

TALK...

JULY 25-31

**PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 24:1-10**

Pray that old doors and gates long shut would open up to receive Jesus. Pray that people who have not heard of God's great love will know who the King of glory is.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

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What parallels did you notice between Kings and Chronicles? What was different or more detailed?

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Was there anything in this week's readings that highlighted for you the reliability or truthfulness of the Bible?

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Have you ever thought that God was being unfair?

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What reasons does Paul give for living in harmony with fellow believers?

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What is God trying to teach you?

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TALKING POINTS**OLD TESTAMENT (2 CHRONICLES 24-36)**

Joash's rise and fall (2 CHR 24)

God punishes Uzziah for his pride (2 CHR 26:16-21)

Hezekiah celebrates Passover in the rededicated Temple (2 CHR 30)

The evil king Manasseh repents and receives mercy (2 CHR 33:11-13)

Cyrus allows the Israelite exiles to return home (2 CHR 36:22-23)

NEW TESTAMENT (ROMANS 12:1—1 CORINTHIANS 1:17)

Our bodies should be treated as sacrifices to God (ROM 12)

"Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." (ROM 13:11)

Treat fellow believers with kindness and humility (ROM 14)

Paul shares his plans for the future (ROM 15:14-33)

"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters . . . to live in harmony with each other." (1 COR 1:10)

Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 16:3

JULY 27–AUG 02



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON ROMANS 16:3

Priscilla and Aquila were a married couple who became Paul's close friends. They, along with all other Jews, had been expelled from Rome by the emperor and had moved to Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). There they met Paul and invited him to live with them. They were Christians before they met Paul and probably told him much about the Roman church.

Like Paul, Priscilla and Aquila were missionaries. They helped believers in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-28), in Rome when they were allowed to return, and again at Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:19). Priscilla and Aquila ministered effectively behind the scenes. Their tools were hospitality, friendship, and teaching. They were not public speakers, but private evangelists. For some of the believers in Rome, their home was used for church meetings.

Priscilla and Aquila show us what a couple can do together to serve Christ. Do we regard our families and homes as places where God's mission can begin and grow? How could God use your home and family as part of his work?

REFLECTION THOUGHT

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA SHOW US WHAT A COUPLE CAN DO TOGETHER TO SERVE CHRIST.

WHAT SHOULD TOLERANCE LOOK LIKE FOR BELIEVERS?

Paul pleads for tolerance between those who are weak in faith and those who are strong in faith, and he teaches that believers need to accept each other (Romans 14:1; 15:7). They should stop condemning and belittling each other. Rather, they should learn to worship God with a united voice and spirit (Romans 15:6).

In Romans, Paul is addressing a specific issue: Do believers need to practice certain requirements of the Jewish law and worship? Theologians have used the Greek word *adiaphora*, meaning "nonessentials," to describe beliefs or practices that are neither required nor prohibited by Scripture. On such issues, Christians must accommodate a variety of opinions.

However, when the Good News itself is at stake, Paul takes a very different approach. In Galatians, for example, Paul confronts false teaching about the Good News by severely castigating the false teachers and by warning readers that adopting false teaching will alienate them from Christ (Galatians 1:6-9; 5:4).

In our day, we need to be careful about what we tolerate and accommodate, and we need to be equally careful about what we decide is worthy of confrontation. Believers need to consider carefully the different issues they confront in their associations with other believers. If the basic truth of the Good News is not violated, we should not quarrel or be divided over such issues.

Other issues, however, strike at the heart of the message of the Good News. In these cases, Christians need to take a stand and be faithful to the Good News and to Christ. The way Paul himself dealt with a variety of issues in his own time can serve as a guide for dealing with conflicts and controversies in our time.



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TALK...

AUG 1-7

**PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 27:7-14**

Respond to God's invitation by opening your heart to his teaching.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage especially encouraged you or challenged you?

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Why was Ezra's shock in Ezra 9 so extreme?

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What recurring themes did you notice in Ezra and Nehemiah?

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Why does Paul tell the Corinthians not to sue fellow believers?

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Where did you see God at work in these readings? How does that affect the way you think of him?

