

## WEEKLY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### December 2023

#### Week 51 (December 24 - December 30) - 1,2,3 John

1) The Apostle John would have been very old--probably in his 90's--when he wrote the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John. Also, he was the last of the twelve apostles. *What do you think it would have been like for John, at this time, being the last of that group who walked with Jesus?*

2) *If you were John, what memory of his time with Jesus do you think you would have treasured the most?*

3) Early on Jesus called John and his brother James, "Sons of Thunder", most likely referring to their aggressive, possibly even violent, tendencies. Yet, John is later known as the "beloved" disciple, and for his most repeated encouragement, "Little children, love one another." *When and how do you think that transformation took place?*

*\* Is there a trait that you have that Jesus has transformed, or is in the process of transforming?*

#### Week 50 (December 17 - December 23) - John

1) John begins his story of Jesus by describing a story of "light and darkness", of good and evil. Share one of your favorite stories of the battle between good and evil (fiction or non-fiction).

2) "Darkness" is a major metaphor for John. List ways in which the metaphor describes the world in which we live. *Which aspect of "darkness" bothers you most?*

3) *Why do you think it is important that Jesus became "flesh" and lived a life just like you and me? Does it make a difference when you think of living your life?*

#### Week 49 (December 10 - December 16) - Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter

1) *What organizations or teams do you identify with? Do you have t-shirts, hats, mugs, etc. that communicate your support of these organizations?*

2) The writers of both Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter are seeking to connect their readers with the story of God told in the Old Testament. *How is it beneficial to us to realize that we are part of a long story, rooted in the story of Israel?*

3) Read Psalm 8. *In what terms does it talk about mankind's place in God's creation? What is man's intended role?*

*\* In Hebrews 2:5-9 the writer cites Psalm 8 concerning man's intended role in creation, and then says, "Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them." What does the writer mean by this? Can you give examples of the reality of this in the world around us?*

4) *"But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor ...". Jesus became human so that we could become what we were meant to be.*

*\* In his famous sermon, **The Weight of Glory**, C.S. Lewis said, "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which ... you would be strongly tempted to worship." How would it affect the way we looked at and treated ourselves and others if we always had this thought in mind?*

#### Week 48 (December 3 - December 9) - Psalm 98

1) Have you ever been 'happy the Christmas is over'? How does our culture's view of Christmas affect your own?

2) What things have you done in the past to keep from being overwhelmed by Christmas? How well do they work?

3) Does the idea of initially concentrating on Christ's second coming seem affect your perception/practice of Advent at all? Why or why not?

## November 2023

### Week 47 (November 26 - December 2) - James and Jude

- 1) Share a piece of wisdom that you learned from your family that has been valuable to you in your life.
- 2) Read James chapter 1 out loud. Make a list of the practical areas of life that James refers to in this chapter (he introduces all of his major themes in chapter 1).

\* *Which of these themes do you find most challenging in your own walk with Christ?*

- 3) James begins his letter with patience ("perseverance" 1: 3-4), and ends with patience. Looking at James 5:7-11, *how does James help us learn patience and perseverance in our lives?*

### Week 46 (November 19 - November 25) - 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus

- 1) Looking at the "Effective Church Leadership" syllabus, which of the 5 "Assignments" would you choose to do? Why? (You can find the syllabus under "Resources" on the [Meadowsprings.org](http://Meadowsprings.org) website)

- 2) In 1 Timothy 6:12 Paul tells Timothy to "*Fight the good fight of faith.*" The Greek word that he uses for "good" means "beautiful." *In what ways do you think the life of faith in Jesus is "beautiful"?*

- 3) *For you, what is the biggest challenge to finishing well?* Refer to 2 Timothy 4:6-7

### Week 45 (November 12 - November 18) - 1 & 2 Thessalonians

- 1) *How much do you think about the "end of the world"? Does it excite you or make you anxious? Why?*

