

THE PATH

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE



About This Bible Reading Plan

The Path: A Journey through the Bible is an opportunity to walk through the Bible in an easy and accessible format. The Path is the story of the Bible, excerpted and condensed so that it is easier to read. In the pages of this booklet, we have laid out a clear trail, an easy-to-follow pathway, so that you can journey from one Bible story to the next and see how they connect to each other. As you read through The Path, you will see all of the major landmarks of the Bible's story—and you will walk in the footsteps of faithful men and women who have done their best to follow God's call. By reading The Path, you will journey through the Bible step-by-step, experiencing an amazing 360-degree overview of the vast, sweeping story of God's extraordinary love for ordinary people.

Inside the gilded-edge pages of the Bible, underneath that intimidating cover, between and through those lists of hard-to-pronounce names, in the midst of that wilderness of words is an incredible, epic story. It is the story of God's extraordinary love that overflowed into the creation of the world, the earth, and all that is in it, including humanity. It is the story of God's relentless, unwavering, unstoppable love for his people, people who are flawed and funny and ordinary, just like you and me. It is the story of the journey of all-too-ordinary people who have tried, sometimes with glorious success and sometimes with abject failure, to respond to God's love. It's the story of how God keeps trying to call us back to him, even when we have wandered and strayed from the path. It's the story of how, in the fullness of time, God came among us, love incarnate, in the person of Jesus Christ, to show us how to walk through this world with love and compassion. It's the story of Jesus' life, of his death, and of his resurrection. The Bible is the story of the founding of the Church, the followers of Jesus in the world, the people of the Way, proclaiming Christ's word and continuing his work. It's the story of you and me, the descendants of these flawed, broken, and beautiful characters, the inheritors of the promise of God. The Path is an invitation to journey through the Bible, to walk through this wilderness of words and see God revealed in them and hear God speaking through them. So let's get started on this epic adventure: a journey through the Bible to grow closer to God!

What You Will Need

1. The weekly Bible readings
2. A Bible
3. Daily Discipline
4. An Openness to the Holy Spirit's Guidance

Daily Prayer Before Reading

God,

*your Word is a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path.*

Give us grace

to receive your truth in faith and love,

*and strength to follow on the path you set before us; through Jesus
Christ, Amen.*

Understanding Bible Verse Number References

When you hear someone mention “John, three, sixteen” from the Bible or if you see it written “John 3:16,” you’re looking at a Bible verse reference. These help us know where in the Bible to find that specific passage.

What do Bible verse numbers mean? Bible verse numbers are a way to reference a specific passage in the Bible. The basic pattern is the name of the Book, the chapter number followed by a colon, and the verse number. For example “Genesis 1:3” refers to the book of Genesis, the first chapter, and the third verse.

Sample Bible Verse References

- *Genesis 1:1-3*

The book of Genesis, the 1st chapter, verses 1 thru 3.

- *Psalms 119:9, 11*

Whenever there is a comma in the reference, what follows it is a verse or multiple verses in the same chapter. Sometimes the Scripture reference can include a selection of 2 or more verses. The example above references the book of Psalms, the 119th chapter, and both verse 9 and verse 11 in that same chapter. This reference would not include verse 10.

- *Matthew 6:25-27, 34*

This example references verse 25 to 27 and then also verse 34 of the 6th chapter of Matthew.

- *Psalms 23*

Sometimes, the verse numbers are not specified when the reference is to an entire chapter of the Bible. For example, "Psalm 23" refers to the book of Psalms, the entire 23rd chapter.

- *1 Corinthians 13:1-13*

There are books that have a number in front of the names. For example, there is a book called "1 Corinthians" and the book right after it is called "2 Corinthians." The above reference means the 13th chapter of the book "1 Corinthians," verses 1 to 13. (Note: Look out for 4 books in the Bible that have the name "John" in them. There is "John," which is sometimes referred to as "The Gospel of John." Then there are also 3 letters (or epistles) called 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. People usually call these "First John," "Second John," and "Third John." Note: John 4:18 is not the same as 1 John 4:18!)

- *Genesis 35:1-36:43*

This would be read: "Genesis Chapter 35, verse 1 to Chapter 36, verse 43." This Genesis reference starts at chapter 35, verse 1 and goes all the way to the next chapter, Chapter 36, verse 43. It basically means the entire two chapters: Genesis 35 and 36. It can also be referenced with just the chapters: Gen. 35-36

- *Ephesians 1:3; 2:8-9*

When the reference is to verses from different chapters of the same book, a semi-colon is used to separate the chapter/verse references. The reference above is to Eph. 1:3 and Eph. 2:8-9. If there is no reference to a book after the semi-colon, it is referring to the last book that was mentioned.

Week 1: God Saw That It Was Good

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Genesis 1:1-13

Tuesday: Genesis 1:14-2:4

Wednesday: Genesis 2:4-9

Thursday: Genesis 2:15-25

Friday: Genesis 3:1-24



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. The Bible tells the story of creation in two different ways. What might this tell us about the nature of creation? What might it tell us about the Bible?
2. According to Genesis 2, the human is put in the garden with a purpose: to till it and keep it. What does this suggest about the relationship between humans and the earth? What does this passage suggest about the relationship between humans and animals?
3. Before God sends the people out of the garden, he makes clothes for them. How does this act of tenderness relate to the punishment immediately preceding? What might we learn about God from this action?
4. Sin is often defined as “separation from God.” Although the word sin doesn’t appear in the Bible until later, Adam and Eve’s actions in this story are traditionally seen as the entrance of sin into the world. What does this story reveal about the nature and impact of sin?
5. In this chapter, we hear the Bible’s story of how the world began. How might this story complement and enhance scientific explanations for the origin of the universe?

NEXT STEPS

- We have another account of creation in the Bible: It’s in the Gospel of John. Read John 1 in the Bible. What connections do you see between John 1 and Genesis 1?
- Look at the two stories in this chapter about the creation of humans, and pay care attention to the words used. What does each story tell us about what humans are like? What is their relationship to God? What is their relationship to one another?

Week 2: The Sign of the Covenant

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Genesis 4:1-16; 5:1-2

Tuesday: Genesis 6:5-8, 13-22

Wednesday: Genesis 7:7-10, 17-22; 8:1-22

Thursday: Genesis 9:1, 9-19

Friday: Genesis 11:1-9, 27-32



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Cain and Abel is the first of many stories in the Bible of sibling conflict. Why do you think this might be?
2. The story of Noah is often told as a children's story, yet it has some difficult parts. What do you notice about this story, reading it again? Which parts are difficult for you? Which parts sound like good news?
3. These stories balance God's punishment with God's mercy: God punishes Cain yet also protects him; God destroys nearly all living creatures but saves Noah and a pair of each species of animal. What do these things tell us about God? How do you understand the relationship between God's judgement and God's mercy?
4. In this story, God's anger at humanity has implications for the animals and all of creation; the animals die alongside the wicked people. God's final covenant is also with "every living creature." What might these things tell us about the relationship between God, humanity, and creation?

NEXT STEPS

- When Noah and his family return to dry land, the first thing they do is build an altar and make offerings to God. Sit down and make a list of blessings that you have received from God and times when God has been especially present with you. Spend some time in prayer, reflecting on what kind of offering you might be called to make to God in thanksgiving for all that you have received.
- The story of the Tower of Babel is usually read on the feast of Pentecost. Read the story of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-13. How is that story related to the Tower of Babel?

Week 3: The Ancestor of a Multitude

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Genesis 12:1-5; 13:14-17

Tuesday: Genesis 15:1, 5-6; 16:3-4, 15-16

Wednesday: Genesis 17:1-22, 26-27; 18:23-33

Thursday: Genesis 21:1-21

Friday: Genesis 22:1-19; 24:67



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Abraham's journey with God involves leaving behind his home and everything he has ever known. What might you have to leave behind or let go of in order to follow God's call?
2. When Abraham begins his journey with God, he doesn't know where the path will lead or what his destination will be like. How does Abraham's example challenge you in your journey with God? How does it comfort you?
3. Abraham encounters God in some very different or unusual ways: He hears God command him to leave his home and sacrifice his son; he argues with God at Sodom and Gomorrah; he has visions from God about his future. Does this seem different from the way that we are used to thinking about humanity's encounters with God? When have you encountered God in an unusual or different way than you expected?
4. Abraham argues and bargains with God, calling of God to show mercy to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, many of the faithful people in the Bible argue with God. What might that teach us about faith? Have you ever argued or bargained with God? Why or why not?
5. The story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac is painful to read and defies simple explanations. How do you wrestle with this story?

