

Marks

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

of Discipleship

September 1, 2019

Day 1: Deuteronomy 34:1

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land:

It has now been 40 years and two generations since leaving Egypt. Moses has been summoned to another Mt. to receive some instructions from God. Before God speaks Moses has some time to look carefully at the land. The land is the symbol of God's promise to Abraham - that Abraham's offspring would be like the stars of the heavens. There are times in history when we see the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. There are times when we are in the middle of a chapter. Moses has been in the beginning of God's salvation, in the middle of it, and now at its completion. Our salvation begins when we accept Christ as Lord. It continues through our life and it is complete when we join the saints above.

Question: Can you find the modern place of Mt. Nebo on a map?

Challenge: When was your mountain top experience when God showed you either the future or just a moment of hope?

Scripture: Exodus 1:1-2:22

Day 2: Deuteronomy 34:2-4

Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. The Lord said to him, ‘This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, “I will give it to your descendants”; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.’

I have always wondered if Moses was surprised at God saying, “you will not go there,” because God had him lead the people to so many strange places for so long. I believe God gave a blessing to Moses by letting him see the future. He saw not just the bare land but he saw the people he had led building homes and raising their children. He saw the people free to worship God.

Question: What is the “western sea” and what important city is not mentioned?

Challenge: Now find the various places mentioned in the verse.

Day 3: Deuteronomy 34:5-7

Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

The period of mourning gives people the time to move the reality of their loved ones death from their head to their heart. It gives time to say goodbye and to prepare for the future. It is healthy to recall the parts of the person's life with other people to help us. God gives us the gift of memory so that we can take with us into the future what we need and leave behind memories that will not help us. Too many today want to “get on with it” without taking the time to really say goodbye.

Question: Why do you think such an important person's burial place is not known today?

Challenge: Think of when you had to say goodbye. What is the healthiest way to say goodbye?

Scripture: Exodus 7

Day 4: Deuteronomy 34:9

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The reason for saying goodbye is to say hello to the future. The Israelites wanted to go back to slavery every time the going was hard and scary. Life moves us to the future and we need to be reminded that God is preparing a way for us to go. Moses passes on his power to lead to Joshua. Our leadership is not successful until we pass on our power to the next person.

Question: Who in the Bible does not seem to have a father?

Challenge: How can you bless someone today?

Scripture: Exodus 11:1-12:17

Day 5: Deuteronomy 34:10

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

Moses could see God because he approached God with a willingness to serve. He was reluctant but still willing. God only asks us to be willing, not to accumulate a bunch of skills before starting His work. God will add to our efforts to bring about His will. We are called to be faithful, not successful. It is God who is successful, not us.

Question: When did Moses see God face to face?

Challenge: Take a look at yourself and see how willing you are to serve.

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-21

Day 6: Deuteronomy 34:11-12

He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

It is Joshua who now leads the people on the final part of the journey. He gets to see and experience God's salvation being completed. It is a familiar storyline in the Bible that one does a lot of the difficult work and the next one receives the benefits. Saul worked hard all his life to secure the country and David received the benefit. John the Baptist prepared the people to hear someone else. God will give us a role to play and as long as we faithfully play that role we will be honored. I am mindful of the 11th chapter in Hebrews where the writer tells us of all those who finished their course in faith without seeing the promise (Jesus). He says how fortunate we are and how grateful we ought to be for their faithfulness. Because we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses we ought to run our portion of the race so that others coming behind us will also find life in Christ.

Question: Can you recall 5-7 of the signs that Moses did in the sight of Pharaoh and Israel?

Challenge: This week think about how God displays power today.

Scripture: Exodus 35:1-29

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September 8, 2019

Day 1: Isaiah 60:1

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you."

With each new dawn we have new possibilities. The night is not a fearsome thing on its own, it is because we cannot see very well and things at night look different than in daytime that we find the night menacing. Darkness always represents chaos and uncertainty. We feel better when we can see what is going on around us. In Isaiah's time there were no street lights. The only illumination at night came from the moon and stars. Dawn was (and is) a sign that God has not forgotten his people and has given us a new day. God created light so that when we see light we automatically feel closer to God.

Question: Do you find more inspiration from a sunrise or sunset?

Challenge: Try to see one or more sunrises this week and greet the new day with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Scripture: Isaiah 54:1-17

Day 2: Isaiah 60:2

"See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you."

When others are in darkness the Lord has chosen the people of Israel to shine as a light to the nations. Isaiah is trying to encourage the exiles to go back to their homeland. Isaiah is telling them that God has not abandoned them but rather chastised them for past sins. God may be angry for a moment but His love lasts forever (Jeremiah 31:2-4). If they go back to their land and live as faithful people then they will be the light of God to the nations.

Question: If the author is not talking about physical darkness as in night time, what is he talking about?

