DEUTERONOMY

HPUMC BIBLE READING PLAN

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 10

CONVERSATION STARTER

When was the last time you sat in complete silence? What did that experience feel like?

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART *Deuteronomy 30:1-10*

"And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it…And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

God is going to do *what* to our heart? Circumcision isn't exactly something we spend a lot of time talking about today. But in the Bible, circumcision is an important theme to describe exactly how God is working in the world, and more specifically, in each of us.

The first time we hear about this practice in the Bible is in Genesis 17, when God makes a covenant with Abraham, and seals it through this new practice. Importantly, this story comes on the heels of a tragic scene in Israel's history, after Abraham and Sarah's sinful treatment of Hagar in Genesis 16. Their desire to make a name for themselves and receive a legacy through their descendents leads them to sexually abuse their servant. This is most certainly ***not*** how God wants humanity to use the power to reproduce. God commands humans to be fruitful and multiply, and He tells Abraham that he will become a great nation. But Abraham and Sarah pervert that by taking a shortcut to achieve blessing by their own means, instead of waiting on God.

So God commands Abraham to cut off a piece of himself that was directly involved in this fall story. Circumcision therefore acts both as a sign of judgment on Abraham and Sarah's "*the end justifies the means*" tactics, and as a sign of God's mercy. Even though

they failed to trust God, God remains faithful to them, eventually bringing them another child, conceived by God's blessing.

So what does this have to do with our hearts?

In the Hebrew imagination, our hearts are not only the source of our feelings and desires but also the locus of our thoughts, beliefs, will, and purposes. And while our hearts are not all bad, they are also not all good. The Bible often points to the reality that our hearts are corrupt and can't be fully trusted. And if we're ever going to be faithful to God, something needs to happen at the core of our being, with our desires, motivations, and emotions. In other words, a part of our *heart* needs to be cut off.

What Moses is doing in Deuteronomy is planting the seed of future hope. Hope for us to escape the endless cycle of death and sin. God knows that we struggle to obey. God knows our desires are often governed by self-seeking motivations instead of trust in Him. But God isn't going to leave humanity stranded. God promises to make a way for us to receive a heart transplant, so we can be faithful.

Spend a few moments discussing this idea with your group. Read Ezekiel 36:16-38 and then John 14:1-31 together. What do these passages reveal about God's plan to give us a new heart and new spirit?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. In our reading for this week, we witness Moses passing the torch of leadership to the next generation. Who has served as a mediator of God's love and grace for you?
3. What have these passages in Deuteronomy revealed to you about God's faithfulness? What words would you use to describe God's character?
4. How can we partner with the Spirit in the transformation of our hearts as we seek to grow in our discipleship with Jesus? What role do we play? What role does the Spirit play?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

In November, we're turning our attention to how we cultivate peace within us and around us. We often think to experience peace, we need to eliminate things: conflict,

worry, hurry, stress. What if instead, through the **practice of silence**, done for a while, we could cultivate peace in the middle of our current circumstances?

This week, be intentional about scheduling quiet time in your calendar. Start with 10 minutes. Turn off all sources of noise and distraction (phone, music, television, etc.). Allow your thoughts to come to rest, and imagine God with you in the quiet. You may experience some resistance at first, but keep going! Gradually increase the duration as you become more comfortable with the practice.