

LET'S TALK...

MAR 1-6



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 48:1-14

Rest your heart in the security of God's strength.
Rejoice as a citizen of the city of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

Was there anything you especially liked or disliked this week?

How do you know when God is calling you to do something?

Why do you think Jesus cursed the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14)?

What does it mean to "stay alert" for the Second Coming?

TALKING POINTS

OLD TESTAMENT (NUMBERS 2:1–15:16)

The vows for Nazirites (NUM 6:1-21)

The priestly blessing: " 'May the LORD bless you and protect you. . . . ' " (NUM 6:24)

God's presence as a fiery cloud over the Tabernacle (NUM 9:15-23)

Miriam and Aaron punished for criticizing Moses (NUM 12:1-16)

Scouts explore Canaan; Israel panics at their report; God punishes them for their lack of faith (NUM 13-15)

NEW TESTAMENT (MARK 11:27–14:72)

The parable of the evil farmers (MARK 12:1-12)

A woman anoints Jesus' feet with perfume (MARK 14:1-9)

" 'This is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. ' " (MARK 14:24)

Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (MARK 14:32-42)

Peter denies Jesus (MARK 14:66-72)

*In this way, they traveled and camped at the LORD's command
wherever he told them to go.*

NUMBERS 9:18

**REFLECT ON NUMBERS 9:17-23**

The Israelites traveled and camped as God guided. When the cloud lifted, they broke camp and started moving. When the cloud stayed, the people knew they were to stay there.

Sometimes God directs us into new places in life, but God also has us remain where we are. When you follow God's guidance, you know you are where God wants you for the time being, whether you're moving or staying in one place. Wherever you are right now, instead of praying, "God, where do you want me to go next?" ask, "God, what do you want me to do while I'm right here?"

To answer that question, look at whom God has placed in your life at the moment, what activities you're involved in, what sort of work you are doing, and what abilities you have. All of these could be part of what God has planned for you.

Direction from God is not just for your next big move. He has a purpose for you where you are right now. What is it?

REFLECTION THOUGHT

**GOD, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO WHILE I'M
RIGHT HERE?**

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF"?

Jesus speaks of loving one's neighbor as the second most important of the Old Testament commandments (Mark 12:31). Love summarizes the entire Old Testament law (Matthew 7:12; 22:40). Jesus repeatedly criticized the Pharisees for their failure to show love. Love is the mark of a true follower of Jesus and of an authentic experience of God (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-21).

When we turn to Paul's writings, we see that love is the most important virtue and more important than any of the spiritual gifts. Love "binds us all together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3:14). Without love, ministry has limited value (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Paul summed up Christian ethics as "faith expressing itself in love" (Galatians 5:6). Love is the central ethical expression of Christian faith, the primary fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and one of the most important motivations for ministry. The most important thing for believers to value and seek is to become a faithfully loving person.



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LET'S TALK...

MAR 7-13



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 55:1-23

Pray for your city or town. Ask God to empower his people to serve in your area.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

What did you think of God's punishment for Moses' disobedience?

Why do you think God chose Balaam to pronounce a blessing on the Israelites?

What differences do you see between Zechariah's attitude and Mary's attitude?

Did you make any connections with other passages of Scripture?

TALKING POINTS

OLD TESTAMENT (NUMBERS 15:17-26:51)

The rebellion of Korah (NUM 16)

Moses disobeys the Lord at the waters of Meribah (NUM 20:9-13)

The Israelites' complaining and the bronze snake (NUM 21:4-9)

Balaam: "How can I curse those whom the LORD has not cursed?" (NUM 23:8)

Israelite men sin with Moabite women (NUM 25)

NEW TESTAMENT (MARK 15:1—LUKE 2:52)

" 'He isn't here! He is risen from the dead!' " (MARK 16:6)

Jesus ascends into heaven and sits at the Father's right hand (MARK 16:19)

Luke writes a careful account "so you can be certain of the truth" (LUKE 1:4)

" 'When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy.' " (LUKE 1:44)

Mary's song of praise (LUKE 1:46-55)



*I am the Lord's servant. May everything you
have said about me come true.*

LUKE 1:38

REFLECT ON LUKE 1:26-31, 38

Mary was young, poor, and female. To the people of first-century Israel, these characteristics seemed like handicaps to serving God in any important way.

