

TALK...

AUG 29-SEP 4

**PRAYING THE PSALMS** PSALM 46:1-11

Pray for the upheaval around the world—the uncertainty and chaos. Quiet yourself and trust in God’s strength and involvement everywhere.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

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How is Ecclesiastes different from other books in the Bible?

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What are some important life lessons you discovered in Ecclesiastes?

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What did you learn about God?

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How is God calling you to “open your heart” (2 Corinthians 6:13)?

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TALKING POINT

OLD TESTAMENT (ECCLESIASTES 1:1—ISAIAH 2:22)

The Teacher finds that all his life’s accomplishments are “meaningless” (ECCL 2:11)

Enjoy your life! (ECCL 11:7-10)

“Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it.” (SONG 8:7)

The Lord desires obedience, not sacrifices (ISA 1:10-17)

“Don’t put your trust in mere humans. They are as frail as breath.” (ISA 2:22)

NEW TESTAMENT (2 CORINTHIANS 6–10)

Paul implores the Corinthians to open their hearts to him (2 COR 6:11-13)

“Let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God.” (2 COR 7:1)

Godly sorrow (2 COR 7:11-13)

How to give generously to God’s work (2 COR 8)

Paul defends his authority against his detractors (2 COR 10)

*How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness?
How can light live with darkness?*

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14

AUG 29-SEP 4



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18

Paul urges believers to not “team up” with unbelievers. This includes business partnerships and marriage relationships. Earlier, Paul had explained that this did not mean isolating oneself from unbelievers (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Paul even urges Christians to stay with their unbelieving spouses (1 Corinthians 7:12-13). He wanted believers to represent Christ well to unbelievers but not lock themselves into personal or business relationships that could force them to compromise their commitment to God. Believers should do everything in their power to avoid situations that could force them to divide their loyalties.

Why does Paul discourage such relationships but encourage believers to stay married to unbelievers? Paul held a high view of marriage and believed that it is a commitment that should be honored if an unbelieving spouse is willing to stay. Paul saw such a willingness as a promising sign regarding the unity of the marriage and the possibilities that a spouse may come to salvation too. But Paul also encourages all believers to “live in peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18; see also 1 Corinthians 7:15; Hebrews 12:14). For some this will mean accepting divorce from an unbelieving spouse. For others it will mean remaining together.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

BELIEVERS SHOULD DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO AVOID SITUATIONS THAT COULD FORCE THEM TO DIVIDE THEIR LOYALTIES.

WHAT IS PAUL'S TEACHING ON CHRISTIAN GIVING?

Paul encouraged the church at Corinth “to excel also in this gracious act of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7). He focuses their attention on the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, asking them to respond to their specific needs. What’s more, it would be a sign that the Gentiles were one with the mother church in Jerusalem.

The Christian life is marked by a forgiving spirit and a generous concern for those in need (2 Corinthians 2:10; 8:1-9:15). Such bountiful giving is a mark of true grace. We see its sublime expression in the Lord of glory, who became one with us and by his poverty made us rich (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:3-11). We have received his grace in salvation (2 Corinthians 9:8-11). Now we give sacrificially to others as a response to “this gift too –wonderful for words!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul describes how Christian giving should look. First, our giving should spring from a willing mind and heart (8:12). Second, true giving is a joy, in contrast with grudging gifts (9:5). There is joy in sowing seed, like a farmer who anticipates a crop (9:6-10), and there is joy in sharing with others in need (8:11-15). Third, Christian giving is marked by generosity and may entail sacrifice, as it did for the Macedonians (8:1-7). Finally, handling money calls for honesty, integrity, and care. Those who handle monetary gifts in the church should be persons of proven reputation and responsibility, like those in 2 Corinthians 8:16-24.

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TALK...

SEP 5-11

**PRAYING THE PSALMS** PSALM 56:1-13

Pray for those being attacked because they are Christians. Pray that they would be vindicated so that all may see God's greatness.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

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Why was fear such a significant part of Isaiah's awe in Isaiah 6? Have you ever had a similar feeling?

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Where did you see Jesus in the book of Isaiah?

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What point was Paul making by boasting in 2 Corinthians 11?

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What did God teach you this week?

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TALKING POINT**OLD TESTAMENT (ISAIAH 3-21)**

"See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed." (ISA 6:7)

Isaiah prophesies the birth of the Messiah (ISA 7:14-16)

"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light." (ISA 9:2)

The Branch from David's family: "He will wear righteousness . . . and truth." (ISA 11)

Isaiah predicts the fall of Babylon (ISA 13)

NEW TESTAMENT (2 CORINTHIANS 11:1—GALATIANS 2:16)

Paul boasts "like a fool" to make a point (2 COR 11)

Paul's thorn in the flesh: "When I am weak, then I am strong." (2 COR 12:1-10)

Final instructions for godly living (2 COR 13:11-12)

"If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant." (GAL 1:10)

Paul confronts Peter about his hypocrisy (GAL 2:11-16)

*So to keep me from becoming proud,
I was given a thorn in my flesh.*

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

SEP 5-11



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-8

We don't know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was because he doesn't tell us. Whatever it was, it was a chronic ailment that kept him from working at times. This thorn was a hindrance to his ministry. Three times Paul prayed for its removal, but God said no.

