

Bible Challenge July 10 - 16, 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

To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind is to reflect God's mercy in responding to one's neighbor. That mercy found its most profound expression in the "gospel that has come to you"—namely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That gospel mercy comes to us again today: at the font, at the altar, and from the pulpit. It is very near to you.

DAY 1: Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Moses calls the people who are about to enter the promised land to renew the covenant God made with their ancestors. Through this covenant God gives life and asks for obedience. God's commandment is neither burdensome nor too far off, but dwells in the people's own hearts.

⁹The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, ¹⁰when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

¹¹Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. ¹²It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" ¹³Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" ¹⁴No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

Adventure Challenge: Deuteronomy 30.

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

Option B: Compare this description of the law with Paul's description of the law in Galatians 3: 10 – 14 and 19-29.

DAY TWO: Psalm 25:1-10.

A Prayer for instruction and deliverance from someone who recognizes both her vulnerability and her unworthiness.

¹To you, O LORD,

I lift up my soul.

²My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.

³Let none who look to you be put to shame;
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.

⁴Show me your ways, O LORD,
and teach me your paths.

⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.

⁶Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.

⁷Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your steadfast love
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.

⁸You are gracious and upright, O LORD;
therefore you teach sinners in your way.
⁹You lead the lowly in justice
and teach the lowly your way.
¹⁰All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast love and faithfulness
to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 25.

Explorer Challenge: Research *acrostic psalm*, of which Psalm 25 is an example. Because of the requirements of this form, the psalm may be understood as a series of related prayers and maxims; try to mark off the individual thoughts.

DAY THREE: Colossians 1:1-14

The letter to the Colossians was written to warn its readers of various false teachings. The first part of the letter is an expression of thanks for the faith, hope, and love that mark this community, including a prayer for strength and courage from Paul.

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Adventure Challenge: Colossians 1.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read an Introduction to Colossians.

Option B. Colossians 1: 9-13 is Paul's prayer for Christian growth. What areas and characteristics of growth does Paul identify, especially in verses 9 - 11? Do these match your own understanding of Christian growth, either as you have experienced it yourself or as you have seen it in others?

DAY FOUR: Luke 10:25-37

Jesus is challenged to explain what is involved in obeying the greatest commandment. Jesus tells a parable rich in surprises: those expected to show pity display hard hearts while the lowly give and receive unexpected and lavish mercy.

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him,

he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Adventure Challenge: Luke 10.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *priest, Levite, and Samaritan*. What is the relative social and religious importance for these three types of people in Jewish culture? How are their differences important to the question the lawyer asked and the answer the lawyer himself gives in response to Jesus' question?

Option B. Use a Bible commentary or other research tools to explore some of the analysis and interpretation that commentators have done on this parable, one of the most well-known.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY: O Lord God, your mercy delights us, and the world longs for your loving care. Hear the cries of everyone in need, and turn our hearts to love our neighbors with the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION; You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself. (*Luke 10:27*)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* *Love* is usually thought of as an emotion, something that seems to come of its own force, beyond our control. What might it mean that we are commanded to love?

Option B. How do you think Jesus would answer, if a lawyer (as in the Luke's parable) were to ask Jesus, "What exactly does it mean to 'love your neighbor **as yourself**'"?"