FIRST CHURCH
WILLIAMSPORT

WISDOM

WEEK 1: KNOWING GOD

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Thank you for using this devotional! Doing these devos together, as a whole church, is one of the ways that we are seeking to live into unity as a community of God's people. All of us (children, students, and adults) are focused on what it means to live out godly wisdom during the next several weeks. These devos are hopefully a tool which can be used not only in your Life Groups, but also to prompt conversation at home.

The devos are designed to complement the weekly sermons in the "Wisdom" sermon series. You can start when you want, but many people find it helpful to do the devos before hearing the sermon, as a way of preparing for worship. Week #1 complements the Sept 18th sermon. So, you might want to begin on Sept 12. Each day is designed to take about 15 minutes. Note that Week #4 focuses on wisdom when suffering and due to the complex nature of this topic, the devos might take a little longer this week. Also, don't miss the last page of the devo for a list of the resources that were used.

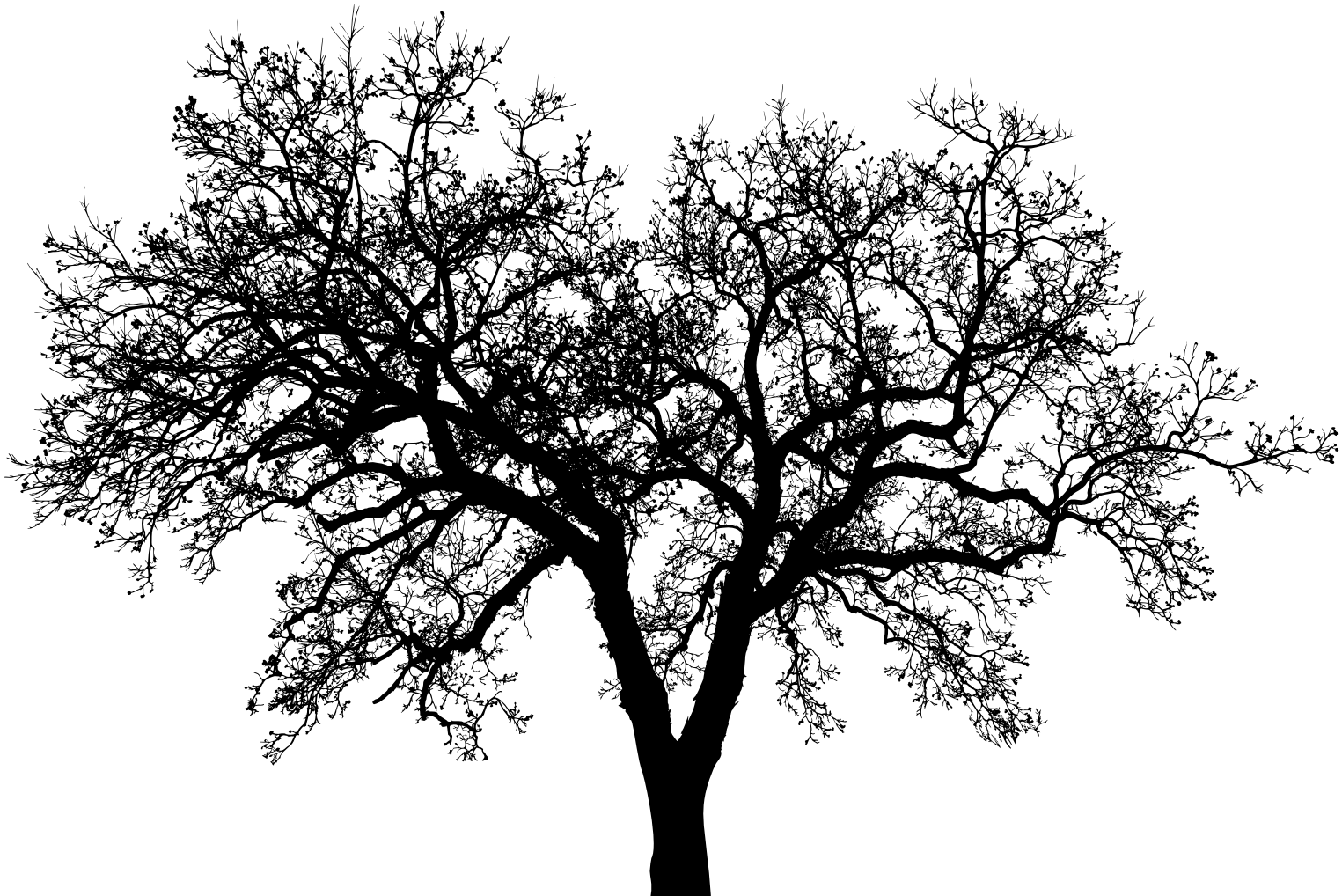
Because we are focusing on "wisdom," we have designed the devos to provide opportunities to gain wisdom, more than knowledge. So, you will find that there is less background information about the Scriptures, and instead you are guided in developing practices that allow you to engage with Scripture. If you have been in Bible Studies for a long time, we hope that these practices provide you with a fresh way to encounter God's Word. And if you are new to Bible Study, we hope that you are delighted to discover that you don't have to know a lot about the Bible to experience God speaking personally to you through God's Word.

A NOTE TO LIFE GROUP LEADERS

There is no "right" way to use this resource. At the end of each week, there are some additional questions that might be useful for your group. But feel free to use any questions in the week's devo that are helpful when your group gathers to discuss the devo. We have provided some background information about the scripture that we thought would be helpful for your group conversation. We also listed the resources that we used to write this devotional so that we could credit the ideas that we shared and so you would have some sources for further exploration if you wished to do that.

WISDOM

Wisdom is the ongoing application of God's truth and knowledge to our circumstances.



DAY 1

GAINING WISDOM

...for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight...

PROVERBS 1:2

READ PROVERBS 1:1-7

Last year, we read the beginning of Genesis together and explored the stories of creation. This year, we are reading Proverbs, a different type of biblical writing. Proverbs is "wisdom literature." It is a collection of sayings that seek to teach us how to live a good life in the good world God created.

Because Solomon is understood to be the fountainhead of wisdom for God's people, Solomon is identified as the author of Proverbs, even though others (Agur in Proverbs 30 and Lemuel in Proverbs 31) contribute to the book. When God's people think of someone who has great wisdom, they think of Solomon. The Bible describes him as wiser than all other men (1 Kings 4:31). It all started when Solomon asked God for wisdom when he became king. (1 Kings 3:1-15). Proverbs describes how things are supposed to work in God's world. Other wisdom books, like Job and Ecclesiastes, offer the perspective of how to live wisely when circumstances aren't as God originally intended.

But reading Proverbs can be tricky. Part of the challenge of reading this book is that we live in a world that has been corrupted by sin. For example, Proverbs 2:12 says "Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse." You can probably think of a situation in which wisdom didn't save a person from the ways of wicked men. Proverbs aren't meant to be read as predictions or promises. They tell us the way that things usually work, recognizing that there are no guarantees and that there will always be exceptions to the rule. This book of the Bible offers the accumulated wisdom of God's people based on life experience and these words of wisdom are validated as God's Word through their inclusion in the Bible.

Proverbs are also situational and so sometimes they offer different perspectives. (Proverbs 26:4 and Proverbs 26:5 are an example.) That is also true of non-biblical proverbs. For example, "Haste makes waste" is true, but so is "He who hesitates is lost." It is true that "birds of a feather flock together" and it is also true that "opposites attract." The book of Proverbs provides us with wisdom from different vantage points, just as the four gospels provide us with different perspectives on the life of Jesus. A single proverb can't contain the whole truth. When applying the wisdom of Proverbs to your life, "if the shoe fits, wear it."

Although much of this book may at first seem like a random collection of "sayings," there are some consistent threads. The most significant unifying thread is "the fear of the Lord." The fear of the Lord is the basis of the wisdom of Proverbs. When we live in "the fear of the Lord," we are able to hear God's voice and discern God's will. This phrase occurs in Proverbs 10 times.

Proverbs assumes that when the world was formed, God created order out of chaos and that it is our responsibility to understand that order and to maintain it so that chaos doesn't take over. Wisdom is the ability to calm the chaos so that the world can be more like the way God intended. Wisdom is not just knowledge or "smarts." Wisdom is doing the right thing, using skill, and creating beauty. The skilled artisans who created the tabernacle furnishings are described as filled with wisdom (Exodus 35:31, 35).

Just as God was the source of Solomon's exceptional wisdom, God is the source of all wisdom. So ultimately Proverbs is a book of faith. It is a book that invites us trust in God's justice and righteousness, even when experience seems to contradict it. As we read selections from Proverbs in the next several weeks, we will be connecting these wise sayings to stories throughout the Bible so we can see the truth of God's word that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7) and we can live a good life in God's good world.

QUESTIONS

1) What Biblical Proverbs are familiar to you? Have you found these proverbs to be generally true? (Some widely quoted Proverbs include Proverbs 3:5-6, Proverbs 22:6, and Proverbs 27:17)

2) What contemporary proverbs can you think of? Have you found these proverbs to be generally true?

3) From what sources are we accustomed to gathering wisdom?

4) What do you think of the statement "Wisdom is the ability to calm the chaos so that the world can be more like the way God intended?" Who do you see modeling this kind of wisdom?

DAY 2

FEAR OF THE LORD

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

PROVERBS 1:7

READ PROVERBS 9:10, 16:6, 19:23

QUESTIONS

1) Read Proverbs 9:10. What does "fear of the Lord" mean to you? What does it mean to you that the "beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord?"

2) How would such wisdom affect your faith? How would it affect your daily life?

QUESTIONS (continued)

3) Read Proverbs 16:6. Atonement is an important word in the Christian faith. What does "atonement" mean? (It's ok to look it up.) Through whose love and faithfulness does atonement come? According to this proverb, what result does fear of the Lord create?

