

September 17 - 23, 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 today's second reading Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Yet we do sin against one another, and Jesus' challenge that we forgive seventy-seven times reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

DAY ONE: Genesis 50:15-21

After Jacob's death, the brothers of Joseph begged for forgiveness for the crime they had done against him. You intended to do me harm, Joseph said, but God used this as an opportunity to do good and save many lives.

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Adventure Challenge: Genesis 49:29 – 50:26.

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Find a summary of Joseph's life to learn why his brothers were concerned that he might still bear a grudge. **Option B.** Look closely at the exchange between Joseph and his brothers; what seems to be their motivations and their assumptions about what happened in the past?

DAY TWO: Psalm 103: 1-13

The psalmist celebrates the LORD's compassion and mercy, who responds to sins not with punishment, but with forgiveness and renewal.

- ¹Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless God's holy name.
- ²Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all God's benefits—
- ³who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases;
- ⁴who redeems your life from the grave
and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy;
- ⁵who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.
- ⁶O LORD, you provide vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- ⁷You made known your ways to Moses
and your works to the children of Israel.
- ⁸LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love;
- ⁹you will not always accuse us,

nor will you keep your anger forever.

¹⁰You have not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor repaid us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you.

¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far have you removed our transgressions from us.

¹³As a father has compassion for his children,
so you have compassion for those who fear you, O LORD.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 103.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Verses 11 and 13 qualify God's *steadfast love* as something for those who fear God. Research *fear of the Lord*. (Google provides many options.) *Option B.* The opening line seems a personal address by the psalmist—*O my soul*; does the rest of the psalm seem personal? Look, for example, at the conclusion, verses 19-22.

DAY THREE: Romans 14:1-12

This Christian community has significant struggles with diversity. Here Paul helps us understand that despite different practices in worship and personal piety, we do not judge one another. All Christians belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all of us and will judge each of us.

¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. ⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. ⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Adventure Challenge: Romans 14.

Explorer Challenge: In verse 1 Paul refers to one group as *the weak*; this term could indicate Paul's evaluation of them, but it might also be that he is using a label put on them by others (who consider themselves strong); which interpretation seems more in line with Paul's larger message?

DAY FOUR: Matthew 18: 21-35

When Peter asks about the limits of forgiveness, Jesus responds with a parable that suggests human forgiveness should mirror the unlimited mercy of God.

²¹Peter came and said to [Jesus], "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 18.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research to find out the relative value of *ten thousand talents* and a *hundred denarii*; or research the possible symbolism of *seven* and *seventy times seven*. *Option B.* Since we no longer have slaves or jail people for their debts, how might you re-tell this parable using a modern-day situation.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

We have an advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous; your sins are forgiven on account of his name. (*1 John 2:1, 12*)

Challenge: Consider what it means to *forgive from your heart*. How might you respond in love to someone who says, "I want to forgive, but in this case I just can't."