



**THE
BIBLE
PROJECT** 2020

Devotional

Jan. 1 – April 11

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WEEK ONE (JAN. 1–4)

Jan. 1, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 1:1–3:24d

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 2:4–18

Genesis 3:22: God says the serpent spoke the truth. Some of our hardest temptations aren't lies, but truths. Yes, we can take quick fixes to improve ourselves. But that's at the expense of longing, mystery, and uncertainty. It's part of the beauty of being human.

Jan. 2, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 4:1–5:32

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 3:1–23

Which Enoch will I be today? The descendant of Cain (Genesis 4:17) or the descendant of Seth (Genesis 5:22)?

Jan. 3, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 6:1–9:17

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 6:5–22; 9:20–27

God reboots creation. Many parallels here with Genesis 1-2, especially between 2:17 and 9:4, where humans have to again avoid the one forbidden thing. Except this time, God introduces something new to humans to help us out: Covenant. (9:9).

Jan. 4, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 9:18–11:32

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 11:1–9

Like Adam and Eve, Noah's nakedness is a metaphor for shame.

Like Cain, Ham is the sad recipient of his parents' shame, and becomes the ancestor of some of the Bible's worst antagonists. How can I keep shame from being passed on to my children?

Jan. 1–4, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Kacy Tillman

Genesis 9:18 is one of the most historically controversial verses of the Bible. This is the passage that tells the story of the time that Noah became inebriated and apparently took off all of his clothes. His son, Ham, witnessed the scene. When Noah realized that Ham had seen his shame, Noah cursed Canaan (Ham's son), saying he should be the "lowest of slaves . . . to his brothers." This singular passage, which came to be known as the "Curse of Ham," was the most often-cited verse supporting the system of slavery in the American Deep South in the 19th century; plantation owners who wanted to justify slavery interpreted it to mean that African-Americans were the sons of Ham, thus suggesting that the Bible had "cursed" them to be inferior for eternity. They argued that, because God ordained slavery, it must be an acceptable – even inevitable – institution. It took abolitionists nearly 45 years to overturn this notion, but the racist ideology it represents remains embedded in the fabric of our society today, dividing us still as it divided us then.

If we read this verse in context, we see that Genesis 9 – the story of Noah and Ham – connects with Genesis 11 – the fall of Babylon – and suggests a vastly different interpretation than it was once assumed to hold. The story of Babylon features brickmakers perfecting their new technology so that they might build a platform to the sky – so that they, too might become gods. Instead of building a more solid infrastructure for the betterment of their citizenry, they built . . . a really big wall. They were prideful and

vain – morally sloppy, like Noah, who had been given the chance to build a faithful community through his sons, but he chose to curse and divide them, instead. The early verses of Genesis show us time and again scenes in which God builds humans a paradise and gives them the reins to it, providing them the tools to work together to help each other out, only to have them royally muck it up.

The new poet laureate of the United States, Joy Harjo, a member of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation, offers a bit of advice about how to end the cycle Genesis outlines; this selection from “Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings” is her prayer:

*When we made it back home, back over those curved roads
that wind through the city of peace, we stopped at the
doorway of dusk as it opened to our homelands.
We gave thanks for the story, for all parts of the story
because it was by the light of those challenges we
knew ourselves—
We asked for forgiveness.
We laid down our burdens next to each other.*

WEEK TWO (JAN. 5–11)

Jan. 5, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 12:1–14:24

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 12:1–20

Stronger together. Both major crises occur when Abram dissolves unity. He subverts his marriage and brings shame to Egypt, then splits from Lot and endangers Lot’s life. Both are a metaphor: Fidelity with God, Unity with one another.

Jan. 6, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 15:1–17:27

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 15:1–11

Talking to God in the dark. Night is a recurring theme here. God meets Abram under the stars, talks to him in a nightmare, and confirms the covenant with flame at night. When I am feeling in the dark, God is closer to me than I even realize.

Jan. 7, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 18:1–20:18

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 16:1–15

Genesis 18:17-19: God chose not to hide from Abraham what was about to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah, in order to motivate him toward faithfulness. What injustice and sadness will I see today that might prompt me toward faithfulness and love?

Jan. 8, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 21:1–23:20

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 17:1–23

For the first time, we see human covenants: between Abraham and Abimelech (Philistine) and Abraham and Ephron (Hittite), representatives of two of the most hostile nations. How will I work for peace today, making covenants of reconciliation between hostile parties?

Jan. 9, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 24:1–25:18

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 27:1–17

Isaac's matchmaker. Abraham's servant had a mission to find a mate for Isaac. He was obedient (24:9), prayerful (24:12), and vigilant (24:21). If I am to be that servant today, who will I meet that can be drawn into an experience of God's love?

Jan. 10, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 25:19–28:9

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 27:18–40

Isaac repeats the deceit of his father Abraham in lying to Abimelech about his wife. Jacob learns from his mother how to deceive his father. These children not only inherit birthrights, but bad traits. What will my children learn from me?

Jan. 11, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 28:10–30:43

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 32:22–32

Jacob is tricked by his uncle, marries two of his cousins, has 12 kids by them and two servants, his wives hate each other, and he steals from his uncle: That's how we get the 12 tribes of Israel. Genesis families put the fun in dysfunction.

Jan. 5–11, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Nicki Taylor

Genesis 12 opens with God giving a blessing to Abram: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your

name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse,” (Genesis 12:2-3a, NRSV). I think it is really easy to get caught up in this – God has said he will make Abram great, and he will curse anyone who tries to curse Abram. It seems like a pretty sweet deal!

But, the end of verse 3 is an important reminder: “**and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed,**” (Genesis 12:3b, NRSV). Abram wasn’t just getting benefits from God, **he was being charged to use his life to bless the entire Earth!** Yikes!

This charge from God to bless the entire Earth still stands. We are called to make God’s love and blessing real to a hurting world. This charge, while daunting, is not impossible. **We all are given opportunities to make God’s love real in the world every day.** We can show kindness and patience to our loved ones, choose not to curse the person who cuts us off in traffic, and find ways to offer our gifts to organizations that are blessing those that are hurting, like our Open Arms homeless ministry or Metropolitan Ministries. We all have the ability and charge to be a blessing to the entire Earth. How will you choose to do it?

Today, pray for persons in Tampa Bay experiencing homelessness.

WEEK THREE (JAN. 12–18)

Jan. 12, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 31:1–36:43

Abbreviated Plan: Genesis 33:1–15

Going to make a T-shirt to wear for when my girls bring boyfriends home. Genesis 31:50: “If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters ... remember that God is witness between you and me.”

