

LET'S

TALK...

FEB 1-7



DISCUSSION GUIDE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 31:1-8

Voice your commitment to God's timing and protection. Commit yourself to worship God for his sure goodness.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

Why did God give the Israelites so many rules to follow?

Jesus refers to hypocrites in Matthew 23. What does hypocrisy typically look like?

What do you think of Jesus' words about violence in Matthew 26:52?

What did you learn about God?

TALKING POINT

OLD TESTAMENT (EXODUS 19:16–31:18)

The Ten Commandments (EXOD 20:1-17)

“ ‘You must not follow the crowd in doing wrong.’ ” (EXOD 23:2)

God shows himself to Moses, Aaron, and the nobles of Israel (EXOD 24:9-11)

Consecrating the priests (EXOD 29)

God blesses craftsmen to build the Tabernacle (EXOD 31:1-11)

NEW TESTAMENT (MATTHEW 23:13–26:68)

Sorrow awaits the hypocrites (MATT 23:13-36)

Jesus foretells the end times (MATT 24)

Whatever we do to others, we also do to Jesus (MATT 25:34-46)

Judas agrees to betray Jesus (MATT 26:14-16)

“At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.” (MATT 26:56)

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!

MATTHEW 25:40

FEB 1-7



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON MATTHEW 25:40

Many have asked who the “brothers and sisters” are in Matthew 25:40. Some believe they are the Jews. Others say they are all Christians. Still others say they are suffering people everywhere. Who exactly are we to feed, clothe, and visit?

Such a question is similar to the lawyer’s earlier question to Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The point of this parable is not who is being served but who is serving. What’s important is serving where service is needed.

We should love every person and serve anyone we can. Such love for others glorifies God because it embodies his love for them.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

THE POINT OF THIS PARABLE IS NOT WHO IS BEING SERVED BUT WHO IS SERVING.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE TABERNACLE?

From the very beginning of creation, God’s plan was to share his life with humanity and allow people the joy of fellowship with him. However, the entrance of sin into the world created a serious obstacle to realizing that goal: If sinful people came into the presence of God, his holiness would destroy them. The Tabernacle provided a temporary means by which the Israelites could enjoy God’s presence without being destroyed by it (Exodus 25:8).

The Tabernacle shows us in tangible ways what is required to enter God’s presence. The altar shows us that sin must be removed through a sacrificial death. The washbasin shows that fellowship with God demands removing uncleanness—anything that conflicts with God’s ethical perfection. In the Holy Place, the lampstand and the table show that we must walk in God’s light and rely on him to provide for our needs. The incense altar represents prayer, and the constantly rising incense reminds us that those who are forgiven and washed—who are walking in his light and relying constantly on him—have unlimited access to him. The curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place reminds us that the Almighty, the most holy God who invites us into fellowship, cannot be approached casually. Behind the curtain, there is no idol but the glorious Ark of the Covenant, over which God’s glory appeared, symbolizing his enthronement as Israel’s king. The centrality of the Ark reflects God’s central purpose for his people—a covenant relationship with the living God.

Our new covenant relationship with God is made possible by Jesus’ perfect sacrifice for sin and his ministry as our high priest before God (Hebrews 9–10). He has fulfilled the requirements that are illustrated by the ancient Tabernacle.



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LET'S

TALK...

FEB 8-14



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 33:12-22

Pray Psalm 33 with hope in the God personal enough to know each heart and to rescue, strengthen, and protect all who trust in him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

How might you summarize the effect this week's readings had on you?

Why were the specifications for the Tabernacle so specific?

Why is personal holiness so important?

Why do you think baptism is so important in these readings?

TALKING POINTS

OLD TESTAMENT (EXODUS 32:1-LEVITICUS 5:19)

The golden calf (EXOD 32)

“I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.” (EXOD 34:6)

The people of Israel contribute to the Tabernacle (EXOD 35:20-29)

The glory of the Lord fills the Tabernacle (EXOD 40:34-38)

Offerings are special gifts, pleasing to the Lord (LEV 1)

NEW TESTAMENT (MATTHEW 26:69-MARK 3:6)

The fate of Judas (MATT 27:1-10)

Supernatural events as Jesus dies (MATT 27:50-53)

“Go and make disciples of all nations.” (MATT 28:19)

“A voice shouting in the wilderness” (MARK 1:3)

“Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?” (MARK 3:4)

Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:20

FEB 8-14



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON MATTHEW 28:18-20

Even after healing many people, the disciples still feared for their lives in the stormy seas (Matthew 8:16, 26). And even after Jesus fed thousands from a meager lunch, the disciples still worried about where they would get their next meal (Mark 8:16). Now, even after seeing Jesus resurrected from death, some still had their doubts.

