

## Bible Challenge January 22-28, 2017 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

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

*At least once a year, Christians are reminded of Jesus' prayer for his disciples that "they may be one so that the world may believe" (see John 17:21). During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, hearts are touched and Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. This year's theme: "Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us."*

### DAY ONE: Ezekiel 36:25-27

<sup>25</sup>I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

**Adventure Challenge:** Ezekiel 36: 16 – 38.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Read Numbers 19 to learn about Jewish cleansing and purification rites. *Option B.* Read an introduction to Ezekiel, a prophet and prophesy that, one commentator notes, "have perplexed readers for centuries."

### DAY TWO: Psalm 18:25-32.

*The Lord confronts the haughty and aligns with the humble; he protects those who trust him.*

<sup>25</sup> With the loyal you show yourself loyal;  
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;  
<sup>26</sup> with the pure you show yourself pure;  
and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.  
<sup>27</sup> For you deliver a humble people,  
but the haughty eyes you bring down.  
<sup>28</sup> It is you who light my lamp;  
the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.  
<sup>29</sup> By you I can crush a troop,  
and by my God I can leap over a wall.  
<sup>30</sup> This God—his way is perfect;  
the promise of the LORD proves true;  
he is a shield for all who take refuge in him.  
<sup>31</sup> For who is God except the LORD?  
And who is a rock besides our God?—  
<sup>32</sup> the God who girded me with strength,  
and made my way safe.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 18: 6 – 36 (or Psalm 18)

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Psalm 18 is known as a *royal psalm*; research what this term means. *Option B.* This psalm also appears in 2 Samuel 22; read that version noting the opening verse to learn how the psalm can be linked to a specific person and situation, giving additional meaning to its verses.

### **DAY THREE: 2 Corinthians 5:14-20**

<sup>14</sup>For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

<sup>16</sup>From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup>So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

**Adventure Challenge:** 2 Corinthians 5.

**Explorer Challenge:** Research *Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:14-20* to learn some of the rich analysis that has been done on this passage.

### **DAY FOUR: John 17:15-23**

<sup>15</sup>I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

<sup>20</sup>‘I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup>that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

**Adventure Challenge:** John 17.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* This reading is from a section of John known as *Jesus’ high priestly prayer*. Research that term or read commentary on John 17.

*Option B.* Understanding Jesus’ prayer “that they may be one, as we are one” prompts the question: How are Jesus and the Father one, yet separate? Research Christian understanding of the Trinity.

### **DAY FIVE:**

#### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

God our Father, your Son Jesus prayed that his followers might be one. Make all Christians one with him as he is one with you, so that in peace and concord we may carry to the world the message of your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

#### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Bear with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (*Eph. 4:2-3*)

**Explorer Challenge:** Pray for Christian unity, asking God to help you reconcile with other Christians whose faith or religious practices you find challenging or uncomfortable.