Jan. 13, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 37:1–41:57

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 1:1–22; 2:1–10

Young Joseph was bratty and boastful, and the his hardships could have made him hardened and bitter. But God did something in him in the pit and prison. I might only see the immediate struggle, but God can see new life in me over the long haul.

Jan. 14, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 42:1–45:28

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 3:1–22

Somehow Joseph found it in himself to forgive his brothers, and in so doing helped them reconcile with each other (“Do not quarrel along the way.” Genesis 45:24). A single act of forgiveness can spark healing for wider circles of people.

Jan. 15, 2020

Full Plan: Genesis 46:1–50:26

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 11:1–10; 12:21–30

Jacob and his family are “aliens” who are given asylum in a foreign land. Despite the Egyptians’ antipathy to foreigners, they welcome them into their borders. Jacob then “adopts” Joseph’s Egyptian sons as his own. Stories of true hospitality and love.

Jan. 16, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 1:1–4:31

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 12:31–42

Moses, like Joseph before him, searches for who he is: a slave raised in royalty, then an Egyptian in Midian, then a fugitive called to be a Hebrew liberator. He is lost until he meets I AM. The first one liberated in Exodus is Moses himself.

Jan. 17, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 5:1–7:13

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 13:1–16

The poor are not lazy. Apparently this line has been used since the days of Pharaoh (5:17) It is injustice that keeps people down, not their character. That injustice broke the Israelites’ spirit (6:9) and made them unable to hope.

Jan. 18, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 7:14–12:30

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 13:17–22; 14:5–31

God knew Pharaoh wouldn’t change. So the plagues were not about convincing him, but about emboldening Moses and the

broken-hearted Hebrews (11:3). It's not about God overcoming Pharaohs today, but about God encouraging me to stand up to them.

Jan. 12–18, 2020: Weekly Devotion by the Rev. Bernie Lieving

The third chapter of Exodus tells of Moses' encounter with God while shepherding his father-in-law's sheep. He saw a burning bush not being consumed, and like any of us would do, he said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why it is not burned up." God called to him and Moses responded. God told him, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." What made the ground holy was the presence of "...the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

As a pastor, I do not hear God declaring as holy ground where I stand behind the altar to consecrate Holy Communion elements or beside the baptismal font to place the baptismal water on an infant's head. I just know that God is there as the bread and cup become for us the body and blood of Jesus and as God claims the baptized infant as one of God's children, calling the child by name. Yet, those places are holy ground.

There are many other places I have stood where I knew I was on holy ground; not because God declared them as such; because from deep inside myself I hear other voices. That happens when I visit any one of the six West Virginia cemeteries where family members are buried. I remember words spoken to me by my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and many others and I celebrate their lives and the influence their Christian faith had

on me. Each time I stand in front of the Vietnam Wall where my friend Bob Carroll's name is etched, I remember his words as he shepherded me into being the chaplain for six hundred combat soldiers. Those places are holy ground.

We all need our holy ground places; where we are aware of God's presence or the influence of faithful people. Where is holy ground for you? Is it where you do your daily devotional reading and praying? Is it where you watch a sunrise or sunset? Is it where you hand a Manna Bag to one of God's children? It is where you work to nurture God's creation? Is it where you are reminded of God's love as a friend touches you in word or deed? Today be aware of holy ground.

Prayer focus: Those in need of holy ground in their daily routines.

WEEK FOUR (JAN. 19–25)

Jan. 19, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 12:31–15:21

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 15:1–21

Life isn't filled with daily Red Sea miracles. But it does have clouds by day and pillars of fire by night. Steady, reliable reminders of God's presence. Anxious Israelites only had to watch for those when they needed encouragement. We can too.

Jan. 20, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 15:22–18:27

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 16:1–30

Mt. Horeb is a special place: God’s burning bush, God’s still, small voice to Elijah, and here, God’s fresh water for complaining Israelites. Horeb means “glowing heat,” which is a way to describe God’s presence, available throughout our lives.

Jan. 21, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 19:1–21:36

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 19:1–9

So many of the laws in Exodus 21 seem antiquated and irrelevant today. But they do remind us that being God’s people means treating others with respect and fairness. A good reminder for the day after Martin Luther King Day.

Jan. 22, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 22:1–24:18

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 20:1–17

God promises brighter days ahead, but in increments, not fell swoops (Exodus 23:29-30). God clears the obstacles for joy gradually, rather than all at once, so that we can develop the disciplines to live into that joy rather than get in the way.

Jan. 23, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 25:1–27:21

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 24:1–18

As elaborate and impressive as the Tabernacle was, it came entirely from material the Israelites had on hand. (25:1-7) I might focus on my shortcomings, but God has already given me everything I need to build God's kingdom on earth.

Jan. 24, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 28:1–30:38

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 25:1–9

Here are 117 verses of explicit instructions on what the priests were to wear and do. It may feel like lots of trivial tedium. But it reminds us that God is pleased by the rhythm and consistency of our spiritual disciplines.

Jan. 25, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 31:1–34:35

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 32:1–35

Exodus 32:14 The Lord changed his mind might offer an unsettling view of God, but it is a liberating view of prayer. Moses and God could talk to each other as friends (33:11). It means God listens, and can be convinced by our prayers.

Jan. 19–25, 2020: Weekly Devotion by John Dormois

As the name of the book indicates, the central feature of Exodus is the escape and wandering of the Israelites from the bondage in Egypt. The final event that forced Pharaoh to allow this migration has been immortalized in the Jewish tradition through the celebration of Passover.

The escape from Egypt fulfilled the second covenant between God and the Israelites: the promise made to Abraham of a land for his descendants. Covenants (a form of contract or promise) are very important in the Jewish tradition. The first followed the great flood (God swore to never again eradicate life on Earth), the second to Abraham and the third occurred with Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Covenants come with rules and responsibilities (evidenced by the ten commandments passed down at Sinai). Unfortunately, the Israelites were not a happy bunch of campers in the wilderness given the lack of good water and food. Frustrated by the circumstances, the people grew tired of waiting for Moses and his discussions with God and built a golden idol to worship instead. Moses had to plead with God not to destroy the unfaithful.

Jesus proposed a new covenant. How central is that to your life? Are you sometimes tempted to substitute a metaphorical golden calf - whether that is money, success, pride, or something else?

Prayer: May we remain mindful of our covenantal relationship with you, O God, and may it always be reflected in our concern and care for others.

WEEK FIVE (JAN. 26 – FEB. 1)

Jan. 26, 2020

Full Plan: Exodus 35:1–40:28

Abbreviated Plan: Exodus 40:1–38

Exodus closes with God smacking Pharaoh one last time. No

matter what the Israelites built for Pharaoh, it was nothing compared to the grandeur and beautiful detail of the Tabernacle. When God's people work together, amazing things can happen.