NEXT STEPS

- Read some stories from the life of Abraham that are not included in this chapter (Genesis 18:1-22 and Genesis 20:1-18 are two interesting ones). What do you notice in these stories? How do they add to your understanding of Abraham?

- Abraham's faith is lauded in the New Testament in Hebrews 11:1-22. Read that account of the faith of Abraham. How does this selection from Hebrews portray Abraham's story? What is missing? What might we learn from it? How does Abraham's story speak to you most clearly about what faith means?
- Isaac's part in the biblical narrative is brief; the story mostly skips from Abraham to Jacob. Read Genesis 24 to learn about Isaac meeting his wife, Rebekah.

Week 4: Joseph Had a Dream

Isaac and Rebekah wanted to have children, but Rebekah was barren. So Isaac prayed to the Lord, and the Lord granted his prayer. Rebekah conceived twin boys: Esau and Jacob. From the beginning, the boys were at odds. They struggled together so much in Rebekah's womb that she cried out to God, and God told her that they were two nations, divided, that one would be stronger than the other and the elder would serve the younger. It wasn't a smooth start. And it didn't help that, as they grew, their parents played favorites; Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. As the oldest son, Esau should inherit his father's birthright and blessing. But Jacob was a bit of a trickster.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Genesis 25:29-34; 27:1-4, 18-40

Tuesday: Genesis 28:12-22; 32:24-31

Wednesday: Genesis 37:3-8; 37:17-28

Thursday: Genesis 41:14-45

Friday: Genesis 45:1-15; 50:15-26



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Jacob, who inherits God's promise to Abraham and becomes Israel, the one after whom God's faithful people is named, is not always an admirable character. A liar and a trickster, Jacob is an unlikely exemplar of faith. What might we learn from his inclusion in God's story?
2. After his dream at Bethel, Jacob says, "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!" Where are some of the places that you feel God's presence most clearly? Have you ever experienced God's presence in a particularly unlikely place? What was that like?
3. One of the pivotal moments in Jacobs's life is when he wrestles with the man at Penuel. After that moment, Jacob believes that he has seen God face to face. How is wrestling a good metaphor for the life of faith? What other metaphors help describe your relationship with God?
4. Joseph says to his brothers that God used for good what they had intended for harm. What does this tell us about how God

works in Joseph's life? What might it say about the presence of God in our lives?

5. Joseph's journey with God involves a lot of ups and downs, but Joseph sees God present with him at all times. What are some of the high points and low points in your journey with God? How do you see God present in those moments?
6. What connections did you hear between Jacob and Joseph's stories and the stories from previous weeks?

NEXT STEPS

- This week we hear two important stories of forgiveness and reconciliation: Jacob and Esau (Genesis 33:1-17) and Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45:1-15 and 50:15-22). Read these accounts again. What might we learn from them about forgiveness and reconciliation? Where in your life do you need to seek or give forgiveness and be reconciled?
- In today's story, we hear about a variety of ways that God speaks to people. God appears to Jacob in the form of a man who wrestles with him and God speaks to Joseph through dreams. How has God spoken to you in your life?

Week Five: I AM Who I AM

Though Joseph and his extended family lived in Egypt for many years, they knew that it was not their true home. On his deathbed, Jacob made Joseph promise to take his body back to Canaan, and Joseph extracted the same promise from his children. During the famine, all the people of Egypt had sold their land to Pharaoh and given themselves over to be Pharaoh's slaves in return for being fed. So, though the Israelites worked hard and prospered, their land, their livestock, and even their lives did not belong to them but to Pharaoh. This didn't matter during Joseph's lifetime, because Pharaoh trusted and respected Joseph, so the Israelites were treated well. But as time passed, things began to change.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Exodus 1:8-11, 13-22; 2:1-15

Tuesday: Exodus 3:1-20

Wednesday: Exodus 4:1-17, 20-23, 28-31

Thursday: Exodus 7:14-24; 11:4-10

Friday: Exodus 12:1-32, 50-51



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Moses is one of the most important biblical figures, yet one of the first things we learn about Moses is that he killed an Egyptian and hid the body. How does this fit with your childhood image of Moses? What might we learn from this part of Moses' life story?
2. Moses is taking his usual, daily walk with his sheep when God appears to him in the burning bush. The Bible tells us that Moses had to "turn aside" to see and encounter God. What might this say to us about how we see and encounter God? Have you ever had to step off your normal path in order to experience God more fully? What was that like?
3. Moses has an amazing encounter with God, but he still doesn't feel "good enough" to answer God's call. Moses worries that he isn't eloquent in speech, and he asks God to send someone else. Have you ever felt "not good enough" to serve God? How might God's response to Moses speak to you?

4. Throughout the story of the plagues, the Bible tells us again and again that Pharaoh's "heart was hardened." What do you think that means?
5. Sometimes it is Pharaoh himself who hardens his heart, and sometimes the Bible says that God hardens Pharaoh's heart. What do you think the difference might be between those two descriptions? What are the effects of a hardened heart in the Bible? What effects do you see today of hardened hearts?
6. This chapter tells of the first Passover, and the institution of the Passover meal that Jews observe to this day. You may see some similarities in this story to that of Jesus' final days. The Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples was likely a Passover meal (Mark 14:12-25), a branch of hyssop is used to feed Jesus sour wine when he is crucified (John 19:20), and Jesus is referred to in John 1:29 as the Passover Lamb. How might we understand those parts of the life of Jesus in light of this story?

NEXT STEPS

- Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush is called a theophany, a revelation or showing of God. The Bible is full of stories of theophanies. Look at some of the other stories of God showing up to people, like Isaiah 6:1, Luke 3:21-22, and Revelation 1:9-19. What do you notice about these stories? How are they similar? What are the differences?
- When God speaks to Moses from the burning bush, he tells Moses two of his names. One is "I am who I am" and the other is "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." What might each of those names tell us about God? Look at some other names of God in the Bible (Genesis 17:7-13, Judges 6:24, Isaiah 9:6, James 1:17). What might these many names teach us about God? What names of God have been important to you?

Week 6: The Waters Were Divided

After the final plague, the death of the firstborn son of every Egyptian family, Pharaoh finally relented and let the Israelites go. They packed up that very evening and started out, just as God had told them. As they traveled, God went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. But their journey was not to be an easy one.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Exodus 14:5-31; 15:20-21

Tuesday: Exodus 16:2-4, 12-26, 30-35; 17:1-7

Wednesday: Exodus 20:1-21; 22:22, 31; 24:15-18

Thursday: Exodus 34:4-9; Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Friday: Deuteronomy 10:12-21; 34:1-5, 7-12



For forty years, Moses led the people of Israel as they wandered in the desert. In spite of God's promise and presence with them, the Israelites struggled to trust and obey God. Though God provided them with manna from heaven, they grew tired of eating it, weeping and complaining that they wanted meat. So God provided quail for them to eat as well. The people's complaints and rebellion grew so extreme that God became angry and Moses had to intercede for the people yet again. God relented and promised forgiveness, but as a consequence for their faithlessness, God said that none of the people who had seen God's glory in the escape from Egypt or the wilderness would enter the promised land; only their descendants would receive that promise. As the people neared the end of their journey and Moses neared the end of his life, he cautioned the people not to forget God in prosperity and to remember God, even when life became easier and they reached the land of promise.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. The journey of the people of God features amazing deliverance, but it also involves wandering in the wilderness for forty years. When has your journey with God felt more like wandering? How has the experience of wandering impacted your faith?
2. In spirit of God's presence and promise to them, the people struggle to trust God, and it doesn't take long after their

miraculous deliverance for the people to begin complaining, quarreling, and fighting against God and one another. Why do you think that is? When have you struggled to trust God? How might you focus on the glorious things that God has done rather than complain about the things you don't have?

