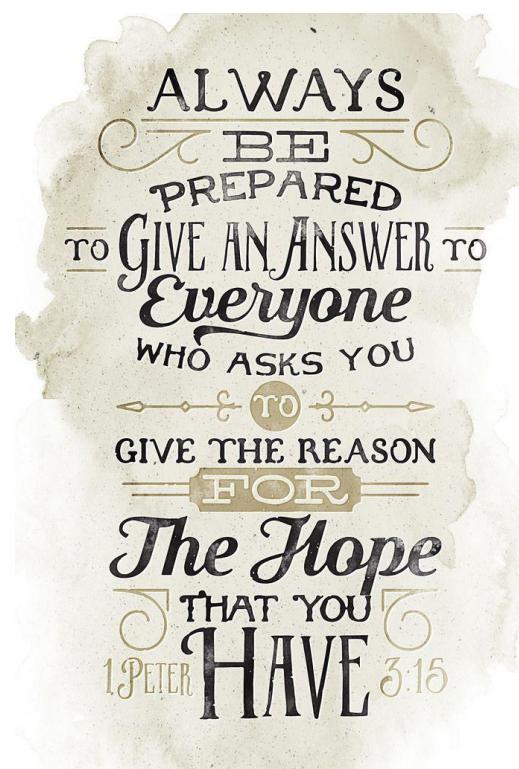
The thought resonated with her as she was trying to pray a way to get her prodigal older, divorced, father of three brother back to church. What she concluded was: all she could do was love him with the love of Christ. Pushing him into a pew on Sunday morning wouldn't be a true answer to her prayers.

Let me unpack this thought further with you. I don't take this to mean the Church is obsolete and to left behind. My take is: being a member of an organization (a church) is not what's going to infuse the Good News into others. Christians are called and commissioned to be like Christ...to be light in the darkness...to be salt in a tasteless spoiled world. We have to demonstrate a Christ-like level of character everywhere we go with everyone we have contact with. If we're not walking with and talking like Jesus out in the world, who would be attracted to the idea of coming to church with us to find out more about the Jesus we confess to follow?

As we begin a new year, would you pray for the Holy Spirit to make you a brighter witness for Christ? Would you seek out ways to connect with people all week long in ways that may seem unusual and too good to be true? That's the work Jesus calls us to, right? "My Kingdom is not of this world."

As people experience a love that is unnatural to us because the Spirit in us is guiding and empowering us; they are going to pause and eventually ask questions. And when the questions come, have an answer ready. Be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you. Even though you may face ridicule and rejection, point to Jesus who wants to give grace freely and unconditionally. Your answers don't have to be long—just be honest and trust God will lead you what to say.

Let's trust God to grow our church family spiritually and numerically. It probably won't happen primarily with invitations to come to a Sunday church service. But as we follow Christ in our lives regularly, consistently, publicly, others will take note that we have been with Jesus. Pastor Rob





## A Purposeful New Year

The man who goes into the new year without some priorities governing his life and without some principles guiding his behavior, is prey to the tempting, unimportant and destructive things in life.

The new year is an opportunity to sort out the useless tasks and plan for the important; to review the failures and resolve to be successful; to take an inventory of causes and pledge life to purpose and service. These being done, the new will truly be new, different and better.— C. Neil Strait

### Scripture Keys to a Joyful New Year

**H**old fast to your faith (Hebrews 4:14)

**A**ssemble with the saints (Hebrews 10:25)

**P**ray earnestly every day (1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18)

**P**ray for great blessings (Malachi 3:10)

**Y**ield not to temptation (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

**N**eglect not your talents and opportunities (Galatians 6:10)

**E**xamine yourself daily (2 Corinthians 13:5)

**W**ork diligently for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58)

**Y**ield your members to righteousness (Romans 6:11,16)

**E**xercise yourself in godliness (1 Timothy 4:7)

**A**im at sinless perfection (Hebrews 6:1)

**R**edeem the time (Ephesians 5:15, 16)

— Gus Nichols

Thomas Dorsey, a jazz musician from Atlanta, made a bold decision in 1926 to leave behind secular music and devote his talent to writing songs for the Lord. But following that call wasn't easy. During the Great Depression, many church leaders criticized his soulful gospel style, calling it "the devil's music." Dorsey later joked, "I got kicked out of some of the best churches in the land."