- 2) It is easy to get caught up in a fascination with end-times events. Paul doesn't seem to want that to happen. He says, "let us be awake" (1 Thess. 5:6), and yet encourages us to lead quiet lives of loving one another (1 Thess. 4:9-12). *What is the difference between being "awake" to the possibility of Jesus returning at any time and being obsessed with or anxious about His return?*

- 3) *What would you want to do if you knew that in 6 months Jesus was coming back?*

\* *What changes would you make in your daily routines and activities?*

### Week 44 (November 5 - November 11) - Psalm 16

- 1) How do you keep fresh your "vertical" relationship with God? Is there any one thing you can think of doing that might make that relationship a little better?

- 2) How do you keep fresh your "horizontal" relationship with MSCC? Is there any one thing you can think of doing that might make that relationship a little better?

- 3) Is God the source of everything good, and He gives us counsel through His word, why do we not pay attention sometimes? What might you do both vertically and horizontally to help you take God's counsel in difficult areas of your life?

## October 2023

### Week 43 (October 29 - November 4) - Philippians

- 1) *What are the top three things that you are willing to "work hard" at in your life? Why?*

- 2) In Philippians 2:12 Paul says to "*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*" The theme is unity in the church. The command is to work hard together in order to fully experience this aspect of our salvation. List ways that members of a church can "work hard" at building the unity of their church family.

- 3) In Philippians 2:14 Paul talks about "grumbling and arguing". *What effects do these have on relationships? What other behaviors or attitudes work against unity in a church family?*

\*\* *Is there a specific action or attitude that you can take in order to strengthen the unity we have at Meadow Springs (or at your church)?*

**Week 42** (October 22 - October 28) - Colossians, Ephesians & Philemon

1) *What is your process for choosing what clothing you wear everyday? What factors influence your choices?*

2) Read Colossians 3:1-3. *What do you think Paul means when he says, "Set your minds on things above..."? Practically, how do we do this?*

3) Using the illustration of our clothing, we are told we have "taken off your old self" and "put on the new self" (Colossians 3:9). *Can you share one aspect of your old self that you have "put off", and one aspect of your new self that you have "put on"?*

\* Looking at the list in 3:12-14, share a quality or two of the new self that you are working on clothing yourself with every day.

**Week 41** (October 15 - October 21) - Galatians

1) Identifying with Paul in Galatians: Paul is sad and frustrated by the Galatian believers who are falling for the false teaching of Jewish "agitators".

\* Share about a time when someone you cared about made poor choices or turned their back on your attempts to help them.

2) Identifying with the Galatian believers: they are hearing an argument which says that they need to add their good works to the belief in Jesus in order to be right with God.

\* *What is the problem with the idea that "good people go to heaven"?*

\* God wants us to do good--to serve and love others (Galatians 5:13-14). *How do we separate the idea of earning God's favor from the actions of serving others and loving our neighbor?*

**Week 40** (October 8 - October 14) - 2 Corinthians

1) *When was the last time that you were physically sore? How did it happen?*

2) In 2 Corinthians 5:2 Paul says, "Meanwhile we groan ...". He is talking about living in our physical bodies. *What kinds of things do we "groan" over?*

3) *What do you look forward to most about your resurrection body--a body fashioned by God to last for eternity?*

4) *Why is it important that we understand that we are unified beings, consisting of both spirit/soul and our physical bodies?*

**Week 39** (October 1 - October 7) - Psalm 44/Romans 8

1) Read Psalm 44. *What are your thoughts about the condition the psalmist finds himself? Were you surprised with the transition at verse 10? Why or why not?*

2) At the end of Romans 8, Paul uses the very graphic imagery from Psalm 44 to describe Christian life in an age of suffering. *Have you ever thought about your life in this way?*

3) *How does Romans 8 and Psalm 44 relate to Jesus' command to "take up [his] cross and follow [him]"?*

## September 2023

**Week 38** (September 24 - September 30) - 1 Corinthians

1) *Have you ever observed a Christian who didn't act like a Christian in some setting outside of church? Share a little.... Or maybe, share about your own struggle to act like a follower of Jesus in a particular "compartment" of your life.*

2) *Make a list of what you think are the key values of American culture. Discuss how these values relate to biblical values--positively? negatively? gray areas?*

3) Can you share an area in which you are tempted to shape the Gospel to fit your life and thinking, rather than shaping your life to the Gospel? This may take some reflection!