4) Read Proverbs 19:23. According to this passage, what result does fear of the Lord create?

OPTIONAL READING

Read Deuteronomy 4:23-24, Isaiah 40:6-8, and Jeremiah 31:31-34. How does each passage identify a different reason for why we should worship in fearful respect of our Heavenly Father?

DAY 3

I AM WHO I AM

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

EXODUS 3:14

READ EXODUS 3:1-17

QUESTIONS

1) Why is Moses told not to remove his sandals? What does this tell us about God?

2) In verses 13-15, how does God refer to Himself?

3) Why does God refer to Himself as "I AM?" What does that tell us about God?

4) What is God's intention for calling Moses in this story? What does this teach us about God?

DAY 4

MOSES' RESPONSE

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

EXODUS 3:11

READ EXODUS 3:1-17

QUESTIONS

1) In what ways does Moses display "the fear of the Lord" in this story? In what ways does Moses not display "the fear of the Lord?"

2) Notice that verse 11 starts with "But." Is there anything God might be calling you to do differently, and you are saying, "but God?"

3) Have you experienced a situation in which you experienced "the fear of the Lord?" In what ways are you most in tune with what it means to live in "the fear of the Lord?"

4) Read verses 13-17 once more. Why is it so important that Moses, and his people, know who God is? How does this knowledge help Moses and the Israelites to follow God?

DAY 5

GOING DEEPER

For his invisible things – that is to say,
his eternal power and Godhead – are understood...

ROMANS 1:20

READ JOHN 10:1-10, 24-30

QUESTIONS

1) Why do the sheep follow the shepherd's voice? Why do they not follow the voice of a stranger?

2) How are we like Christ's sheep? (Remember that in verse 30 he says that he and the Father are one.)

QUESTIONS (continued)

3) Read verse 3. Think back to our previous story about Moses. How does God initially call to him? What does this teach us about our relationship with God and the type of relationship that he desires to have with us?

4) Think back to the story of Moses. At first, Moses resists God's calling. He is only able to look at God's calling through his own lens, not through God's lens. How difficult is it for you to look at your life and calling through God's lens and to prioritize His wisdom, ahead of your own? Is it something you think about at all? If necessary, what steps could be taken in order to improve this shortcoming?

5) What wisdom did you gain throughout this week?

FOR GROUPS

DISCUSSION

Many people find "the fear of the Lord" to be a confusing idea. Dallas Willard wrote that fear of the Lord is "more than 'reverential awe' . . . fear is the anticipation of harm. The intelligent person recognizes that his or her well-being lies in being in harmony with God and what God is doing in the 'kingdom.' God is not mean, but he is dangerous. It is the same with other great forces he has placed in reality. Electricity and nuclear power, for example, are not mean, but they are dangerous. One who does not, in a certain sense, "worry" about God, simply isn't smart."

For Willard, God "is not mean, but is dangerous." Similarly, CS Lewis views God as "not safe, but good." And yet Jesus, our perfect example of faith, called the Father "Abba," which is often translated "Daddy." This name for God can help us understand what it means to "fear the Lord." Like Jesus, we are invited to have a relationship with God that is like that between a treasured child and a loving Daddy. "Fear of the Lord" is like the healthy respect that a child might have for his/her father. It is a desire to please the Father and to be like the Father.

But it is more than that. As Tim Keller has written, "To fear the Lord is to be overwhelmed with wonder before the greatness of God and his love." It acknowledges God's lordship and calls for our submission, not because we are afraid of God, but because we recognize how great God is and want to honor God. When we have the "fear of the Lord," we begin to have true wisdom. We are primed to hear God's voice and live a life that is in harmony with God.

Q U E S T I O N S

1) Discuss Proverbs 9:10 “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” How does having the fear of the Lord help you to know God and live a life in harmony with God?

2) Who do you know whom you would describe as “wise?” Why did you think of this person?

3) Continue reading the call of Moses (Exodus 3:18-22). What do we learn about God in this passage?

4) In what area or situation in your life do you currently need wisdom? Pray for wisdom in the area each person lifts up.

5) What question in Days #1-5 was especially meaningful for you?

6) What wisdom did you gain this week?

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WEEK 2: REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS

WISDOM

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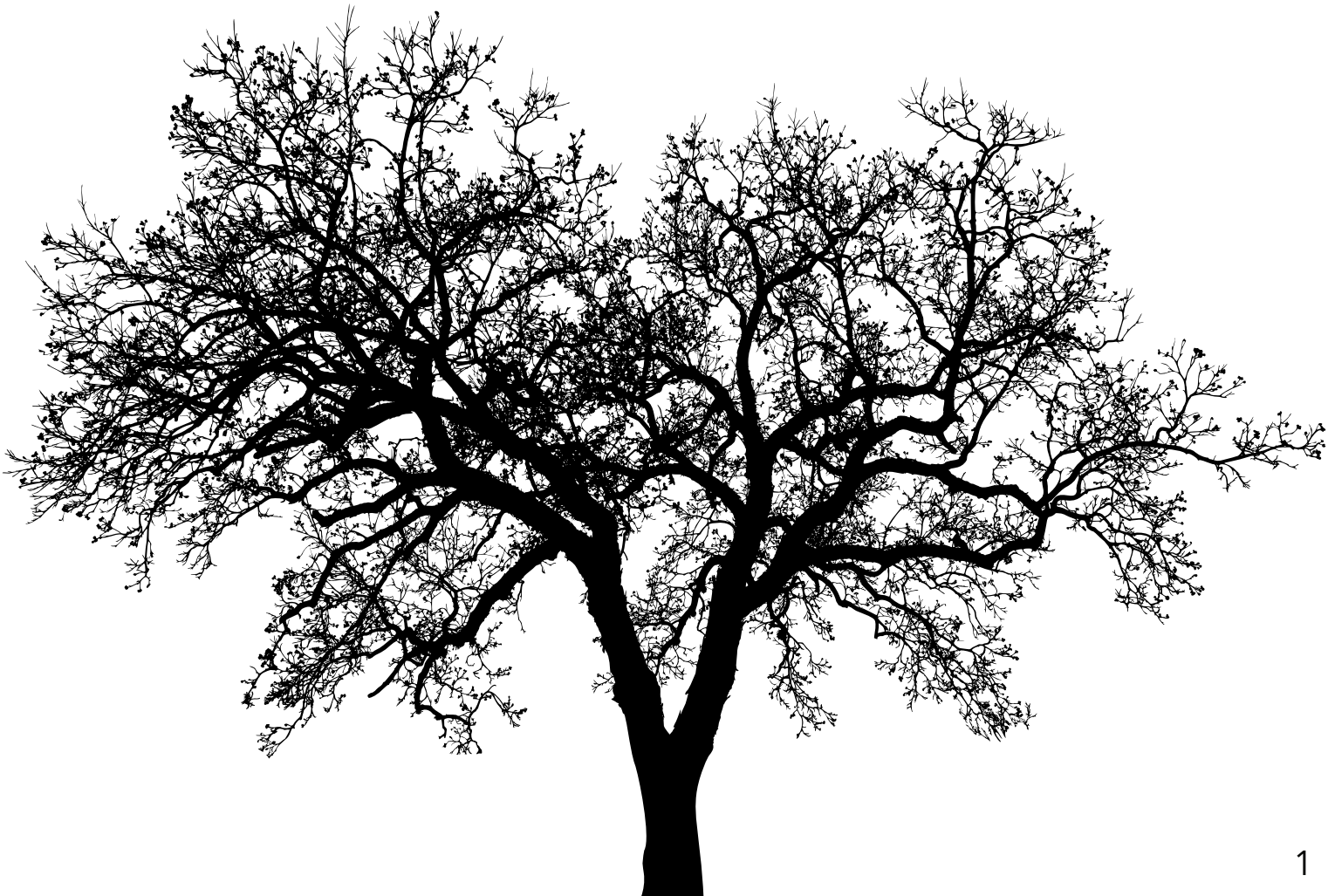

DAY 1

RELATIONSHIPS

...for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair

PROVERBS 1:3

READ PROVERBS 10:11-14, 11:12-13, 24:17-18, 24:28-29

QUESTIONS

1) Each of these proverbs offers different advice and/or caution about our relationships with other people. What advice does each proverb offer?

Proverbs 10:11-14

Proverbs 11:12-13

Proverbs 24:17-18

Proverbs 24:28-29

DAY 2

JOSEPH & HIS BROTHERS

So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God...

GENESIS 45:8

One of the most intriguing relationships in the Bible is the story of Joseph and his brothers in the Old Testament. Joseph was one of Jacob's twelve sons and was jealously viewed by his brothers as being Jacob's favorite. One day, Joseph had a dream that he would one day reign over his family and that his brothers were bowing down to him. Upon hearing this, his brothers plotted to kill him. However, at the last minute, Joseph's brothers decided to spare his life and instead sold him as a slave to traders, reporting to his father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. (Genesis 37) Joseph wound up working as a slave in Egypt, where he soon was wrongfully convicted of a crime and sent to prison. (Genesis 39)

While in prison, Joseph became known for his ability to interpret dreams and was later sent to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph told Pharaoh that his dreams were predicting seven years of plentiful harvest that would be followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh was so pleased with Joseph's ability that he put him in charge over all of Egypt. Joseph ordered that the seven years of plenty should be used to store up food, and when the years of famine arrived, Egypt had so much food that people from around the world were traveling to Egypt in the hopes of buying food. (Genesis 40 & 41) Among those who traveled to Egypt in search of food were Joseph's brothers.

At first, it appears as though Joseph is unsure of how to deal with his brothers. Joseph accuses them of being spies and demands that they return with his youngest brother, Benjamin, who had not been permitted by his father to make the journey. However, Joseph is immediately generous to his brothers, instructing his servants to give them food but not to accept their money as payment. (Genesis 42) Finally, the time comes when Joseph can no longer refrain from revealing himself to his brothers.

