

Bible Challenge February 19-25, 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 first reading we hear, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." Yet we know we cannot achieve perfection. Our attempts to love neighbors and even our enemies fall short of what God desires for us. Yet in Jesus we see one who loved even those who persecuted and killed him. We are made holy in baptism, and forgiven at the table of God's mercy. As a people made holy by God, we go in peace to love as we have been loved.

DAY ONE: Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

The Holiness Code in Leviticus urges people to be holy since God is holy. Holiness is lived out in partiality for and consideration of the poor and the weak. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. ⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God. ¹¹You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. ¹²And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. ¹³You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. ¹⁴You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. ¹⁵You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. ¹⁶You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD. ¹⁷You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Adventure Challenge: Leviticus 19.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *Holiness Code*.

Option B. Research definitions for the word *holy*. In the context of the whole chapter, which definition(s) apply in verse 2.

DAY TWO: Psalm 119:33-40

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; incline my heart to your decrees.

³³Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,
and I shall keep it to the end.

³⁴Give me understanding, and I shall keep your teaching;
I shall keep it with all my heart.

³⁵Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for that is my desire.

³⁶Incline my heart to your decrees
and not to unjust gain.

³⁷Turn my eyes from beholding falsehood;
give me life in your way.

³⁸Fulfill your promise to your servant,
which is for those who fear you.

³⁹Turn away the reproach that I dread,
because your judgments are good.

⁴⁰Behold, I long for your commandments;
by your righteousness enliven me.

Adventure Challenge: *Option A:* Psalm 119. *Option B:* Psalm 119:1-40.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read a commentary on Psalm 119 to learn how it is organized.

Option B. Notice how each verse in this passage begins with a different verb asking God to do something. As this passage develops, do you see progress or change in the speaker's attitude or response to God's law?

DAY THREE: 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church and its ministry. We are God's temple because God's Spirit dwells in us, and we belong to Christ. Hence we are called to build wisely upon this sure foundation not for our own benefit but for others to experience Christ's benefits.

¹⁰According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. ¹⁸Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." ²¹So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, ²³and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Corinthians 3. (This is a repeat of last week's challenge, as we continue to read through 1 Corinthians.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Write a brief summary of the problem that 1 Corinthians 3 raises and of Paul's responses to this problem in 1 Corinthians 3 and 4.

Option B. Make a list of the metaphors or comparisons that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 3 for believers. Do you as a believer identify well with any of these metaphors? (Example: verse 18 says you are "God's temple.")

DAY FOUR: Matthew 5:38-48

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares an end to the law of vengeance. God's people will respond to evil with love and forgiveness.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ³⁸"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. ⁴³You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 5. (This is our fourth and final week on this chapter.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read Exodus 21:12 – 27 (especially verse 24), Leviticus 24: 17 – 22, and Deuteronomy 19: 15 – 21. (These are sources for "an eye for an eye.")

Option B: In light of Matthew 5:44-45, review last week's Day One reading, Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

DAY FIVE

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God of compassion, you invite us into your way of forgiveness and peace. Lead us to love our enemies, and transform our words and deeds to be like his through whom we pray, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

In those who obey the word of Christ, the love of God has reached perfection. (*1 John 2:5*)

Adventure Challenge: Make a short list of actions by other people that make you angry; pray for those people. (If possible pray for specific people whose actions have angered you.)