**Week 37** (September 17 - September 23) - Romans

- 1) Word association: *What or who comes into your mind when you hear the word, "righteousness"? Explain.*
- 2) *How does defining "righteousness" as "right relationship" change the way we might think about it? Give examples.*
- 3) Romans 1:17 says that the righteousness that we receive from God is "by faith from first to last". *What does it look like in daily life to live by faith, versus depending upon ourselves or trying to earn God's favor?*
- 4) Martin Luther's discovery of righteousness being a gift of God was a breakthrough in his spiritual life. *Can you think of a time when you experienced a breakthrough in your spiritual life?*

**Week 36** (September 10 - September 16) - Acts

- 1) Word association: *when you hear the word "church" what thoughts come to mind? Positive or negative? Why?*
- 2) The book of Acts tells a pretty dramatic story: the birthday of the church, the apostles preaching and doing miracles, persecution of Christians, the explosive expansion of the church, incredible sharing and caring with in the fellowship of believers, the inclusion of all people equally in the church, etc. *In what ways should we expect the church today--our church--to be like the church in Acts? In what ways might we expect to be different?*
- 3) *Do you feel that the Holy Spirit provides empowerment to you for living the Christian life? How does that work for you?*

**Week 35** (September 3 - September 9) - Psalm 73

- 1) *Can you think of a time when faith was difficult for you? What caused the difficulty? How did you get through it?*
- 2) *Do you ever find yourself, like Asaph in Psalm 73, envying people who aren't Christians? What is it that you envy?*
- 3) Asaph gained the perspective he needed when he went to church--into the "sanctuary of God." *What are some of the benefits to gathering with other believers for worship and fellowship?*
- 4) *How can having the "long-range view of life" change the way we think about things right now? Give some examples.*

## August 2023

**Week 34** (August 27 - September 2; Church in Paradise - No Discussion Questions)

**Week 33** (August 20 - August 26; Guest Speaker - No Discussion Questions)

**Week 32** (August 13 - August 19; Guest Speaker - No Discussion Questions)

**Week 31** (August 6 - August 12) - Intro to the New Testament

- 1) *Share about a time in your life when you felt like you were on "blank pages".*
- 2) *Why do you think God allowed 400 years to pass between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament?*

3) *Looking back on your life, when have you seen God working good things out during a time when you couldn't see them?*

## July 2023

**Week 30** (July 30 - August 5) - Malachi, OT Summation

- 1) *What are the most memorable parts of the Old Testament Story to you?*
- 2) *What character in the Old Testament do you most identify with, and why?*
- 3) *One clear message of the Old Testament story is the inability of human beings to consistently choose what is good. How does this truth about people play itself out in the world we live in today? Give examples.*

**Week 29** (July 23 - July 29) - Haggai

- 1) Share a choice that made that you later would have made differently, and why.
- 2) Haggai invites us to reflect on the paths that we have walked and to what extent they have brought satisfaction in our lives (read Haggai 1:5-6). List ways in which people might spend the time and energy of their lives and ultimately be disappointed.
- 3) *In what ways might we, even as followers of Christ, be "busy with our own houses" while neglecting the priority of worshipping God? (Haggai 1:9).*
- 4) *How does the idea of rebuilding the temple relate to us today in terms of personal and community time with God?*