3. When God rains down manna from heaven, the people are instructed to only take enough for food each day, and nothing more, but they find it difficult to do. Why do you think God asks them to do that? Why do you think it's so difficult? Compare this to Matthew 6:9-13. What might these passages say to us today?
4. In Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, God is very specific, describing in great detail the tabernacle and vestments and what to eat and what to wear. What might God be saying to us about our lives by listing the laws so specifically? Even though we live in a different time, how might those laws speak to us today?
5. Moses leads the people for forty years, sticking with them even when they grumble, complain, and sin. Yet he doesn't get to see the people make it all the way into the Promised Land. What do you think about that? What might that say to us about our own service to God?
6. The Bible retells the story of Moses and the people in the wilderness again and again; it becomes a touchstone for the story of the people of God. Look at the way the story is told in Psalm 78. How does it compare with the story in this chapter? What do you notice about that version of the story?

NEXT STEPS

- Moses pleads with God on behalf of the people who have sinned. What might this say to us about how we are called to pray and relate to one another? Make a list of some people you are called to pray for or ask someone else to pray for you.
- Many of the Ten Commandments seem straightforward and obvious, if not easy. But one of the most overlooked is the command to remember the Sabbath. How do you – or could you – observe Sabbath in your life? Set a goal for observing the Sabbath in your coming week.

Week 7: The Wall Fell Down Flat

Moses had died, and the people he had been leading were poised on the edge of the land of promise. But God's promise to his people was not contingent upon any one person, even a great leader like Moses. The story of God and God's people continued with new leadership, as they entered a new chapter of life together.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Joshua 1:1-9; 2:1-24

Tuesday: Joshua 3:1, 5-17

Wednesday: Joshua 6:1-25

Thursday: Joshua 11:16-23; 23:1-16

Friday: Joshua 24:1, 14-31



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Joshua contains a lot of violence and descriptions of “holy wars,” reminding us that it is not only “other people” who engage in holy war; in our Bible we are implicated in holy war. How can we wrestle with this difficult part of our holy scriptures? What might the presence of these stories say to us about our history? What might we learn from them?
2. At the end of each of the conflicts in Joshua, the biblical text says, “And the land had rest from war.” How do wars impact the people as well as the natural world and the land? What might the presence of these verses tell us about humanity’s impact on and responsibility for the land?
3. In his final speech to the people, Joshua tells them that they can serve either God or foreign gods, and they must “choose this day whom you will serve.” What do you think about his description of following God as a choice about whom you will serve? What are some of the other “gods” that you might be tempted to serve in today’s world?
4. The Collect for Peace in *The Book of Common Prayer* says, “O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom...” How might serving God, instead of the gods of this world, bring you deeper freedom?

NEXT STEPS

- Two of the most important theological documents in our lives are our calendars and our checkbooks; they tell us where we spend our time and where we spend our money. Set aside time this week to look at your checkbook and your calendar. What do they say about who you are serving? Are you spending your time and money on the things you value most? in what ways could you change your allocation of time and money to more accurately reflect your priorities?
- Joshua is not the only one to speak about serving god; Jesus will underscore the importance of serving God with both his words and his life. Read Matthew 20:20-28 and Luke 16:13. How do Jesus' words compare to Joshua's?

Week 8: The Lord Raised Up Judges

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Judges 2:6-23

Tuesday: Judges 3:7-30

Wednesday: Judges 4:1-10, 12-23

Thursday: Judges 16:4-31

Friday: Judges 21:25



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. The book of Judges tells the story of a continuous cycle of sin-judgment-repentance-forgiveness-sin, which gets played out over and over. What does this cycle tell us about the people of Israel? What does it tell us about God? Where have you seen this cycle in your life or the world today?
2. When the people have a leader in their lives, like Moses or Joshua or some of the judges, they find it easier to follow God. Who are some of the spiritual leaders in your life who have helped you to follow God more closely?
3. God yearns for the people to turn to him as their leader, their judge, and their king, rather than needing earthly judges and kings to tell them how to live. Why do you think that is so difficult for the people? How do we struggle with this same challenge in our day and time?
4. The book of Judges has many stories that might seem more at home in a soap opera or blockbuster film: Ehud kills Eglon in the bathroom, then sneaks out the window; Jael kills the king after lulling him to sleep in her lap, and Samson falls for Delilah's ridiculous tricks again and again. How do you wrestle with these stories as part of our holy scriptures? What might the presence of these kinds of stories (and these kinds of people) tell us about salvation history?

NEXT STEPS

- One of the judges in the Bible, Gideon, takes a bit of persuading before he trusts God. Read Gideon's story in Judges 6:11-8:28. What do you notice: How does Gideon compare to other judges we read about? How does God respond to Gideon's tests?

- We often have a deep discomfort with the idea of being judged. Yet the Bible is clear that God will judge us. Read Psalm 51 and Romans 14:1-13. How might we hear God's judgment as good news? How might turning to God instead of earthly judges bring us deeper peace?

WEEK 9: Speak, For Your Servant Is Listening

In the time when the judges ruled and the Israelites turned further and further away from God, a man named Elimelech, from Bethlehem in Judah, went to live in the country of Moab with his wife, Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Mahlon and Chilion met and married two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. But Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion all died in Moab, leaving Naomi without her husband or her two sons. So Naomi decided to leave Moab and return to her home in Judah, where she had learned that the Lord had heard the cry of the people and lifted the famine that afflicted the land.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Ruth 1:7-18, 22

Tuesday: Ruth 2:1-23

Wednesday: Ruth 4:1-17

Thursday: 1 Samuel 1:6-28; 2:12-13

Friday: 1 Samuel 3:1-21



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Ruth famously says, “For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God.” This passage is often understood in the context of marriage, but that misses the larger meaning. What do you imagine if it was like for Ruth to make this declaration and to do what it says? What was she giving up? What was she gaining?
2. Ruth chooses to be a part of Naomi’s family, even though they are not related by blood, and their social ties have been broken. Who are some of the people in your “family” who are related, not by blood, but by choice? What might these relationships teach us about the family of God?
3. Hannah prays and longs for a son for many years. When he is finally born, she gives him up to serve God, and it brings her deep joy. What might we learn from her faithful example?
4. When Samuel hears the voice of God calling him, at first he thinks it is the voice of Eli, his trusted mentor. What does the voice of God sound like to you? Has the voice of God ever spoken to you through other people? What was that experience like?

5. It takes four tries for the Lord to reach Samuel. Have you ever experienced God speaking to you persistently? Has it ever taken a few attempts for God to get through?

NEXT STEPS

- After Hannah dedicates her son to God and leaves him with Eli to serve the Lord, she sings a song of praise. Read her song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. What do you notice about her prayer? How might her example inspire and challenge you? Then read Luke 1:26-56 to hear another story about an inspiring mother and the song she sings in praise of God.
- Both Hannah and Ruth have to give things up in order to love and serve God: Ruth gives up her homeland and her family, and Hannah offers up her beloved son. Yet they both find, not resentment, but joy in offering those things to God. Reflect on some things that you might have given up (or might be called to let go of) in order to follow God more fully. Pray for God's grace, not only to let go of those things, but also to do so with a joyful heart.

Week 10: Determined to Have a King

While Samuel was growing up in Eli's household, disaster struck the people of Israel. In the midst of a battle with the Philistines, the ark of the Lord was captured. When Eli heard the news, he fell over backward and broke his neck, dying on the spot. The ark of the Lord stayed with the Philistines seven months, but during that time they suffered: their gods fell on their faces, and the people broke out in tumors. Finally, in desperation, the Philistines returned the ark to Israel, in an attempt to avoid God's wrath. There was much rejoicing in Israel, as they welcomed the ark home. The ark would remain safely in Shiloh until David would later bring it into Jerusalem. Samuel took Eli's place as chief priest and judge and lived his life just as he began it: faithful to the Lord, following his ways, and teaching the people to do the same. He called the people to put away foreign gods and direct their hearts fully to the Lord, and they did. He called them to repent and return to the Lord, and they did.

BIBLE READINGS

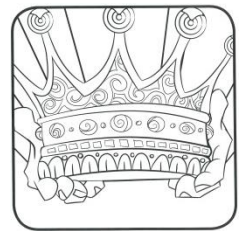
Monday: 1 Samuel 8:1, 3-22; 9:1-2, 15-21

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 10:1-11, 17-24; 13:8-15

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 14:24-35, 47-48

Thursday: 1 Samuel 15:1-3, 10-31, 34-35

Friday: 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-23



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Again and again, God gives Saul specific directions to follow, and each time, Saul fails to do precisely as God asks. What might we learn from Saul about the importance of listening closely to God? What might we learn about obedience?
2. Saul is possessed by the spirit of God when he is first chosen by Samuel, and the spirit causes him to praise and prophecy. At the end of Saul's story, the evil spirit that seizes him is also said to come from God. What do you make of this?
3. Do you find Saul to be a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
4. Samuel grieves deeply over Saul's failure as a leader. Samuel had hoped Saul would be more than merely a successful ruler but rather that he would help lead the people closer to God.