Jan. 27, 2020

Full Plan: Leviticus 1:1–4:35

Abbreviated Plan: Leviticus 1:1–17

The sacrificial system seems so antiquated, especially with the gory details. But it's a reminder that God requires my very best, even when things are going well. Discipleship is in the little things done well, consistently.

Jan. 28, 2020

Full Plan: Leviticus 5:1–7:38

Abbreviated Plan: Leviticus 10:1–20

Leviticus is about mulligans. Do-overs. About acknowledging when we mess up, and having the chance to start over. The sacrifice imagery seems antiquated, but the main idea is still true: God offers us chances to get it right, and make it right.

Jan. 29, 2020

Full Plan: Leviticus 8:1–10:20

Abbreviated Plan: Leviticus 16:1–34

Aaron goes from the high of God's holy calling to the low of God's holy wrath and the death of his sons. His silent reaction (10:3) is haunting. Ministry is high reward and high cost, joy and grief. In that silence, we wrestle with God.

Jan. 30, 2020

Full Plan: Leviticus 11:1–14:57

Abbreviated Plan: Leviticus 25:1–22

The purity laws remind us that 1) sin is pervasive, 2) it requires vigilance to detect and avoid, and 3) God's grace can cleanse us through repentance, ritual, and the love of community.

Jan. 31, 2020

Full Plan: Leviticus 15:1–18:30

Abbreviated Plan: Leviticus 25:23–55

Aaron releases the scapegoat into the wilderness with the people's sins, still haunted by the sins of his sons. May I experience God's forgiveness like a scapegoat: my sins cast far and out of sight, and may I forgive others in the same way.

Feb. 1, 2020

Full Plan: Leviticus 19:1–23:44

Abbreviated Plan: Leviticus 26:1–20

I don't need to be perfect for God to love me. I need to love God because God is perfect. And that means offering to God my very best.

Jan. 26–Feb. 1, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Sue Wellner

EXODUS 35:1 - 40:38 – Rest on the Sabbath, Tabernacle Construction

LEVITICUS 1:1 - 4:35 – Instructions for offerings (Burnt, Grain, Peace, Sin)

LEVITICUS 5:1 - 7:38 – More instructions for offerings (Sin, Guilt, Peace)

LEVITICUS 8:1 - 10:20 – Instructions for the priests

LEVITICUS 11:1 - 14:57 – Instructions for the health of the people

LEVITICUS 15:1 - 18:30 – Instructions for the altar

LEVITICUS 19:1 - 23:44 – Standards for the people; Seasons and Festivals

This week we are looking at how God set about separating His chosen people, the Hebrews, from the peoples and cultures that would surround them once they arrive in Canaan.

Moses has just led them out of Egypt after 400 years of living within that culture. Now they need to learn what it means to be the people of God and how to “live in the world” without “being of the world.” They must accept that the pagan practices with which they are familiar, including the worshiping of multiple gods, will not be their life from this point forward.

To make that point, God provides them with a series of very specific rules and requirements for their lives, including how to make his home (The Tabernacle) so that he can live with them. He gives them a moral code for living within the family and with others, how to identify and treat diseases that could kill them, what sacrifices are required to atone for their sins and what constitutes an acceptable offering. He gives them annual celebrations, and how to enter into relationship with Him. **While we may believe that these passages have little value for us today, there is much to be found in the underlying themes that applies to us.**

The first is that God gave the rules for the benefit of His people. They were not to oppress the Hebrews, but to guide them in living healthy physical and spiritual lives. They were needed to break old patterns of behavior and establish new ones.

The second is that God wanted to LIVE WITH his people. The instructions for obtaining the materials for the Tabernacle and

its construction were designed to ensure that the giving of personal treasure, be it materials, skills or time, was done from a willing heart. This allowed the people to welcome God into their midst, rather than Him forcing them to accept Him.

The third is that God demonstrated his love through the rules and guidance He provided. Not only did He make provision for His people to draw near to him, but he gave them the option to turn away...making their, and our, willingness to follow a cornerstone of relationship with him.

So, as you move through your week, focus on the level of willingness within your heart. Do you give gladly of your treasure (material wealth, time, skills)? Do your feet willingly walk the path that God has set before you, and your hands joyfully perform the tasks you have been called to do? Is each act, however mundane, offered up as an act of worship? Do you set aside time to rest in the Lord? He told His people to rest on the Sabbath so that their, and our, bodies and minds could be re-energized and find peace, and most importantly...so that we take time to deepen our personal relationship with God.

Prayer: God, help me to willingly learn and apply these lessons from Leviticus in my life this week.

WEEK SIX (FEB. 2–8)

Feb. 2, 2020

Full Plan: Leviticus 24:1–27:43

Abbreviated Plan: Leviticus 26:40–46

If only sabbath, sabbatical years, and jubilee were more observed in today's world. It would renew our energies, restore our land and economies, and repair our relationships.

Feb. 3, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 1:1–4:49

Abbreviated Plan: Numbers 1:1–2; 5:1–10

Team work makes God's dream work. Each Levite had a vital role to play to ensure the worship of God. Thank God for the ministry of the people in the church, all sharing in the responsibility of accomplishing the mission.

Feb. 4, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 5:1–7:89

Abbreviated Plan: Numbers 10:11–13; 11:1–33

The benediction I learned as a youth: "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26)

Feb. 5, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 8:1–10:36

Abbreviated Plan: Numbers 12:1–16

Numbers 9 reminds us of what God has done in our shared past (Passover) and what God can do in our shared future (Cloud and Fire). The spiritual life is a dynamic tension between remembering and following.

Feb. 6, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 11:1–14:45

Abbreviated Plan: Numbers 13:1–3; 26–33

Nearly every hard emotion is in this reading: discontentment, sadness, jealousy, fear and anger. Some of those emotions even come from God! It reminds us that every close relationship has bad days. Even the life of faith has dark nights of the soul.

Feb. 7, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 15:1–18:32

Abbreviated Plan: Numbers 14:1–25

The offerings were mainly for praising God and confessing to God. But the people wanted personal access, the ability to make requests directly of God. The fact that we can do that today should humble us, not make us feel entitled.

Feb. 8, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 19:1–21:35

Abbreviated Plan: Numbers 20:2–13; 27:12–23

It's easy to sympathize with the thirsty, desperate Israelites in their quarrel with God at Meribah. God provided, only after reminding them they weren't God. Quarrels with God are natural and permissible, if we remember we aren't God.