**Week 28** (July 16 - July 22) - Habakkuk

- 1) Habakkuk is about "life in the meantime". It is about having the promise of something really good ahead, but having to wait for it. Think about a time when you have had to wait for something good in your life. *What is something you are waiting for right now?*
- 2) In Habakkuk 2:2-3 God promises that He is bringing events to an end point--a point of final justice and wonderful blessing. In the meantime, he says, the person in right relationship with Him will live by "faithfulness" (2:4). *What do you think living by "faithfulness" looks like in everyday life?*
- 3) Chapter 3, verses 17-19 are the climactic expression of faith in the book. Rewrite them in your own words. *What failures and losses might we experience, and yet "rejoice in the LORD"?*

**Week 27** (July 9 - July 15) - Jonah (Micah, Nahum)

- 1) God commanded Jonah to go one direction, and Jonah went in the opposite direction! *Can you think of a time when you did the opposite of what you were told (by parents, teachers, coaches, etc.)? How did it turn out?*
- 2) *Why did Jonah go in the opposite direction of God's command (compare 1:3 with 4:1-2)? What would Jonah have liked to see happen to the Assyrians?*  
*\* Can you identify with Jonah's hatred for the Assyrians? Who might we feel that way toward in our lives?*
- 3) Even if we don't have "enemies" like the Assyrians, we all want to feel a little bit special. That often involves looking down on other people in some way. Talk about some ways/areas in which we can think of ourselves as better than others.
- 4) The book of Jonah has no ending. It leaves the reader to answer the question: *Will I choose to care about other people the way God cares about other people?* Good question! Talk to God about your answer to this question.

**Week 26** ( July 2 - July 8) - Psalm 81

- 1) *Have you ever thought of God as calling out to you to: "Listen to me"?*
- 2) *Mike said in the sermon that "sin is allowing something to become more important to you than God". Do you agree with this? Why or why not?*
- 3) *Where do you find it particularly difficult to agree with God? What steps can you take today to listen more closely?*

## June 2023

### Week 25 (June 25 - July 1) - Joel

- 1) *Why do you think the minor prophets are read so little today? Have the discussions about Hosea and Joel changed your thoughts any?*
- 2) *Joel uses a current situation (the locust swarm) to discuss an even more important issue (the Day of the Lord). What is so important about the Day of the Lord?*
- 3) *How important in your daily life are the issues of a) repentance, b) the Holy Spirit, and c) the Final Judgement? How might you incorporate them into more regular consideration in your life?*

### Week 24 (June 18 - June 24) - Hosea (Amos)

- 1) *God uses the marriage of Hosea and Gomer to symbolize His relationship with Old Testament Israel. What does this choice of symbolism suggest to us about how God views His relationship with his people, His relationship with us? (How is a marriage like the relationship God has with us?)*
- 2) *Do parents love their children more when they behave well than when they behave badly? Should they?*
- 3) *What does it mean to say that God's love for you "unconditional"? (And what doesn't it mean?)*

### Week 23 (June 11 - June 18) - Ezekiel & Daniel

- 1) *The setting of the story of Daniel is the life of exiled Israelites in Babylon, a culture not friendly to their faith.*
  - \* *Talk about ways in which our culture is friendly or unfriendly to our Christian faith.*
- 2) *Jeremiah 29:4-7, and Daniel 1 suggest a level of cooperation and participation in the cultural setting in which we live.*
  - \* *What goals should we have in mind as we decide how to participate in our culture?*
  - \* *Discuss what positive participation in culture might look like for us in America.*
- 3) *List and discuss possible ways that for us to maintain a clear sense of our core identity in Christ, as "a chosen people, God's special possession". Habits? Behaviors? Relationships? Money and possessions? Food? etc.*

### Week 22 (June 4 - June 10) - Lamentations

- Grief strikes us all. What were some times where you found yourself really grief stricken? If you don't want to share the specifics, how did you feel during those times of intense grief? Why do you think people process grief differently than others?
- Why do you think people get "stuck" in their grief? Is this good or bad? What might you use Lamentations to help someone through their grief?
- Do you agree or disagree with Lamentations being a "Liturgy for Grief"? Why or why not?

