

Bible Challenge September 4 - 10, 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

Called to contemplate the cost of discipleship today, we might be helped by translating Paul's request to Philemon into our prayer of the day: Refresh my heart in Christ. Strengthened by the company and forgiveness of the Christ in the blessed sacrament and recalling God's grace in remembrance of baptism, we can be strengthened in this hour to "choose life"—to choose life in God as our own.

DAY ONE: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Moses speaks to the Israelites, who are about to enter the land promised to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this passage, he lays out the stark choice before them: choose life by loving and obeying the Lord; or choose death by following other gods.

¹⁵See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Adventure Challenge: Deuteronomy 30.

Explorer Challenge: Research *Deuteronomic code* and *Deuteronomic theology* to learn some of the background of this passage.

DAY TWO: Psalm 1

This psalm introduces the whole psalter, establishing "the law of the Lord" as the source of lasting happiness.

¹Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

²Their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and they meditate on God's teaching day and night.

³They are like trees planted by streams of water,
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither;
everything they do shall prosper.

⁴It is not so with the wicked;
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.

⁵Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes,
nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

⁶For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked shall be destroyed.

Adventure Challenge: See how much of this Psalm you can memorize in 15 minutes.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* "The law of the Lord" (verse 2) likely refers specifically to *Torah*; research this word.

Option B: Research possible meanings for the phrase “delight in the law of the Lord.”

Option C: Read Psalm 119, the longest psalm, which also deals with the glory of God’s law.

DAY THREE: Philemon 1-21

While Paul was in prison, he was aided by a runaway slave named Onesimus. The slave's master, Philemon, was a Christian friend of Paul. Paul told Onesimus to return to his master and encouraged Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a Christian brother.

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, ²to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God ⁵because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. ⁶I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. ⁷I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

⁸For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, ⁹yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment.

¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. ¹²I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. ¹³I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; ¹⁴but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. ¹⁵Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Adventure Challenge: Philemon (one of the shortest books of the Bible.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Read an introduction to Philemon.

Option B: Research slavery in the Bible.

DAY FOUR: Luke 14:25-33

Jesus speaks frankly about the fearsome costs of discipleship. Those who follow him should know from the outset that completing the course of discipleship will finally mean renouncing all other allegiances.

²⁵Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus;] and he turned and said to them, ²⁶“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 14.

Explorer Challenge: *Option A:* Research commentary on verse 26; is Jesus literally asking us to hate our

family and our lives?

Option B: Research *hyperbole*, a rhetorical tool or way of speaking that is common in the Bible.

DAY FIVE:

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Direct us, O Lord God, in all our doings with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Let your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes. (*Ps. 119:135*)

Explorer Challenge: Set aside a time to meditate on God's teaching.

Option A: Imagine yourself as someone who, as most people until recent times, had no formal schooling and could perhaps barely read. What would the law of the Lord mean to you?

Option B: Spend your meditation simply repeating Psalm 1, or chose just one verse to repeat as a mantra.