

Bible Challenge August 7 - 13, 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 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

Jesus says, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is God's promise from the beginning—to Abraham, to the early church, and to the "little flock" of which we are a part today in assembly. Faith, God's baptismal gift, trusts the promises of God. Have no fear.

DAY ONE: Genesis 15:1-6

God promises childless and aging Abram that a child of his own will be his heir and that his descendants will number as many as the stars. Abram trusts God's promise, and through this faith he is considered righteous.

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ²But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." ⁴But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." ⁵He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Adventure Challenge: Genesis 15.

Explorer Challenge: Compare the application of Genesis 15:6 that is found in Romans 4:1-12 with that in James 2:14-26.

DAY TWO: Psalm 33:12-22

Because "the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" (verse 5), the psalmist calls humans to put their hope in God, rather than lesser sources of strength or protection.

¹²Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD!

Happy the people chosen to be God's heritage!

¹³The LORD looks down from heaven,
and sees all humankind.

¹⁴God sits firmly enthroned and watches
all who dwell on the earth.

¹⁵God fashions all their hearts
and observes all their deeds.

¹⁶A king is not saved by the size of the army,
nor are warriors rescued by their great strength.

¹⁷The horse gives vain hope for victory;
despite its great strength it cannot save.

¹⁸Truly, your eye is upon those who fear you, O LORD,
upon those who wait for your steadfast love,

¹⁹to deliver their lives from death,
and to keep them alive in time of famine.

²⁰Our innermost being waits for you, O LORD,
our helper and our shield.

²¹Surely, our heart rejoices in you,
for in your holy name we put our trust.

²²Let your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we place our hope in you.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 32.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Using this section, explain the difference between what God sees (verse 15) and what God is watching (verse 18).

Option B. How would you explain the truth of verse 12 in the context of today's multi-ethnic culture and our nation's official separation of church and state?

DAY THREE: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Abraham and Sarah exemplify the vision of faith that people of God enact in every age. Their hope and trust in God's promise allowed them to face an unknown future and to receive the promise of God.

¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ²Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

⁸By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. ¹²Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

¹³All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Adventure Challenge: Hebrews 11.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read an introduction or summary of Hebrews to learn its background and main themes.

Option B. The passage defines faith, explains what it does, and gives examples. Use a good dictionary to explore the meaning(s) of the word *faith*; compare it to similar words like *belief*, *assurance*, *trust*, and *confidence*. Which definition best helps to explain verse 3?

DAY FOUR: Luke 12:32-40

Jesus encourages disciples to invest their hearts and live fully into God's reign. Instead of facing life with fear, those who know God's generosity are always ready to receive from God and to give to others.

[Jesus said:] ³²"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

³⁹But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Adventure Challenge: Luke 12.

Explorer Challenge: Just before this reading (Luke 12:31), Jesus urges his followers to “strive for the kingdom.” This reading opens with the assurance that God will “give you the kingdom.” Re-read Luke 12 to determine if Luke seems to stress more the idea if we should strive for the kingdom or simply accept it as a gift; or perhaps these are two sides of the same coin.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your church. Open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may be ready to receive you wherever you appear, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Keep awake and be ready, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Explorer Challenge: Research the phrase *kingdom of God*; the Wikipedia article presents a number of different ways this phrase has been interpreted, both historically and currently.