

Bible Challenge - June 12 - 18, 2016

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 are 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

The enormity of our sin is surpassed only by the mercy of God. We come, repentant, to the table of the Lord. In the body and blood of Jesus, in the announcement of our absolution, all our sins are forgiven. "Happy are they ... whose sin is put away." Happy are we.

DAY 1: 2 Samuel 11:26—12:10, 13-15

King David seduced his neighbor Bathsheba and was responsible for the death of her husband, Uriah. God sends the prophet Nathan to confront the king. Nathan tells the king a parable and opens David's eyes to see his own guilt.

²⁶When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD,

^{12:1}And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." ⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

⁷Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. ¹³David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan said to David, "Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die.

¹⁴Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die."

¹⁵Then Nathan went to his house.

The LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became very ill.

Adventure Challenge: 2 Samuel 11 – 12:25 (the whole David and Bathsheba story)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Using a standard reference, read a summary of David's life.

Option B. Using a standard reference, research Nathan and Bathsheba.

DAY 2: Psalm 32

A teaching song about the joy of confession and forgiveness.

¹Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!

²Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!

³While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,

because of my groaning all day long.
⁴For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.
⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.
⁶Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers
to you in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.
⁷You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.
⁸"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;
I will guide you with my eye.
⁹Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle,
or else they will not stay near you."
¹⁰Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.
¹¹Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

Adventure Challenge: Compare this psalm with Psalm 1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Read an alternative translation of this psalm.

Option B. Explore the ironies (or apparent contradictions) in this psalm. Example: the opening line calls "happy" those (sinners) who are "forgiven," but the last line calls the righteous "glad." In verse three the speaker claims to have "held my tongue" but also talks about "groaning all day long." Verse four indicates that God's "hand was heavy upon me" while in verse seven God "preserves me from trouble."

DAY 3: Galatians 2:15-21

Paul preaches on the power of God's grace to make us faithful. We are made right with God through Jesus Christ alone, through no work of our own. As a result, Christ's life has become our whole identity.

¹⁵We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. ¹⁷But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. ¹⁹For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

Adventure Challenge: Galatians 2.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Some translators prefer to translate "faith in Jesus Christ" in verses 15, 16, and 20 as "the faith of Jesus Christ" or "the faith of the Son of God." Re-read this passage and determine if this distinction is important for you.

Option B. Read Chapter 3 to see where Paul is going with this discussion of law and faith.

DAY 4: Luke 7:36—8:3

Through a dramatic encounter of rich and poor, righteous and sinner, Jesus teaches the relationship between receiving mercy and responding with a lavish outpouring of love. Jesus also provokes his host by claiming authority to forgive sins.

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." ⁴¹A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." ⁴⁸Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

^{8:1}Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ²as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 7 - 8:3.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* To determine how significant the two debts were, research the value of a *denarius* for a person of that time. Is the relative value important for the parable?

Option B. Research the three women named in verses 8:2 and 3

Option C. Women are central in this reading. Using references or your own analysis, explore the importance or role of women generally in Luke's gospel.

DAY 5

PRAYER OF THE DAY: O God, throughout the ages you judge your people with mercy, and you inspire us to speak your truth. By your Spirit, anoint us for lives of faith and service, and bring all people into your forgiveness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: In this is love, that God loved us and sent the Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (*1 John 4:10*)

Explorer Challenge: With a dictionary, explore the meaning of "judge" and "mercy." Does being merciful contradict or complement the idea of justice or making a sound judgement?