When faced with our own doubts and fears, it's encouraging to know Jesus didn't give up on the disciples. Instead, Jesus reassured them. He reminded them of his authority—the same authority that fed thousands and calmed storms. He hadn't changed in that regard. He also reassured them that he was present with them—always.

What's more, Jesus entrusted his work to these doubting disciples. After reassuring them of his power and his presence, he gave them a mission.

We have the same mission today. So when you're facing your own doubts and fears, remember Jesus' power and the promise of his presence. Remember the stories of his miracles—of food, healing, and victory over death. And take heart that Jesus still uses disciples who have their doubts.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

JESUS ENTRUSTED HIS WORK TO THESE DOUBTING DISCIPLES.

CAN GOD BE SORRY FOR DOING SOMETHING AND THEN CHANGE HIS MIND?

Thirty-four times in the Old Testament, God is said to "change his mind" or "be sorry" (Hebrew *nakhama*). What could this mean? Did he relent, or did he have pity? Was he sorry, or did he grieve?

One thing is clear: God never repents of sin or moral failure, because he is perfect (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29). He may decide to halt calamity or judgment that he initiated in response to prayers of repentance (Jeremiah 18:7-10), a human intercessor (Amos 7:2-6), or with no apparent human mediation (2 Samuel 24:16). On a few occasions, God is "sorry" about something he has already done, such as choosing Saul to be king (1 Samuel 15:11). God is not admitting past mistakes; he is expressing anguish over lives gone awry.

Theologians debate the degree to which God, who is all-wise and all-powerful, can "change his mind." In the Bible, any language that refers to a change in God's mind reflects a human perspective on God's activity. Any change in God, therefore, is a change as humans experience him—a reflection of his unchanging love, mercy, faithfulness, and holy will. It does not suggest a change in God's power, omniscience, foreknowledge, wisdom, or holiness.

Series of horizontal dashed lines for reflection notes.



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LET'S TALK...

FEB 15-21



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 38:1-22

Grieve for your sins, and anticipate God's grace. Confess your dependence of God, and wait for his peace.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

What did you find strange or confusing?

Why did God punish Aaron's sons as he did?

How do you let your light shine?

Did anything in this week's readings strike you as especially applicable to your own life? Why or why not?

TALKING POINTS

OLD TESTAMENT (LEVITICUS 6:1-16:28)

Portions of the offering due to the priests (LEV 7:28-38)

"The glory of the LORD appeared to the whole community." (LEV 9:23)

The sins of Aaron's sons (LEV 10)

"Therefore, you must be holy because I am holy." (LEV 11:45)

"I myself am present in the cloud above the atonement cover." (LEV 16:2)

NEW TESTAMENT (MARK 3:7-7:23)

"Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (MARK 3:35)

The parable of the lamp (MARK 4:21-25)

Jesus casts demons out of a man and into a herd of pigs (MARK 5:1-20)

"Your faith has made you well." (MARK 5:34)

Jesus walks on water (MARK 6:45-52)

When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. "He's out of his mind," they said.

MARK 3:21

FEB 15-21



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON MARK 3:20-21

With the crowds pressing in on him, Jesus didn't even take time to eat. Because of this, his friends and family came to take charge of him (Mark 3:31-32), thinking he had gone "over the edge" as a religious fanatic. They were concerned for him, but they missed the point of his ministry. Even those who were closest to Jesus were slow to understand who he was and what he had come to do.

Maybe your family doesn't understand your faith. Maybe they're trying to talk sense into you. Maybe they are genuinely concerned about the choices you've made. Their concerns might provide you a good opportunity to explain your faith to them. But instead of trying to convince them of anything, tell them what you've become convinced of and why. Ask them questions too. Listen to their concerns. Let the conflict become a conversation.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

MAYBE YOUR FAMILY DOESN'T UNDERSTAND YOUR FAITH. LET THE CONFLICT BECOME A CONVERSATION.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FOLLOWER OF JESUS?

One of the core purposes of Mark's Gospel is to help his readers understand and accept the call to take up their cross and follow Jesus. This call is addressed not only to those who would be Jesus' apostles but to all who desired to follow him (Mark 8:34). For some, the call to discipleship is very hard, but God provides grace (Mark 10:24-27). Others find it easy to respond to Jesus' call (Mark 2:14-15).