Challenge: Think about why the sunrise is like God's glory shining on you.

Scripture: Exodus 24

Day 3: Isaiah 60:3

"Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

All of the various nations of the world will be drawn to Jerusalem because it will shine so brightly that people will want to see the light. When the wise men saw the star they went first to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is to be

a city where God's mercy could be experienced, where God's law is followed cheerfully, and where God's presence can be felt by all who live there. Jerusalem, and by extension all of the people of Israel were to be a sign of hope to the world - a sign that God will redeem all of creation from the pain and fear of death.

Question: Do you think Jerusalem has lived up to what God wanted?

Challenge: Think about a time when you felt the presence of God. What was taking place and can you reproduce that experience?

Scripture: Psalm 112

Day 4: Isaiah 60:4

"Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm."

Along with the leading persons of the nations coming to Jerusalem, all those who had been forced to leave will also come. The sons and daughters are the children of those who were taken into captivity. Isaiah means that Jerusalem will be once again a place where others find inspiration and hope. Jerusalem is more than a physical city, it is a sign of hope. It is a place where peace, justice and mercy are found. The concepts of justice and peace are fine ideas but without a physical manifestation they do not on their own have the power to instill hope.

Question: Do you think the author is speaking figuratively or is this something he is seeing? Why?

Challenge: What would for you be a physical manifestation of hope?

Scripture: Isaiah 52

Day 5: Isaiah 60:5

"Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come."

During Solomon's time Jerusalem (even though it was in the hills and inland) was a large trading city. A lot

of wealth flowed in and out of the city. Trade is different than tribute. Tribute is brought to appease a ruler or in fear of a powerful ruler. Tribute is designed not only to enrich the one receiving it, but to keep the giver in a state of poverty so they cannot gain power. Trade implies that two parties each receive what the other needs without one impoverishing the other. When the worship at the Temple became more giving tribute, God withdrew his protection for the nation. Nations will once again come to Jerusalem

when it uses the wealth it receives for God's work. The same is true in the 21st century. If we use our wealth for selfish reasons and not for God's work, our wealth will pass away.

Question: Why do you think the Bible asks that we give 10% of our wealth to God's work?

Challenge: You may spend a lot less on yourself than you think. Go ahead and see how much you spend on yourself in a week.

Scripture: Isaiah 59:1-22

Day 6: Isaiah 60:6

"Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD."

Wealth will come to a people to the degree that they will acknowledge God as the giver of all things and use what God has given them as God would have them use it. In the New Testament, Jesus (in the Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25:14-30) tells us that God's wealth will be given to those who will use it, not to those who will hoard it. In another place (Mark 8:36) Jesus said what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul. God will provide us with the wealth we need in both money and ideas if we will use it for God's purposes.

Question: Where else have you heard in the Bible of gold and incense being brought as a gift?

Challenge: How well are using the wealth that God has given you in money and time and talent?

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-7

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September 15, 2019

Day 1: Romans 8:12

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

All the New Testament books are written to believers - followers of Christ and ones who are “in Christ.” Romans, like Paul’s other letters, asks simply - to what do we owe our future? We do have a debt of gratitude to pay but to whom are we to pay it? The answer, Paul will go on to say, has great consequences for our future. If our debt is to God it means A certain way of living - if our debt is to good luck, our own brain or parents then another way of living comes into play.

Question: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you read the word “flesh”?

Challenge: Each day write a list of things you are grateful for. At the end of the week look over the list and offer a prayer of gratitude to God.

Scripture: Romans 8:1-17

Day 2: Romans 8:13

for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

When Paul uses the word “flesh” he means the customs demanded by the Jewish Law (especially circumcision). Paul does not think that those customs are bad for a person to follow, however they cannot make us part of the family of God. Following a healthy diet is very good for us; daily exercise will prolong our life, but these things will not make us part of the family of God. Paul believes following those Jewish customs will in fact take us further away from God. I knew a person with cancer that used natural remedies to cure the cancer. By the time they realized that chemo was needed it was too late for the chemo to do any good. If you wanted to go to San Diego from here it wouldn’t matter how good the mode of transportation was if it did not have you arrive in San Diego.

Question: Paul obviously does not mean something positive by the words “deeds of the body,” but what do you think he means?

Challenge: If we wanted to tell someone not to live according to the flesh what would tell them are “deeds of the body” today?

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-26

Day 3: Romans 8:14

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

If you did not look like your parents or much like others in your family, you might wonder if you were a member of that family. The longer we are around our family members especially the grandparents and cousins, we come to really believe we belong. There is a spirit that family members seem to share. If we believe and are baptized we are in Christ and if we are in Christ then we share the Spirit of Christ who is in God. As we share together in worship, prayer and Bible study we become more convinced that we truly belong.

Question: What is your first response to someone telling you that you are a child of God?

