

trinitychurch

OF THE NAZARENE

Devotional Reading Guide

July 30 — August 26, 2018

2 Kings—Ezra



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About this Guide

This monthly devotional is designed to guide our reading through every book of the Bible between 2018-2019.

Each week, we will read several chapters of Scripture. You are encouraged to spread out this reading by incorporating it into your daily devotional practices. Remember, this is not homework we are obliged to complete, it is spiritual formation that we make time to invest in. God wants to meet with you!

Two pages are set aside in this booklet for each week's reading. The first page offers a brief devotional reflection to help you begin thinking about how to apply the reading.

The second page is devoted to your own reflections. Questions are provided to help you engage the reading both thoughtfully and personally. However, do not limit yourself to these questions or to the space provided: allow the Holy Spirit to guide how you engage and respond to God's Word.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. May God bless you as you read God's Word more and more!

Growing Together

God's Word is meant to be studied together. While we hope that this devotional guide will be a valuable tool to your personal study of Scripture, we also hope that you will join us in continuing to reflect on God's Word at Trinity each week.

On Sundays, our morning and evening Worship Celebrations will provide more detailed teaching about the passages that you have read. They will also be a space for us to ask questions and reflect on how God is calling us to respond to God's Word.

Weekly Connect Group meetings and Bible Studies also present a great opportunity to regularly reflect with sisters and brothers in Christ on passages as they are preached in worship. If you would like more information on how to get connected, please contact our church office:

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Prayer of Illumination

(Can be said prior to Bible reading)

Merciful and gracious God, You did not abandon Your people when they were slaves in Egypt. You rescued them. Even when Israel was exiled for their unfaithfulness, You did not abandon them. You will not abandon me. Open my eyes as I read today so that I may not abandon You. As I read Your story again, teach me the ways of Your Kingdom so that I may cling to You all the days of my life.

July 30-August 5: 2 Kings

Finding God

On the surface, 2 Kings seems to be a history of events in Israel and Judah: it records each king and their accomplishments. But there's another, more important story being told here—a story woven throughout the Bible: the story of God's faithfulness. While kings pursue power through war, alliances, and trade; God works miracles with jars of oil, flour, and water.

Naaman is a man who is familiar with the way world works. He knows that wars earn power, kings are in control, and everything has a price. So, upon hearing the remarkably generous advice of a kidnapped slave girl—that there is a prophet in Israel who can cure his leprosy—he loads up his money and heads for the palace. After all, kings have the power, don't they?

Naaman doesn't find healing at the palace, but is directed toward Elisha's house. So he heads that direction, but the prophet doesn't even come out to greet him. How rude! How inconsiderate! Elisha merely sends a servant who tells Naaman to go take a bath in the Jordan! "Preposterous! Bathe in your dirty river!"

Naaman is so sure about how things are *supposed* to work in the world—and so offended by Elisha's actions—that he almost leaves. Yet, at the urging of his servants, Naaman decides to give it a try: so he takes a bath—or seven—in the Jordan river. And you know what? He comes out clean: truly clean.

Naaman thought he understood where power resides and how the world works, but he didn't. It was when he humbled himself enough to heed the words of God through Elisha that Naaman realized just how wrong he had been. Power doesn't belong to kings, commanders, or even to Elisha; power belongs to the One true God who had created the universe. Is there an area of your life where you are reluctant to jump in the river?

Questions for Reflection

How can you thank God for this Word that you have read?

What do these passages teach us about God?

What do these passages teach us about humanity?

Can you relate to Naaman? Where in your life have you trusted in the ways of the world? How can you trust God more?

Was anything about the reading confusing to you? If so, what questions might you want to ask to help bring understanding?

How is God calling you to respond to what you have read?

Memory Verse of the Week

Now, O LORD our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are God.

— 2 Kings 19:19 (NASB)

August 6-12: 1 Chronicles

Thanksgiving

If you were new to church, it wouldn't take long before you realized that we have a particular custom at meal times: we pray. Whether it's called "saying grace," "blessing the food," or "giving thanks"; most of us have developed the habit of praying before we eat. In fact, I've seen entire rooms of people sit still next to delicious food while waiting for someone to bless it, which is especially awkward if the pastor has forgotten to do so. We are so used to this custom that we don't feel comfortable eating until we pray.

That is a wonderful thing! It is fantastic that we have woven prayer into our habits of eating. Yet, habits can have an unfortunate consequence: sometimes we can get so used to doing something that we forget *why* it's important. Sometimes I think that people wait for prayer before a meal more out of social expectation than out of reverence to God. More often, we say a few quick words over the food out of a feeling of obligation without really ensuring our hearts appreciate the meal as a gift from God.

The reason that we Christians particularly take a moment to pause and thank God for food is because *God* has given it to us. We pray because we believe that all things come from God and without God's provision, we would have nothing on the table. We pray because plants and animals have died so that we can keep on living. We give thanks to God for the gift of life.