Then, in 1932, tragedy struck. While in St. Louis for a revival, he received a telegram that his wife had died suddenly during childbirth. His faith was shaken to the core, and grief nearly silenced him. Yet in his deepest sorrow, Dorsey turned back to what he knew best — music. Out of that heartbreak came one of the most beloved hymns of all time:

*"Precious Lord, take my hand,  
Lead me on, let me stand.  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn..."*

Dorsey's song reminds us that even in our valleys, God is near — guiding us, strengthening us, and using our pain to comfort others who walk the same road.

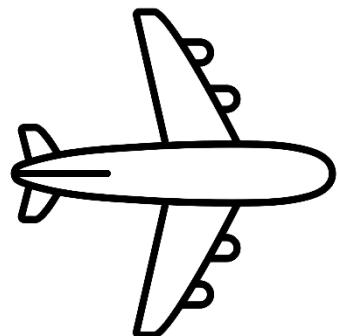
### What We Really Need →

Twelve ministers were on a flight headed to a conference in Seattle when the plane hit a fierce storm. Trying to calm their nerves, they told the flight attendant, "Let the pilot know everything's fine — there are twelve ministers on board!"

A few minutes later, the flight attendant returned from the cockpit.

"Well?" one of the pastors asked with a grin. "What did the pilot say?"

She smiled and replied, "He said he was glad to have 12 ministers aboard, but he would rather have four good engines."





Every parent has said it a hundred times: “I need you to clean your room.” “I need you to take out the trash.” “I need you to get started on your homework.”

It’s understandable—we’re busy, and the things that need to be done feel urgent. But there’s a subtle message hiding in that phrasing. When we say, “I need you to...,” the responsibility sounds like it still belongs to *us*, not *them*.

What if we could flip that internal message? What if children began to hear from us—and eventually from inside their own hearts—“You need to...”?

That’s the language of the conscience. And with a simple shift in vocabulary, you can begin to strengthen your child’s internal motivation and build a deeper sense of responsibility, thus training the conscience.

### The Conscience: God’s Internal Guidance System

The Bible speaks often of the conscience. In Acts 23:1, Paul says, “*I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.*” Notice the word *duty*—that’s the prompting of the conscience at work. It’s not just about knowing right from wrong; it’s about feeling an inner obligation to do what’s right.

That inner sense of duty is what moves children from merely following rules to taking ownership for their actions.

When you train a child’s conscience, you are helping them develop an inner voice that says:

- “I should finish my chores.”
- “It’s time to get ready without being reminded.”
- “I need to be honest right now.”

This is more than behavior management—it’s heart-based parenting.

### Why “You Need To” Works

The phrase “You need to...” mirrors the language of the conscience.

When a child hears, “You need to get your schoolwork done,” it communicates that this is *their* task, *their* responsibility, and *their* opportunity to grow. The more they hear it from you, the more they’ll begin to hear it internally—prompting them even when you’re not around.

Compare that to “I need you to get your schoolwork done.” That’s parent-centered. The focus is on the parent’s need, not the child’s responsibility.

This may seem like a small difference, but over time it changes how a child perceives responsibility. One approach builds external compliance; the other builds internal character.

### Practical Ways to Use “You Need To” in the Home For Younger Children (Ages 3-10)

At this age, kids are forming habits and routines. Parents are still the primary motivators, but this is the perfect time to begin shifting responsibility.

Instead of saying:

“I need you to pick up your toys.”

Try saying:

“You need to pick up those toys now. That’s your job.”

Instead of:

“I need you to brush your teeth now.”

Try:

“You need to brush your teeth because it’s bedtime.”

Why it works:

This slight shift nudges children to own their tasks, even if they still need reminders. Over time, they begin hearing *you need to* in their own hearts—and that’s the conscience being shaped.

You can also reinforce the prompting function of the conscience by asking questions like:

- “What do you need to do next?”
- “What’s your job right now?”
- “What would be the right thing to do?”

This kind of coaching language engages the heart and mind—not just behavior.