Challenge: How do we become part of our family? church? country?

Scripture: I John 2

Day 4: Romans 8:15

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’

We are not only in the family but we are inheritors from the Father. We inherit all the Father has through the Son. In Roman society it was through the father that one gained their inheritance. The inheritance we receive is eternal life. We are not born into God’s family but can all be adopted into that family.

Question: What does Abba mean?

Challenge: If God has granted you an inheritance of eternal life what will you give as a bequest to His church?

Scripture: II Corinthians 8:1-24

Day 5: Romans 8:16

it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

It is God who verifies that we are children of God. The Spirit of God communicates to us in various ways that say we are in the family of God. One of the reasons we believe that there is more to a person than flesh and bone is the fact that we can feel and experience something more than physical reality. We know that God is in the very core of our being. Those who say there is no God have to work to make that assertion. They have to overcome their own spirit to deny that God exists. Sometimes persons will assert that God cannot be because of a personal tragedy that they believe God should have prevented. If we listen we will see that our spirit is in communication with God’s spirit and that communication is saying “come home you are mine child.”

Question: Read John 3:8. Why does John compare the Spirit to the wind? Is it a good comparison?

Challenge: Think of a time you have really wondered if God is real. How did you make it through that time?

Scripture: Romans 1:1-32

Day 6: Romans 8:17

and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

With this verse Paul shifts to a new section of his letter. He will go on to say that if we suffer, our suffering is nothing compared to what will be our glory. His proof is Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead. He was dead but was given new life and a new body. We shall rise like He did in a new body to share in the inheritance with Him in glory. The cost of the inheritance is high. Paul tells us we will suffer. He also tells us that when we do suffer (as Jesus did) we are closer to Him. We will all die someday but our death is not defeat but victory. As Paul will say later in the letter to the Corinthians – “*Death has been swallowed up in victory.*” “*Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, where is your sting?*” *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

Question: What kind of suffering is Paul talking about?

Challenge: Think of someone or a group who is today suffering for the faith. Make a point to pray for them

Scripture: Romans 8:18-39

of Discipleship

September 22, 2019

Day 1: Job 2:11

Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him.

The friends of Job come to console and comfort him. This is a traditional expression of “being with” someone in their grief. The immediacy of their response to Job’s pain speaks well for them. There is a way to lessen the pain of grief if we can share it with others.

Question: What is your impression of the friends from this verse?

Challenge: Do a little research to see where the three friends came from.

Scripture: Job 1:1-2:11

Day 2: Job 2:12-13

When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

There was a woman whose husband had a bad heart attack that left him with 10% of his heart functioning. This caused great distress for her in that she was having trouble dealing with the physical demands of her husband's illness. She invited us to a family dinner where we saw how hard it was for her husband to participate. He had to go and rest often and generally had trouble doing things. He was not in pain but just could not get around. At first it was hard to understand why she would organize a family dinner in the midst of such distress. But as the evening went on Jolene and I began to understand their problems dealing with the illness in a way we could not have by just hearing about it. As we left the house and talked about the experience we realized that the woman needed others to know and really understand how bad their situation was. The only way to communicate that fact was to see him in what was a normal role of host and not able to come close to do what he loved doing so much. Our being there and living with her reality for a bit helped her to know she was heard. The response of the friends from weeping to throwing dust is meant to convey not only solidarity with the grieving person but to help the person know that their pain is understood.

Question: Why seven days?

Challenge: Today when we are confronted with very bad news weeping is considered a good release. What other ways have you seen that people have expressed grief?

Scripture: Genesis 50:1-14

Day 3: Job 3:1-3

After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. Job said: ‘Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, “A man-child is conceived.” ‘Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?’

Job first suffers in silence and that silence is respected by his friends. When he gives voice to his suffering it is jarring to hear him talk for he is saying that he wishes he was not born. Job is angry; however in his anger he does not curse God, but himself. If Job does not express his anger then it will turn rotten and bitter. If he had kept quiet we would have no hope in his story. What is hopeful about Job’s speech is that he is entering a phase of suffering that will lead to healing. Will his friends hear him and will we hear others we encounter that are suffering as they express their anger?

Day 3: continued

Question: Why does Job not curse God? Is he too pious, or afraid things will get worse, or what?

Challenge: Have you ever felt like Job? How did you get past it?

Scripture: Lamentations 1:1-17

Day 4: Job 4:1-2

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: ‘If one ventures a word with you, will it be too much? But who can keep from speaking?’

Before Job can answer, Eliphaz launches into his speech. Perhaps he believes he must speak because of the depth of Job’s distress. We often move to advice or encouragement too soon. I was amazed to hear a young girl in treatment saying she did not want her parents to forgive her too soon. Fortunately I did not say, “Why not? They love you.” but waited until she had finished. Her point was that if they forgave her past actions too soon it would make her efforts to be sober not important.