When have you been disappointed in one of your spiritual or civic leaders in whom you had put a tremendous amount of hope and trust?

5. In spite of his grief, Samuel remains faithful to God and is willing to try again with the leadership of David. When have you moved through grief and disappointment to choose to trust and follow another leader?
6. The stories of Israel's kings raise questions about the relationship between human authority and divine authority. How do you see the relationship of those two things? When have you needed to balance obedience to God with obedience to earthly leaders?

NEXT STEPS

- From the story of Samuel and Saul, we learn about the importance of spiritual leadership, even as we hear about the flawed humanity of our leaders. Take a moment to think about some of the important spiritual leaders in your life. Write or call one of those leaders, and thank him or her for bringing you closer to God.
- Samuel speaks up when Saul's political leadership is not in line with God's commands. How might you be called to speak to your political leaders in a way informed by your faith? Draft a letter to one of your senators or representatives addressing an issue you are passionate about, writing not only as a citizen but also as a Christian.

Week 11: A Man after God's Own Heart

Saul was deteriorating. The Spirit of the Lord had abandoned him, and it was replaced by evil spirits that tormented him. Samuel, Saul's trusted prophet and advisor, had left him. And the Israelites were still deeply entrenched in a war with the Philistines. The Philistines, with their much more advanced weaponry and aggressive military, continually oppressed and harassed the Israelites, never allowing the people a moment's peace.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: 1 Samuel 17:1-11, 32-52

Tuesday: 2 Samuel 6:5-19

Wednesday: 2 Samuel 7:1-17

Thursday: 2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26-27

Friday: 2 Samuel 12:1-25



Just as Nathan had said, Bathsheba and David's child became very ill. David pleaded with God for the life of his child, weeping, fasting, and laying all night on the ground, hoping that God would change his mind. But on the seventh day, the child died. After their child's death, David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and she bore another son, whom they named Solomon. Solomon was beloved, both by his parents and by God.

David had many children with his wives and concubines, at least twenty of whom are named. But David's sons, especially Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, could not get along. They fought over who should succeed their father as king, and their disagreements caused division and conflict in the kingdom. God had chosen Solomon to rule after David's death, but his brothers would not relent. Much to the heartbreak of their father, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah each died as a result of their treacherous behavior in pursuit of the throne. So it was that, after David died, what God had promised came to pass, and Solomon succeeded him as king.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. The story of David and Goliath is familiar, and yet most of the time we barely scratch the surface when reading it. What did

you notice, reading the story this time that you might not have noticed before?

2. What does David's relationship with God look like? What impact might the example of his life and relationship with God have of on our relationship with God?
3. In what ways are Saul and David similar as leaders? In what ways do they differ? What does each king's reign teach us about God?
4. Nathan tells David a story that helps David see his own life and actions more clearly. Have you ever had a story (from books, movies, or history) that helped you see your life more clearly? What was it and what did it teach you?
5. In our journey with God, there are times when we make a wrong turn, as David does in this story. Repentance means "turning around" and getting back on track. What does turning around look like in David's story? When are sometimes when you have taken a wrong turn and needed to turn around?

NEXT STEPS

- Many of the most beloved poems and hymns in the book of Psalm's are attributed to David. Read a few psalms (Psalm 23, 51, 63, and 139 are good possibilities, among others). What do you notice in reading these psalms? How do they help you understand David? What do they say about David's relationship with God? What might you learn from them about how to talk with God?
- The friendship between David and Jonathan is legendary. Read the story of their friendship in 1 Samuel 18-20. Reflect on some of the central friendships in your life. This week, take time to give thanks for those friendships, remembering them in your prayers. Write your friends a note, telling them what they have meant in your life.

Week 12: The Wisdom of God Was in Him

David's son Solomon followed him as king, as God had promised David.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: 1 Kings 3:1-28

Tuesday: 1 Kings 4:29-30, 32-34; 7:51; 11:1-13

Wednesday: 2 Chronicles 3:1-14; 4:19-22

Thursday: 2 Chronicles 5:2, 6-8, 10-14

Friday: 2 Chronicles 7:1-5, 12-22



Soon, what the Lord had said came to pass. After Solomon died, the northern tribes of Israel, led by Jeroboam, rebelled, and civil war broke out. As a result, the once unified Israel was divided into two kingdoms; Rehoboam, son of Solomon, became king of Judah, the smaller, southern region where Jerusalem and the temple were located. Jeroboam became king of Israel, the larger, northern kingdom. Jeroboam and the people of Israel immediately did what is evil in the sight of God, abandoning the rules for sacrifices, worshiping other gods, and setting up golden calves to worship at Bethel and Dan. And soon, even Rehoboam and the people of Judah went astray, building other high places and worshiping other gods.

Neither of these rulers was a man after God's own heart, and neither of the kingdoms lived into their identity as God's people. There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, between the northern and southern kingdoms. And when Rehoboam died, and his son Abijah succeeded him, things didn't get any better. The kingdom remained divided and the people continued to sin. The kings of Israel were particularly evil, scorning the ways of God and leading people further and further astray. The kings of Judah were not much better. Occasionally, a good king, like King Asa of Judah, would arise, and do what was right in the sight of the Lord, removing idols and returning to God. But inevitably the people would turn to sin again, either because of, or in spite of, their leader.

The people of Israel, who had clamored for an earthly king, were experiencing that reality. Even the greatest of their kings, David and Solomon, had failed to fulfill their portion of the covenant with God.

And now, the kingdom of Israel had fallen into division and disarray, with the people turning against one another, as separated from each other as they were from God. God was not finished with them yet, but it was a dark time, indeed.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. When God appears to Solomon at Gibeon, he says, “Ask what I should give you.” What would you ask God for if he appeared to you in a dream?
2. Solomon is renowned for his wisdom. Who are some of the wise people in your life? What words of wisdom have they spoken to you?
3. Solomon is responsible for building the temple, the sacred place of worship where God chooses to dwell among the people. What do you notice about the temple? How does it compare to the places where you have worshiped God?
4. The story says that “the glory of the Lord filled the temple.” Where are some of the places that you have seen “the glory of the Lord”? What was that like?
5. Thus far in the story, we have heard the stories of many different leaders: Abraham, Moses, Deborah, Saul, David, and Solomon. How do these leaders compare to one another? What similarities have you seen, and what differences have you noted?
6. The people of Israel repeatedly beg God for a king, like other nations have, and God gives them what they ask for. How does the reality of kingship compare to what they might have wanted? What might we learn from their experience?

NEXT STEPS

- Solomon is renowned for his wisdom, and many of the books of the Bible known as “wisdom literature,” including Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, are attributed to Solomon. Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-20 or Proverbs 12:1-26. What do these writings say about wisdom? Do you agree or disagree with that assessment?
- In addition to being renowned for wisdom, Solomon is known for his love of women. So it is perhaps no surprise that the Song of Solomon (also called the Song of Songs) is attributed to him. Read Chapters 2, 7, and 8 of the Song of Solomon (or read the

whole thing). What do you notice about the poetry of this book? Some say that this is about the love between humans the way that God intended it to be; others say that the poetry is a metaphor for the love between God and God's people. How do you hear this message?