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TALKING POINT**OLD TESTAMENT (EZRA 1:1— NEHEMIAH 3:14)**

"All the people assembled in Jerusalem with a unified purpose." (EZRA 3:1)

Israel's enemies oppose the rebuilding of the Temple (EZRA 4)

Ezra arrives in Jerusalem to teach God's decrees to Israel (EZRA 7)

Ezra's grief over the Israelites' intermarrying with pagans (EZRA 9)

"The God of heaven will help us succeed. We . . . will start rebuilding this wall." (NEH 2:20)

NEW TESTAMENT (1 CORINTHIANS 1:18–7:24)

"Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish . . ." (1 COR 1:27)

"For [God's] Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets." (1 COR 2:10)

Extreme devotion to human leaders is foolish (1 COR 3)

"For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power." (1 COR 4:20)

Sexual immorality within the Corinthian church (1 COR 5)

*You won't be proud of one of your leaders
at the expense of another.*

1 CORINTHIANS 4:6

AUG 1-7



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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REFLECT ON 1 CORINTHIANS 4:6-7

The Corinthians had split into various cliques, each following its favorite preacher (Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc.). Each clique really believed it was the only one to have the whole truth and thus felt spiritually proud.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to "pay attention to what I have quoted from the Scriptures." Looking back at those Old Testament passages, we see that each has to do with knowledge—some sort of man-made ideas. In each case, men start out believing that what they know is what's important. But Paul quotes these Scriptures, which point out the futility of starting there.

Later, Paul offers the Corinthians an alternative: "While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church" (1 Corinthians 8:1). For Paul, love isn't simply better than knowledge, it is "a way of life that is best of all" (1 Corinthians 12:31). In fact, Paul says love should be "your highest goal" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

In one of his most famous passages, Paul writes, "If I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge . . . but didn't love others, I would be nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Which is more important to you—having knowledge or having love?

REFLECTION THOUGHT

FOR PAUL, LOVE IS "A WAY OF LIFE THAT IS BEST OF ALL."

WHY WAS ISRAEL'S SECOND TEMPLE SO SIGNIFICANT?

The dedication of Israel's second Temple on March 12, 515 b.c. was the most significant event in the lives of those who returned from Babylonian exile. Now they could worship and praise God in the same way their ancestors had worshiped before the Exile. Now, God's requirements for covenant relationship with him could be fulfilled. After seventy years of estrangement from God, the covenant community was now restored.

This joyous event did not come without difficulty. With God's help, the Israelite exiles who returned overcame sixteen years of opposition from the people who had inhabited their land and from Persian officials. Their enemies made every attempt to discourage them, but the Israelites completed rebuilding the Temple and reestablishing worship through patience, persistence, and strong prophetic encouragement (Ezra 5:1-5; 6:14).

The dedication of the Temple demonstrates that God can accomplish his will through a small group of people who set their priorities on pleasing him and who trust him to provide the resources to fulfill his promises (Ezra 6:8; Haggai 2:7-8). Instead of focusing on what little they had, the people of God trusted in what he could provide. They were dedicated to glorifying God and maintaining their relationship with him. God proved that he was sovereignly in control of nations and could change the hearts of the leaders of those nations to accomplish his will (Ezra 5:5; 6:6-10, 22).

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TALK...

AUG 8-14

**PRAYING THE PSALMS** PSALM 34:1-10

Remind yourself of God's greatness. Reflect on his work in your life. Pray for others who have not tasted God's goodness yet.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

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After reading Nehemiah, how might you define godly courage?

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Why does Paul counsel his readers not to get married?

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Are there some activities that you willingly avoid out of concern "for the good of others" (1 Corinthians 10:24)?

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What do you think God is trying to teach you?

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TALKING POINT**OLD TESTAMENT (NEHEMIAH 3:15—ESTHER 3:15)**

Nehemiah defends the public against corrupt officials (NEH 5)

"I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come." (NEH 6:3)

Jerusalem's wall is completed (NEH 6:15-19)

The Israelites vow to remain faithful to the Lord (NEH 10)

Haman's plot to eradicate the Jews (ESTH 3)

NEW TESTAMENT (1 CORINTHIANS 7:25–11:34)

"I want you to be free from the concerns of this life." (1 COR 7:32)

We should not act in a way that causes others to stumble (1 COR 8)

The Christian walk as a race: "I run with purpose in every step." (1 COR 9:24-27)

Do everything for God's glory (1 COR 10)

Instructions for worship and participating in the Lord's supper (1 COR 11:17-34)

I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:35

AUG 8-14



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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REFLECT ON 1CORINTHIANS 7:35

We tend to get hung up on deciphering Paul's words to better understand marriage and being single. We look for guidance for our decisions and expectations. But Paul seems to be frustratingly hard to pin down in passages like this. Why? Because that's not Paul's focus.

Paul states his concern plainly. But we can miss it in our desire for him to answer our own questions. Paul says, "I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible." This means that whether we are married or single, we have a single purpose: to serve the Lord. The purpose for married people is not different from single people. We have the same purpose.

