

## Bible Challenge July 30 – August 5, 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

*As Solomon prays for wisdom, we seek to more deeply know the treasures of faith. In today's gospel Jesus offers everyday images that reveal to us the reign of God: a tree that becomes a sheltering home, yeast that penetrates and expands, a treasured pearl, a net that gains a great catch. Even as we seek the riches of God's reign, the great surprise is that God's grace finds us first!*

### DAY ONE: 1 Kings 3:5-12

*Because Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the defeat of his enemies, God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to govern the people well. In verse 13 God gives him additional honor and riches beyond compare.*

<sup>5</sup>At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you."

<sup>6</sup>And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. <sup>7</sup>And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup>And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup>Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

<sup>10</sup>It pleased the LORD that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup>God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup>I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."

**Adventure Challenge:** 1 Kings 3. (The chapter ends with the well-known story of Solomon's wise judgment.)

**Explorer Challenge:** Research *Solomon*.

### DAY TWO: Psalm 119:129-136

*When God's word is opened, it gives light and understanding.*

<sup>129</sup>Your decrees are wonderful;

therefore I obey them with all my heart.

<sup>130</sup>When your word is opened it gives light;

it gives understanding to the simple.

<sup>131</sup>I open my mouth and pant

because I long for your commandments.

<sup>132</sup>Turn to me and be gracious to me,

as you always do to those who love your name.

<sup>133</sup>Order my footsteps in your word;

let no iniquity have dominion over me.

<sup>134</sup>Rescue me from those who oppress me,

and I will keep your commandments.

<sup>135</sup>Let your face shine upon your servant

and teach me your statutes.

<sup>136</sup>My eyes shed streams of tears,

because people do not keep your teaching.

**Adventure Challenge:** *Option A.* Psalm 119: 129-152. *Option B.* Psalm 119 (the longest in the Bible).  
**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research Psalm 119 to learn about its theme and complex organization.  
*Option B.* Research the origin and meanings of the word *iniquity*; then re-read the Psalm text.

### DAY THREE: Romans 8:26-39

*These words celebrate the depth of God's actions for us. Through Christ's death for us and the activity of the Spirit praying for us, we are fused to God's love poured out in Jesus Christ. Nothing, not even death itself, is able to separate us from such incredible divine love.*

<sup>26</sup>The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup>We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. <sup>31</sup>What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Adventure Challenge:** Romans 8. (This is the third week we have dwelt on this chapter of Romans.)

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* The passage begins with *our weakness* and concludes with our triumph over anything. Trace that evolution from weakness to triumph. Review 7:21 -24 to better understand what Paul means by *our weakness*. *Option B.* Research *predestination*. (Much is written about this concept; sample a little, remembering that individual writers may reflect a particular viewpoint in the controversy.)

### GOSPEL: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

*Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus and his disciples proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near!" Here, Jesus offers several brief parables that explore the implications of this announcement for people's lives.*

<sup>31</sup>[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup>it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." <sup>33</sup>He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

<sup>44</sup>"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. <sup>45</sup>Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup>on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. <sup>47</sup>Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup>when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup>So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>51</sup>Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." <sup>52</sup>And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

**Adventure Challenge:** Matthew 13 (a series of parables about the kingdom of heaven).

**Explorer Challenge:** Review these five parables (or all seven in Chapter 13) and summarize what you think are the key points Jesus is making about the kingdom of heaven.

**DAY FIVE:**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Many will come from east and west and will eat in the kingdom of heaven. (*Matt. 8:11*)

**Challenge:** Pray for wisdom to live in the kingdom of heaven and to treasure its richness.