## May 2023

### Week 21 (May 28 - June 3) - Jeremiah

1) Jeremiah 36 depicts a shocking rejection of God's Word. *Reflect on the ways in which people continue to reject God's Word, though it may be more politely and less defiantly.*

2) Jeremiah describes the restoration of Israel in idyllic terms of home and family, farming and herding sheep, and especially of family and neighbor relationships--a peaceful life in community. *Share the things that would make up an ideal life to you: homes, land, relationships, work. etc.*

3) The New Covenant, which provides a new closeness to God (His Spirit living inside of us), and a new, internal, ability to live for Him, is totally built on the forgiveness of our sins. In Jesus, all of our sins--past, present, and future--have been forgiven!

*\* Do you struggle with really believing that your sins are forgiven and forgotten by God?*

*\* How does, or would, knowing this full forgiveness change your relationship with God?*

#### **Week 20** (May 21 - May 27) - Isaiah

1) Often in great stories the plot comes to a point at which it looks like there is no hope for the future. *Can you think of a popular story--movie or book--like that? What happens in that story?*

2) Read Isaiah 6:9-13. *What do we learn about Isaiah's mission, the people he is speaking to, and the future from this passage?*

3) Isaiah 42:3 emphasizes the gentleness of God's Servant/Jesus. *Talk about people you know who are like a "bruised reed" or a smoldering wick". What does it mean that Jesus deals with them in gentleness and sympathy (Hebrews 4:14-16)? How can we represent Jesus in the lives of these people?*

#### **Week 19** (May 14 - May 20) - Song of Songs

1) Do you have a favorite love song? If so, what is it and why?

2) The Song of Songs is jam-packed with images and metaphors that represent some aspect of the couple's relationship. Scan the book, and pick out an image that you are interested in. What does the image represent? What does it express?

*Can you think of an image that would express something about your relationship to your spouse (or a friend)?*

3) How has the church community been helpful or not helpful in talking about sexuality? You can talk about your church experiences in the past, or your current experience, or both!

4) What can our church family do to encourage a positive, attractive, and God-honoring view of human sexuality? Think of this in terms of our young people, but also those of us in all stages of life.

#### **Week 18** (May 7 - May 13) - Psalm 49

1) Are you a patient person? Why or why not?

2) Psalm 49 calls for patience in dealing with difficult trials/evil days. How hard is it to endure during difficult days?

3) Jesus calls us to think differently when it comes to "fixing" the world - instead of vengeance, He calls for radical love (walking the extra mile, etc.). Is this easy or hard for you?

4) How can we develop patience and endurance in our lives?

## **April 2023**

#### **Week 17** (April 30 - May 6) - Ecclesiastes

1) Think of a "dark" book you've read, or movie you have watched. Did you enjoy it? What was good or bad about it?

2) The writer of Ecclesiastes sees "meaninglessness", *hevel* --"smoke, vapor" (Hebrew) wherever he looks in life.

\* Scan the book and list some of the areas of life he talks about. Which of these areas have you especially noticed, or struggled with in life?

3) Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-14. What key ideas stand out to you in these verses?

\* What "season" of life do you see yourself in right now?

4) The "fear of the LORD" is the underlying principle for all real wisdom, for all of life (Proverbs 1:7, Ecclesiastes 12:13).

\* Are there spheres or compartments of your life in which you find you are less inclined to include God--whether intentionally or unintentionally?

#### **Week 16** (April 23 - April 29) - Proverbs

1) **Here's a fun way to start thinking about Proverbs:** Pick a proverb or saying (nonbiblical) that is significant to you and tell how it has contributed to your life.