READ GENESIS 45:1-15

QUESTIONS

1) Describe Joseph's reaction. What emotions are portrayed?

2) Examine verses 5-8. What assurance does Joseph give his brothers?

3) In what ways does Joseph display godly wisdom that comes from beyond himself?

DAY 3

PICTURE IT

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

GENESIS 45:7

WHAT IS "PICTURE IT?"

Stories are powerful. When children hear a story, they tend to put themselves in the story and experience it as they are listening to it. The "Picture It" method of Scripture engagement gives you the opportunity to engage your imagination and connect with Scripture personally by placing yourself in the story.

You step into the story and let it enter your mind—not just as a series of facts, but as a story with real, living people. This method is especially helpful for those who tend to connect to Scripture on a purely intellectual level because it invites you to tap into your emotions, allowing stories that you've known for years to come alive. With the "Picture It" method, you are no longer just reading a book—you are living a story.

HOW TO ENGAGE

1) **Prepare your heart** to read God's Word.

2) **Slowly read** Genesis 45:1-15, the story we read yesterday.

HOW TO ENAGE (continued)

3) **Use your imagination** to place yourself in the story

a)Who are you? Do you imagine yourself as Joseph, one of his brothers, an Egyptian within earshot, someone else?

b) Where are you? What does the place feel, sound, look, smell like? Try to really imagine it.

c) What are you feeling? Are you anxious? Secure? Full of sorrow? Full of love? Confused? Confident? Scared? Peaceful?

4) **Look back** at the passage to ground your imagination in the details of the story. Make sure that your imaginings line up with what the Bible actually says.

5) **Enjoy yourself**. The imagination is a rich, wonderful tool for exploration. Allow yourself to get lost in the beauty and truth of the biblical stories.

6) **Pray**. Turn your experience into a prayer to God.

7) **Action**. Did this scripture engagement practice reveal any wisdom to you upon which you can take action?

DAY 4

RECONCILIATION

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid.
Am I in the place of God?"

GENESIS 50:19

READ GENESIS 50:15-21

QUESTIONS

1) In today's passage, we fast forward in our story of Joseph and his brothers. Seventeen years, later, Joseph's father, Jacob, dies, and his brothers are once again concerned that Joseph might seek revenge against them. To whom does Joseph credit for both division and reconciliation in his relationship with his brothers?

2) How could this wisdom impact your own relationships? Is there a specific relationship, either past or present, for which you need godly wisdom to repair the relationship or to give you peace concerning it? Explain.

DAY 5

GOING DEEPER

...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...

LUKE 6:27b

READ LUKE 6:27-38

QUESTIONS

1) When we read these difficult words of Jesus, the "easy" response is either to dismiss them or take them to the extreme. We invite you to wrestle with Jesus' intent. How does this passage encourage you to act differently than what might seem "normal" in our world?

2) Which part of this teaching is the most challenging for you? How do you believe God is inviting you to live out these words today? Explain.

3) Examine verse 36. How has your Father been merciful? Read on to verses 37-38. How has God set an example for us to follow in our relationships?

4) How could this passage make you more wise?

FOR GROUPS

DISCUSSION

In the ancient world, it was widely accepted that relationships were reciprocal. What this means is that a person was good to those who were good to them with the expectation that in the future the generosity would be returned. One could argue that our culture has the same expectation. But the Bible teaches that those who follow Jesus are to show mercy because God is merciful (Luke 6:36) and are not to practice reciprocal relationships. "... for disciples, for God's people, loving, lending, and doing good are all about generosity that does not draw boundaries based on the recipients' responses....God's mercy is to be the measure for God's people's behavior." (Sarah Henrich)

QUESTIONS

1) How does the story of Joseph and his brothers and Jesus' teaching in Luke 6 challenge the practice of "reciprocal relationships?"

2) In what ways did Joseph show wisdom in his interactions with his brothers? Are there any ways in which he was not wise? What insights did you gain from looking at this story from the perspective of exercising wisdom in the repair of relationships?

QUESTIONS (continued)

3) As you worked through this week's devotional, did you think of a damaged relationship in your life for which you need wisdom? Pray for one another.

4) Share your experience of engaging with Scripture through "Picture It."

5) What question in Days #1-5 was especially meaningful for you?

6) What wisdom did you gain this week?

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WISDOM

WEEK 3: HEALING ANGER

WISDOM

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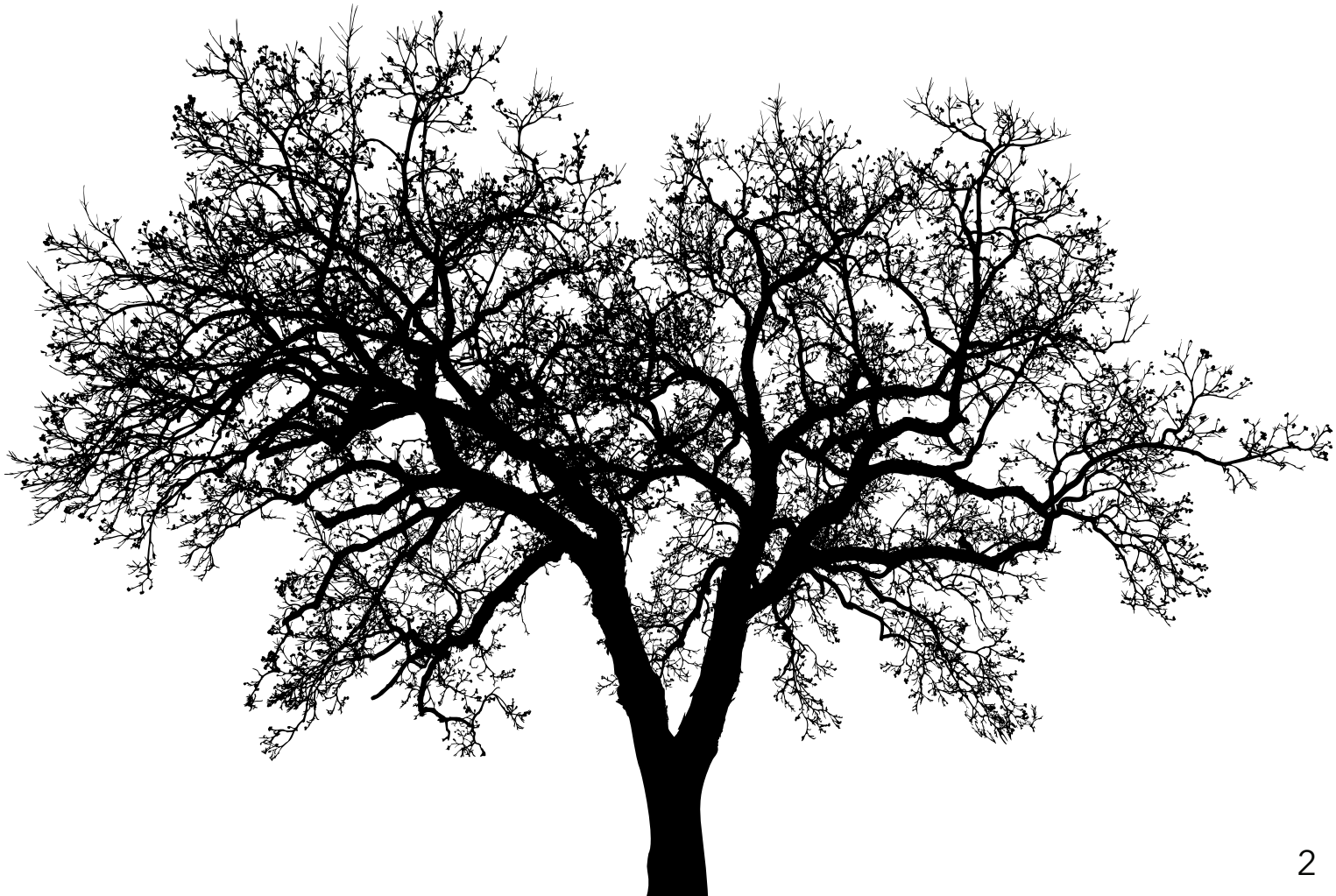

DAY 1

ANGER

Whoever is patient has great understanding...

PROVERBS 14:29

READ PROVERBS 14:29-30, 15:1&8, 25:21-22

QUESTIONS

1) Each of these proverbs offers different advice and/or caution about our relationships with other people. What advice does each proverb offer?

Proverbs 14:29-30

Proverbs 15:1 and 8

Proverbs 25:21-22

DAY 2

SAUL & DAVID

But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed...

1 SAMUEL 26:11

This week's story focuses on Saul and David. Saul was the first anointed king of Israel. (1 Samuel 9 & 10) At first, Saul walked in step with God's commands, but after awhile, Saul became selfish and self-serving, seeking to glorify himself and not the Lord. (1 Sam 11 & 13) This caused the Lord to reject Saul as king and to anoint a boy named David as future king of Israel. (1 Sam 15 & 16) Shortly after, David defeated Goliath and all of the people praised him, causing Saul to become jealous of David. Saul soon became paranoid, relentlessly chasing David with the intention of killing him. (1 Sam 17-19) The rest of 1 Samuel shares how David is continuously running for his life with Saul in hot pursuit, including one story about how David had a chance to kill Saul, but decided to spare him instead. Then, in Chapter 26, David is presented with a second opportunity to kill Saul.

READ 1 SAMUEL 26:1-16

QUESTIONS

1) What reason does David give for not killing Saul? (verses 9-12)

2) As David fled from Saul, he was surely filled with many strong emotions. What wisdom is displayed by David that prevents him from lashing out against Saul? Additionally, what wisdom from previous weeks of our study is David displaying?