Why would God allow such a thorn to hinder Paul's ministry? Because of his thorn, Paul relied on God more. It cultivated in Paul a stronger character, humility, and an ability to empathize with others. Apparently, who Paul was mattered more to God than what Paul accomplished.

What are you more concerned about—what you accomplish or who you become?

When we are strong in abilities or resources, we are tempted to do God's work with our own strength, and that can lead to pride. We may accomplish more for God, but we will not be more like him. When we are weak, we are more likely to depend on God to fill us with his power. Then we are stronger than we could ever be on our own. More importantly, we become more like him.

REFLECTION THOUGHT

WHAT ARE YOU MORE CONCERNED ABOUT—WHAT YOU ACCOMPLISH OR WHO YOU BECOME?

WHY DID ISAIAH CONDEMN SUCH RELIGIOUS PEOPLE FOR HYPOCRISY?

Isaiah preached to people who seemed to be very religious. They fasted, prayed, celebrated holy days, and brought their sacrifices to the Temple. Yet God rejected their worship (Isaiah 1:11-15). The Lord himself had prescribed these rituals, so why did he reject them?

The people's worship was not from the heart, and they did not match these rituals with the personal holiness and social justice that God requires (Leviticus 19:13-17). The people of Judah had fallen into the trap of religious hypocrisy.

Religious hypocrisy can result from selective obedience, giving lip service to God's law without a change of heart and lifestyle to back it up. People who parade their piety in front of others often have little desire to truly obey God.

Many years after Isaiah, Jesus confronted this kind of hypocrisy in the Pharisees. He challenged them to be better doers of God's whole revelation rather than just the parts that brought them recognition and honor (Matthew 23:23). The apostles Paul and James also distinguished between mere religiosity and true spirituality (1 Corinthians 3:1-23; James 1:21-2:13). Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees also serves as a warning to us: We are not to be like them (Matthew 6:1-18; 1 Peter 2:1). Instead, Jesus calls us to obey his entire word and to go beyond mere formalism and appearance in our devotion to God.

Series of horizontal dashed lines for reflection notes.



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TALK...

SEP 12-18

**PRAYING THE PSALMS** PSALM 61:1-8

Seek the Lord, and spend time in his presence.
Rest in him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Was there anything that especially encouraged you or challenged you?

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What parallels did you find between Isaiah and other passages in the Bible?

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In what specific ways do you believe our world will change with the restoration of God's earthly Kingdom?

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Why did Paul criticize the Galatians so strongly for following the law?

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What did you learn about God's character?

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TALKING POINT**OLD TESTAMENT (ISAIAH 22:1–41:16)**

“The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears.”
(ISA 25:8)

“He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you, the clay!” (ISA 29:16)

Looking forward to restoration from the Lord (ISA 35)

“[Jerusalem's] sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned.” (ISA 40:2)

The world fades, but God's promises are eternal
(ISA 40:8)

NEW TESTAMENT (GALATIANS 2:17—EPHESIANS 1:23)

If we could be good on our own, there was no need for Christ to die (GAL 2:21)

Paul corrects the Galatians' excessive reliance on obedience to the law (GAL 3)

“You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” (GAL 3:26)

“You will always harvest what you plant.” (GAL 6:7)

The church is the body of Christ (EPH 1:23)



“Do not be disturbed by this blasphemous speech against me from the Assyrian king’s messengers. Listen! I myself will move against him.”

ISAIAH 37:6, 7

REFLECT ON ISAIAH 37:6, 7

Assyria was poised to strike, like an ax raised and ready to fall. Hezekiah saw no way out. The situation seemed hopeless, but Hezekiah didn’t give up. Instead, he asked Isaiah to pray that God would help his people. Hezekiah did exactly what Isaiah had been calling the people to do. He turned to God. Turning to God is an act of faith, demonstrating the belief that God is there and that he is able to help.

Hezekiah then watched God come to Judah’s aid. The answer to Hezekiah’s prayer was already in motion: King Tirhakah of Ethiopia was poised to attack the Assyrians. Hezekiah just didn’t know it. He persisted in prayer and faith even though he could not see the answer coming.

When we pray, we can trust that God has already prepared the best answer. Our task is to ask in faith and wait in humility.

Are you facing an impossible situation? Does the outcome seem like a foregone conclusion? The disciples probably thought the same thing when Jesus died. Sometimes God rescues his people, like he did for Hezekiah, but sometimes God waits. Will you turn to God and trust him anyway?