1. A penny saved is a penny earned.
2. Haste makes waste.
3. Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today.
4. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
5. The difficult can be done right away; the impossible takes a little longer.
6. You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.
7. A place for everything and everything in its place.
8. He who laughs first laughs last.
9. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
10. Two heads are better than one but one face is better than two.

2) What do you think the writer means when he says that the "fear of the LORD" is the "**beginning**" of knowledge/wisdom?

3) Of the areas of life that Proverbs speaks to--work, marriage, sexuality, relationships with neighbors, use of the tongue, friendship, finances, leadership, emotional intelligence, etc. -- what is one area you would like to gain wisdom in right now, and why?

4) Proverbs is basically a call to the young to choose a life of faith in God. Share someone who you would like to see make this decision. If you are in a group, pray for these people.

#### **Week 15** (April 16 - April 22) - Job

1) *What is your favorite type of music, and why? What does song/poetry add to our lives?*

2) Share some of the sources that you have used to gain "wisdom" during your life. Could be people, education, books, circumstances, etc. (Be specific: names, authors, classes)

3) The story of Job speaks to the idea that God operates a direct cause-effect world--good things happen to good people; bad things happen to bad people.

\* This is an almost universal mindset. *In what ways is it true? In what ways is it an insufficient way of looking at life?*

4) In chapters 38-41 God dramatically establishes the fact that we cannot begin to comprehend the complexity of the universe, and human life, let alone hope to control it! Yet, He does comprehend and control it.

\* The challenge, then, for us is to let go of the need to understand and control, and to trust Him. *Are there areas of life in which you find this difficult to do?*

5) *What personal lessons do you take away from the story of Job?*

#### **Week 14** (April 9 - April 15) - Esther



1) What do you make of the fact that God is never mentioned in the book of Esther?

*\* Have you ever experienced a "series of coincidences" that, looking back on, you could see how God was in control of?*

2) Esther's uncle, Mordecai, told her that she may have been put in her position specifically so that she could intervene at that moment in the lives of her people.

*\* Share what you think your key role or roles are right now in the lives of the people around you.*

3) The book of Esther tells the story of a "great reversal"--much like the "great reversal" that occurred when Jesus was crucified ... and then rose from the dead!

*\* How do these two stories compare? In what ways is Easter far greater than the story of Esther?*

*\* Are there circumstances in your life, or perhaps in the life of friends or church family members, that look quite dark, but that you can still believe that God is at work in behind the scenes?*

### **Week 13** (April 2 - April 8) - Psalm 79

1) Jerusalem is in shambles and so is the psalmist.

*\* Can you relate to a similar time in your life where everything seemed to have gone wrong? How did you eventually handle it? What worked well and what did not?*

2) What do you think about the three steps of a) confession (if needed), b) looking for what God is trying to teach you (discipline) and c) testing - as possible sources of "figuring it out" in a time of upheaval?

3) The psalmist is finally able to settle into a place of thanksgiving and praise in the midst of a terrible scene.

*\* How realistic is this for you? What are the barriers for you to attain this step? Is it a lost cause?*

## **March 2023**

### **Week 12** (March 26 - April 1st) - Ezra & Nehemiah

1) Ezra and Nehemiah are about the people of Israel being allowed to return home from exile in Babylon.

*\* Can you think of a time when you returned to a place after some time away? In what ways was it pleasing? In what ways was it disappointing?*

*\* Have you ever been involved in a "rebuilding" project? How did you go about it?*

2) Read Ezra 9:8-9. List and talk about the various ways that these two verses refer to God's goodness to the exiles.