Feb. 2–8, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Martha Chamberlain

In the Wilderness

Are we there yet? I'm hungry! This is the wrong way.
Turn back!

Picture the nation of Israel in the back seat of the car with Moses driving, following the GPS directions of the most holy God, and you have an image of the Book of Numbers. After a detailed census of the tribes (hence the book's name), Numbers gives us God's very specific instructions on how the Israelites are to honor and obey him on the journey to the land he has promised them (*Numbers 1-10*).

It's all pretty clear, really. Honor, trust, and obey God, and he will take care of you, Israel. Remember God is holy and God is faithful.

But soon, doubts and fears arise among the Israelites. They're tired. The journey is long. Manna, manna every day--they want meat to eat (*Numbers 11*)! Rebellious leaders challenge Moses and even God's promises (*Numbers 12*). Fears overpower them (*Numbers 13*). Their lack of faith dishonors God, repeatedly, and they suffer for it.

Isn't that our story, too? In the wilderness times of our lives, are we like the Israelites? Do we ask God to give us what we want, without gratitude for what he has already provided? Do we rely on our problem-solving skills and our will, rather than seeking his guidance? Do we let our fear overcome our faith?

In Numbers, God administers justice with mercy for Israel's sins. He is faithful to his promises to Israel, as he is faithful to each of us. In the wilderness times in our lives, we can trust that. We can

trust God.

Prayer theme: Pray that you may learn to trust God in the wilderness.

WEEK SEVEN (FEB. 9–15)

Feb. 9, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 22:1–25:18

Abbreviated Plan: Numbers 32:6–42

The story of Balaam and Balak reminds us that prayer is neither selective hearing or selective speaking. We must be open to receiving from God what we don't want to hear. And, we must be faithful to say what we are reluctant to say.

Feb. 10, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 26:1–31:54

Abbreviated Plan: Deuteronomy 6:1–25

Moses not being allowed to enter the Promised Land can seem like a cruel irony. But he was at least given a remarkable consolation prize. The view of the land from afar, the ability to see a future he could not claim, but that he helped carve.

Feb. 11, 2020

Full Plan: Numbers 32:1–36:13

Abbreviated Plan: Deuteronomy 8:1–20

God ordered nothing less than the complete conquest of Canaan. Likewise, God wants nothing less than the complete spiritual makeover of our lives and the world. Any remaining injustice or sin

is a “thorn in the side.” (Numbers 33:55-56)

Feb. 12, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 1:1–4:49

Abbreviated Plan: Deuteronomy 28:1–24; 64–68

Deuteronomy may have been written in part during the Exile. So, when my life and the world around me seem in exile, far removed from what it can and should be, Deuteronomy reminds me of this: stay faithful. (4:3)

Feb. 13, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 5:1–8:20

Abbreviated Plan: Deuteronomy 29:9–29

Jesus, like the Israelites, was tested in the wilderness. This Deuteronomy reading contains all three of his responses to the devil. (5:9, 6:16, 8:3) Jesus drew strength from God’s faithfulness, just as God had instructed the Israelites.

Feb. 14, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 9:1–12:32

Abbreviated Plan: Deuteronomy 30:1–20

God knew that the spoils of victory could make the Israelites forgetful and boastful. Change for the better can be as challenging to the spiritual life as change for the worse. My faith is tested in the good times and in the bad.

Feb. 15, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 13:1–16:22

Abbreviated Plan: Deuteronomy 31:1–8; 14–29

The law required putting to death those who would sway us from God. Super harsh. But it is language that Paul uses in Colossians 5. “Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” God takes seriously that which lures us away.

Feb. 9–15, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Jayne Cabigas

The Greatest Commandment

Scripture is chock full of commandments and regulations. Some are very culturally bound and outdated; others are timeless. Some help us function as a society: do not kill or steal. Others help us respect one another: honor your parents and don't commit adultery. Some help us treat God with reverence: don't curse in God's name and honor the sabbath. But the greatest commandment is this: Love God with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength.

That's really all that God wants from us. Love God. Love God's creation. All the time with all our might. In fact, if we do this, the greatest commandment, we don't really need any other rules.

This sounds so simple, but is so hard to do, so God also calls us to remind ourselves about this rule all the time. Put this commandment on post-it notes all over your house to remind you when brushing your teeth or getting a glass out of the cupboard. Teach your children to love and talk about it all the time. This will lead us to hold each other accountable and challenge each other to love more. Put it on your keys so you are reminded to love while

driving or once you get to work. Surround yourself with people who will push and encourage you to love more fully.

It's human nature to find a shortcut or exception to the rule. We rationalize that our action or inaction don't really make a difference in the larger scheme of things. But God wants our full effort 24/7, making God's love real everywhere, all the time.

Pray this today: Help me to love you, God, with all my heart, with all my mind and with all my strength. Help me to love when I'm tired or depleted. Help me to find joy and connection in serving. Remind me that love is all I need and all I have to give. Amen.

WEEK EIGHT (FEB. 16–22)

Feb. 16, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 17:1–20:20

Abbreviated Plan: Deuteronomy 34:1–12

For the first time we hear about kings and prophets, further evidence that Deuteronomy was written during the monarchy and exile. Neither office supersedes God. We must never trust earthly rulers to give us what only God can provide.

Feb. 17, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 21:1–25:19

Abbreviated Plan: Joshua 1:1–18; 2:1–24

Today's reading is filled with laws that seem entirely archaic and antiquated. It's impossible to imagine taking them all literally today, which is a reminder that faithful Bible reading should allow reason

and experience, not just tradition.

Feb. 18, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 26:1–30:20

Abbreviated Plan: Joshua 3:1–17

If unchecked, Deuteronomy 28 can lead to vending machine theology (God blesses me when I do good) or bad theodicy (suffering happens because of me). Instead, we should be motivated by covenant. (Deuteronomy 29). We love, because God first loved us.

Feb. 19, 2020

Full Plan: Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12

Abbreviated Plan: Joshua 4:1–24; Joshua 5:1

Moses gives a final reminder to heed God’s commandments, and a reminder that God is with them and goes before them no matter what. And then he dies in peace. Would it be that we all finish our journeys just as strong.

Feb. 20, 2020

Full Plan: Joshua 1:1–3:17

Abbreviated Plan: Joshua 6:1–27

The crossing of the Jordan is referenced in our baptismal liturgy, as a reminder of how God is present and powerful through the symbol of water. Our baptism, then, reminds us to be “strong and courageous, not dismayed, for God is with us.”

Feb. 21, 2020

Full Plan: Joshua 4:1–6:27

Abbreviated Plan: Joshua 7:1–15

Before the Israelites conquered Jericho, they 1) remembered who they were (circumcision), 2) remembered what God had done (Passover), and 3) remembered their new responsibilities (manna stopped, began eating off the land).