3) Read on in the story, verses 17-25. How does David respond to Saul?

DAY 3

SUBMISSION

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

1 PETER 2:21

READ 1 PETER 2:21-25 & ISAIAH 53:1-10

QUESTIONS

1) Yesterday, we read about how David chose to submit to God's will instead of acting out of his emotions. Today, we will look at the ultimate model of that submission. Describe your thoughts as you read through these passages.

2) How can reflecting on Christ's example influence our own choices when we are presented with moments of conflict or tension?

3) What wisdom can we glean from these passages?

OPTIONAL READING

Read Luke 22:39-46 for more.

DAY 4

GODLY WISDOM

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure

JAMES 3:17a

READ JAMES 3:13-18

QUESTIONS

1) What advice and caution does James offer in this passage?

2) Describe the differences between "earthly" wisdom and godly wisdom.

3) What wisdom did you gain from this week's devotions? How, or in what areas of your life, can you immediately apply this wisdom?

DAY 5

PRAY IT

Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

PSALM 37:3

WHAT IS "PRAY IT?"

Prayer can be powerful and passionate, but at times it can also seem limp and dry. Do you sometimes feel like your prayers are repetitive or in a rut? Do you ever wonder if you're praying "wrong?" The Bible can help us to pray. "Pray It" is a scriptural engagement practice that combines Bible reading with prayer. Prayer and Bible reading don't have to be separate practices. When we learn to pray the scriptures, we learn to "pray attention" as we read God's Word. Our Bible reading is less likely to "go in one ear and out the other," but instead becomes a conversation with God.

HOW TO ENGAGE

1) Prayer of Preparation: "Lord surprise me with what you want to show me today."

2) Read Psalm 37:1-9 all the way through.

3) Slowly read the passage again, pausing to pray. As you finish a sentence or a verse, stop and turn your thoughts into a prayer for the world, our community or yourself. For example, "Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong" (37:1) might spark a prayer for our world. You might pray "Lord, I see evil causing so much heartache and destruction in our world. Almost every day there is news of wars, shootings, destruction, etc. I can fret when I hear the news. Help me to trust in You."

4) Close your time of prayer by praying the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13).

FOR GROUPS

DISCUSSION

This week, we read a portion of James, a New Testament book that, like Proverbs, has a lot to say about wisdom. It is obvious that James wrote his letter with the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) in the back of his mind. But unlike Proverbs, James does not share wisdom through the use of short, memorable sayings. Instead, James contrasts "godly wisdom" (or "wisdom from above") with "earthly wisdom" (or "wisdom from below). As Greg Gilbert writes, "Wisdom is much more than we usually think. It is not just pithy sayings or clever solutions to problems. It is actually the very mind of God, the pattern according to which he created and ordered the world. To have wisdom, therefore, is to see the world as God sees it, and then to act in accordance with that understanding."

In the ancient world, "earthly wisdom" reinforced the existing social hierarchy by keeping people in their place. In contract, "godly wisdom" does not give one person greater status than another and does not seek to climb the social ladder. "Earthly wisdom" is individualistic. When you do what is "wise" from an earthly perspective, you "look out for #1." James wants to convince us to live out "godly wisdom" that is concerned with the well-being of our community, not just our own well-being.

QUESTIONS

1) How might understanding wisdom as "seeing the world as God sees it" help to heal from anger?

QUESTIONS (continued)

2) In 1 Samuel 26, how does David live out the Proverbs that you read on Day #1?

3) Is anger an emotion with which you struggle? Pray for one another about the areas in which you need wisdom in dealing with anger.

4) Share your experience of engaging with Scripture through "Pray It."

5) What question in Days #1-5 was especially meaningful for you?

6) What wisdom did you gain this week?

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WEEK 4: DEVELOPING HUMILITY

WISDOM

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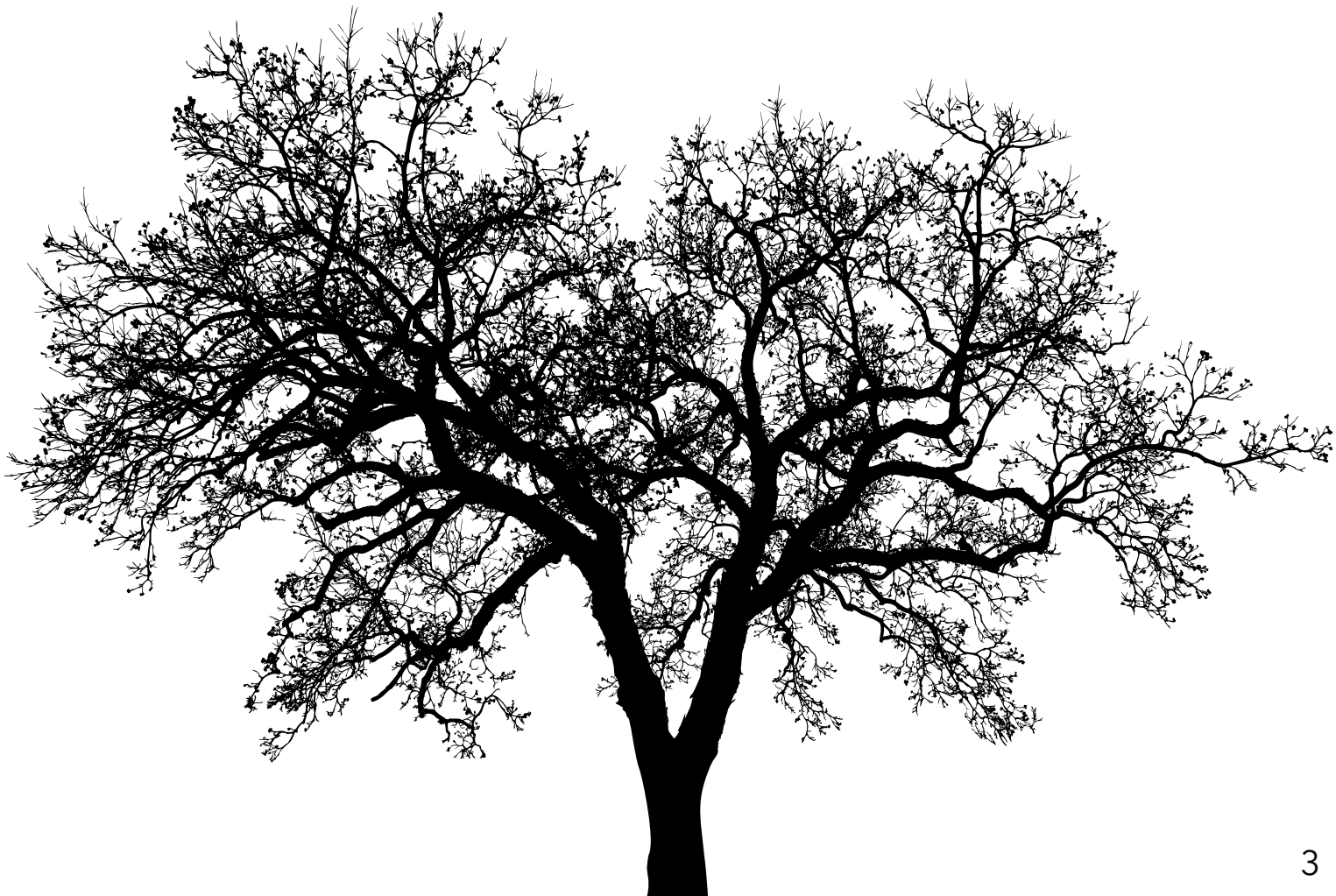

DAY 1

HUMILITY

When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.

PROVERBS 14:29

READ PROVERBS 11:2, 15:33, 16:18-19, 21:4

QUESTIONS

1) Each of these proverbs offers different advice and/or caution about our relationships with other people. What advice does each proverb offer?

Proverbs 11:2

Proverbs 15:33

Proverbs 16:18-19

Proverbs 21:4

DAY 2

JUSTIFIED

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled,
and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

LUKE 18:14b

Before beginning to think about this parable, we must first understand the status of Pharisees and tax collectors in Jesus' time. Pharisees were viewed as religious experts who were well-educated in the Jewish law and religious texts. They strictly followed religious rules and were largely viewed, by themselves and by others, as spiritually superior members of society. Tax collectors were widely viewed as greedy, self-serving people who robbed citizens of extra money while also serving the government. Anyone listening to Jesus would have automatically associated a tax collector as a sinful person who took advantage of others.

READ LUKE 18:9-14 & JEREMIAH 9:23-24

QUESTIONS

1) Compare and contrast the Pharisee and the tax collector in this story. What point is Jesus trying to make?

2) What does it mean to be "justified" before God? (It's ok to look it up. You might want to look up "justification bible definition.")

3) Why does God value the faith displayed by the tax collector more than that of the Pharisee?

DAY 3

JOURNAL IT

...but let the one who boasts boast about this:
that they have the understanding to know me...

JEREMIAH 9:24a

Some of us like to journal. Some of us don't. But journaling Scripture is different from keeping a diary. A Scripture journal is a conversation with God. This practice will help you to engage the Bible more deeply by slowing you down so that you can focusing your mind and reflect more deeply on a passage. Most of us experience a fast-paced life, but the words of scripture meant to be received slowly.

In Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, Donald Whitney writes, "By slowing us down and prompting us to think more deeply about God, journaling helps us feel more deeply (and biblically) about God." It is meant to be a place where you can safely record and reflect on your raw thoughts and feelings, ask questions, search for patterns, and develop your own thoughts with the Holy Spirit as your guide. Journaling Scripture can also provide a written record that helps you remember God's faithfulness.

READ JEREMIAH 9:23-24

HOW TO ENGAGE

1) **Begin with prayer**. Ask God to give you an openness to this practice and to speak to you as you seek to be faithful to God's word.