*\* Have you experienced a time when you have been through difficulty and discovered an "brief moment" of grace when God gave you the chance to start new and grow in some area of your life and faith?*

*\* Is there an area of your life right now in which Christ wants you to depend on Him in a fresh way?*

3) The term, "exile" actually became a positive aspect of Jewish identity after Babylon. *How does the word "exile" still describe us as followers of Christ in today's world? What might it mean for the way we live?*

### **Week 11** (March 19 - 25) - 1 & 2 Kings; 1 & 2 Chronicles

1) King Solomon is a picture of extremes: he seeks and is granted incredible wisdom (read 1 Kings 3), and, in his older age, he allows himself to turn away from Yahweh and even worship false gods. *How do you think this can happen? Are there precautionary steps we can take to protect ourselves from drifting away in our commitment to Christ?*

2) Review the story of "Elijah versus the prophets of Baal" (1 Kings 18), and the story of Elijah hiding in a cave (1 Kings 19).

*Elijah feels alone, and he feels that all that he has done as a prophet of Yahweh has been for nothing. How does God respond to Elijah? How does he respond to us when we are feeling like Elijah?*

3) Each of the kings in 1 & 2 Kings is evaluated either as, "... *And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done,*" or as, "*He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the ways of Jerobaom ...*".

*If an epitaph like this was written about you, can you think of someone you would want to be compared to (other than Jesus)? Why?*

#### **Week 10** (March 12 - 18) - 1 & 2 Samuel

1) 1 & 2 Samuel are about establishing kingship in Israel; ultimately they are about the role of human leadership in our lives. *Think of a leader you have appreciated in your life. Share who it was and what qualities made him/her a good leader.*

2) Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20. *Can we relate the guidelines God gives for kings to us in the leadership roles we have in our lives? What might that mean?*

3) Talk about some differences between Saul and David. *How would you want to be different from Saul? What qualities of David would you most like to reflect in your life?*

4) When the people of Israel ask for a king they are asking for someone who would provide a sense of security and safety in a scary world. *In what ways do we wrestle with the question of security in our lives? What scares you?*

*\* How do we learn to look to Jesus and trust God in the areas in which we feel insecure?*

#### **Week 9** (March 5 - 11) - Psalm 135

1) Have you ever been in doubt or distress during your spiritual life? How might reflection on instances of God's provision help you deal with the uncertainty of the present situation? How might such a prayer be worded?

2) Is the idea of worship being a "remembering" event new to you? What about the idea appeals to you? Is there something about it that's hard to put your arms around?

3) What steps can you take to make God's Name and Renown your life's desire?

## **February 2023**

#### **Week 8** (February 26 - March 4) - Ruth

1) Think of an "ordinary" person who you admired as a kid--a family friend, aunt, uncle, cousin, member of your church, etc. Tell us a little about them.

2) The book of Ruth has three main characters: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Which of these three characters do you most identify with and why?

*\*Discuss the qualities that you see in each main character.*

3) The value that is at the heart of the story of Ruth is "hesed" faithfulness--covenant loyalty, love, commitment to one another. What might this kind of covenant faithfulness look like in our church? Give some possible examples of living this way with one another.

4) The story of Ruth comes across as a small town story of ordinary people. How does 4:17, and the genealogy of 4:18-22 change the scope of the story?

*\*How can seeing ourselves and our stories as part of a much bigger story change our perspectives, and maybe even the way we live?*

#### **Week 7** (February 19 - 25) - Judges

1) Who is (or was, when you were a kid) your favorite superhero, and why?

2) As you think of the various Judges--Othniel, Ehud, Deborah/Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson--*what are some qualities that we see in them and can admire?*

*\*What flaws, weaknesses, sins do we see in these judges?*

3) Read Judges 2:7, and then 2:10. *How do you think it went so quickly from one condition to the other?*

*\*Can that happen today? How does it happen? What can/should we be doing to prevent it?*

4) Can you think of an area of your life in which you are tempted to "do what is right in your own eyes" rather than follow what Jesus says is right?

#### **Week 6** (February 12 - 18) - Joshua

1) Share about a PLACE that has been special to you in your life (for instance, Aunt Audrey's farm).

2) The book of Joshua is about Yahweh keeping His word to give the Promised Land to Israel.