Feb. 22, 2020

Full Plan: Joshua 7:1–11:23

Abbreviated Plan: Joshua 8:1–29

The story of Achan reminds us that the truth always comes to light. Hidden sins don't stay hidden forever, and they affect many innocent victims. Help us, Lord, be true to you, even when we think no one is watching.

Feb. 16–22, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Jess Johnson

“Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.” Joshua 5:13-15 NIV

Is God for us? Is he on our side?

In Deuteronomy 31, as Moses reveals to the Israelites that he won't be following them into the Promised Land, he tells them, "The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Later, after Moses has died, the Lord says to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."
(Joshua 1:9)

Sounds like God is trying to make it clear - you can count on me.

So, what are we to make of this exchange Joshua has outside the walls of Jericho, standing face to face with the Lord himself? "Are you for us or for our enemies?" Joshua asks. And the Lord's answer? "Neither."

Neither? What happened to that whole 'I'll-never-leave-you-nor-forsake-you' thing?

Across scripture, God reveals his purpose to us: namely, his glory. And he's created us with a clear purpose: to glorify God, by loving God and loving all.

We often ask God to bless our plans and our work. Joshua wanted God to bless the Israelites entry into the Promised Land.

Perhaps, instead of asking God to bless what we are doing

and what we care about, we should figure out what God is doing and what he cares about and get involved with that. Because it is already blessed.

Prayer focus: Tell God you want to be on His side. Ask Him to open your eyes to what he is doing in your life and in the lives of those around you. Ask Him to use you for His purposes.

WEEK NINE (FEB. 23–29)

Feb. 23, 2020

Full Plan: Joshua 12:1–17:18

Abbreviated Plan: Joshua 24:1–28

The Israelites underwent a significant identity change. From nomadic warriors to settlers. From a life on the move to life on the land. It's a crucial life transition, too: learning to bloom where you are planted, not being itchy to move on.

Feb. 24, 2020

Full Plan: Joshua 18:1–24:33

Abbreviated Plan: Judges 2:1–23

The long lists of borders and geography seems tedious, but it underscores two points: God was faithful to deliver what God promised to the Israelites, and God made room for everyone to be part of God's household. There is hope in both ideas.

Feb. 25, 2020

Full Plan: Judges 1:1–3:6

Abbreviated Plan: Judges 3:1–11

Sin is a result of forgetfulness (as Richard Rohr explains). A forgetfulness of who God is or what we are called to be. God provided the Israelites with judges to serve as reminders. What will God send us today to remind us how to be faithful? We need to be attentive.

Feb. 26, 2020

Full Plan: Judges 3:7–5:31

Abbreviated Plan: Judges 3:12–30

The story of Deborah is a timely reminder that God's voice of power and liberation can come from any person, regardless of their gender. All we have to do is listen to them, stay with them, and go with them (Judges 4:8).

Feb. 27, 2020

Full Plan: Judges 6:1–8:35

Abbreviated Plan: Judges 4:1–24

The story of Gideon reminds us that God doesn't need quantity, numbers advantages, or power games to make things happen. God just needs obedient hearts willing to struggle and stay faithful for the long haul. A timely message, to be sure.

Feb. 28, 2020

Full Plan: Judges 9:1–12:15

Abbreviated Plan: Judges 16:1–30

The stories of Abimelech and Jephthah remind us of the perils of lusting for power. When you crave it, you'll do anything to get it. And when you have it, you don't realize what it has done to you. The power of love is greater than loveless power.

Feb. 29, 2020

Full Plan: Judges 13:1–16:31

Abbreviated Plan: Judges 17:1–13; 18:1–13

The secret of Samson's strength was his hair. But the test of Samson's strength was his integrity. It doesn't matter how much charisma one has in public if one is compromised in private.

Feb. 23–29, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Susan Northcutt

I read non-fiction books – the settling of the Northwest Territory, the Manhattan Project, an interpretation of Homer. And I read with a gender lens: *Where are the women?*

In the last chapters of *Joshua* followed by the stories in *Judges*, I read through recurring cycles of disobedience and deliverance.* From the death of Joshua to the rise of the monarchy, the people of Israel struggled to be faithful to the covenant. My attention, however, was drawn to Deborah.

Deborah, a vital and capable woman, is introduced as a prophetess and a judge (Judges 4: 4). The verse also notes that she is the wife of Lappidoth, a necessary disclosure in the patriarchal society of Israel. Indeed, the world of the ancient Middle East favored men in custom and law; women were dependent, both economically and legally, upon fathers, husbands, sons. The

language of *Judges*, and the Old Testament as a whole, rests on patriarchy.

God called Deborah to be a prophetess, His spokesperson to all Israel. The times were perilous as the Israelites were enslaved in Canaan by King Jabin and his military commander Sisera. But the prophetess Deborah designed a plan of attack, a strategy, to free the people of Israel (Judges 4:6-9A). With the warrior Barak leading an army of ten thousand men, Deborah achieved victory over the oppressors. But there was a surprise ending: a woman named Jael killed Sisera (Judges 4:17-22), thus owning the highest of Israel's honors (Judges 4:9b). The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) records the events of this battle and ultimate victory. It is a narrative poem that captures the rhythms and images of ancient warfare.

God also commissioned Deborah to be a judge. "She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided," (Judges 4:5). Although her role was unconventional in a patriarchal society, Deborah heeded God's call, knowing that God had chosen to speak through her. For many years she provided guidance and leadership to the tribes of Israel, performing her duties faithfully. Deborah was wise and righteous.

A concluding comment about the story of Deborah: in the context of a patriarchal culture, economy and political system, Deborah appears to be an exception, perhaps an aberration. Beliefs about femininity and masculinity – about gender and gender roles – were (are) complex, ever-changing and often ambivalent. It seems to me that Deborah lived in a period favorable to women, embodying an essential spiritual message.

Deborah – a prophetess, judge, strategist, wife and woman:
the divine in the female experience.

Pray that you recognize characteristics and qualities that mark the lives of courageous and righteous women.

**The New International Version Study Bible* summarizes the cycles as apostasy, oppression, cries of distress, and divine deliverance. *The Scofield Study Bible III*, based on the *New American Standard Bible*, cites rebellion, retribution, repentance and restoration.

WEEK TEN (MARCH 1–7)

March 1, 2020

Full Plan: Judges 17:1–21:25

Abbreviated Plan: Judges 18:14–31

Civil war breaks out among the tribes over the inhumane treatment of a person deemed second-class in society. Thousands of lives lost, and heartbreaking division. But it ends with reconciliation and compassion, and a new future.

