

## Bible Challenge October 2 - 8, 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

*A little faith goes a long way is our Lord's point in the gospel. A mustard seed's-worth has miraculous potential. The patience, tenacity, and endurance required for the life of faith are the blessings received in water and the word (holy baptism), bread and wine (holy communion), the word read and proclaimed in this assembly. Anticipate them. Receive them with thanksgiving.*

### DAY ONE: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4

*Injustice and violence in the time leading up to the Babylonian exile move this prophet to lament: How can a good and all-powerful God see evil in the world and seemingly remain indifferent? God answers by proclaiming that the wicked will perish, but the righteous will live by faith.*

<sup>1</sup>The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

<sup>2</sup>O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not listen?

Or cry to you "Violence!"  
and you will not save?

<sup>3</sup>Why do you make me see wrongdoing  
and look at trouble?

Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.

<sup>4</sup>So the law becomes slack  
and justice never prevails.

The wicked surround the righteous—  
therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

<sup>2:1</sup>I will stand at my watchpost,  
and station myself on the rampart;  
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,  
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

<sup>2</sup>Then the LORD answered me and said:  
Write the vision;

make it plain on tablets,  
so that a runner may read it.

<sup>3</sup>For there is still a vision for the appointed time;  
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it;  
it will surely come, it will not delay.

<sup>4</sup>Look at the proud!  
Their spirit is not right in them,  
but the righteous live by their faith.

**Adventure Challenge:** Habakkuk 1 – 2 (or all of one of the shortest books of the Bible).

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* Read an introduction to Habakkuk to learn what is known (and not known) about this prophet, his message, and what is unusual in his prophesy.

*Option B:* Habakkuk 2:4b is key for Paul; read Galatians 3: 10 – 14 to see how.

## DAY TWO: Psalm 37:1-9

*Although we are provoked by those who do evil and may be jealous of their success, the psalmist counsels us to commit our way to the LORD and patiently trust in the LORD.*

- <sup>1</sup>Do not be provoked by evildoers;  
do not be jealous of those who do wrong.
- <sup>2</sup>For they shall soon wither like the grass,  
and like the green grass fade away.
- <sup>3</sup>Put your trust in the LORD and do good;  
dwell in the land and find safe pasture.
- <sup>4</sup>Take delight in the LORD,  
who shall give you your heart's desire.
- <sup>5</sup>Commit your way to the LORD; put your trust in the LORD,  
and see what God will do.
- <sup>6</sup>The LORD will make your vindication as clear as the light  
and the justice of your case like the noonday sun.
- <sup>7</sup>Be still before the LORD and wait patiently.  
Do not be provoked by the one who prospers,  
the one who succeeds in evil schemes.
- <sup>8</sup>Refrain from anger, leave rage alone;  
do not be provoked; it leads only to evil.
- <sup>9</sup>For evildoers shall be cut off,  
but those who hope in the LORD shall possess the land.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 37.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* Psalm 37 is an acrostic psalm; research what this means and how that impacts the psalm.

*Option B:* Make a list of the different ways the psalmist recommends that we respond to “the wicked” and their apparent success. (Because of how the psalm was constructed, the psalmist sometimes repeats the same advice in slightly different words or images.)

## DAY THREE: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

*This message written from Paul to Timothy is a personal message of encouragement. In the face of hardship and persecution, Timothy is reminded that his faith is a gift of God. He is encouraged to exercise that faith with the help of the Holy Spirit.*

- <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>2</sup>To Timothy, my beloved child:  
Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
- <sup>3</sup>I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup>Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup>I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. <sup>6</sup>For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; <sup>7</sup>for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.
- <sup>8</sup>Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, <sup>9</sup>who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup>but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. <sup>11</sup>For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, <sup>12</sup>and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to

him. <sup>13</sup>Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup>Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

**Adventure Challenge:** 2 Timothy 1-2.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* This week we begin 2 Timothy (the previous weeks' readings were from 1 Timothy); if you have not done so already, read an introduction to these two letters to learn about their themes and focus.

*Option B:* Research Saint Timothy, to whom this letter was written, and perhaps also Lois and Eunice, mentioned in verse 5.

#### **DAY FOUR: Luke 17:5-10**

*On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus instructs his followers about the power of faith and the duties of discipleship. He calls his disciples to adopt the attitude of servants whose actions are responses to their identity rather than works seeking reward.*

<sup>5</sup>The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" <sup>6</sup>The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

<sup>7</sup>Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? <sup>8</sup>Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? <sup>9</sup>Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? <sup>10</sup>So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

**Adventure Challenge:** Luke 17.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A:* Research *mustard seed, mustard seed faith, or mustard seed parable.*

*Option B:* Using a concordance or other reference tools, research how the word *slave* is used in the new testament. (The same word may be translated *servant*.) How often is it used in connection with an evaluation like *worthless or good*? Note who is making the evaluation in this passage from Luke 17.

#### **DAY FIVE:**

##### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Benevolent, merciful God: When we are empty, fill us. When we are weak in faith, strengthen us. When we are cold in love, warm us, that with fervor we may love our neighbors and serve them for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

##### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

The word of the Lord endures forever. That word is the good news that was announced to you. (*1 Pet. 1:25*)

**Adventure Challenge:** Re-read 2 Timothy 1:8-14, as though Paul had written this letter directly to you. Does the advice apply to you or would Paul have written something different?