*\*When you think of the perfect place—the promised land—what would it be like for you? Beaches, mountains, gardens, communities ...?*

3) There is a saying: the world is a bridge; we cross over it, but we don't build our houses upon it.

*\*Is it possible to be too attached to places in this world? If so, in what ways?*

*\*How can the places in this world that we love point us to greater realities that God has in store for us?*

#### **Week 5** (February 5 - 11) - Psalm 32

1) What are the similarities and differences between iniquity, rebellion (transgression) and sin? Can you think of examples from your own life?

2) Have you ever tried to hide a sin from God, or failed to own up to it...hoping it would "just go away"? What happened?

3) What are the two parts of repentance? Why are each important?

4) For reference, the seven penitential psalms are 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143. Try reading one the next time you repent of your sins to God. I'd love to hear about it!

## **January 2023**

#### **Week 4** (January 29 - February 4) - Deuteronomy

1) Fear: Yahweh had promised to take Israel into the land of Canaan, but in Numbers 13 and 14 the people refused to go because they were afraid. Fear is one of the greatest enemies of faith. *\*Can you tell a story of the battle between fear and faith in your own life?*

2) Consequences: Israel spent 40 years in the desert because of the decision they made in Numbers 14. *\*What are some of the decisions that we may make that have long-term effects on our lives? Have you seen good and bad examples of this? Share one.*

3) Passing on our faith: In Deuteronomy, Moses is basically appealing to the next generation to love and be faithful to Yahweh. *\*What strategies do you think are important in one generation passing on faith in Christ to another generation? How can you be part of this process in the lives of the people around you?*

*\*Something to think about: if you had the chance to give a final speech to your friends and family, what would you say?*

#### **Week 3** (January 22 - 28) - Leviticus

1) Have you ever read through Leviticus? If so, what did you think about the book, and if you haven't ever read it, why not?

*\*Take some time Monday-Wednesday of this week to read the book in light of the sermon and see if it makes more sense.*

2) Why is holiness important for God's people? (Hint: Remember Israel's vocation.)

*\*Three people die in Leviticus because they violated the holiness of God; does that make you comfortable or uncomfortable?*

3) We are justified (saved) before God because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Yet holiness is commanded in the New Testament - "Everything we are to do is to be holy before the Lord; we are to "Be holy because I am holy" (I Peter 1:15-16 (taken from Leviticus 19:2)).

*\*What is your motivation to be holy if you are already saved?*

## **Week 2** (January 15 - 21) - Exodus & Numbers

1) What stories are you familiar with, or have you heard of, from the book of Exodus?

*\*What parts of these stories do you enjoy? Are there parts of these stories that bother you or confuse you? Which parts and why?*

*\*If you could go back in time and experience one of the stories in Exodus, which one would it be and why?*

2) Moses is the central human character in this part of the Bible. What is Moses like in these stories? In what ways would you want to be like him? And in what ways would you want to be different?

3) One of the clearest themes in the story so far is the weakness of the human heart--the difficulty in trusting God, even when He has repeatedly proven Himself.

*\*Can you think of times you have doubted God in the little picture, and later seen how He has been at work in the bigger picture?*

**EXTRA CREDIT:** God's personal name is Yahweh. Why is Jesus given the "name that is above every name", that is, the name of Yahweh, in Philippians 2:9?

## **Week 1** (January 8 - 14) - Genesis

1) Human beings are created in the "image" of God. Limiting your observations to Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15, what does the image of God consist of?

*\*What are some ways we can live out the image of God in our daily lives?*

2) In Genesis 11 human beings are using technology (brick-making) to try to assert themselves and become great. In what ways can human technology be dangerous for us today?

3) How is Genesis 50:20, "What you intended for evil, God meant for good...", summarize the stories of Genesis? The Bible?

*\*Have you seen God work this way at times? Turning evil/bad things into something good? Can you share a story?*

*\*How can this principle change the way that we look at the world, and our circumstances?*