March 2, 2020

Full Plan: Ruth 1:1–2:23

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 1:21–2:10

Sometimes, when times are darkest and feel most hopeless, the most beautiful words that someone can tell you are, “Where you go, I will go.” And it’s the best thing you can tell someone else.

March 3, 2020

Full Plan: Ruth 3:1–4:22

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 8:1–22

The story of Ruth (a Moabite) ends with her genealogy. She was the grandmother of David, ancestor of Jesus. It's a reminder that even in the family tree of Jesus, there is room for foreigners and immigrants.

March 4, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 1:1–3:21

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 9:1–3; 9:15–27; 10:1–27

Samuel was born into a world of grief. Hannah grieved her barrenness, Eli grieved his wayward sons, and the people were without divine vision. But the call of Samuel brought hope, and his obedience came in the words, “Here I am.”

March 5, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 4:1–7:17

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 15:1–35

God is not a lucky rabbit's foot, or vending machine, or cosmic butler that can meet our desires on demand. Nor can God be captured and contained by any one tribe. God not only loves all, but reigns over all. To get that wrong is to do harm.

March 6, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 8:1–12:25

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 16:1–13

The anointing of Saul is God saying to the Israelites, “I’ll give you what you want, but you really don’t know what you’re asking for.” God often cares more about what we need, and less about what we want, because what we want isn’t always best.

March 7, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 13:1–15:35

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 17:1–24

Saul’s impatience and ego distorted true service to God into self-promotion. He was also so busy being a warrior that he left little time to be a spiritual leader (1 Samuel 14:35). He lost his kingship because he made it about himself, not God.

March 1–7, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Joanie Mellen

The last few chapters of Judges sets the stage for the powerful Book of Ruth, for **“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land...” Ruth 1:1.**

And so begins the story of Naomi and her family fleeing their homeland in search for food and a better life in the land of Moab. The immigration hardships begin. Naomi’s trials continue with the death of her husband. Both sons, who had married local Moabite women, also die, leaving Naomi no choice but to return to her native Judah. She urged her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to return to their mother’s home. But Ruth said: **“Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people, and your God my God...” Ruth 1:16.**

Ruth’s profound loyalty is what is most remembered in

this story, along with the generosity of Boaz and the ultimate redemption of Naomi's family through Ruth's marriage to Boaz resulting in a son, Obed. This son begins the genealogy of David - loyalty, generosity and faithfulness save the day!

1 Samuel begins with Hannah's Prayer pleading with God for children, and her prayer was granted! One offspring, Samuel, becomes a wonderful spiritual leader for Israel. But, the people of Israel become dissatisfied with the elderly Samuel. Against Samuel's advice, they demand a king, so Samuel appointed Saul. Saul begins well, but he is corrupted by his power and becomes unfaithful to God. He self-destructs - will things ever change?

Prayer: Let us be mindful of the needs of the immigrant and wary of unfaithful Kings.

WEEK ELEVEN (MARCH 8–14)

March 8, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 16:1–17:58

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 17:25–58

David conquered two foes: the one within Saul's darkened spirit, and the second, external enemy of Goliath. He defeated the first with peace and music and the second with violence. Jesus said we need to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves. David was both.

March 9, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 18:1–20:42

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 18:1–9; 19:1–24

As Saul's anger grew stronger for David, so did Jonathan's love for him. It's the story of the human condition: hate vs. love, jealousy vs. goodwill, violence vs. peace. May we be more like Jonathan and less like Saul in our interactions with others.

March 10, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 21:1–24:22

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 20:1–42

Ahimelech shows mercy on David and a vengeful Saul makes him pay with his life. David shows mercy on Saul and spares his life. The contrast couldn't be more stark. Revenge perpetuates violence. Forgiveness ends it.

March 11, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 25:1–28:25

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 28:1–25

Abigail and Achish both show hospitality to David, saving his life from Saul, exhibiting great risk in doing so. How might we create bridges rather than walls with those who are our perceived enemies today?

March 12, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Samuel 29:1–31:13

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Samuel 31:1–13

Major low for David: Amalekites stole family members, including two of his own, and the people turned against him. But he strengthened himself in God (1 Samuel 30:7) and pressed on to recover what was lost. Let this be a good reminder to trust in God

today.

March 13, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Samuel 1:1–4:12

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Samuel 5:1–25

The transition from Saul to David was ugly and violent. David was a shepherd who learned to be a warrior, and then he had to learn to govern. He saw that the first step in bringing people together was to teach them how to grieve (2 Samuel 3:35-36).

March 14, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Samuel 5:1–7:29

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Samuel 6:1–23

At the one year anniversary of the massacre in New Zealand, we pray for an end to religious violence. David's violence established Jerusalem, but God would later deem him too violent to build the Temple. May God's peace prevail over violence in God's name.

March 8–14, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Amy Kerr

This week's reading introduces us to David and reminds us that outward appearances are not what matters, nor is it the means by which God judges us. We are reminded of this in 1 Samuel 16:7 "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'"

I know I have been judged quickly by my appearance – I

am judged by how I look, how young or old I appear, the clothes I choose to wear and many other external factors that have nothing to do with my true character or potential. I see others judged this way, and if I am honest, I have also judged this way.

But this passage reminds us that outward appearances are not everything, in fact they mean very little. David, a shepherd boy, was a highly unlikely candidate to be chosen by God. David's humble nature and his trust in God despite the evil around him was the reason he was chosen. David was not chosen based on appearance, profession or family status. Those outward features that we are so keen to observe and comment on are not what should occupy our attention or our judgements, but instead we should be focusing on others' hearts and souls – the way they love those around them and make God's love real.

Prayer: God, please speak to my heart and help me show the world a humbler, kinder and more trusting person. Let me not focus on my outward appearance but focus on bettering myself from the inside out. Let us not judge others by their appearances but accept that each of us is wonderfully and beautifully made in your image as we seek to know each others' hearts. Amen.

WEEK TWELVE (MARCH 15–21)

March 15, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Samuel 8:1–10:19

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Samuel 7:1–17

On the outside, David is successful and victorious. On the inside, he is still heartbroken over the loss of Jonathan. Like a game

of “Would Your Rather: defeat all your enemies or keep all your friends?” Perhaps David would choose the latter.

March 16, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Samuel 11:1–14:39

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Samuel 11:1–27

David’s sin is not only found out; it casts a long shadow on his family. His children devolve into abuse and aggression, and his house becomes rife with conflict. How will the consequences of our sins impact future generations?