2) **Read** Jeremiah 9:23-24.

3) **Write** the passage in the space provided. Write the entire passage or particular phrases that stand out to you.

HOW TO ENGAGE (continued)

4) **Reflect** on the thoughts and feelings that are prompted by this passage and respond in any of the ways below that seem helpful to you.

a) Write down your thoughts and feelings

b) Write questions you have about the passage

c) Write a truth you notice in the passage

d) List any action steps that you want to take in response to this passage

e) Write a prayer based on this passage

5) **Relax**. There is no "right way" to Journal Scripture. If what you are doing helps you experience growth and depth in your relationship with God, you are doing it "right."

DAY 4

BOAST IN THE LORD

Therefore, as it is written:
"Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:31

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:25-31

1) We have learned that God values humility much more than pride. Today, let's examine why. Why did God choose the foolish, weak, lowly, and despised things? In other words, why did God intend it to be this way?

2) In verse 30, Paul writes that Jesus Christ is our "wisdom from God." What does it mean that Jesus is our wisdom?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 11:21b-30 & 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

1) In the passage from 2 Cor 11, Paul is criticizing those who might boast about their strong faith and good deeds by sarcastically boasting about his sufferings. How is Paul's "boasting" different from how we usually think of boasting? Why does Paul choose to focus on, and even boast about, his weaknesses instead?

2) What weaknesses do you have that God might be ready to use for his glory?

DAY 5

GOING DEEPER

So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

ROMANS 14:8b

READ ROMANS 14:1-12

QUESTIONS

1) Paul warns about judging others here. Why? What does he say is the most important part about any faith-led decision that a person makes?

2) Read verses 10-12 again. What wisdom should we take from this section? How does this wisdom shape your thoughts, relationships, etc.?

3) What wisdom did you gain from this week's devotions?

FOR GROUPS

DISCUSSION

Proverbs makes it clear that pride is contrary to wisdom. In the Bible, pride is almost always portrayed as a negative trait because it is an inflated sense of our own importance, which leads to confidence in ourselves rather than in God. Both Augustine and C.S. Lewis identified pride as the "cardinal sin," the vice which leads to all other vices. But what does sinful pride look like in our lives? Sinful pride isn't delighting in a child's accomplishments. It isn't wrong to be proud of the community in which one lives and to work to make that community even better. Pride is an elevation of self that results in an attitude of rebellion toward God and contempt toward other people.

In Proverbs, pride is often contrasted with humility. It is interesting that humility is a word that comes from "dirt" (humus). The person who has humility recognizes that their worth is not in what they are made of (dirt), but in the presence of God (breath) that gives each one of us life (Genesis 2:7). As Andrew Murray wrote, "Humility is the displacement of self by the enthronement of God."

QUESTIONS

1) How do you distinguish between “pride” and “humility?”

2) Share your experience of engaging with Scripture through “Journal It.”

3) Is pride something with which you struggle? Pray for one another to live a life of humility.

4) What question in Days #1-5 was especially meaningful for you?

5) What wisdom did you gain this week?

FIRST CHURCH
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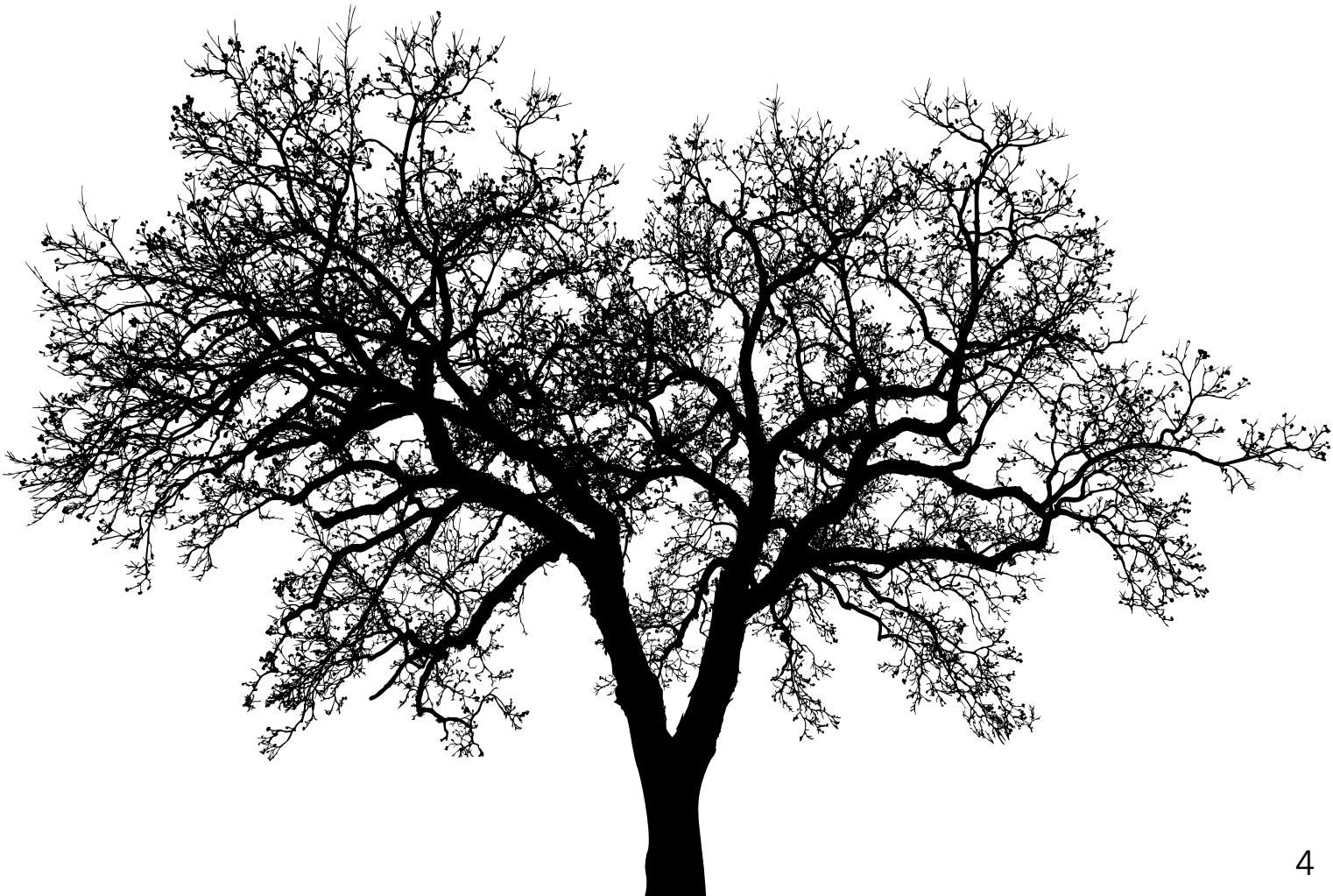
WISDOM

WEEK 5: ENCOUNTERING SUFFERING

WISDOM

Wisdom is the ongoing application of God's truth and knowledge to our circumstances.



DAY 1

WISDOM IN SUFFERING

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves...

PROVERBS 3:11-12

Suffering is a part of life. These verses are easy to read and understand when we are not suffering, but they are much more difficult to read when we are suffering and often leave us with just as many questions as answers. Whether you are suffering or not, there is Godly wisdom to be found that might help and encourage us when suffering inevitably comes.

READ PROVERBS 3:9-14, 10:25, & 24:10-12

QUESTIONS

1) Is there a certain proverb that stands out to you this week? If so, which one, and why?

2) When facing difficult times, what assurances or encouragement do these verses provide?

3) Do these verses stir any questions that you have about suffering, either your own or just the topic in general? (Note: God is mighty and complex. It's ok when we do not have answers or do not fully understand, and when that happens, it does not diminish God's love for us, nor does it cheapen any faith that we have in Him.)

DAY 2

A CONVERSATION

Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?

JOB 1:10

The book of Job can be a difficult book to read. In the opening chapter, we read about a conversation between God and Satan (which similarly occurs at the beginning of Chapter 2). It's almost like a spiritual curtain has been pulled back, revealing a spiritual battle between good and evil that humans are seldom able to see. After this conversation takes place, Job suffers greatly. He loses his family, property, and fortune. His friends turn on him and he is afflicted with illness.

READ JOB 1:1-12

QUESTIONS

1) What is the result of this conversation between God and Satan?

2) What does this tell us about the power and omnipotence of God?

QUESTIONS

3) This spiritual curtain is similarly withdrawn in Luke. Read Luke 22:31-34.

a) Job 1 and Luke 22 give us insight about the relationship between God and Satan. How does it make you feel to know that Satan has "demanded to have you, that he might sift you as wheat?" (ESV, v. 31)

b) What is your reaction to knowing that Jesus has prayed for Peter that "[his] faith may not fail?" (v. 32)

4) Use what you have gained from today's passages as you strive to answer the following questions.

a) Sometimes, we are led to believe that our blessings are the result of our good deeds, while our sufferings are the result of our misdeeds. In these passages, is human suffering automatically the result of sin or a lack of faith?

b) Is relief of our pain and answering our questions of primary importance to God? (Questions adapted from Nancy Guthrie, The Wisdom of God, p. 43 & 51.)

5) This subject is heavy, and there is a lot to take in. How does this make you feel? How do you suppose God wants you to feel as you think about human suffering and His sovereign power?

DAY 3

HOW TO RESPOND

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

JOB 33:4

QUESTIONS

1) Open up a Bible with an ESV translation. Flip through Chapters 3-37 in the book of Job. Look at the bold headings to each chapter. It is easy to see that Job is in agony, yet he refuses to turn against God. Write down some of the headings that most stand out to you about how Job is responding to his suffering.