I use this illustration as a concrete example of our prayers of thanks. David writes a psalm of thanks recorded in 2 Chronicles 16:8-36. It is full of genuine and heartfelt praise of God for who God is and for what God has done. Our lives should resound with the thanks and praise of God at all times, for God has created us and saved us. May our thanks be genuine and from the heart.

Questions for Reflection

How can you thank God for this Word that you have read?

What do these passages teach us about God?

What do these passages teach us about humanity?

Take a moment to thank God for who God is in your life.

Was anything about the reading confusing to you? If so, what questions might you want to ask to help bring understanding?

How is God calling you to respond to what you have read?

Memory Verse of the Week

Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head above all.

— 1 Chronicles 29:11 (NRSV)

August 13-19: 2 Chronicles

Exile and Justice

This is the second time in three weeks that we've read about the exile of Israel. It's not a pleasant subject. After everything that Israel had gone through to get to the Promised Land and after all that God had done to provide for them, Israel turned away. They worshipped idols and forgot God's laws. They became more concerned about competing with their neighbors than they were about being God's holy people.

2 Chronicles 36:15-23 summarizes what happened. God tried to call Israel back. God tried to warn them by sending the prophets. But Israel didn't listen, so God allowed them to be exiled. Jerusalem, the heart of Israel and the place where God dwelled, was looted and destroyed. Even the temple was burned.

Verse 21 explains that, during this exile, the land was finally able to rest. As we know if we have read the laws of Leviticus, Israel was supposed to steward the land entrusted to them. They were to allow it to rest, even as they were to rest every week on the Sabbath. But just as they had forgotten God's laws, Israel had neglected to care for their land.

God advocates for justice, even when it means holding God's own people accountable to their sin. There are many questions that Israel's story asks of us: Do we listen to God when God calls to us? Do we carefully steward the resources God has entrusted to us? Do we obey God's commands? Do we remember that our primary goal is to embody holiness, grace, and peace for the sake of the world?

If you feel convicted by answering "no" to any of those questions, talk about that with God. After all, God doesn't leave Israel in exile. God doesn't abandon God's people. God pursues us. We just have to turn back toward Christ.

Questions for Reflection

How can you thank God for this Word that you have read?

What do these passages teach us about God?

What do these passages teach us about humanity?

How can you relate to Israel's sin? Pray to God about that.

Was anything about the reading confusing to you? If so, what questions might you want to ask to help bring understanding?

How is God calling you to respond to what you have read?

Memory Verse of the Week

... if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

— 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

August 20-26: Ezra

Coming Home

There is something special about coming home, isn't there? During our years in Kansas City, my wife, Felisha, and I were able to make periodic visits our family in Lompoc. I specifically remember one occasion when we landed in Santa Barbara airport. It was January of 2017 and California had received more rain than it had in some time. The hills were green, dotted with yellow mustard flowers. The cool air was crisp and the sun was bright. We could see mountains and we could see the ocean! I remember turning to Felisha and saying: "This is home."

The feeling of "home" is an interesting one. It's not that Felisha and I didn't like Kansas City; we had grown to love it. In fact there are many things in a metro area like Kansas City that you can't find in Lompoc. We had made friends and established roots in our communities. But that stuff doesn't necessarily define "home." Home is a deeper sense of belonging and familiarity: where you're from that has shaped a big part of who you are. It may be hard to describe "home" with words, but you *know* when you're there.

While in exile, the Israelites had thought long and hard about their home: the God who had given it to them and the disobedience that had taken it away. And Israel's exile wasn't like our nice time in Kansas City. Israel had been forcibly taken from their home while everything they had known was destroyed. And there were points in exile when they didn't know if they would ever get to go back.

In Ezra, we again see God's faithfulness to God's people: God is bringing them home! Maybe you have sometimes felt as though you are alone or exiled. Remember this: God will not abandon you. In God, you can always find the place you belong.

Questions for Reflection

How can you thank God for this Word that you have read?

What do these passages teach us about God?

What do these passages teach us about humanity?

Do you feel “at home” with God? Pray about that.

Was anything about the reading confusing to you? If so, what questions might you want to ask to help bring understanding?

How is God calling you to respond to what you have read?

Memory Verse of the Week

With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the LORD: “He is so good! His faithful love for Israel endures forever!” Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the LORD because the foundation of the LORD’s Temple had been laid. — Ezra 3:11 (NLT)

Our Logos Journey

In January of 2018, Trinity Church of the Nazarene began a two year journey to deeply engage God's Word. We chose to use the Greek term, *logos*, to name this journey because *logos* literally means "word." In the Christian tradition, *logos* not only refers to God's Word—the Holy Scriptures of the Bible—but also to God's Word made flesh: Jesus Christ.

We are convinced that God wants us to invest ourselves more deeply in God's *logos*. As we draw near to Christ and invest ourselves in the study of Scripture, we know that God transform us to better love God, each other, and others in our community.

Over these two years, we will be reading all 66 books of the Bible, engaging them in Worship, and studying them through weekly Bible Studies and Connect Groups. This guide will direct our reading every month, offer some devotional thoughts each week, and encourage space for reflection.

We hope that you will join us on this exciting *Logos* journey!



*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. — John 1:1*