Paul's primary concern is that we fulfill that purpose "with as few distractions as possible." For individuals, longings and desires may distract them. For couples, concern for their spouses may distract them. Paul wants them to be aware of this, and this is why neither one is better than the other.

Both marriage and singleness have their distractions. But whatever our place, for however long we are in it, our focus should be serving God.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

BOTH MARRIAGE AND SINGLENESSE HAVE THEIR DISTRACTIONS.

WHAT DOES A PRAYING LIFE LOOK LIKE?

Prayer is essential for anyone who desires to live a godly life and carry out an effective ministry. Prayer anchored Nehemiah's life and leadership. Nehemiah spent four months in intensive intercessory prayer when he heard about Jerusalem's disgraceful condition (Nehemiah 1:1; 2:1). His prayers included praising God for his power and covenant love, confessing the nation's sins, and calling on God to act (Nehemiah 1:4-11). Nehemiah based his prayer for Jerusalem on God's "covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands" (Nehemiah 1:5).

Prayer was a reflex for Nehemiah because he depended on God. When God presented an opening for Nehemiah to approach the Persian king about returning to Jerusalem, Nehemiah immediately prayed for God's guidance (Nehemiah 2:4-5). He knew that only God could change the king's heart.

Nehemiah's constant dependence on God in prayer was matched by a practical ingenuity. Nehemiah responded to threats against those building the wall by posting guards and rallying the people, all while praying for God's protection and strength (Nehemiah 4:9).

He needed God's help and blessing then and in the future as he confronted people who acted improperly. He found that some Jews were not contributing their tithe, some were not keeping the Sabbath, and some had married unbelievers (Nehemiah 13:10-12, 15-22, 29-31). When confronting these people about their sin, Nehemiah prayed for God to have compassion on him and remember what he had done. Nehemiah knew that he had to depend on God's power to change people's hearts.

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LET'S

TALK...

AUG 15-21



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

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A WAY TO SEE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 38:1-22

Pray for those who feel abandoned by friends and family. Ask God to draw near to them and encourage them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

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What did you think of the dialogue between God and Satan at the beginning of Job?

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What aspects of Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 do you see in your relationships with others?

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What spiritual gifts has God given you?

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What did you find confusing or have questions about?

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TALKING POINT

OLD TESTAMENT (ESTHER 4:1—JOB 19:29)

“ ‘Perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?’ ” (ESTH 4:14)

Esther exposes Haman's plots (ESTH 7)

The first Festival of Purim celebrated (ESTH 9:20-32)

“ ‘Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?’ ” (JOB 2:10)

Job wants to argue his case with God himself (JOB 13)

NEW TESTAMENT (1 CORINTHIANS 12–16)

God has placed each person exactly where they should be (1 COR 12:18)

Paul's discourse on love (1 COR 13:1-10)

Paul on the importance of prophesying and speaking in tongues (1 COR 14)

“Whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me.” (1 COR 15:10)

“Nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.” (1 COR 15:58)



Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:23

REFLECT ON 1 CORINTHIANS 15:23

The bodily resurrection of Christ is the center of the Christian faith. In the Jewish faith, the first part of the harvest was brought to the Temple as an offering (Leviticus 23:10ff). In the same way, Christ was the first to rise from the dead and never to die again. He is our forerunner, the guarantee of our eventual resurrection to eternal life. In the resurrected Christ we see an example of what our resurrected life will be like, in both body and spirit (Philippians 3:21).

Most Greeks did not believe that people's bodies would be resurrected after death. According to Greek philosophers, the soul was the real person, imprisoned in a physical body, and at death the soul was released. They saw the afterlife as something that happened only to the soul.

By contrast, Christianity affirms that the body and soul will be united after resurrection. The church at Corinth was in the heart of Greek culture. Thus, many believers had a difficult time believing in a bodily resurrection.

Do you think of eternal life as only a spiritual experience? That's not all it is: It will also include new physical bodies in a new creation, and our bodies and spirits will be in harmony.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

CHRISTIANITY AFFIRMS THAT THE BODY AND SOUL WILL BE UNITED AFTER RESURRECTION.

HOW DOES FAITH HELP US RESPOND TO SUFFERING?

The book of Job invites us to examine the basis of our faith in God. Job's loss of possessions and family members and the alienation of his friends shook his faith to its foundation. However, he kept his faith by trusting in God, and he showed Satan's accusations to be unfounded.