2) Job questions God, blames God for his misery, and accuses God of ignoring his pleas. Still, Job loves God. (Reminder: God is not directly responsible for Job's suffering.) Read Job's response in Job 19:25-27.

a) Are the verses you just read in the beginning, middle or end of the book of Job? What is your response to reading Job's statement of faith at this point in the story?

QUESTIONS (continued)

b) What would it take for you to get to the place where you respond to suffering as Job did?

c) Job's words in verse 25 are prophetic. Does it surprise you that these words are from Job's mouth?

3) Finally, God answers Job. Read Job 38:1-18. (Read further if you want. It continues through Chapter 41.)

a) Summarize God's message to Job.

b) Is God's response what you expected? Why or why not?

c) Then read Job 40:1-5. What wisdom does Job display in his response to God?

d) How does Job reflect this week's proverbs from Day 1?

DAY 4

SEE IT

"Hail, king of the Jews!"

MATTHEW 27:29b

WHAT IS "SEE IT?"

From the very first verse of the Bible, God reveals Himself as the Creator, an Artist who created the masterpiece of this world in which we live. As works of art created in God's own image (Genesis 1:27), we can join the Master Artist by being artists ourselves.

Throughout history, people have created works of art that convey deep truths and help us connect with the emotional side of our faith. Suffering is an emotional experience and so an artist can be especially helpful to us as we seek to understand what godly wisdom looks like in the face of suffering.

A good piece of art can help us see the truth of a passage as well as give us "fresh eyes" for familiar passages. Slowing down to really look at a piece of art and to meditate on a passage of scripture in the presence of the Holy Spirit, can help us to encounter God. The artist becomes our companion, a commentator who helps us see aspects of a passage that we might have missed. Scripture engagement through art can assist in your spiritual development by letting you share in the wealth of insights God has already given to others.

HOW TO ENGAGE

1) **Pray**. Ask God to help you "see." Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you wisdom and discernment as you seek to discover new truths in the passage you are about to read.

2) Read Matthew 27:27-31. Artwork can never substitute for actually reading and experiencing the biblical text for yourself. The artwork is to help you meditate on Scripture, allowing/assisting you to see what is already there.

3) Look at "Christ Crowned with Thorns" by Horace Pippin. What do you notice? What emotions do you feel? How does this piece help you to connect with the Scripture on a deeper level? Does seeing this painting help you process suffering in a new light?

4) Read about the artist who created this painting on the next page.

5) Look at the painting again. Did you notice anything different this time? Did you feel anything different? Did anything change in the way you connected with the scripture?

Horace Pippin: American Artist

Horace Pippin was an American black artist. He was born only 23 years after the official end of slavery in the United States and was the grandson of slaves. His parents were domestic workers who found it difficult to make ends meet and provide school supplies for Horace, so as a child Horace learned to "make do." When he was 10 years old, he entered an art contest and won a box of crayons, a prize that allowed him to keep doing what he loved, creating artwork. But despite his resourcefulness, Horace wasn't able to complete school. At age 14, he dropped out of school to help support his family. He worked wherever he could (hotels, farms, coal yard etc.) until World War I started, and he was sent to Europe to fight for freedom.

In the army, Horace experienced segregation and discrimination. He was part of a division of African American soldiers that had to be joined to the French Army because many American soldiers refused to march with black men. When his unit was sent to the front line, Horace experienced the horror of combat. He was wounded and returned home. Due to his shoulder injury, it was difficult for him to find work and once again he struggled to "make do."

Disabled, poor, and struggling with horrendous war memories, Horace returned to drawing. At first he drew on old cigar boxes. Eventually he started painting. Painting became his therapy, even though it was slow. It took Horace 3 years to complete his first painting, in part because his wounded right shoulder made it difficult for him to paint. He had to use his left arm to support his right arm while he made the brushstrokes. His first paintings helped him process the trauma of war and were images from his experience in the war. But as time passed, his painting took other directions. Always staying close to his roots in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, Pippin created several paintings based on Scripture. "Christ Crowned with Thorns" is considered to be one of his best paintings with a religious theme.

Horace Pippin never had an art lesson. He describes how he paints in this way:

The pictures . . . come to me in my mind and if to me it is a worthwhile picture I paint it . . . I do over the picture several times in my mind and when I am ready to paint it I have all the details I need.

Today he is considered to one of the 20th century's foremost African American artists. His paintings have hung in such prominent galleries as the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. While the New York Times described him as "the most important negro painter" in American History, Horace struggled with how to be a black artist and critics have struggled with how to "classify" his work. Perhaps his greatest gift as an artist was expressed by Professor of Art David C Driskell, "He was comfortable being Horace Pippin, an artist with a different view of the world."

DAY 5

GOING DEEPER

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.

JAMES 5:7

QUESTIONS

1) Read James 5:7-11.

a) According to James, what should be our ultimate desire?

b) How is the Lord "compassionate and merciful" (v. 11) even when we suffer?

2) Read Hebrews 4:14-16.

a) Even though Jesus was perfect and sinless, he suffered during his life, and especially in the final days of his life. How does Jesus' example of faithfulness inspire you?

b) When suffering occurs, what comfort should we take from these verses?

3) Read Psalm 23.

a) As we conclude this week, pray over these verses. Which part(s) most stand out to you?

4) What wisdom did you gain throughout this week?

FOR GROUPS

DISCUSSION

The Bible is, of course, a single book, but it is also a collection of different kinds of literature. It includes law, poetry, letters, etc. Job, one of the oldest books of the Bible, is considered wisdom literature. Proverbs offers wisdom of how things usually work—those who do what is right are rewarded and those who do wrong are punished. But the book of Job offers a different perspective on wisdom. Job recognizes that our assumptions about how God works aren't always correct. We may suffer even if we are faithful in every way. There are no formulas that always predict how life will turn out. Life is both ordered and wild; it is beautiful and dangerous. And we live in a world that is vast and complex.

God's wisdom in Job acknowledges that sometimes the righteous suffer, but it doesn't explain why. Rather than search for explanations of our suffering, it invites us to bring our pain to God and trust God's wisdom that is beyond our human comprehension.

QUESTIONS

1) Nancy Guthrie identifies 4 false assumptions about suffering that are addressed by Job. Which assumption(s) do you believe God is inviting you to stop believing?

a) False Assumption #1 "If I am godly, I won't have to suffer."

b) False Assumption #2 "My suffering is about me and my life in the here and now."

c) False Assumption #3 "My suffering is the result of God's punishing me for my sin."

d) False Assumption #4 "What I need most from God are relief for my suffering and answers to my questions."

2) How does the story of Job point to Christ? In what ways is Job like Jesus? How does the death and resurrection of Jesus answer some of the unanswered questions in Job's story?

3) Share your experience of engaging with Scripture through "See It."

4) What question in Days #1-5 was especially meaningful for you?

5) What wisdom did you gain this week?

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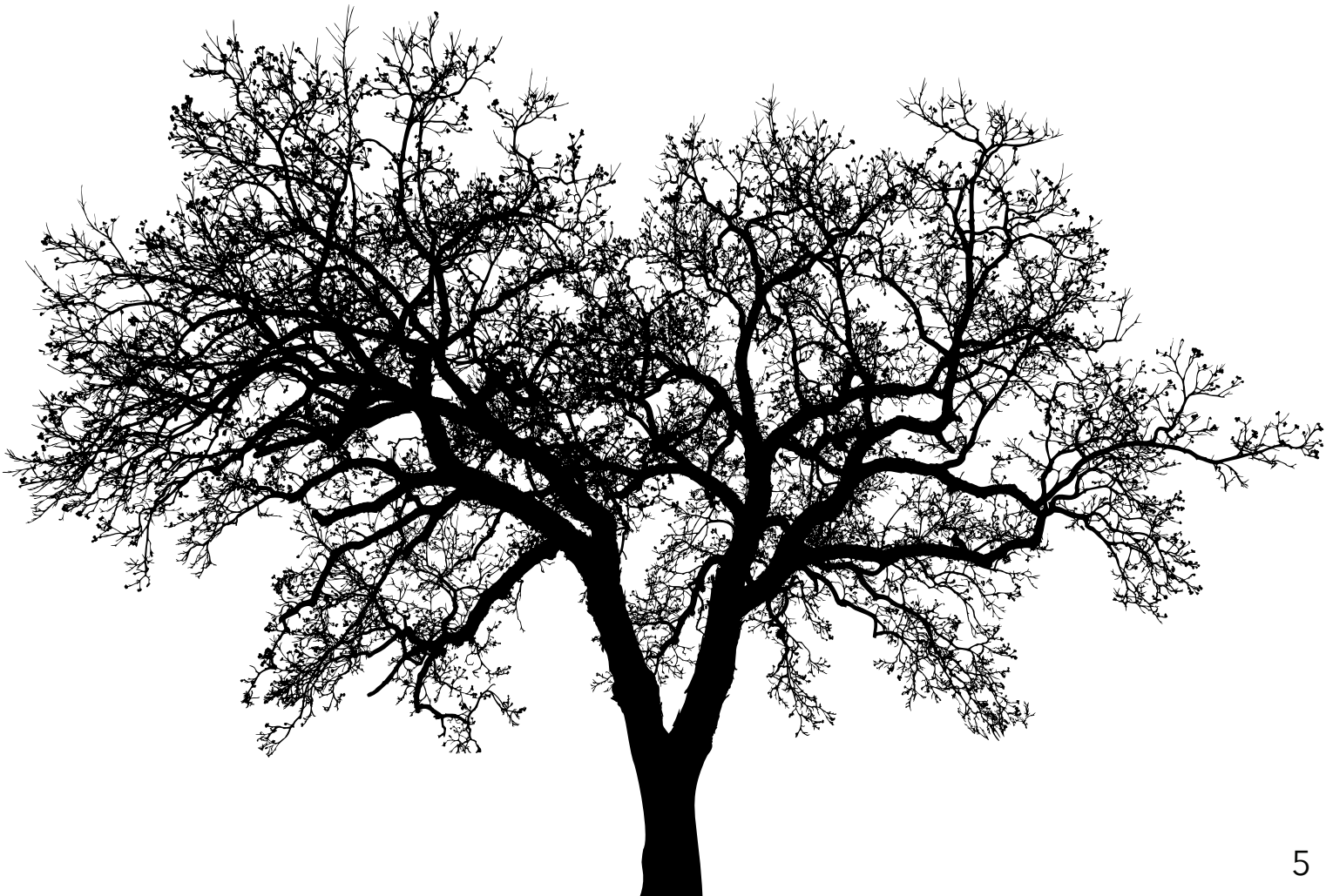
WISDOM

WEEK 6: FOLLOWING GOD'S PLANS

WISDOM

Wisdom is the ongoing application of God's truth and knowledge to our circumstances.