REFLECTION THOUGHT

SOMETIMES GOD RESCUES HIS PEOPLE, BUT SOMETIMES GOD WAITS.

HOW ARE PEOPLE MADE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD BY FAITH?

For Jewish Christians in the first century, it was hard to accept this answer. From the time of Abraham, God’s law played a defining role in how they thought about their relationship with God. This included the Jewish rite of circumcision.

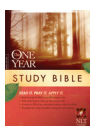
When the Christian faith moved from the Jewish to the Gentile world, it was natural for questions to arise. The believers in Galatia needed to know how people become acceptable to God. What do people need to do to earn God’s favor? Do Christians need to keep God’s law to be accepted as part of God’s family? As Paul’s mission to Gentiles advanced, these questions became pressing.

For Paul, the answer was simple: There is nothing people can or need to do. Only Christ could do—and has done—what must be done to make people acceptable to God.

The apostle Peter understood from his vision in Joppa and his experience in Caesarea that God has accepted Gentiles as Gentiles, on the basis of their faith in Christ’s finished work (Acts 10:9–11:18). They did not have to become Jewish by obeying God’s laws, including circumcision, for Christ provided them open access to God by faith. Peter and the Jerusalem church therefore welcomed Gentile believers into fellowship.

No one is accepted by God and made righteous before him on the basis of keeping the law (Galatians 2:16). Even Abraham was accounted as righteous and accepted by God because of his faith—not because he was circumcised, which came later (Genesis 15:6; 17:9-14; Galatians 3:6). All people, then and now, are accepted by God and made righteous before him on the basis of faith alone.

Lined writing area for reflection notes.



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TALK...

SEP 19-25

**PRAYING THE PSALMS PSALM 67:1-7**

Bless God by praying this psalm of praise to him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What passage most surprised you?

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Were there any passages that particularly encouraged you or challenged you?

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What parallels did you find between the Old Testament and the New Testament?

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Why do you think there is such a focus on servanthood in this week's Isaiah readings?

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How did the life described in Ephesians 5 cause you to evaluate your values and behavior?

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TALKING POINT**OLD TESTAMENT (ISAIAH 41:17–59:21)**

The Lord's chosen servant (ISA 42:1-9)

“I . . . am the LORD, and there is no other Savior.” (ISA 43:11)

Even Cyrus of Persia is God's instrument (ISA 45:1-13)

“He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins.” (ISA 53:5)

“I will bring others, too, besides my people Israel.” (ISA 56:8)

NEW TESTAMENT (EPHESIANS 2:1—PHILIPPIANS 1:26)

“We are God's masterpiece.” (EPH 2:10)

Gentiles are included among God's holy people (EPH 2:11-22)

Christians should live in unity and love with each other (EPH 4)

“Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness.” (EPH 5:11)

The armor of God and spiritual warfare (EPH 6:10-18)

And it is he who says, "I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness."

ISAIAH 42:5, 6

SEP 19-25



DISCUSSION GUIDE

REFLECT

PS 119

A WAY TO SEE

REFLECT ON ISAIAH 42:5, 6

Sometimes called the Servant Song, this passage is about the Servant-Messiah. Israel and the Messiah are both often called "servant." Israel, as God's servant, was to help introduce the world to the one true God. The Messiah, Jesus, would fulfill this task in a special way by quite literally being God's presence in the world.

In Matthew 12:18-21, some of these verses (Isaiah 42:1-4) are quoted with reference to Christ. Part of Christ's mission on earth was to demonstrate God's righteousness and to be a light for all nations. The chosen servant reveals a character of gentleness, encouragement, justice, and truth.

God's loving attributes are desperately needed in the world today. Through Christ, God's people have the opportunity to share in his mission. God calls us to be servants of his Son, demonstrating God's righteousness and bringing his light. As we surrender to God's Spirit, we can show such sensitivity to people around us, reflecting God's goodness and honesty to them. How can you be part of God's mission today?

REFLECTION THOUGHT

GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE IN CHRIST'S MISSION.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE FOR CHRIST?

From prison Paul wrote, "To me, living means living for Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Why are believers called to devote their lives to Christ? There are many reasons.

Believers acknowledge that they owe everything to Christ, especially their salvation. Devoting their lives to his service expresses their eternal indebtedness and gratitude (Romans 12:1).

Believers acknowledge Christ as their master and Lord, and they submit to Christ's rule in their lives. They recognize that they belong to the Lord and no longer live simply for themselves (Romans 14:7-9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Believers now share in Christ's death and resurrection—they have died to themselves and have risen with him (Romans 6:3-14). They have a new identity in Christ (Romans 8:14-17; Philippians 3:20).

Believers recognize that everything of value is found in Christ. Things of the world that once seemed important have lost their attraction. Nothing compares to the infinite value of knowing Christ (Ephesians 3:18-19; Philippians 3:7-11).

Dotted lines for reflection notes.



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