Without using the words she felt she needed to do penance.

Question: What is your impression of Eliphaz?

Challenge: Can you think of a time you expressed your feelings only to have them down played by the other person?

Scripture: Job 5:6-16

Day 5: Job 4:3-6

See, you have instructed many; you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have supported those who were stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?

Instead of listening to Job and hearing his pain Eliphaz launches into a lecture on the nature of God (as he sees it) and uses his past discussion with Job as proof that he is correct. He hints that somehow Job’s suffering is a consequence of foolish behavior.

Question: Do you think Eliphaz has ever had any trouble like Job? Why or why not?

Challenge: Give yourself a task this week to really listen to someone before you advise them.

Scripture: Job 4:7-5:5

Day 6: Job 5:17-19

‘How happy is the one whom God reproves; therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he binds up; he strikes, but his hands heal. He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no harm shall touch you.’

Eliphaz interprets Job’s suffering as a form of correction. His advice is to embrace that correction and give praise to God.

Question: Put yourself in Job’s place. What does this response feel like to you?

Challenge: Pick a time period when you were in distress. What did you find helpful?

Scripture: Job 5:20-27

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September 29, 2019

Day 1: Job 7:1-3

‘Do not human beings have a hard service on earth, and are not their days like the days of a day-laborer? Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like laborers who look for their wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me.

In these verses (1-6) Job describes not only his own condition but speaks for many who find themselves in such pain about life that they cannot see hope anywhere. The examples Job uses to describe his state are hard to listen to. Slaves are subject to someone else's power and will. The slave looks at time much differently than a free person. For a slave, their hope is that day will end and they can rest. A day-laborer's hope comes at the end of work when he is supposed to be paid (and many times is cheated by the one in charge). In both cases the only satisfaction is at the end of the work, not in the work itself.

Question: Do people have hard service on earth?

Challenge: Think about the most fulfilling job you have had. What made it fulfilling?

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Day 2: Job 7:4-6

When I lie down I say, “When shall I rise?” But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. 5 My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, and then breaks out again. 6 My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and come to their end without hope.

With the above compassion to a slave, a day-laborer and himself, Job is saying that his only satisfaction will be at the end of life - not during it. Verse 4 and 5 speak of the sores he was afflicted with that make it impossible to find rest at the end of day. A weaver's shuttle goes back and forth across the cloth mixing the thread into the cloth. It never gets anywhere - it just goes back and forth until it runs out of thread and then stops. This is how Job feels about his life in the absence of any hope. Time for Job is not a gift but a burden to bear.

Question: Where did the sores come from?

Challenge: Look about you this week for images of hope.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 2

Day 3: Job 7:20-21

If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth you will seek me, but I shall not be.’

To complete his lament Job wonders why his wrong was so bad that the current calamity was visited upon him. He questions God's choice of target because he knows that he has done no wrong. Job is like us when something bad happens to us that is totally unexpected and totally random. Even though our heads know it was not our fault still we will wonder if we did something wrong.

Question: Why do you think Job would assume he was the target of God's wrath and not just a random occurrence of bad luck?

Challenge: When have you felt like you were a “target” of God's wrath?

Scripture: Isaiah 50

Day 4: Job 8:1-3

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered: ‘How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?’

It seems that Job's friend passes over his pain and just hears Job's questioning of God. Bildad believes Job is questioning God's character (and maybe Job is!) and so he sets out to defend God. Bildad believes that Job is questioning two of the main truths of God's nature - God is *just* and *in the right*. Bildad's reasoning goes like this; God is always just so if this calamity happened to Job then there must have been something Job did that was wrong. Talk about goofy thinking!

Question: What does verse 3 have to do with Job's problems?

Challenge: Have you ever felt the need to “defend God”?

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9:7-12

Day 5: Job 8:4-7

If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression. If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place. Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.

Bildad's insensitivity goes further by stating that if the children were killed then they must surely have sinned. The fact that you, Job, are not dead means that your sin was not as great. Bildad loses his humanity in his desire to see the world according to a set of rules.

Question: What does “make supplication to the Almighty” mean? Does God work that way?

Challenge: How would you answer someone who believed that a person's sin has caused God to kill someone as punishment?

Scripture: Psalm 23

Day 6: Job 8:20-22

‘See, God will not reject a blameless person, nor take the hand of evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy. Those that hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more.’

The end of Bildad's speech sounds hopeful. He advises Job to accept that he is at fault. His advice is to wait and to praise God. Bildad's final words show how much he has not listened to Job. We must listen to people before we jump to offer advice or assurance that things will be better.

Question: Does this verse imply that God rejects the person who is at fault?

Challenge: How well do you listen to people before you give advice? How well do you listen in general?

Scripture: Isaiah 55