DAY 1

TRUSTING GOD

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

PROVERBS 3:7

READ PROVERBS 3:5-8

QUESTIONS

1) According to this passage, what is needed in order to "make your paths straight?" (multiple answers exist)

2) Which of the above answers stands out most to you? Why?

READ PROVERBS 16:1-4, 9, 25, 33

QUESTIONS

1) What wisdom can be gained from these verses?

2) How might any or all of these verses affect the way you pray, worship, and serve?

3) As you look back over your life, can you identify an example of Proverbs 16:9 or Proverbs 3:5-6?

DAY 2

OUR DESIRES

"Throw me into the sea," Jonah said,
"and it will become calm again.

JONAH 1:12

READ JONAH 1:1-17

QUESTIONS

1) From the passage, what did God want from Jonah?

2) It is not explicitly stated what Jonah wanted. However, what misconception about God is apparent in Jonah's response in verses 3 and 10? What does this look like in your life?

3) Needless to say, Jonah does not experience the joy of being connected to God at the end of Chapter 1. Can you share about a circumstance where you experienced this disharmony with God? Conversely, can you share about a time when you experienced the joy of completing the Lord's work?

DAY 3

GRACE

And when God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he abandoned his plan to destroy them and didn't carry it through.

JONAH 3:10

In Jonah 2, Jonah prays to God from the belly of the fish, acknowledging that he has disobeyed God and that only God can save him. Jonah promises to follow God, and God causes the fish to spit out Jonah onto dry ground.

READ JONAH 3:1-10

QUESTIONS

1) Once we read Chapter 3, we can look at the first chapter of Jonah through a different lens. How is the belly of the fish actually an act of grace from God?

2) Is there something in your life that you are being to called to look at as act of grace rather than place of despair?

3) Take a few moments of extra prayer today. What plans might God have for you right now that you are avoiding or simply missing?

DAY 4

IS IT RIGHT?

For I knew you were a gracious God,
merciful, slow to get angry, and full of kindness

JONAH 4:2b

READ JONAH 4:1-11

QUESTIONS

1) Describe how Jonah reacted to God's decision to spare Nineveh in Chapter 3. Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

2) What is God's explanation for saving Nineveh and not destroying it (v. 10-11).

3) How does the end of Jonah give you new insight or enhance your appreciation of John 3:16?

4) Looking back at the proverbs from Day 1, which proverbs do we see reflected in Jonah's story?

5) In what ways is Jonah the opposite of what is advised in these proverbs?

DAY 5

GOING DEEPER

When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

JONAH 2:7

When we read the story of Jonah, we usually focus on Jonah himself, because he is the main character. But now that you have read the whole story, we invite you to consider how God determines the steps of all of the characters in this story:

Jonah | Jonah is probably the most unique prophet in the Old Testament. Obadiah and Micah are the books we find before and after Jonah in the Bible. Read Obadiah 1:1 and Micah 1:1 and glance at these short books. Obadiah and Micah are typical prophets who receive the Word of the Lord and speak it to God's people. Jonah doesn't say very much at all. The only words Jonah utters on behalf of God (words of prophecy) are a single sentence that is found in Jonah 3:4. Instead, Jonah's actions tell the story. Jonah tells the sailors that God "made the sea and dry land" (1:9) and yet he thinks he can run from God by getting on a ship to Tarshish. He knows that God is "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love" (4:2) and yet Jonah has no compassion for the people of Nineveh. He is an example of a person whose words and deeds do not match up. It is ironic that Jonah's name (1:1) means "dove, son of faithfulness/truth" because Jonah is repeatedly unfaithful to living out what he knows to be true about God.

The Sailors | The sailors do not know God or follow God. And yet when Jonah tells them that he is a Hebrew who worships the LORD (1:9), they are terrified. The sailors are innocent men who are just doing their job, and yet they face the consequences of Jonah's rebellion as they endure the violent storm. Their story reminds us that "cause and effect" thinking doesn't always work. The sailors also are pagans, and yet they behave like pious followers of God. They cry out to God (1:14), offer sacrifices to the Lord (1:16) and make vows to God (1:16). The fate of the sailors, both physically and spiritually remains unknown at the end of the story.

The People of Ninevah | Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, a superpower notorious for violent cruelty. They were pagans who did not follow God. Throughout the book of Jonah, this city is described as "great," (1:2, 3:2, 4:11) which likely refers to the size (3:3) but may also be an indication of the concern God had for the people of this city. It is shocking that Jonah's message (3:4) resulted in the entire city believing God and engaging in acts of repentance (3:5). These were people who were feared by those around them and who had a reputation for being evil (See Nahum 3:1-7). But everyone, including the king (and the animals!), believes God, calls upon God, fasts and repents.

QUESTIONS

1) Read Jonah 1:3 and 4:1 and Read Proverbs 16:9. What steps did God ask Jonah to take? Would you describe Jonah as wise? Why or why not?

2) Read Jonah 1:10-16 and Proverbs 1:7. What steps did the sailors take? Would you describe the sailors as wise? Why or why not?

3) Read Jonah 3:5 and Proverbs 28:13. What steps did the people of Nineveh take? Would you describe the people of Nineveh as wise? Why or why not?

4) Can you think of a time when you were called to repent? The Ninevites fasted and put on sackcloth when they repented. What do you do when you repent?

FOR GROUPS

DISCUSSION

The book of Jonah is only 4 chapters long and is a story that is easy to read. It is relatively easy to relay the events in this story. Many children know the story of "Jonah and the Big Fish." But there are so many "odd" and unexpected parts of this story that there are multiple explanations as to what this story is really about. What does God want us to learn from this story? Marty Solomon believes that the point of Jonah is to communicate the importance of repentance for all people (those who follow God and those who are far from God) because God cares about all people. Tim Mackey suggests that the point is to "mess with the reader" by prompting us to consider if we are really OK with the reality that God loves our enemies. And Daniel Timmer suggests that Jonah is a case study in how it is possible to know the truth and still act in a way that is completely contrary from the truth. What the experts agree on is that this is a masterfully told story. Perhaps God wants us to learn multiple truths from this story.

QUESTIONS

1) As you read the story of Jonah this week, did you notice anything that you had never noticed before?

2) What are some of the parts of this story that strike you as “odd” or “unexpected?”

3) What do you believe God wants you to learn from this story?

4) What question in Days #1-5 was especially meaningful for you?

5) What wisdom did you gain this week?

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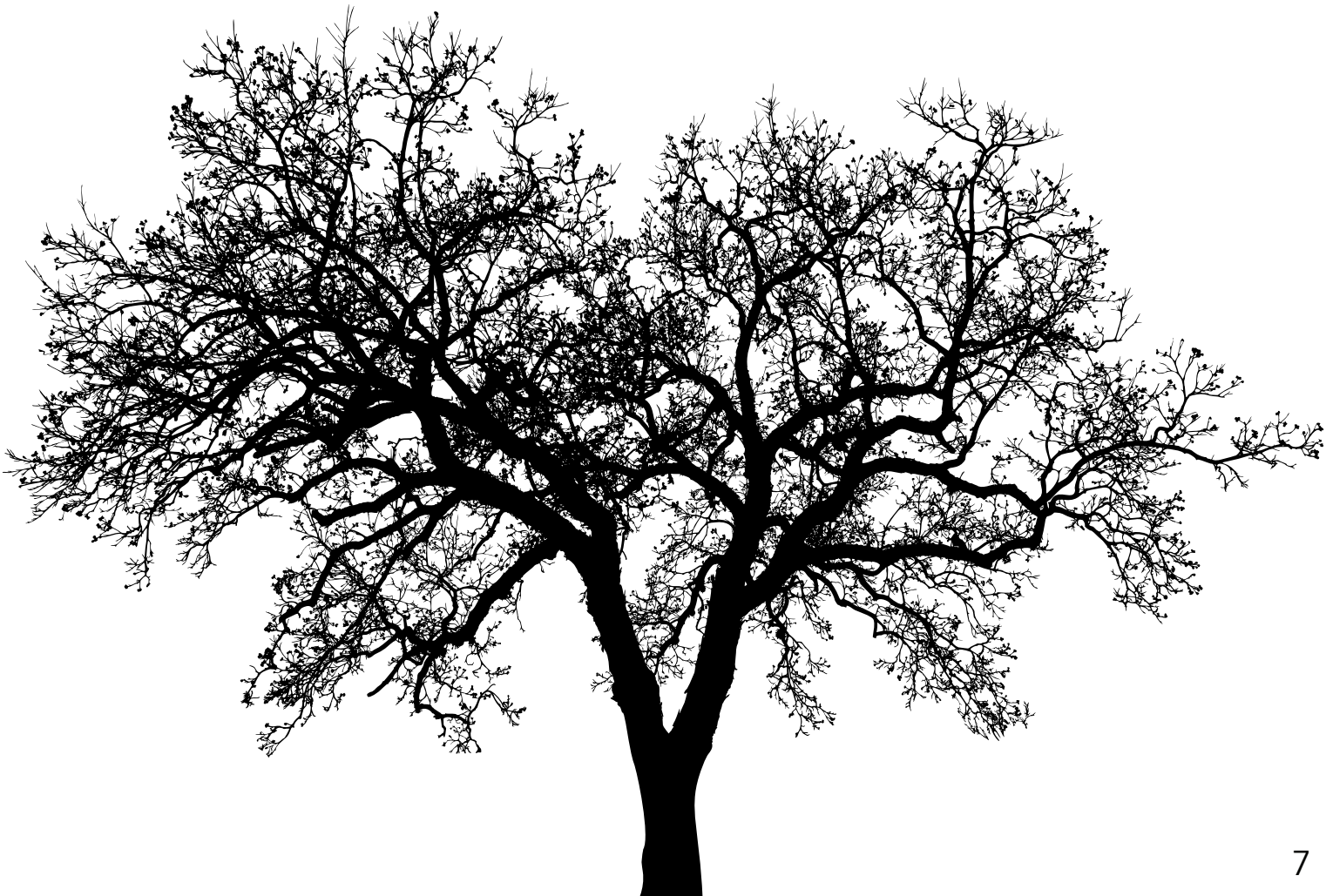
WISDOM