Week 13: Here I Am; Send Me

As the people wandered further and further from God, God's love for them did not wane. Even amid division and turmoil, God sent prophets to call the people to repent and return to the Lord. In the midst of a particularly dark time in Israel, when King Ahab and his wife Jezebel were encouraging worship of other gods like Baal and Asherah and slaughtering prophets and priests who worshiped the Lord, God sent Elijah the Tishbite to speak judgment and truth to the king, and to show by signs and miracles the power of almighty God. God sent ravens to bring food to Elijah in the wilderness where he lived, but one day the river that he drank from dried up, because God had sent a drought upon the land.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: 1 Kings 17:8-24; 18:1-2, 17-40

Tuesday: 1 Kings 19:9-18

Wednesday: Isaiah 6:1-8; 5:8-25

Thursday: Jeremiah 1:4-10; 5:19-31

Friday: Jeremiah 7:1-15, 30; Psalm 137:1-6



It was a dark time, indeed, for God's people. They were far from home, unable to worship God in their holy place, unable to observe their festivals, unsure of how to remain faithful in a foreign land. The people were in exile, distant not only from their home, but also from their God. But God was not finished with them yet; even in the midst of the people's faithlessness, God remained faithful, waiting to draw the people back in love.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah each encounter and are called by God. How are their encounters with God similar? How are they different? What might we learn about God's presence from these stories?
2. Through the prophets, God speaks words of judgment about how the people of God are living. Which parts of the prophecies stand out to you? What seems to anger God the most? How can we hear the words of these prophets in our time?

3. The prophets often speak about the relationship between worship and living justly. What are some of the things that you notice from their words? How do you wrestle with the relationship between how you worship and how you live?
4. The prophets speak persistently to the people, calling them to return to God, but they refuse to hear. What might we learn about God from this persistence? What might we learn about ourselves?
5. What connections do you hear between this week's story and the stories of previous weeks?

NEXT STEPS

- Some of the most famous references to the words of the prophets are in the preaching of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. Read his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" or listen to his "I Have a Dream" speech. What connections does he make between the times of the prophets and his own time: What connections might we them make with our world today?
- The prophets proclaimed God's special concern for the poor, the outcast, the stranger, and the widow. How can you pray for these people? How do the words of the prophets call you beyond prayer to action? Resolve to act on one or two specific ways that you will do justice, welcome the stranger, or care for orphans and widows this month.

Week 14: Daniel, Servant of the Living God

Driven into exile in Babylon, God's people began to wrestle with what faithfulness looked like in a foreign land. How could they worship God when the temple, the center for worship, was destroyed, and they were hundreds of miles away? How could they observe their festivals in a distant land? And, most importantly, how could they return to worshipping God, and only God, when the leaders of Babylon demanded otherwise?

Four young men, in particular, were faced with this dilemma: Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel. They had been taken into exile when Israel fell, and they were sent to serve in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. The four of them had great knowledge and wisdom, and God gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams. Once, King Nebuchadnezzar had a very troubling dream, and no one in his court was able to interpret it. Daniel prayed to God for wisdom and insight and was able to interpret the dream for the king. So Daniel rose in the ranks of the king's court, and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were appointed overseers.

Yet in spite of the favor that Daniel and his friends had garnered, they were not exempt from the challenges that faced the Israelites in exile. One day, King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue and commanded all people to fall down and worship it every time they heard the sound of music in the streets. If they did not worship the statue, they would be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to do as King Nebuchadnezzar commanded, and some of the king's followers reported the infraction to him.

BIBLE READINGS

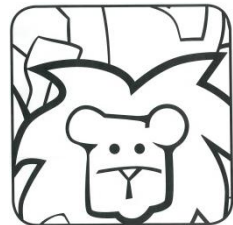
Monday: Daniel 3:12-30; 5:1-9, 13-17, 23-31

Tuesday: Daniel 6:1-28

Wednesday: Isaiah 61:1-4; 40:1-11

Thursday: Isaiah 9:2-7; 65:17-25

Friday: Ezekiel 37:1-14



As they lived in exile, the people remembered and repeated the words of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, believing that, in spite of their sin,

God would remain faithful to them. And, of course, God was faithful, and deliverance did come. After their seventy years in exile, God would work through surprising people: foreign kings in a foreign land to bring his people home once again.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel all have to make difficult choices about obeying God instead of worldly authorities.. When have you had to make a choice about following God, even when it might have brought you into conflict with others? What were the consequences of that choice? How did you experience God's presence during that time?
2. Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel each have visions of the salvation of God. How do those visions compare to one another? What might we learn about God and God's salvation from each vision? What about these visions do you find challenging? What do you find comforting?
3. The prophet Isaiah writes about "the way of the Lord...a highway for our God." Look carefully at that portion of today's chapter. What does God's pathway look like? What implication does this have for our walk with God?
4. The prophets alternate words of judgment with words of comfort. What is the relationship between these two different kinds of speech? What does each of them teach us about God?
5. In their darkest hour, the people of Israel cling to the promises of God and repeat the verses of their holy scriptures to find comfort and hope. What verses from the Bible have brought you comfort and hope in difficult times? How might some of these comforting words speak to you today?

NEXT STEPS

- In this chapter we hear the stories of some extraordinary prophets: Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Unfortunately, though they speak passionately and live faithful, dedicated lives, these prophets are largely unsuccessful: the people do not heed their calls to change and repent. In fact, there is only one story in the Hebrew Bible of a successful prophet, whose prophecies cause the people to turn from their evil ways: Jonah. Read the book of

Jonah (it's only a few pages long). What do you notice about Jonah's story? How is he like the other prophets we hear about? How does he differ? What is his reaction to the "success" of his prophecy?

- Ezekiel, Isaiah, and many of the other prophets had beautiful, intricate visions of God. Close your eyes and imagine God. What does God look like? Smell like? Sound like? Draw, paint, or write about your vision of God and God's glory.

Week 15: Go Up and Rebuild

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Ezra 1:1-7; 3:10-13; 6:14-22

Tuesday: Haggai 1:1-9

Wednesday: Nehemiah 7:73-8:1-18

Thursday: Nehemiah 9:6-32

Friday: Esther 3:5-11; 4:1-3, 13-17; 7:3-6



King Ahasuerus granted Esther's request; the slaughter of the Jews was called off, and Haman instead was hanged on the gallows he had constructed to execute others. God was present once again, through unexpected people in unexpected places.

Thus it was that many Jews had returned to Jerusalem, but others were still scattered abroad. The descendants of Israel and Judah had recommitted themselves to following God and worshiping God, yet they still fell short of being the people God was calling them to be. They were settled back in the land that God had promised to them, but they were not alone there. They lived in the midst of Samaritans, Gentiles, and others who did not believe in or follow their God. And they wrestled with how they were called to live among and intermingled with other people, rather than set apart from them. In the years to come, divisions would arise, even among the Jews; there would be Pharisees and Sadducees, different sects within Judaism, who disagreed about the interpretation of the Torah, or about where emphasis should be placed in living according to God's laws.

The story of the people of God continued—flawed, broken, and ordinary people, trying imperfectly to follow the extraordinary God who loved them more than anything.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. King Cyrus, King Darius, and King Artaxerxes are outsiders. They are not Israelites, yet they help the Israelites fulfill what God asks of them. Who are some of the other “outsiders” that we have heard about in the biblical story? What might their presence and action tell us about God's salvation?
2. The people of Israel face numerous obstacles to rebuilding the temple and the wall around Jerusalem, yet they persevere over

many years. When have you faced obstacles in what God was calling you to do? How have you found the strength to persevere?

3. Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah speak the truth to the people, even when it is hard for them to hear. Who are some people in your life who have spoken truth to you, even when it was hard? When have you been the person speaking truth, even when it was hard?
4. When Ezra reads the people the scriptures for the first time, they are overcome with both joy and conviction. Have you ever been deeply touched by a passage of the Bible? What was the passage, and what has it meant to you?
5. Ester is one among many of the female leaders we have read about in the Hebrew Bible. How does her story and kind of leadership compare to some of the other biblical women we have encountered (Miriam,, Sarah, Deborah, Ruth, etc.)?
6. The journey of the people of God has involved a great detour: a time of strife and conflict followed by years of exile. They have finally made their way back home, home to their holy land, but also home to the heart of God. What detours have you experienced in your life's journey? Have you made your way back home yet? If so, what was that homecoming like? If you're not home, what steps might you take to return?

NEXT STEPS

- Ezra is able to retell the story of God's salvation so that people gain a sense of the continuity of God's presence with them, even in the midst of struggle and in spite of their sin. How would you tell the story of God's salvation, if someone asked you? Take time to think it over or even write it down.
- Before Esther goes to the king, she asks Mordecai and the other Jews to fast and pray on her behalf; even though she goes before the king by herself, she is not alone but is supported by a community. Make a list of some of the communities that have supported you at critical times in your life and what that support looked like. Then make a list of some ways that you can support others, both in your family and in your wider community of faith.

