

# DEUTERONOMY

HPUMC BIBLE READING PLAN

## GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 2

### CONVERSATION STARTER

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If you could only ever listen to *one* song for the rest of this year, what would you choose?

### LISTEN AND OBEY IF YOU WANT TO LIVE

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When was the last time you asked someone to *listen* to you? If you're a parent or a teacher, you probably use that word a lot. Or maybe you've had to ask a distracted friend whether you still have their attention. When we need to communicate something important, often, we begin by asking the other person, "Are you listening?"

This is precisely what Moses is doing with the second generation of God's people in Deuteronomy. At the beginning of his speeches, Moses starts by calling them to "listen." But, just like when a parent uses it with their children, this word means more than simply *hear* these words. It means *do what I say*.

The Hebrew word for "listen" is *shema*, and beyond just listening with your ears, it means 'pay attention to' or 'respond.' In other words, to listen *is to obey*. There is no separate word in Hebrew for 'obey,' you would use *shema*. In Psalm 27:7, the Psalmist says, "Hear my voice when I call, Lord; be merciful to me and answer me." He isn't asking God just to *hear* his cries, but to *do something about them*.

Similarly, when Moses tells the people to *shema*, he's calling them to *listen* and *obey* the words he's about to speak. Moses says, "And now, O Israel, [*shema*] the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live" (Dt 4:1). **Listen and obey the law and you will live.**

This verse gives us a clue about the purpose of the Law–It leads to life! This can be hard for some of us to wrap our minds around because we don't associate the ancient Law with life. We might think of it as outdated, irrelevant, and possibly even offensive.

But the Law was originally meant to be a gift from God, a way for God to form and mold His people into a new kind of community. A community that would love God and love others well, that would lead with generosity and integrity, with justice and righteousness. By obeying God, the people wouldn't just experience blessing themselves, they would end up blessing the entire world as a result ([Exod. 19:5-6](#)).

Today, we don't follow the Law of Moses, but this same idea isn't all that foreign to us. When Jesus calls us to faithfulness, he's calling us to live in such a way that we would reveal God's character to the rest of the world. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to **listen and obey**, so we can be salt and light for the world ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)). In this way, Jesus helps us understand the heart behind the Law: to love God and love others. This is the way, He claims, that leads to life. When we listen and obey God, that life isn't just available to us, it becomes a means of blessing all those around us, too.

In our Western world that prizes freedom and independence above all things, it seems strange to suggest somehow that obedience is what opens the door to “the good life.” But this is precisely what Moses (and generations later, Jesus) are suggesting. **We do not find our life by desperately clinging to it, but by surrendering it in obedience to God, choosing to follow the way of Jesus.**

So the question we're left with is simply, *are you listening?*

Spend a few minutes discussing this idea with your group. What assumptions about and previous experiences with the Law/Torah are you coming into Deuteronomy with? Did you have a generally positive, neutral, or negative view of it before this week? Why is that? How does it change your perception of the Law to view it as a gift that leads to life?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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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. Can you share a time when following God's commands brought you peace and blessing?
3. We are called to *bear God's name*, to represent God to the rest of the world. What does this look like on a practical level? How does this apply to us as a community of Jesus followers?
4. What activities or practices help you experience God's presence in your life?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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In September, we are focusing on cultivating a life with God where love can grow within us, and we believe this happens in the context of community. Psychiatrist and author Curt Thompson says, "We all are born into the world looking for someone looking for us, and we remain in this mode of searching for the rest of our lives." To cultivate love, we must surround ourselves with others seeking to do the same. Whether it's a mentor, small group, counselor, or a handful of friends, these are people who love you, challenge you to grow, and regularly ask, "How are you really?"

Cultivating this kind of community takes intentionality; it won't happen by accident. These kinds of relationships require effort, commitment, consistency, and authenticity. This week, we want to challenge you to take a step toward finding this kind of community. You can do that by joining an HPUMC Small Group. Our Small Group Launch is happening right now, you can register [here](#) by Sunday, September 15. Or, you can simply gather a group of your friends to start a weekly Bible study (you can even use our weekly Group Guides as a tool for discussion!). Don't be intimidated to make the ask; every relationship has to start somewhere and most people are just waiting for an invitation into deeper community.