WEEK 7: EXPERIENCING GRACE AND GLORY

WISDOM

Wisdom is the ongoing application of God's truth and knowledge to our circumstances.



DAY 1

TRUSTING GOD

My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight...

PROVERBS 3:21

READ PROVERBS 3:21-23 & JOHN 14:5-14

QUESTIONS

1) What life is being promised in both of these passages?

2) What role can wisdom play in our pursuit of this life?

3) Look again at the passage from John. Jesus is saying that wisdom leads to more than just knowledge about God.

a) What more have the disciples already experienced? (v. 9-11)

b) What more is there still to be experienced? (v. 12-14)

DAY 2

HEALING

...and they were filled with wonder and amazement
at what had happened to him.

ACTS 3:10b

Today's story takes places after the death and resurrection of Jesus, after Christ's ascension into Heaven, and also after the gift of the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples on Pentecost. In this story, Peter and John are walking toward the temple when they encounter a beggar on the streets.

READ ACTS 3:1-10

QUESTIONS

1) What is the beggar's request as he encounters Peter and John?

2) What do Peter and John give him instead?

READ ACTS 3:11-16 AND ACTS 4:4

QUESTIONS

1) What saved the beggar? (v. 3:16)

2) What are the more widespread results of the disciples' initial encounter with the beggar? (v. 3:9-10; 4:4)

3) How do both the beggar and the crowd experience, not just knowledge, but life in Christ in our story?

4) In what aspects or times of your life do you most experience life in Christ? In what areas of your life are you most prone to forget?

DAY 3

REVEALED BY THE SPIRIT

But we have the mind of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:16b

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-19 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-16

QUESTIONS

1) The Fall Kickoff has centered around the topic of wisdom. What does it mean to you that "the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing?" (v. 1:18)

2) In verse 2:7, what is the "secret wisdom of God?"

QUESTIONS

3) Verses 2:14-16 offer a warning to those who follow worldly wisdom (the natural person) and those who follow spiritual wisdom (the spiritual person). How might these two people experience the world and their faiths differently? (Read Romans 8:5-11 for the same message in further detail.)

4) "Transformation in Christ" is our church's vision. Describe the transformation that can take place as a result of godly wisdom. Do you have a transformation story you can share? This can be incredibly "dramatic" or incredibly "ordinary" from the world's perspective.

DAY 4

THE END GOAL

but I press on to take hold of that
for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

PHILIPPIANS 3:12b

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14

QUESTIONS

1) In this passage, Paul alludes that knowledge is not the end goal.

a) According to Paul, what is his goal? (v. 10-11 and 14; also v. 20)

b) What part of verses 10 and 11 speaks to you the loudest? Why?

c) What steps do you need to take in order to pursue these goals?

2) What wisdom did you gain from this week's devotions?

3) What wisdom did you gain from our entire study on wisdom?

DAY 5

CONTEMPLATE IT

The Lord is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.

PSALM 113:4

WHAT IS "CONTEMPLATE IT?"

"Contemplate It" is a tool to help us use God's Word to have a personal conversation with God. It is a practice that gives us a chance to talk to God and God a chance to talk back to us. Another name for this practice is lectio divina, which means "divine reading." Like the other practices we have experienced in this devotional, "Contemplate It" invites us to slow down when we engage with Scripture. Too often we are "fast food" Bible readers, rapidly gulping down the Bread of life (John 6:35). The result is that we are unable to properly absorb our "spiritual meal." But just as it takes some time to break a "fast food habit," it might take a few tries to slow down and get used to this Scripture engagement practice. Find a quiet place where you can spend at least 15 minutes contemplating this passage of Scripture. Today, just give it a try. You might find that it allows you to savor your time in God's Word and find joy in meeting God.

HOW TO ENGAGE

1) **Reading** | Reading is the first and foremost part of "Contemplate It."

a) After preparing your heart and mind to be in God's Word, slowly read Psalm 113. Psalm 113:4 references "glory" specifically, which is a focus of this week. Also, praising God is a way to experience God, and this is a week about experiencing wisdom. Also, this is a psalm that references raising up poor from the dust (just like in the Acts 3 story with the beggar).

b) Note specific words. Think about the intentionality of the word ordering. Look for repetition, themes, pictures, and dialogue. Stay alert for a single word, phrase, verse, metaphor, or message that catches your eye, stirs you, or connects with you emotionally.

c) Read the passage again. Stop at whatever had tugged at your heart and reread that significant piece over and over, lingering over the words and phrases. Repetition will help to keep that piece of Scripture in the forefront of your mind.

HOW TO ENGAGE (continued)

2) **Meditation** | Biblical meditation is not the same as Eastern meditation. In Eastern meditation, the objective is detachment and an empty mind. In biblical meditation, the objective is attachment to God and filling our mind with God's Word. To practice Christian meditation is to do what Mary did when Jesus was born. She treasured up all the things God had done and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

a) Ask the Holy Spirit to make the passage "come to life" so that you can grasp the connections to your own life.

b) What parts of the passage spoke to you?

c) Focus intently on why the Holy Spirit might have chosen these words to speak to you. Reflect on how it might connect to your life.

d) What do you want to remember today from your reading of God's Word?

3) **Prayer** | Take all the thoughts, feelings, actions, fears, convictions, and questions you have meditated on and offer them to the Lord in prayer. In your prayer, you are bringing your life and Scripture together in God's presence. Simply talk to God and tell Him what you're feeling, just like you would with a good friend or family member.

4) **Contemplation** | Don't skip this final stage. It is vital. The "task" in this stage is to simply be silent in the presence of God (Psalm 46:10). Just be with God. You don't need to always be talking at God. In this stage, simply sit in the presence of God and feel His tender love and embrace. Resist worrying about your cell phone, work, friends, family, illnesses, and whatever else holds you back from God and sit in the love that is shared between you and Jesus.

FOR GROUPS

QUESTIONS

1) Describe a time when you felt like you experienced God's glory.

2) What difference has this study on wisdom made in your life? Be specific.

3) What practices around wisdom were most challenging? Which were most helpful?

4) Share your experience of engaging with Scripture through "Contemplate It."

5) Did you "discover" a new way of engaging with Scripture during this study?

6) Your pursuit of wisdom can be a blessing to those around you. Read Proverbs 23:23-24. Are there ways that you can see these Proverbs playing out in your life, either as the "father" or the "son?"

R E S O U R C E S

Week 1 – Day 1

The Bible Project "Proverbs" https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/proverbs/

New Interpreter's Bible Commentary – Proverbs by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen

The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible – Wisdom by Nancy Declaisse-Walford

Week 1 – Questions for Life Groups

Wllard, Dallas, Renovation of the Heart

Lewis, C.S. The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

Keller, Tim The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God

Week 2 – Day 3

"Abide: Picture It" by Dr. Phil Collins https://www.thomasnelsonbibles.com/blog/abide-picture-it/

The Abide Bible Course by Phil Collins and Randy Frazee, 2022

Week 2 – Questions for Life Groups

Henrich, Sarah "Commentary on Luke 6:27-28" https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/seventh-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-627-38-2

Week 3 – Day 5

"Abide: Praying Scripture" by Dr. Phil Collins https://www.thomasnelsonbibles.com/blog/abide-praying-scripture/

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Week 3 – Questions for Life Groups

Gilbert, Greg, James: A 12 Week Study (Knowing the Bible Series edited by J.I. Packer and Dane C. Ortlund)

Johnson, Luke Timothy, New Interpreter's Bible Commentary "James"

Week 4 – Day 3

"Abide: Journaling Scripture" by Dr. Phil Collins https://www.thomasnelsonbibles.com/blog/abide-journaling-scripture/

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Week 5 – Day 4

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Week 5 – Questions for Life Groups

Guthrie, Nancy The Wisdom of God: Seeing Jesus in the Psalms and Wisdom Books.

Mackey, Tim "The Bible Project: Overview of Job" https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/job/

Week 6 – Questions for Life Groups

Mackey, Tim. Bible Project: The Book of Jonah https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/jonah/

Solomon, Marty and Brent Billings "Jonah" BEMA Podcast https://www.bemadiscipleship.com/52

Timmer, Daniel "How to read Jonah" Credo Magazine https://credomag.com/2019/10/how-to-read-jonah-theologically/

Week 7 – Day 5

"Abide: Contemplate" by Dr. Phil Collins https://www.thomasnelsonbibles.com/blog/abide-contemplate/