Week 16: Good News of Great Joy

Nearly four hundred years passed. The people of God resettled and rebuilt in the land that God promised them. It was a time of relative peace and prosperity, as the people reestablished their lives and their worship. In the political arena, the Persians were replaced by the Greeks after the conquest of Alexander the Great, and first the Ptolemies of Egypt and then Seleucids of Syria were given governance over the land where the Jewish people lived. Then, in 63 BCE, General Pompey conquered Palestine, and Roman rule began.

As political leadership changed, so too did the religious establishment. The high priest and the scribes began to exercise a great deal of religious and political power. Sometimes religious leaders exercised their power well, but other times they abused their power for wealth and personal gain. Divisions between the Pharisees and the Sadducees became deeper, as each group became more and more convinced that they had the right understanding of God. Even in the midst of relative peace, the people strayed from God. Even as they observed the right festivals and said the right prayers, people were not living the lives of love and mercy and kindness that God called them to live.

And so, once again, the God who has loved the people from the beginning of creation, who has pursued them even as they wandered afar, who has been faithful to them even when they were faithless, spoke to the people. But this time God spoke in a different way. It was a way that was both new and unique and as old as time itself. It was the way that God had been speaking since before time and forever, if only people had ears to hear.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: John 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18

Tuesday: Luke 1:26-56

Wednesday: Luke 2:1-40; 2:41-52

Thursday: Matthew 1:18-25

Friday: Matthew 2:1-23



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Dreams and fulfillment of prophecy loom large in stories about Jesus' birth. Why do you think the gospel writers tell the stories in this way?
2. How is God doing a new thing in Christ? How is God doing the same thing?
3. How does Mary model faithfulness for us? What can we learn from her story?
4. How does Joseph model faithfulness? What can we learn from his story?
5. The early stories of Jesus are full of hymns; in this chapter we hear the *Magnificat*, the *Gloria*, and the *Nunc Dimittis*. How can music help us remember prayers and worship God? What hymns or prayers have been important in your life of faith?
6. In this chapter, we hear many different people respond to the news of Jesus' birth: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, Simeon and Anna, and King Herod. What do we learn from each person's response? Which response resonates most deeply with you, and why?

NEXT STEPS

- Read Matthew 1:18-2:23, then read Luke 1:5-2:52. How are the stories different from one another? How are they the same? How are they different than what you read in this chapter?
- Read Exodus 1:18-2:10. How is it like Matthew's birth narrative? Why do you think Matthew tells his story in this way?

Week 17: Follow Me

BIBLE READINGS

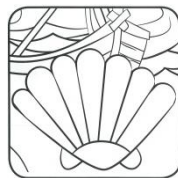
Monday: Luke 3:2-6; 4:14-22; 10:25-37

Tuesday: Luke 15:1-2, 11-32; 16:19-31

Wednesday: Mark 1:9-13, 16-20; 2:23-3:6; 4:1-20

Thursday: John 1:43-51; Matthew 4:23-5:48

Friday: Matthew 6:19-34; 7:24-39; 25:31-40



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. What common themes emerge in this selection of Jesus' teachings? How are they different from what you remember? How are they the same?
2. Jesus' actions and teaching led to a lot of conflict with the religious authorities of the day. What is at the heart of their disagreement in these texts?
3. Do you think Jesus focuses more on behavior or belief? Which do you think is more important? Why?
4. The last two parables depict scenes of judgment. Many are surprised to learn that Jesus spoke more about hell than Paul the Apostle. Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
5. The interpretation of the parable of the sower seems to suggest that Jesus sometimes taught in parables so that people would NOT understand. What do you think of this explanation? Do you find it problematic? Why or why not?
6. In response to questions or criticism, Jesus often tells stories. Why do you think Jesus teaches in this way? What stories (biblical or otherwise) have been important in your life of faith?

NEXT STEPS

- Read Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount (6:17-49). How is it different from Matthew's version (5-7)? Which do you like more? Why?
- This is just a small selection of teachings that Jesus gave. What important ones are missing? What important ideas about Jesus are not present here?

Week 18: Proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Luke 5:17-26; 8:26-39; 19:1-10

Tuesday: Mark 5:21-43; 9:2-10; 10:17-27

Wednesday: Matthew 9:35-10:4; 11:1; 8:5-13;
15:21-28

Thursday: John 6:1-14; 6:35-58; 7:53-8:11

Friday: John 9:1-7; 11:1-53



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Is belief necessary for miracles or do miracles lead to belief? Are both somehow true at the same time?
2. Which miracle is most important to you for understanding who Jesus is?
3. Is there a miracle story not in this chapter that has been significant for you in your faith journey? What made it important for you?
4. Which story in this chapter is most difficult for you to accept? Why?
5. Why do you think the feeding of the 5,000 is one of the only stories to be included in all four gospels? Why do you think the evangelists considered this an important story about Jesus?

NEXT STEPS

- Read the Gospel of Mark. How is Jesus different in that gospel from how he has been presented in these chapters?
- Read John 1-12. How do miracles and belief interact? How are Jesus' discourses related to the miracles?

Week 19: Crucify Him!

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: John 12:1-12; 18:28-19:16; Mark 11:1-27

Tuesday: Mark 12:28-40; 13:1-13; 14:1-11

Wednesday: Mark 15:21-47; Matthew 21:33-46

Thursday: Matthew 26:17-35, 59-68; 27:1-2;

Friday: Luke 21:1-4; 22:39-62; 23:39-43



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Jesus accuses the scribes of devouring widows' houses but praises the woman who pours nard worth a year of wages on his feet. Do you see a contradiction here? Why do you think the woman receives praise?
2. This is the story of how Jesus spent his final days and hours on this earth. What do we learn about what he valued most from the story – what he did, where he went, and with whom he spent his time in these final moments? What might that teach us?
3. According to the text, why does Jesus have to die? What other explanations have you heard for why Jesus had to die?
4. In his final days, Jesus is denounced by religious leaders, betrayed and denied by two of his disciples, and abandoned by almost all of his followers. What might we learn from the difficult parts of Jesus' life?
5. The liturgies of Holy Week developed as a way of mystically transporting Christians to Jerusalem so that we could walk with Jesus through his final days. How does the liturgical journey that we take during Holy Week connect to these stories? How has walking with Jesus through Holy Week impacted your faith journey?
6. In church, we share Holy Communion as a way to remember and connect to Jesus's Last Supper with his disciples. What connections do you hear between the stories we read and your church's celebration of Holy Communion? How do worship and communion nourish you for your journey with God?

NEXT STEPS

- Each of the gospels describes Jesus' death differently. Read Matthew 27:45-54; Mark 15:33-39; Luke 23:44-48; and John 19:28-30. Which scene do you find most compelling? Why?
- From the cross, Jesus cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" which is the beginning of Psalm 22. Read this psalm. What do you notice about this prayer? When have you felt like the psalmist? What does it mean to you that Jesus prayed this prayer?

Week 20: We Have Seen the Lord

Jesus had died and was buried, laid in a tomb with a stone rolled in front of it. The cross stood empty. The disciples had scattered, full of sadness and fear. It seemed like the end. Since Jesus had died on Friday afternoon, right as the Sabbath was beginning, he had to be buried quickly; the commandments prevented people from doing any work, even burying a body, on the Sabbath. So Jesus' followers rested according to the commandment and waited until the Sabbath was over to tend Jesus' body. Deep in grief, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought the spices needed for anointing the body, and they went with heavy hearts to the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had given to Jesus. They were sure that the Lord that they had loved and followed was dead, and they went to mourn and to lovingly and carefully prepare his body for burial.