## For Older Children & Teens (Ages 11-18)

Older kids are highly aware of autonomy, which is why it's essential to transfer responsibility to them deliberately. They need to feel the weight of their decisions without you carrying it for them.

Instead of saying:

"I need you to clean your room before friends come over."

Try saying:

"You need to decide what kind of environment you want to live in. Keeping your room clean shows you're taking ownership."

Instead of:

"I need you to finish your project."

Try:

"You need to follow through on your commitments. That's how you grow into someone others can trust."

Also consider asking reflective questions like:

- "How do you know when it's time to start studying?"
- "What does it look like to take initiative with your responsibilities?"
- "How is your conscience speaking to you right now?"

This approach is empowering. You're not just correcting behavior—you're training your teen to listen to the inner promptings of the conscience that God gave them.

## Responsibility Is Learned Through Practice

Scripture teaches that responsibility grows through *faithfulness* in small things.

Jesus said in Matthew 25:21, "*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.*"

That's a good parenting model. It might not be good to say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant,*" but the idea of commanding a child for being responsible is important.

When a child practices responsibility in little ways—setting the table, remembering homework, managing a bedtime—they're building internal muscles that will sustain them in adulthood.

But this kind of growth doesn't happen by accident. It happens when parents train the conscience with intention, repetition, and clear, moral vocabulary.

## Final Encouragement

You may be thinking, "*I've been saying it wrong for years.*" That's okay. It's never too late to start using heart-based vocabulary in your parenting.

Try this today:

- Choose one common instruction and rephrase it with "You need to..."
- Reinforce the idea of doing what's right—even when no one is watching.

As you do, your child's sense of obligation will grow. Their conscience will strengthen. And they'll begin to act—not just because you told them to, but because something inside them is calling them to do what's right.

That's the kind of responsibility that sticks. That's how the heart grows strong.



**Sow a thought  
and you reap an action;  
sow an act  
and you reap a habit;  
sow a habit  
and you reap a character;  
sow a character  
and you reap a destiny."**

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Sunday, January 4, 2026

## Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

*Write it on your heart that every day  
is the best day in the year. —Ralph Waldo Emerson*



The first week of a new year is always shocking to me. I wonder where the past year went. It all happened so fast! Most of us probably feel the same way. We look back over the months behind us — the joys and the sorrows, the triumphs and the trials, and take stock. For some of us, this past year was marked by health challenges, the loss of loved ones or changes we never anticipated. For others, it may have brought unexpected blessings, new friendships or milestones celebrated with those we love.

No matter what the year held, the apostle Paul's words in verse 3 of today's reading offer us a profound truth to carry forward as we go into 2026: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

Think about that for a moment — *every spiritual blessing*. Not just some, not just enough to get by, but *every blessing* in Christ. What are these blessings? Paul goes on to list them:

- We are *chosen* before the foundation of the world (v. 4).
- We are *adopted* as God's children through Jesus Christ (v. 5).
- We are *redeemed* and forgiven by the grace of God (v. 7).
- We are *lavished* with grace, given insight into the mystery of God's will (v. 8-9).
- We are *sealed* with the Holy Spirit, a guarantee of our inheritance (vv. 13-14).

This list provides the inspiration for two powerful responses as we step into a new year: *gratitude for the past and courage for the future*.

*Gratitude for the past year.* Gratitude is more than just saying "thank you." It's a posture of the heart that recognizes God's faithfulness in every season. Perhaps you might take a few moments today to remember the small blessings that brightened your year. These are whispers of God's grace — evidence that God has been with you every step of the way.

*Courage for the year ahead.* The new year stretches before us like a blank page, and while it holds promise, it can also feel uncertain. But here is the good news: *you are blessed in heavenly places.* Your life is hidden with Christ, and nothing that comes your way is beyond God's reach. God has already secured your future, marked out your path and promised to be with you.

—Timothy Merrill

*Prayer: Loving God, I thank you for the blessings of the past year. As I step into this new year, help me to remember that, in Christ, I am incredibly blessed. Give me courage for the days ahead and a heart that trusts in your unfailing love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



# HOME TOUCH® Activity Page

Week of January 4, 2026

**Daily Bible Readings****Sunday:** Genesis 1-5**Monday:** Genesis 6-12**Tuesday:** Genesis 13-18**Wednesday:** Genesis 19-23**Thursday:** Genesis 24-28**Friday:** Genesis 29-32**Saturday:** Genesis 33-36

READ  
THROUGH  
THE BIBLE  
IN ONE  
YEAR!

