

Bible Challenge February 12-18, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions of different ways to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

In the reading from Deuteronomy we are called to choose life by loving and obeying God. Much of the gospel reading echoes portions of the Ten Commandments. Jesus' instructions to the crowd reveal a pattern of behavior that honors both God and the neighbor, resulting in life and health for the whole community. We, too, are invited to embrace these commandments, not out of fear of retribution, but because God has promised that to do so means life for us.

DAY ONE: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

The Lord sets before the people of God a clear choice. Life and prosperity will come to the faithful; loss of the land will be the consequence of disobedience. Choosing life entails loving and holding fast to the Lord. Life in God's presence presupposes the promise made to the ancestors.

[Moses said to the people] ¹⁵See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Adventure Challenge: Deuteronomy 30 (or 30:11-20).

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read Deuteronomy 29 to learn the background of Moses' challenge.

Option B: Research *Deuteronomistic Code*, a term scholars use for the commandments Moses is citing.

DAY TWO: Psalm 119:1-8

The commandments of God are a blessing; they are the key to a truly happy life!

- ¹Happy are they whose way is blameless,
 who follow the teaching of the LORD!
- ²Happy are they who observe your decrees
 and seek you with all their hearts,
- ³who never do any wrong,
 but always walk in your ways.
- ⁴You laid down your commandments,
 that we should fully keep them.
- ⁵Oh, that my ways were made so direct
 that I might keep your statutes!
- ⁶Then I should not be put to shame,
 when I regard all your commandments.
- ⁷I will thank you with a true heart,
 when I have learned your righteous judgments.
- ⁸I will ¹keep your statutes;
 do not utterly forsake me.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 119 (a real challenge because this is the longest psalm in the Bible).

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read a commentary or a discussion of Psalm 119.

Option B: Identify the eight different terms used in Psalm 119 to refer to God's law. How do these different words highlight different characteristics of or responses to God's law.

DAY THREE: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Human leaders in the church are not the ones who control ministry. Rather they are fellow workers who belong to God, the one who truly controls and continuously empowers the ministry of the church.

¹Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? ⁴For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? ⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Corinthians 3.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research Apollos to learn what we know about him.

Option B. Imagine yourself as one of the Corinthians to whom Paul was writing. How might you respond to the statement by Paul that you are *infants* or that you are *of the flesh*? How does Paul make these judgments acceptable?

DAY FOUR: Matthew 5:21-37

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorts his followers to embrace standards of righteousness that exceed legal requirements and traditional expectations.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ²¹"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' ²²But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. ²⁷You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. ³¹It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³²But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. ³³Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 5. (This is our third week on this important chapter, the opening sections

of the Sermon on the Mount. As an alternative to re-reading, try memorizing the Beatitudes, verses 3-11.)

Explorer Challenge: Review Matthew 5:17 – 48. How is verse 17 a prelude to all that follows? How many times does Jesus repeat *you have heard it said*? Why is that repetition important? Do you see any relationship or development in the laws Jesus cites? Is verse 48 an impossibly hard new commandment or a new way of thinking about and responding to laws (a parallel to verse 17)?

DAY FIVE: PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, the strength of all who hope in you, because we are weak mortals we accomplish nothing good without you. Help us to see and understand the things we ought to do, and give us grace and power to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

You are the light of the world. A city set upon a hill cannot be hid. (*Matt. 5:14*)

Explorer Challenge: We often consider laws to be restrictions that limit what we can and can't do; consider how God's laws are intended to be light and life, liberating us to lead us to lives of joy and hope.