March 17, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Samuel 15:1–19:43

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Samuel 12:1–14; 24–25; 13:1–14

The conflict between David and Absalom had to be the low point of David’s life. David grieved over his rebellious son’s death, just as any parents would mourn the bad choices of their children. David kept his throne, but it cost him greatly.

March 18, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Samuel 20:1–24:25

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Samuel 13:23–31; 18:1–17

The close of David’s reign is filled with more uprising, settling of scores and a sinful display of arrogance. David was not perfect, but he tried to keep his focus and praise on God (2 Samuel 22-23).

March 19, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Kings 1:1–4:34

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Kings 1:28–31; 2:1–6; 3:1–15

1 Kings 3:5-9 contains Solomon’s prayer for “an understanding mind to discern good from evil,” to govern over the people. It is a humble, noble request, one that ought to be more displayed by our spiritual and civic leaders today.

March 20, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Kings 5:1–8:66

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Kings 5:1–18; 9:1–9

1 Kings 8:22-53 contains the longest prayer so far offered by a person to God. Solomon appeals to God for mercy, justice, and forgiveness. It is a reminder that the Temple itself was not the object of worship, but the means to worship God.

March 21, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Kings 9:1–11:43

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Kings 10:1–10, 23–25; 11:1–13; 41–43

The rise and fall of Solomon in 3 chapters. You could have all the riches, pedigrees, influence and intellect in the world, but without a moral compass that is consistent with God’s best, it can all be torn to shreds. (1 Kings 11:30)

March 15–21, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Gary Uremovich

It is so easy to be dualistic in our thinking. Seeing everything as either good or bad, right or wrong causes us to see those that have made mistakes or lapses of moral judgment as evil. As you read this week’s Scripture, notice that the heroes of our faith

demonstrated serious moral flaws. Amazing! After all, David was a ‘man after God’s own heart’ (Samuel 13:14). He should have been perfect - but he wasn’t. He was an adulterer and murderer. His family was broken with incest and rebellion. Despite David’s flaws, he wrote amazing psalms with passion. He was an incredible commander of military forces. He was an incredible king of Israel.

The son of David, Solomon also had terrible flaws. He prayed for wisdom which was granted by God. Despite his wisdom he took bad advice from his advisors which led to a purge of the kingdom and a revolution. Eventually, he took the gods of his wives and even brought sacrifices to these pagan gods.

The Bible allows us to see our heroes as broken people. We see them, ‘warts and all.’ This term originated from Oliver Cromwell (25 April 1599 – 3 September 1658). It is said to derive from Oliver Cromwell’s instructions to the painter Sir Peter Lely, when commissioning a painting. At the time of the alleged instruction Cromwell said ‘paint me warts and all.’ Cromwell was Lord Protector of England - a very important position. Lely thought his commission meant that he needed to paint Cromwell in an attractive manner. Cromwell did not want his portrait to be artificially attractive. This might be one reason some people are not interested in reading the Old Testament. It shows us our spiritual leaders as real people - warts and all!

Pray this week that God would use you, warts and all!

WEEK THIRTEEN (MARCH 22–28)

March 22, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Kings 12:1–16:34

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Kings 12:1–33

1 Kings 16 is a rapid-fire review of the earliest kings of the divided kingdom. They had various resumes, but shared one common evaluation: did they do “evil” or “right” in the sight of God? Ultimately, that’s the only evaluation that matters.

March 23, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Kings 17:1–19:21

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Kings 18:16–46; 19:9–21

1 Kings 17-19 is a treasure trove of encouragement for the weary and worn out. The widow’s oil, the mountain top face off, the hand-sized cloud, the still small voice: all reminders that whatever you are going through, God is in it with you.

March 24, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Kings 20:1–22:53

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Kings 5:1–27

Ahab was blind to the truth of Micaiah and blind to his envy of Naboth. It is fitting that he died wearing a disguise; he had deceived himself with his lies. May I be open to the truths God and others have to reveal to me about myself.

March 25, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Kings 1:1–8:15

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Kings 17:1–23

The stories of Elisha remind us that we can have hope in the

hardest times. We need to keep pouring (widow), stay humble (Naaman), and open our eyes to God's presence (Arameans).

March 26, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Kings 8:16–10:36

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Kings 17:24–41

What goes around, comes around. Ahab and Jezebel's descendant is assassinated in the land stolen from a man Ahab murdered. It is soon followed by Jezebel's death. "Judge not, lest ye be judged," Jesus says. What goes around, comes around.

March 27, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Kings 11:1–13:25

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Kings 24:18–20; 25:1–12

Joash was a survivor of a murderous mother and cared about the upkeep of the Temple. But in the end, he too was unfaithful to God, and that's how he is remembered. In the end, faithfulness to God is what matters.

March 28, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Kings 14:1–17:41

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Kings 25:13–26

Even the good kings weren't perfect. Many of them still had a blind spot that caused their downfall and led people astray. God, help me discover my faults, no matter how small they first appear, and help me discover freedom in your grace.

March 22–28, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Glenn Simpson

1 Kings and 2 Kings, originally written as one book, offers a history of the failure of a succession of the leaders of Israel following King David. Their failure is even more obvious when considering God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7.

Beginning with Solomon, a long succession of kings failed to lead with God as the centerpiece of their lives. Instead, the kings misled through idolatry, debauchery, slavery, violence, and other sinful human conditions. Although Solomon might rightfully claim that he built David's desired temple, his leadership failed to abide by God's covenant. Ultimately, the failed leadership of Israel's kings led to the exile of Israel to Babylon.

What does the story of Kings mean to our daily lives? Whether leaders or followers, we must put God at the centerpiece of our lives. It is so easy to covet false idols and let our human condition affect our judgment. Material goods are often our distraction from God, but power and ego also mislead us.

How can we better focus on God and not our human distractions? Remember that God is always with us and consider that prayer is our best option.

Prayer focus: What is God saying to me? Help me, God, to ignore my desires for material goods, power, self-importance and attention. Help me understand your desires for me and my life.

WEEK FOURTEEN (MARCH 29 – APRIL 4)

March 29, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Kings 18:1–21:26

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Kings 25:27–30

The Assyrians engaged in psychological warfare against Judah, trying to turn the Israelites against their king. But it didn't work. Hezekiah taught them not to engage impostors. May we also be strong to turn away threats to our devotion to God.

March 30, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Kings 22:1–25:30

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Chronicles 17:1–27; 22:1–13

Josiah was the last good king of Judah. He rediscovered the law and removed the barriers that prevented people from following it. May we remove the obstacles that keep us from following, loving and serving God.