SCRIPTURE CITATIONS

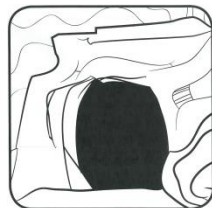
Monday: Luke 24:1-12; 24:13-49

Tuesday: John 20:19-31; 21:1-19

Wednesday: Matthew 28:16-20

Thursday: Acts 1:3-11

Friday: 1 Corinthians 15:1, 3-8



The stories of Jesus' resurrection and appearances to the disciples marked the beginning of a new chapter in the understanding of God's relationship with humanity. In the coming months, years, and decades, the disciples and their followers would grapple with what Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension meant for God's relationship with humanity. What the disciples had believed was the end—the death of Jesus on the cross—was only the beginning. As Jesus ascended into heaven, leaving his followers behind, staring at the sky, a new chapter was beginning; the Holy Spirit was being sent anew into the world, and the Church was being born.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. In this chapter, we hear the stories of a number of different people who experience the death and resurrection of Jesus: the women who visit the tomb, Peter, Thomas, the disciples of the

- road to Emmaus, and others. Who do you most identify with in this story, and why?
2. The women are the first to proclaim the good news of the resurrection. What might this mean for us today?
 3. In many of Jesus' resurrection appearances, his disciples do not immediately recognize him. Why do you think this is? What might this say to us about God? What do you notice about how Jesus is made known to them?
 4. Each time Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, he gives them instructions and commissions them. Look back at each of Jesus' appearances. What are the specific things that Jesus tells his disciples to do each time? What might these instructions say to us about our job as Jesus' disciples?
 5. Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus and walks alongside the disciples as a companion on their journey. When have you especially felt Jesus "walking with you" in your journey? What was that like? Did you recognize Jesus while you were walking, or did you notice his presence only in hindsight?

NEXT STEPS

- We have heard the story of the resurrection so many times that it is familiar and unsurprising to us, but when the disciples first hear the story of the women it "seemed to them an idle tale;" it was astonishing and unbelievable. Close your eyes and try to imagine yourself in the place of the disciples, living this story for the first time. What would you feel? How would you respond?
- The story of Jesus' resurrection that you read in this chapter is from the Gospel of Luke. But each of the gospel writers tells the story of the resurrection in a different way. Read the four stories of the resurrection: Luke 24:1-12, Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, and John 20:1-18. What similarities do you notice? What differences stand out to you? Which version is your favorite, and why? Which version is your least favorite, and why? How does God speak to you through these different narratives?

Week 21: Filled with the Holy Spirit

When Jesus ascended into the heavens, he promised that he would one day return. As he was departing, Jesus told the disciples that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit and would be witnesses to him in “Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The disciples were the ones who would pick up the story of Jesus and spread it into the whole world. So they left Olivet without Jesus physically among them, yet they were sent out with a mission and a promise of God’s continual presence.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Acts 1:12-17, 21-26; 2:1-47

Tuesday: Acts 4:1-22; 4:32-37; 5:1-11

Wednesday: Acts 6:1-6; 7:51-8:3

Thursday: Acts 8:26-40; 9:1-19

Friday: Acts 10:1-22; 11:17-18



Peter witnessed to Cornelius, and as he was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his family. In this way, God clearly demonstrated that non-Jews are acceptable to God and were able to receive God’s salvation. Cornelius and his family were baptized, and Peter reported this good news back to the Jerusalem church.

So it was that the church in Antioch grew, and the Good News of Jesus Christ spread through many countries, extending its reach beyond those who are Jewish to welcome Gentiles and other converts as well. Peter’s travels took him to Lydda, to Joppa, to Caesarea, and finally back to Jerusalem. And Paul, once the chief persecutor of Jesus’ followers, became the church’s most ardent advocate. Paul traveled to Rome, where he lived for two years, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with boldness.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. What do you think of Acts’ description of the believers sharing everything: Is this a helpful model for us today? Why or why not?
2. Acts depicts a lot of conflict but always returns to positive summaries about the Church. Do you think the same could be true of the Church today? How so?

3. Saul had a radical encounter with the risen Christ, and his whole life changed. Have u ever had an encounter that changed you in a significant way? What was it like?
4. Acts calls followers of Jesus “those who belonged to the Way.” What does it mean to you to be someone who “belongs to the Way”? What might that description teach us about what is means to be a Christian?
5. In this chapter, we hear two important stories of journeys: the Ethiopian eunuch is converted and baptized while traveling on the Wilderness Road and Jesus appears to Saul of the road to Damascus. How do these stories speak to you about your journey with God?
6. Both Peter and Paul changed their minds about certain religious beliefs or practices: They came to see that both Jews *and* Gentiles could follow Jesus, and they changed their understanding about religious practices surrounding which foods were unclean. Have you ever changed you mind about a religious belief or practice? What precipitated that change?
7. Peter and Paul engage in lively debate with one another about matters of faith and practice. Their debate and exchange of ideas helped to shape the belief of the Church. Who are some people who have challenged aspects of your faith? How has that debate and exchange helped shape your beliefs?

NEXT STEPS

- This chapter recounts the first half of the book of Acts. Read Acts 12-28 to see how the rest of the story unfolds
- The Holy Spirit is very active in Acts, directing the believers and guiding the church. In what ways does the Holy Spirit work today? In what direction do you think the Holy Spirit may be guiding the Church?

Week 22: Grace May Abound

After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul became filled with zeal for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with the whole world. Paul took seriously Jesus' command to witness "to the ends of the earth." After his original stint preaching and teaching in Jerusalem, Paul set off on a series of missionary journeys that made up the remainder of his ministry.

Paul took four separate missionary trips, spanning nearly twenty years and traveling over 10,000 miles. First Paul traveled with Barnabas to Cyprus and Antioch (modern-day Syria and Turkey). His second journey, with companions Silas and Timothy, took him to Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Caesarea, among other destinations. Next Paul visited Galatia, Ephesus, Macedonia and Greece with Timothy, Luke, and others. Paul's final journey took him to Rome. As Paul traveled, he told the story of his conversion, preached the gospel, healed the sick, and drove out demons. His preaching and teaching helped found many churches and encouraged some that were started by others. But although Paul's words and actions were inspiring, they also got him into trouble on many occasions.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: Acts 16:16-34; 2 Corinthians 11:22-29

Tuesday: Philippians 3:4-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10

Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 13:1-13; 1:10-17; 11:17-34

Thursday: Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 6:1-11

Friday: Romans 8:1-2, 31-39; Galatians 3:23-29



Though Paul intended to travel to Spain, we do not know if he ever made it there. Tradition tells us that Paul traveled as far as Rome and died in the 60s during Nero's persecution of Christians and Jews. Peter is also reported to have been martyred in Rome during this same time. We know that Paul's letters traveled far and wide, spanning not only distance but also time, encouraging and challenging churches in his age and even to today. After Paul's death,

others picked up the torch to carry the message of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Paul and Silas find themselves in jail, and they use that experience as an opportunity to sing hymns of praise to God and to share the good news of Jesus with their jailer. Would you have done the same if their situation? Why or why not?
2. This is only a small sample of Paul's writing. What important teachings are missing?
3. Paul often speaks of his gospel (literally, "good news"). Which passage was especially good news to you? Why?
4. Which text(s) do not represent good news to you? Why?
5. Paul has great confidence in his understanding of God's activity in his life and in the world around him. Is this inspiring or challenging for you? Why?
6. Paul's letters are very situational; they are written to specific people in specific communities to address specific concerns. Why might this be important for us to remember as we now read them as scripture?
7. Much has been made about the differences between the teaching of Jesus and of Paul. How are they similar? How are they different?

NEXT STEPS

- Some of the writings attributed to Paul, particularly those about marriage (Ephesians 5:21-33) and the role of women (1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15) have caused conflict in the church. How do you wrestle with these texts?
- As Paul travels around, he tells and re-tells the story of his conversion, his encounter of Jesus. It is his personal story of meeting and coming to follow Jesus that is central to the spread of the early Church. Take some time to reflect this week on the story of how you met and came to follow Jesus. Consider writing out your story briefly. Pray about how you might share that story with others.

Week 23: Be Doers of the Word

While Paul traveled around preaching and teaching, others were also spreading the good news of God in Jesus Christ, starting churches and encouraging other believers. Belief in Jesus spread to the Jews in the Diaspora, those living outside of Palestine, as well as to Gentiles in those wider areas. Many of those early Christian leaders also wrote letters, just as Paul did. One author, known as James, wrote passionately about what following Jesus looked like, lived out in real life, in ways both large and small.

BIBLE READINGS

Monday: James 1-3

Tuesday: James 4-5

Wednesday: Hebrews 10:10-25; 11:1-3, 7-38

Thursday: Hebrews 12:1-29

Friday: Hebrews 13:1-6, 20-21



Other leaders wrote letters and preached sermons as well, building up the Church as it grew and spread. In the centuries to come, followers of Jesus would debate and discuss the implications of Jesus' life and the biblical narrative for what they believed about God and humanity and would wrestle with how to live faithfully in a changing world, as they waited for Jesus to come again to judge the living and the dead. As Paul, James, Peter, John, the author of the letter to the Hebrews, and other early leaders taught, what people believed and how followers of Jesus lived and acted in this world mattered very much; by word and example the people of God were called to proclaim Jesus until his return. But they also waited with eager longing for Jesus to come again, as he had promised he would. So the Church lived in the meantime, balanced between the now and the not yet, living faithfully on earth while hoping for heaven, being in this world while not quite of this world.

QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Which part of James's letter is most meaningful to you? Which part is the most difficult?
2. How do you understand James's assertion that "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for

orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world”?

3. Some people see James and Paul to be in conflict: James says that faith without works is “dead” (James 2:17), but Paul says that we are saved by faith alone, apart from works (romans 3:28). How do you understand the relationship between faith, works (good deeds), and salvation? How does that understanding impact your life and actions?
4. Hebrews gives a stirring account of people who showed us what living “by faith” looks like. Think back of what you have read so far. Which faithful people from our story does the author fail to mention? Which biblical example of faith is most important to you? Who are some people in your life whose faithfulness has inspired you?
5. Many of the epistles are either anonymous or attributed to an important figure in the early Church but not necessarily written by that person. Does their anonymity change the way you think about them? Why or why not?

NEXT STEPS

- A number of the epistles are only a few pages long and can be read in one sitting (in fact, you read the entire letter of James in this chapter). Sit down and read either Philemon or 2 John. What stands out to you about either letter? How do they relate to letters that you have read or written? How do those letters, written to a particular person in a particular time, speak to you today?
- These epistles in our Bible were simply letters written between Christians to offer insight and encouragement. Write a letter of encouragement to a friend or family member who is struggling. Consider including a verse from one of the epistles that you think might speak to them.

Week 24: The Alpha and the Omega

Jesus came into the world, lived, died, and was resurrected. He taught his followers, by word and example, what it looked like to follow God in this world, and he had by his death and resurrection, broken the power of sin and death forever. Yet even as he called people to faithfulness and righteousness in this world, Jesus also spoke about the world to come, and promised that he would come again in power and great glory. As Jesus' followers lived out life in this world, they waited for Christ to come again, at any moment, and they hoped and wondered what that coming would look like.

As Christianity grew and spread, some civic leaders felt threatened by the idea that Christians worshiped and obeyed Jesus, and not earthly leaders. As a result, many early Christians were persecuted, tortured, martyred, or exiled. The Roman emperors, Nero (54-68) and Domitian (81-96), were particularly infamous for this kind of persecution. During times of persecution, Christians often looked to apocalyptic language and Jesus' promise to come again in order to find hope in the midst of their suffering.

During one such time of persecution, a man named John, who tradition says had been exiled to the isle of Patmos, had a series of apocalyptic visions, which he described as "the revelation of Jesus Christ." These visions were rich with imagery, metaphor, and mystery. Sometimes John wrote in allegory or code. Many of John's references were to contemporary places, people, or situations that were difficult to understand outside of their context, and he made allusions that were culturally conditioned. But the force and beauty of John's vision echoes through time, revealing a small glimpse of the glory of God.

BIBLE READINGS

- Monday:** Revelation 1
- Tuesday:** Revelation 4
- Wednesday:** Revelation 5; 7:9-17
- Thursday:** Revelation 21
- Friday:** Revelation 22



QUESTIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

1. Many early Christians believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. Is it problematic to you that he did not? What expectation do you have for Christ's return?
2. Which images from Revelation are hardest for you to consider? Why?
3. Which images offer you the most hope? Why?
4. Revelation is often read in funerals, in large part because of the images of heaven. How does heaven as John describes it relate to your visions of heaven? What might you learn from the similarities and differences?
5. The Book of Revelation (and the Bible as a whole) concludes with an image of a renewed earth. In what ways is the earth in need of renewal? What might your role be in that renewal?
6. The final sentences of the Bible are: "The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon'. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen." What do you think about this ending? Is this how you would have ended the bible? Why or why not?

NEXT STEPS

- Read the letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3. How might these letters speak to our churches today?
- The Bible looks different when you are comfortable than it does when you are struggling. The images of judgment found in Revelation, in particular, often sound scary and distasteful to people who are comfortable but hopeful to those who are suffering. Why do you think that is? How might you be called to listen carefully to those whose experience is different from yours?

The Story Lives On; the Journey Continues

That's the end. Of the Bible, that is. What began in Genesis with, "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth," now comes to its conclusion in the Revelation to John with, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen." These two phrases bookend the holy scriptures, the text that Christians through the centuries have proclaimed as "the Word of the Lord."

Yet, although Revelation is the end of the Bible, it's not the end of the story, the end of the journey. Far from it. The Bible continued as it was told and retold, shared and passed down. Parents would recite these words to their children, at bedtime and at mealtime, when they arose in the morning and when they laid down at night. They would tell them of Moses and Miriam, Abraham and Sarah, of the judges and the prophets, of Jesus and the disciples, of the faithful followers of Jesus who proclaimed him after his death and resurrection. And people would gather, early groups of the believers, the very first churches. They did not have buildings, but they met together in homes and in graveyards and wherever they could. And they shared these stories, first telling them from memory, then reading them from precious bits of parchment. And then they went out. Compelled by the power of this story, inspired to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, people walked into the world in witness to God's love, telling the story of Jesus everywhere they went.

It wasn't always easy, sharing these stories. The powers of this world were threatened by people who proclaimed the power of Jesus Christ. Rulers were wary of believers who said God was their ultimate King and Judge. In the centuries following Jesus' death and resurrection, being a Christian, sharing the stories of the Bible, could easily get you killed: hung on a cross, thrown to the lions, beaten and beheaded. And yet, the story persisted. People believed so passionately in the Lord Jesus Christ that they continued to proclaim him, even in the face of death. The story of God's extraordinary love for ordinary people was unstoppable, and the

journey of God's people didn't end in the pages of the Bible; it continued out into the world and in the lives of those who knew and proclaimed the Risen Lord.

And so this story of God's great love was passed down, from one generation to the next. What began as oral narratives, relayed from one person to another by word of mouth, was written down, laboriously copied by hand onto scrolls and then into bound books. At first, these holy books were infinitely precious and incredibly expensive, and only the rich and privileged few possessed them. Centuries later, with the invention of the printing press, Bibles could be mass produced, so that today it is the best-selling book of all time, and anyone can hold in their hands the Holy Word of God.

The story of God's love spread, not only through time but also around the world. What started as a small band of bedraggled followers in Jerusalem grew and spread and changed into a worldwide Jesus Movement, with millions of disciples in every nation and corner of the globe, ordinary people made extraordinary by God's Spirit working in and through them. Some have been prophets and priests and princesses; some have been scholars and scribes and saints. Men and women and children from every walk of life have encountered the risen Jesus in Word and Sacrament and have been transformed by the extraordinary story of God's relentless, unwavering, unstoppable love.

And now you number among them. Now you have read for yourself the incredible story of God's relentless pursuit of his people. Now you have heard what is the breadth and length and height and depth of God's great love for you. Now you have journeyed through the Bible—you have seen its glorious vistas, you have traveled through its dark valleys, you have walked in the footsteps of generations of faithful people who would go anywhere to follow Jesus.

But although this book is over, your journey with this story has only just begun. You can go back to the beginning and read it again, making the journey not as a new explorer, but a seasoned hiker. Walking the same path again gives you the chance to notice things

you didn't see the first time, to learn each bend in the road until it is as familiar as your own backyard. And then, you can pick up a Bible and explore the rest of the mountain, the parts that we had to skip but that are just as breathtaking and beautiful and holy as what you have read here. There are dozens of other trails, filled with new landmarks and exciting vistas, and beautiful scenery, and you have a lifetime to explore and discover them all.

Then, of course, you can tell the story of your adventure. Tell your family and friends about all that you've seen. Describe these amazing vistas to neighbors and strangers. Talk about them in your home and work and city and even to the ends of the earth. And then, invite them to come explore with you. You've traveled this path, so you can show them the way. Because this story isn't just for you. It's for everyone. It is the greatest story ever told, and it's much too good to keep to yourself.

So congratulations, you've finished *The Path*. You have completed your journey; you have read the Bible. And now it's time. Take the journey off of the page and into your life. Let the story of God's extraordinary love for ordinary people change your life and change the world.