For everyone, following Jesus requires a total commitment to turn from selfish ways (Mark 8:34-35). Taking up one's cross is a metaphor for giving up one's life to follow Jesus even to death, as illustrated by Jesus' crucifixion. For example, Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their homes and their sources of income to follow Jesus. For a rich man, turning from his selfish ways required selling all he had and giving the proceeds to the poor. Following Jesus also means being identified with him without being ashamed, and being faithful to Jesus and his teachings (Mark 8:38). It requires removing anything that would interfere with following Jesus, regardless of how painful doing so might be (Mark 9:43-48). It requires entrusting one's life entirely to Jesus (Mark 5:34) and repenting of sin (Mark 6:12). It even requires putting loyalty to Jesus above loyalty to one's own father and mother (Matthew 10:37). Jesus explicitly commanded his disciples to proclaim his message (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus and the apostles, through their teaching and example, call Jesus' followers to proclaim the Good News wherever they may be (see Mark 4:20; Romans 10:14-15; Colossians 1:23).

Alongside Jesus' demands for discipleship are the rewards of following Jesus. Those who follow Jesus are promised entrance into the Kingdom of God. They receive his forgiveness for their sins, and they become members of the family of God. They are saved from judgment and obtain eternal life.

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LET'S TALK...

FEB 22-29



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 38:1-22

Pray Psalm 45 for Christ's bride, the Church. Pray for God's blessing and for the beauty of the Church.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

Are there any practices in Leviticus that you wish the modern church would adopt?

Why did God tell the Levites to "protect . . . Israel from the LORD's anger"?

What did you think of Jesus' encounter with the Gentile woman (Mark 7:24-30)?

What did you learn about God in this week's readings?

TALKING POINTS

OLD TESTAMENT (LEVITICUS 16:29-NUMBERS 1:54)

Holiness in personal conduct (LEV 19)

Special instructions for priests (LEV 21)

"I am the LORD who makes you holy." (LEV 22:32)

The Year of Jubilee (LEV 25:8-22)

Blessings for obedience and punishment for disobedience (LEV 26)

NEW TESTAMENT (MARK 7:24-11:26)

Jesus heals a blind man (MARK 8:22-26)

"You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." (MARK 8:33)

"Anyone who is not against us is for us." (MARK 9:40)

Jesus on divorce and marriage (MARK 10:1-12)

Jesus clears the Temple (MARK 11:15-26)

These are the LORD's appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as official days for holy assembly.

LEVITICUS 23:2

FEB 22-29



REFLECT ON LEVITICUS 23:1-2, 44

Festivals played a major role in Israel's culture. God established several national holidays each year for celebration, fellowship, and worship. Worship involves both celebration and confession. But in Israel's national holidays, the balance seems heavily tipped in favor of celebration—five joyous occasions to two solemn ones.

Israel's festivals were ordained by God as times of celebrating with him. God wanted to set aside special days for the people to come together for rest, refreshment, remembrance, and thanksgiving for all he had done for them.

The God of the Bible encourages joy! God does not intend for worship to be only meditation and introspection. He also wants us to celebrate. Reflection and confession are essential, of course. But this should be balanced by celebrating who God is and what he has done for his people.

REFLECTION THOUGHT GOD WANTS US TO CELEBRATE.

WHAT PLACE DO THE POOR HAVE AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE?

God commanded Israel to care for its people's well-being. Israel's covenant with God and Israel's character as an extended family created a sense of equality among the people. A family should provide for members who are facing difficulty. For the Israelites these members included widows and orphans, the poor, and foreigners (Exodus 22:22; Leviticus 19:10). In Leviticus 19:9-10, the edges of the fields and the gleanings of field and vineyard were to be left for the needy. The crops that grew spontaneously each Sabbath year and Jubilee year were allocated to the poor and the foreigner (Leviticus 25:1-55). Those who were destitute were not to be victimized. Instead, loans were to be made at no charge, or the debtor was to be allowed to work off his debt with dignity as a bondservant (Leviticus 25:35-42). These positive steps ensured that the poor had food to eat.

The Bible first mentions concern for the poor in the radical accommodations of the offering system to those unable to afford more costly offerings. Birds could substitute for lambs in the whole burnt offering and the sin offering (Leviticus 1:14-17; 5:7-10), and there were similar concessions in the cleansing rituals (Leviticus 14:21-22). Perhaps the most striking is in the substitution of flour for the sin offering (Leviticus 5:11-13). The life-for-a-life symbolism is forfeited for economic reasons, clearly showing God's desire that the poor experience forgiveness of sins even when they cannot afford a lamb.

This theme continues in the prophets' concern for the poor and helpless and their pleas for social justice and compassion (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 2:6; 4:1; 8:4). Their concern was for a worship that was informed by a proper attitude toward God and one's fellow human beings (Isaiah 1:15-20; Micah 6:6-8). The prophets regarded the wealthy and powerful with suspicion, often questioning their morality (Micah 6:12). Likewise in the Gospels, greater respect is paid to the widow's offering because of the devotion it represented (Mark 12:41-44).



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