Even in his complaints, Job acknowledged that only God could provide the answers he needed. When Job wished for death, it was to gain relief until God could deal with him under more favorable conditions (Job 14:13). When Job desired a mediator, it was to facilitate finding favor with God (Job 9:33-35). When Job complained that God didn't listen, it was because he knew that his answers had to come from God (Job 19:25-27). That is the very essence of faith.

Sin does bring suffering, but Satan's accusation that suffering people must have sinned is not necessarily true (Isaiah 54:17; Romans 8:1). Some today blindly follow Job's friends in equating godliness with blessing. But at its root, this equation expresses unbelief because it refuses to realize that "what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later" (Romans 8:18). As the apostle Paul reminds us, "We must also share his suffering" (Romans 8:17).

We are not meant to know or understand everything (see Genesis 2:17; Deuteronomy 29:29; Acts 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). Some things are for God alone to comprehend and direct according to his sovereign will. Our response should be to accept in faith what he sends us. Even when we suffer, we can trust God (see Romans 8:26-39).

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TALK...

AUG 22-28

**PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 40:1-10**

Wait patiently for the Lord. Remember his wonderful deeds. Listen for his words.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

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What did you learn about yourself?

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Why was God angry with Job's friends but not with Job?

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Have you ever forgiven someone who tried to hurt you (or been forgiven in this way)?

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What does it mean to "evaluate others from a human point of view" (2 Corinthians 5:16)?

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TALKING POINT**OLD TESTAMENT (JOB 20-42)**

" 'And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold.' " (JOB 23:10)

Job vows to keep his conscience clear for as long as he lives (JOB 27:2-6)

Elihu's angry rebuke to Job and his friends (JOB 32-37)

God to Job: " 'Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you.' " (JOB 38:3)

"When Job prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes." (JOB 42:10)

NEW TESTAMENT (2 CORINTHIANS 1-5)

God delivers Paul from trouble in Asia (2 COR 1:8-11)

Paul forgives the troublemaker who attacked him (2 COR 2:5-11)

" 'Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' " (2 COR 3:17)

God displays his love and glory through people ("fragile clay jars") (2 COR 4)

God's promise of new bodies for the faithful (2 COR 5:1-10)



“Why say [God] does not respond to people’s complaints?”

JOB 33:13

REFLECT ON JOB 33:13

Being informed brings a sense of security. It’s natural to want to know what’s happening in our lives. Job wanted to know what was going on and why he was suffering. In previous chapters, we sense his frustration.

Elihu claimed to have the answer for Job’s biggest question, “Why doesn’t God tell me what is happening?” Elihu told Job that God was trying to answer him, but Job was not listening. Elihu misjudged God on this point. If God were to answer all our questions, we would not be adequately tested. What if God had said, “Job, Satan’s going to test you and afflict you, but in the end you’ll be healed and get everything back”? Job’s greatest test was not the pain; it was not knowing why he was suffering.

Our greatest test may be that we must trust God’s goodness even though we don’t understand why our lives are going a certain way. We must learn to trust in God, who is good, and not in the goodness of life.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

WE MUST LEARN TO TRUST IN GOD, WHO IS GOOD, AND NOT IN THE GOODNESS OF LIFE.

IF JOB WERE RIGHTEOUS, HOW COULD HE RESPOND THE WAY HE DID?

For as long as people have read Job’s story, they have struggled with the tension between the positive and negative aspects of Job’s character. The book’s approval of Job in the opening prologue is unequivocal (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3), yet we later hear God interrogate Job: “Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words?” (Job 38:2).

God’s questions have led various people to accuse Job of talking too much and even of confusing God’s work with the work of Satan. Some side with Job’s counselors in blaming Job for his suffering. Still others follow Eliphaz and Elihu in arguing that Job’s suffering was God’s loving and sanctifying chastisement (Job 5:17-27; 33:15-33; 36:7-17). Even the faithful are not exempt from that (Hebrews 12:6-12; see Proverbs 3:11-12). However, this explanation flies in the face of the rationale given in the book’s opening verses.

Job suffered because God wanted to prove Job’s integrity to Satan. God’s own judgment of Job’s life was positive from start to finish (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 42:7). This perspective carries through to the New Testament, where Job is shown as an example of endurance that we should imitate (James 5:11).

To understand Job, we need to see Job as a real person. He reacts in a natural human way. Job rages, protests, moans, and even vacillates between confidence and despair, but he never gives up. He does not curse God, and he does not make a false confession of guilt in the hope that God will then let up on him. Although Job could not understand his situation, he knows that his answer will be found in God (Job 19:25-27). Job’s righteousness did not come by never questioning God, but rather by continuing to trust in spite of his questions.

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REFLECT

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