A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster. She risked remaining unmarried for life unless the baby's father agreed to marry her. She risked being forced into begging or prostitution to support herself if her own father rejected her. And Mary risked being considered crazy as well with her story about becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

But God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience he has ever asked of anyone. Why did he choose someone with so little social standing? For the very same reason that Mary willingly accepted so many risks.

She had an attitude that God could use. Mary responded to Gabriel, "I am the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:38). Mary knew that God was asking her to serve him, and she willingly obeyed.

You may feel that you're incapable, inexperienced, or inadequate for God's service. Or you may see insurmountable obstacles that have no clear resolutions. But God's call isn't based primarily on ability, skill, or knowledge. God is looking for people with a servant's attitude.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

GOD'S CALL ISN'T BASED PRIMARILY ON ABILITY, SKILL, OR KNOWLEDGE.

WHY DO PRAISE AND REJOICING HAPPEN SO OFTEN IN LUKE'S GOSPEL?

Praise and rejoicing are prominent in Luke's Gospel (as well as in Acts). Throughout Luke's Gospel, the recipients of God's grace praise him for his wonderful deeds (Luke 1:46; 24:53).

This recurrence of praise is closely linked to one of Luke's key themes: The coming of Jesus the Messiah fulfills God's promise, and that is a reason for joy. The Old Testament prophets had predicted that nature itself would break forth in songs of praise when God's salvation arrived (see Isaiah 55:12).

When Jesus entered Jerusalem at the end of his ministry (Luke 19:37-40), his disciples shouted and sang, "praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen." The Pharisees called on Jesus to rebuke his disciples, but he responded, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!" At the end of the Gospel, the disciples "returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God" (Luke 24:52-53). The arrival of God's marvelous salvation is a cause for rejoicing and praise.

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE



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LET'S TALK...

MAR 14-20



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 63:1-11

Pray that God would give you a longing for himself.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

Why do you think God regards vows so seriously?

What do you think of Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:24-26?

Have you ever had to love an enemy?

How is God asking you to trust him?

TALKING POINTS

OLD TESTAMENT (NUMBERS 26:52—DEUTERONOMY 3:29)

Joshua chosen to succeed Moses as leader of Israel (NUM 27:12-23)

Dire consequences for failing to completely drive out the Canaanites from the land (NUM 33:55-56)

The Israelites camp just outside the Promised Land (NUM 36:13)

Moses reminds the Israelites of their wandering in the wilderness (DEUT 1-2)

“ ‘Do not be afraid . . . for the LORD your God will fight for you.’ ” (DEUT 3:22)

NEW TESTAMENT (LUKE 3:1-6:38)

John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus and is arrested by Herod (LUKE 3:1-20)

“ ‘You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.’ ” (LUKE 3:22)

Jesus eludes the mob at Nazareth (LUKE 4:28-30)

Jesus, Simon Peter, and the miraculous catch of fish (LUKE 5:1-11)

“ ‘Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.’ ” (LUKE 6:37)

*Take possession of the land and settle in it, because I have given
it to you to occupy.*

NUMBERS 33:53

**REFLECT ON NUMBERS 33:50-56**

God told Moses that Israel should drive out the wicked inhabitants and destroy their idols before settling in the Promised Land. The Israelites had endured more than 400 years of slavery while God graciously waited for the sins of the people of Canaan to warrant his judgment (see Genesis 15:13-20). Now God was going to use Israel as his instrument of justice. God was finally eradicating the wickedness of these nations.

God warned that if the Israelites did not obey him, these nations would later become a source of great irritation. That is exactly what happened. The Israelites did not fully understand God's reasons and did not carry out his command. This eventually led them to compromise and corruption.

In Colossians, Paul encourages us to "put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you" and "clothe yourselves with love" (Colossians 3:5, 14). Yet, we are sometimes hesitant to kill sin living in us. God wants to use us for his purposes, but we must first put sin to death.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

WE ARE SOMETIMES HESITANT TO KILL THE SIN LIVING IN US.

WHY WOULD GOD COMMAND ISRAEL TO COMPLETELY DESTROY ANOTHER NATION?

The Lord's command to Israel to annihilate its enemies poses a major ethical problem. How could the God of love mandate genocide?