Each week, *HomeTouch* will provide daily readings from the Bible that will take you through the Bible in one year. Sometimes, we will suggest a **Verse to Remember**. Many *HomeTouch* readers try to memorize these verses; memorization stimulates both the mind and the heart!

## Find the missing words using the code below:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Z Y X W V U T S R Q P O N M L K J I H G F E D C B A

As a looks after his

H S V K S V I W

H X Z G G V I V W

flock when he is them, so will I look after my  
D R G S

sheep. I will them and them. I  
I V H X F V K Z H G F I V

will for the lost and bring back the  
H V Z I X S H G I Z B

I will bind up the and strengthen the  
R M Q F I V W D V Z P

You are my , the sheep of my pasture, and I am your  
H S V V K

God, says the Lord God. —Based on Ezekiel 34



January 2026						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Sunday, January 11, 2026

## Scripture Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

***God sometimes takes us into troubled waters  
not to drown us but to cleanse us. —Anon.***



In 2018, my youngest daughter and I were in Israel, and we spent a night in Tiberius. The following morning, we drove south a short way to a popular spot on the Jordan River where people could be baptized. Many people milled about. I spotted a well-known television evangelist there with a large group of devotees. There were changing rooms for men and women to prepare. Upon leaving, one could browse in a gift shop.

In some ways, the commercial activity was off-putting. But in other ways, we were thankful that such a place made a baptism in the Jordan possible. I baptized my daughter. And it was memorable for both of us, in part because the experience placed us both into the gospel of Matthew, chapter 3 — the text for today.

Something remarkable happened 2,000 years ago at the Jordan River. Jesus, the Son of God — sinless, perfect, and divine — stepped into the muddy water to be baptized. Not because he needed cleansing, but because he chose to identify with us in every way. But what stands out most in this moment is not just what Jesus did, but what God said. “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (v.17).

Notice this: before Jesus preached a single sermon, healed a single person or performed a single miracle, God the Father declared his love and approval. Not because of what Jesus had done — but simply because of who he was. This is the kind of love we all long for. And this is the kind of love that God extends to you, right now.

Maybe you’ve slowed down in recent years. Maybe your body doesn’t move like it used to. Maybe you feel that your “usefulness” is behind you. But this passage reminds us that our identity isn’t tied to productivity or performance — it’s tied to grace.

In Christ, you are God’s beloved child. That identity doesn’t fade with age. It doesn’t vanish if your calendar is empty or your mobility is limited. You are not forgotten or set aside. The same voice that spoke from heaven still speaks over you: “You are my beloved. I am pleased with you.”

Let that truth sink in. Let it be louder than your worries, stronger than your regrets and deeper than your loneliness.

—Timothy Merrill

*Prayer: O God, may I remember my baptism and to claim the promise of your presence every day of my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Week of January 11, 2026*
**Daily Bible Readings**
**Sunday:** Genesis 37-39

**Monday:** Genesis 40-42

**Tuesday:** Genesis 43-46

**Wednesday:** Genesis 47-50

**Thursday:** Matthew 1-4

**Friday:** Matthew 5-7

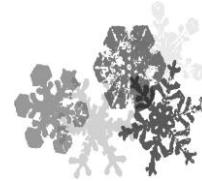
**Saturday:** Psalms 1-3

## Verse to Remember

*Happy are those ... [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. —Psalm 1:1-3*

## ANAGRAM ADVENTURE!

An *anagram* is a word made of the same letters as another word. In the lists below, find each word's anagram by rearranging the letters in each of these real words to form a new real word. Example: LISTEN = SILENT (SILENT is an anagram of LISTEN).



