

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 7: God's Blessing

Daily Reading for Week

- Numbers 5-7, Psalm 30
- Numbers 8-10, Psalm 31
- Numbers 11-13, Psalm 32
- Numbers 14-16, Psalm 33
- Numbers 17-18, Psalm 34
- Numbers 19-21, Psalm 35
- Numbers 22-24, Psalm 36
- Video: Numbers
- Minimum Reading: Numbers 6:22-27, Numbers 14, Numbers 23-24

Focus of time together

Reflect on Israel's repeated disobedience and rebellion as well as God's patience and generous blessing on his people.

Connecting Exercise (15 minutes)

Share with the group in what way you have experienced a blessing this week?

Opening Prayer

Intro to Discussion

This week in our YOBL reading we have read most of the book of Numbers. Numbers sounds like a boring book and if we're honest the first 10 chapters kind of are. They are filled with Moses taking a census of Israel as they are about to leave Mt. Sinai after having spent a year there in God's presence as he's given them the Law. But after the first 10 chapters of mostly, you guessed it, numbers, the book becomes a travelogue of Israel's journey from Mt. Sinai to the Promised Land. As Israel begins to journey a pattern begins to emerge. The people begin to grumble and complain to God about a variety of things. The journey is hard, they are hungry, thirsty, tired, etc. They begin to actually wish they were back enslaved in Egypt. God hears their grumbling and is exceedingly patient with them, allowing the people to follow their disobedient desires and feel the full weight of the consequences. This results in God declaring in Numbers 14 that, because of the people's desire to forsake the Promised Land and return to Egypt, anyone over the age of 20 would not enter the Promised Land. So Israel

wanders through the wilderness between Mt. Sinai and the Promised Land (a journey that should take 2 weeks) for 40 years. And yet, despite Israel's constant rebellion, God still chooses to remain faithful to them, even blessing them in the midst of their grumbling. He continues to provide them with manna, quail and water throughout their journey. This culminates in the story of Balaam, a pagan sorcerer/prophet sent by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse Israel. Three times Balaam tries to curse Israel and three times God only allows him to bless Israel, even though Israel is unaware this is happening. We see God's faithfulness and steadfast love of his chosen people despite their rebellion.

Whole Group Discussion (60 minutes)

Questions for Basic Understanding

These questions are to help us interpret and understand the text as it was intended to be interpreted and understood.

How would you summarise the section of Numbers that you have read so far in a sentence or two?

Questions for Listening to Scripture

These questions are to help us be affected by Scripture in the way it was intended to affect us

1. What can you learn about God through the stories about Balaam in Numbers 23-24?
2. What do they illustrate about God's relationship with Israel?

Questions for Interacting with Scripture

These questions are to help us slow down to taste and notice Scripture, savour its richness and meditate on the complexity of its meaning.

1. The stories of Balaam collectively read almost as a comedy with a supposedly terrifying prophet/sorcerer unable to say anything bad about Israel to curse them. What do you think Balaam must have felt as three times his attempts to curse are turned by God into blessings?
2. Is there any part of the blessings that God gives Israel through Balaam that you find particularly beautiful, rich or interesting?

Questions for Practicing Community

These questions are to help us reflect thoughtfully on our felt experience together as community and provide opportunities to build on it further..

We just looked at a story of God blessing his people through a pagan prophet who meant to curse them. Blessing another is an art that is not often practiced in the church today.

Dallas Willard writes, " *Blessing is the projection of good into the life of another. It isn't just words. It's the actual putting forth of your will for the good of another person. It always involves God, because when you will the good of another person you realise*

only God is capable of bringing that. So we naturally say "God bless you"

Practice blessing one another. In Numbers 6:22-26 we see God instructing Moses and Aaron HOW to bless his people.

The LORD said to Moses" "Tell Aaron and his sons" "This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them

"The LORD bless you
and keep you^a
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you^a
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace"

- 1) Break up into pairs.
- 2) Take turns speaking this blessing from Numbers over one another. Speak slowly, trying as best you can to maintain eye contact. If you are receiving the blessing do your best to give the speaker your full attention.
- 3) As you speak, try to posture your heart towards the person you are blessing remembering they are created in the image of God and God wants good things and fullness of life for them. If you are receiving the blessing, ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and allow you to fully receive this as a gift from God.
- 4) When you are ready, speak the following blessing over one another:

The Lord bless you.
And keep you; *Pause*
The Lord make his face shine on you
And be gracious to you; *Pause*
The Lord turn his face towards you
And give you peace. *Pause*

- 5) When everyone in pairs has had a turn blessing and being blessed come back together and ask, what was that experience like for you?

Closing Time of Prayer (15 minutes)