What justification could Israel have had for invading, conquering, and destroying the land of Canaan and its peoples? From a human perspective, it appears that Israel's aggressive campaigns to settle Canaan were illegal and immoral.

However, the war against the Canaanites was led by God, not by mere human whim (see Deuteronomy 7:2). The conquest was directed against wicked people who had rebelled against the Lord and his purposes. Their sin had reached its full measure and now justified their destruction (Genesis 15:16). Israel became God's instrument to carry out his justice.

Historically and theologically, the war that Israel was authorized to wage was limited to its Old Testament setting. Medieval campaigns, such as the Crusades by European "Christians" against Middle Eastern "infidels," or the more recent jihads of Islamic terrorism cannot be justified based on Old Testament practice. Jesus made it very clear that "God blesses those who work for peace" (Matthew 5:9) and that "those who use the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). No justification for such action exists in the modern world. In the final judgment, God himself will bring human wickedness to justice (see Revelation 19:11-21; 20:7-10).



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TALK...

MAR 21-27



PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 70:1-5

Pray for those who are in urgent need of God's deliverance.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

What did you learn about yourself?

Do you see any similarities between the behavior of the Israelites and your own?

Why do you think Jesus' women followers are specifically mentioned in Luke 8?

What do you think of Jesus' reaction to his family in Luke 8:19-21?

TALKING POINTS

OLD TESTAMENT (DEUTERONOMY 4-17)

" 'If you search for [God] with all your heart and soul, you will find him.' " (DEUT 4:29)

The Ten Commandments (DEUT 5:6-21)

" 'You were the smallest of all nations!' " (DEUT 7:7)

God lavishes his love on a thousand generations (DEUT 7:9)

Justice for God's people (DEUT 16:18-20)

NEW TESTAMENT (LUKE 6:39-9:27)

The slave of a Roman officer is healed; the son of a widow is brought back to life (LUKE 7:1-17)

" 'Are you the Messiah we've been expecting?' " (LUKE 7:20)

" 'I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love.' " (LUKE 7:47)

Jesus heals the bleeding woman and brings a dead girl back to life (LUKE 8:40-56)

" 'You must take up your cross and follow me.' " (LUKE 9:23)

Go up and take over the land I have given you.

DEUTERONOMY 9:23

MAR 21-27



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON DEUTERONOMY 9:23

Moses reminded the people of their unbelief 40 years earlier, when they had refused to enter Canaan. The Israelites had refused to follow God in spite of all he had already done. They looked only to their own resources instead of to God's power.

Sometimes God asks impossible things of his people. God asked Nehemiah and Ezra to rebuild the walls and the Temple under their enemies' watchful eyes. He asked Peter to walk across the waves. He asked Paul to bear a thorn in his flesh. And he asked Israel to drive the nations out of the Promised Land.

We tend to think that God gives orders and abandons us to complete them. But God is not like that at all. God told Israel he had already given them the land. God wasn't going to wish them luck and disappear. God was going with them. In truth, he was going before them.

If God is asking you to do the impossible, remember that he has not abandoned you to do it alone. God is going with you. His "power works best in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). And "what is impossible for people is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

REFLECTION THOUGHT

GOD WASN'T GOING TO WISH THEM LUCK AND DISAPPEAR.

DOES GOD KEEP HIS PROMISES?

God specifically promised Abraham to bring his descendants into possession of the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8). God repeated his promise to Moses (Deuteronomy 1:6-8). Now God was ready to fulfill his promise, using Moses' successor, Joshua, to begin the process.

God always keeps his unconditional promises. Joshua led Israel's first generation of settlers into the Promised Land, and his victories opened the hill country for settlement by the Israelites.

Whether or not an individual or a whole generation benefits from God's faithfulness depends on obedience. Throughout the history of the Old Testament, God's people alternated between their partnering with God and their turning from God—between enjoying the fulfillment of his generous promises and reaping the harvests of defeat, dispersion, and death.

Just as God fulfilled through Joshua the promise of land to Abraham and Moses, he later fulfilled through Jesus the promise of an unfailing dynasty to David (2 Samuel 7:11-16; see Matthew 21:9). God's fulfillment of his promises will continue into eternity.



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