Master	=	ignores	=
Generate	=	abroad	=
Weather	=	diaper	=
Earnest	=	scared	=
Glean	=	alerted	=
Outside	=	gallery	=
Nerve	=	praised	=
Direct	=	beard	=
Priest	=	ideals	=
Roasting	=	lameness	=
Reveals	=	lament	=
Strut	=	decimal	=
Forest	=	serpents	=
Resist	=	observe	=
Grown	=	petals	=

**ANAGRAM ADVENTURE:** Left column — master=stream; generate=teenager; weather=wreath; earnest=eastern or nearest; glean=angel or nearest; outside=tedious; nerve=never; direct=credit; priest=stripe; roasting=organist; reveals=several; strut=trust; forest=softer or foster; resist=sister; grown=wrong. Right column — ignores=regions; abroad=aboard; diaper=repaid; scared=sacred; alerted=treadle, altered or related; gallery=allergy or largely; praised=despair; beard=bread or barbed; ideals=ladies; lameness=salesmen; lament=mental or mantle; decimal=medical or claimed; serpents=presents; observe=verbose; petals=staple.

Sunday, January 18, 2026

## Scripture Reading: John 1:29-42

*Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. —Martin Luther King Jr.*



Millard Fuller was a self-made millionaire by age 29. In the 1960s, he was living the American dream — high income, high profile and high stress. His success came at a cost: his health, his marriage and his confusing sense of purpose. Everything was deteriorating.

In 1965, after a deep personal and spiritual crisis, Fuller and his wife, Linda, sold all of their possessions, gave their wealth to charity and sought a simpler life rooted in Christian service. They spent time at Koinonia Farm, a Christian community in Georgia committed to racial reconciliation, justice and communal living. It was there that the idea for Habitat for Humanity was born. In Fuller's own words, this change was the result of a call to radical discipleship: "I had to rediscover what it meant to follow Jesus — not just with my beliefs, but with my whole life."

In 1976, the Fullers founded Habitat for Humanity International, which has since built or renovated millions of homes around the world for people in need. The organization is fueled by the belief that every person deserves a decent place to live and that faith in action changes lives — including the lives of those who build.

This is a great story. But most of us aren't called to make headlines or found organizations. And as we age, it can feel as though we have less to offer — less energy, fewer opportunities and not much to "show" for our faith. Or so we feel.

But in John 1, when Jesus calls his first disciples, he doesn't ask for résumés. He simply says, "Come and see." That invitation still stands — not just for the young and strong, but for the quiet and faithful. Discipleship doesn't always look dramatic. Sometimes it looks like a steady prayer life, a word of encouragement, a generous heart or simply trusting God in difficult seasons.

The world may not notice these things — but God does. Faithfulness matters. Obedience matters. Trust matters. You may never have walked away from a Fortune 500 company like Millard Fuller, but every time you say yes to Jesus in your daily life, you are answering his call.

—Timothy Merrill

*Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me — not because I'm strong or successful, but because I'm yours. Help me to live each day as your disciple, even in small and hidden ways. Remind me that faithfulness, not fame, is what you value most. Amen.*



Week of January 18, 2026

**Daily Bible Readings**

**Sunday:** Matthew 8-11  
**Monday:** Matthew 12-15  
**Tuesday:** Matthew 16-19  
**Wednesday:** Matthew 20-22  
**Thursday:** Matthew 23-25  
**Friday:** Matthew 26-28  
**Saturday:** Psalms 4-6

### Verse to Remember

*He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*

—Matthew 16:15-16

#### Can you do this in two minutes?

Here are 10 short words, all with the letter F in them. Can you unscramble them in two minutes? That's about 11 seconds per word. Try it!

yfl \_\_\_\_\_

tefe \_\_\_\_\_

hsfi \_\_\_\_\_

gofr \_\_\_\_\_

ofx \_\_\_\_\_

nfa \_\_\_\_\_

rouf \_\_\_\_\_

rokf \_\_\_\_\_

evfi \_\_\_\_\_

fcea \_\_\_\_\_

### EMPTY BOXES

Arrange the numbers 2 through 10 in the boxes so that each column, row and long diagonal add up to 18. One number is already given.

 6

Can you do this in two minutes?  
fly, feet or fete, fish, frog, fox, fan,  
four, fork, five, face.

EMPTY BOXES: Top row:  
9,2,7; Middle row: 4,6,8;  
Bottom row: 5,10,3.

“I Have a Dream...”