March 31, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Chronicles 1:1–9:44

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Chronicles 22:14–19; 23:1–6, 24–32

These nine chapters recap the Old Testament so far, and remind us of the covenants with Abraham (stars in the sky) and David (royal line). As dysfunctional as our families might be, God can still do great things in and through them, when we are faithful.

April 1, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Chronicles 10:1–12:40

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Chronicles 25:1, 6–8; 26:1, 12–22

David realized his impulsiveness in asking for water that required his soldiers risking their lives. He honored them by offering the water to God. I need to control my impulses, and make sure I honor those who provide for me.

April 2, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Chronicles 13:1–16:43

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Chronicles 27:1, 23–24

What if my baptism is my “ark of the covenant,” an outward and visible sign of God’s covenant favor on my life? How will I preserve and cherish it, and live it out against injustice and evil today?

April 3, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Chronicles 17:1–22:1

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Chronicles 28:1–10

The site of the Temple was chosen at the intersection of penitence and praise, amid human suffering. Worship happens when I acknowledge my broken condition, confess, and offer praise to God.

April 4, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Chronicles 22:2–27:43

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Chronicles 28:11–21

David prepared everything in place for Solomon to be able to build the Temple. Likewise, our primary job is not to build the kingdom for ourselves, but to make it possible for the next generation to

flourish in the faith.

March 29 – April 4, 2020: Weekly Devotional by the Rev. Vicki Walker

A central theme from Disciple Bible Study, a popular Biblical overview course, is that we are “Covenant making” and “Covenant breaking” people. This week’s readings remind us of our historical, and if we are honest, our own personal, made and broken covenants with God. From the finest kings to the cruelest kings, from the most faithful, to the most evil, we see recounted in these stories the human temptations and struggles with power and possessions. Through it all, we also see the faithfulness of God, God’s desire for relationship with us, God’s compassion and mercy, and even God’s ability to change God’s mind when persuaded by a contrite heart, as in the story of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 10.

While the readings of the genealogies may seem tedious, stay with it. God is painstakingly showing us the lineage of David and God’s faithfulness to the fulfillment of His covenant with Israel. Beyond the individual heritage, the author carefully details the tribal genealogies as well.

This week we also bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, and hear God’s promise to David that one of his descendants will restore the Temple in Jerusalem. This promised King Solomon would be a strong and courageous man of peace.

Take a moment to think back upon your own heritage. Who are some of the significant people in your history? What are the stories you have passed down from generation to generation? Who

were the scoundrels and scallywags?

Take a moment to reflect on your own life – your own commitments across the years. The times you were faithful and the times you were not. No matter what, you can be assured that God was faithful. God was always ready to accept you back, forgive your mistakes, extend grace and mercy, and restore your relationship with him.

All of these people and all of these decisions, large and small, our best days and our worst days, helped shape and form us into who we are. And clearly, we can see from our Biblical ancestors that God can use anyone and everyone to accomplish his purpose, no matter what.

Prayer: Dear God, Thanks for these mothers and fathers in the faith. Thanks for these stories of their humanity and their mistakes. Thanks for giving all of us second chances, for offering us forgiveness, and helping us to see the big picture of how our lives fit into your story. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK FIFTEEN (APRIL 5–11)

April 5, 2020

Full Plan: 1 Chronicles 28:1–29:30

Abbreviated Plan: 1 Chronicles 29:1–30

Lessons on stewardship: 1) We give for the future to be built beyond us (28:8), 2) Leaders give first as an example to all (29:6) and 3) What we give is out of God's abundance to us (29:14).

April 6, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 1:1–5:1

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Chronicles 19:1–11; 20:1–12

As in 1 Kings, we hear that the Temple was built in partnership between Solomon and Hiram, Phoenician king of Tyre. It's a reminder of the good that can happen with inter-religious cooperation.

April 7, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 5:2–9:31

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Chronicles 20:13–30

Chronicles says nothing about Solomon's misdeeds, only his achievements. Likewise, we tend to focus on how good we are, rather than naming our shadows and confessing our sins. May we see ourselves with balance that only comes from God's grace.

April 8, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 10:1–13:22

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Chronicles 21:4–20

What are we to make of Rehoboam's response to Jeroboam? Is he to be criticized for not showing compassion, or commended for being principled? The reading invites reflection on the merits of compromise.

April 9, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 14:1–16:14

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Chronicles 28:1–27

God's Spirit invites instability. It prompts change. When we welcome it, that's how we grow. It might make us fearful, but God says, "Take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded," (15:7).

April 10, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 17:1–20:37

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Chronicles 34:1–33

Jehoshaphat instructed the leaders to govern with these three qualities: fear of the Lord, faithfulness, and wholeheartedly (19:9). These are good qualities to live by.

April 11, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 21:1–24:27

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Chronicles 35:1–27

Unsung hero Jehoaida the prophet. He was willing to confront evil and take any risks necessary to carry out God's will. Because of him, Joash was protected and so was David's royal line.

April 5–11, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Carleen Boyer

Like Solomon and Bezalel in 2 Chronicles, we are chosen by God. Their task from God was clear - construct the temple and tabernacle. The people contributed willingly and generously for both structures. History says they even "recycled" using the spoils of war as building materials.

The Chronicles cover the many details of kings and monarchs, as they follow God's order to build them. Were the

reigns of the kings smooth? No. Life happened. The stories relay tales of blessings for obedience and judgment for disobedience. The kings' reigns, like the lives of common people, were a mixture of good and evil. Now we are in 2020 and not much is different, right?

The projects of the kings centered on the presence of God as they planned and built those structures. In a perfect world, all would have progressed smoothly with God's people practicing holy living.

In 2020, how would we define holy living as part of our living as Methodists?

As we know, life has peaks and valleys. So does our faith. Just like today, the challenges of life during the time of the kings and monarchs included politics, war, idols, greed, trade, labor issues, prosperity, power, disobedience and peace. The stories relay tales of blessings for obedience and judgment for disobedience. The kings' reigns, like the lives of common people, were a mixture of good and evil, and again, not much is different today. The Old Testament prophets warned them to trust the Lord and listen.

How can we demonstrate trust and praise the Lord through our financial resources, as well as protect the resources of our planet?

Wesleyan scholars remind us that holy living, trust and faith are a lifelong journey (Chronicles surely demonstrated a long faith journey). People have different ways of coming to faith. It takes a

lifetime to become the people God wants us to be. Wesley would have us live a life that matters.

How do holy living, trust, prayer and defining a life that matters fit into our daily routines? What do we choose as the center of our religious lives?

Chronicles 20:23 is a good place to begin. Let's use this scripture as a starting point for our daily prayers: "Give thanks to the Lord for his love endures forever."