### MLK DAY

Monday,  
January 19, 2026

Sunday, January 25, 2026

## Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:18-22

***God doesn't call the qualified; God qualifies the called.***

***—Attributed to A.W. Tozer, Corrie ten Boom, et al.***

When I read today's Bible passage about when Jesus approached some fishermen and invited them to follow him because he would teach them how to fish for people, I wondered about the biggest fish ever caught on a rod and reel. I went to my computer and started to research.

I learned that on May 17, 1985, Les Anderson of Soldotna, Alaska, landed the all-tackle world record king salmon, a 97-pound, 4-ounce beast from the Kenai River. The mammoth Chinook was nearly 5 feet long and had an amazing 37.5-inch girth! It took him 40 minutes to bring it in. The fish was nearly as long as a grown man's arm span, and the story made headlines across the country. To this day, that salmon still holds the world record for the largest caught on sport tackle. People marveled — not just at the fish, but at the patience, strength and persistence it took to land it. According to one source, Anderson's record catch is still on display at the Soldotna Visitor Center.<sup>1</sup>

Fishing takes patience, timing, skill, and a little bit of faith that what's beneath the surface will bite. So, it's no surprise that when Jesus called his first disciples, he called fishermen. "Follow me," he said, "and I will make you fishers of people" (v. 19).

Peter, Andrew, James and John weren't famous or powerful. They were just regular working men with nets in hand. But when Jesus called, they dropped everything. The Bible says, "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." No hesitation. No excuses.

Now you might be wondering, "What does that have to do with me? I'm not holding a fishing pole, and I don't get around like I used to." But here's the truth: Jesus still calls you. And you can still "fish" for people.

Fishing for people doesn't mean thumping a Bible in someone's face, or inviting a friend to church. Fishing for people, as with fishing for fish, requires *lures*. What can you do to attract people to Christ? Perhaps expressing appreciation is the ticket. Sometimes it means writing a card of condolence, making a phone call, praying for someone by name, or sharing your story of faith with a grandchild. Do you see what I mean? Fishing with lures means keeping your heart open and your eyes alert for someone who needs encouragement, forgiveness or a gentle word of understanding. You don't need a boat to be a fisher of people. You just need love and willingness.

—Timothy Merrill

<sup>1</sup> Les Anderson's World Record King Salmon: The Biggest Fish Story. <https://alaskasportshall.org/inductee/les-andersons-king-salmon>

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for still calling us to follow you. Give us the courage and compassion to keep fishing—not with nets, but with love. Amen.*



Week of January 25, 2026

#### Daily Bible Readings

**Sunday:** Job 1-4  
**Monday:** Job 5-7  
**Tuesday:** Job 8-10  
**Wednesday:** Job 11-13  
**Thursday:** Job 14-17  
**Friday:** Job 18-20  
**Saturday:** Psalms 7-9

**What well-known expression do you see here?**

little little  
late late

Answer: Too little, too late.

Answer: Ma has a ham; Euston saw I was  
not Sue.

#### PALINDROME PUZZLE

**Directions:** A *palindrome* is a word that reads the same backward or forward, like *radar*, *sis*, *Bob* or *racecar*. But here are short sentences with the words mixed up. Rearrange **the words** so that the sentence is the same spelled forward or backward. Write your answer on the line provided.

has ham Ma a

was Sue I Euston saw not

#### UNSCRAMBLE THE MINOR PROPHETS

Our readings this week take us into the Minor Prophets, so called because most of them are short books. The list below contains all 12 of the Minor Prophets.

Unscramble their names to discover their identities!

OJEL \_\_\_\_\_

AZAEHINPH \_\_\_\_\_

MCIAH \_\_\_\_\_

NJHAO \_\_\_\_\_

ABKUKKAH \_\_\_\_\_

AGIAGH \_\_\_\_\_

DHAIABO \_\_\_\_\_

OASM \_\_\_\_\_

MUNAH \_\_\_\_\_

AHRIZAHCE \_\_\_\_\_

OAESH \_\_\_\_\_

IHCMALA \_\_\_\_\_

Unscramble the circled letters to reveal the secret word (the first letter is provided).

**K** \_\_\_\_\_