

DEUTERONOMY

HPUMC BIBLE READING PLAN

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 4

CONVERSATION STARTER

What is the most memorable way someone has ever blessed you? Why did it mean so much to you?

BLESSING AND CURSES

Deut. 11:26-29

“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.” (Deut. 11:26–29)

Like so many other themes, the theme of blessing and curse starts in the first few pages of the Bible. In Genesis 1, God issues the first blessing over the animals, that they may “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.” Next, God gives humanity an additional blessing. He appoints humanity to rule over creation and oversee His good, flourishing world as His partners. We are commissioned by God to bring forth goodness, beauty, and fruit from God’s world that is bursting with potential. So in essence, **God’s blessing is about flourishing, abundance, and life.**

But you know the story. Instead of embracing God’s blessing, Adam and Eve decide to seize life on their own terms. Tim Mackie calls their decision to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil an attempt to take a “*shortcut to blessing.*” But instead of blessing, this brings a curse.

When you think about curses, you might think about witches and magic spells, but in the Bible, a curse is what happens when God hands people over to the consequences of their own actions. It is what happens when we try to seize blessing on our own

terms—living life according to what seems good to us, instead of what is truly good according to God. And in Genesis 3, what does the curse unleash on creation? Toil, scarcity, isolation, death, pain...

But God is determined to end the curse and restore His blessing among all nations of the world, and He wants to do it in partnership with the family of Abraham. He wants to bless them so that they will be vehicles of His blessing to the nations, and what He asks of this family, the Israelites, is that they live by His wisdom and trust His definitions of what is good and true.

In Deuteronomy 11, Moses once again presents this as a choice to trust God, a decision between life and death, blessing and curse. We can be tempted to view this as if God is demanding they earn their blessings and threatening punishment if they don't. But that's not at all what's happening here. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we are given two options: will I trust that God knows best and that His ways lead to life abundant? Or will I choose to place my trust in myself and do what is right in my own eyes?

Trusting God leads to blessing and life because He knows best. Trusting in what I think is best leads to sin and death because I do not. God is not saying, *earn my favor, and I will reward you*. He is saying, *trust in my ways because my ways lead to the life that is truly life. I have your best in mind!*

Take a moment to discuss this idea with your group. What are some things people in our culture often turn to for blessing or fulfillment besides God? These could be people, organizations, philosophies, ideologies, etc. Where does our trust in these things ultimately lead?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from last week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. Moses makes it clear to the Israelites that they didn't earn the blessings in the Promised Land; it was a gift from God because He is gracious! What do you think is the difference between trying to *earn* God's favor and putting in *effort* to honor Him? Why do you think it's so easy for us, even as believers, to get caught up in earning?
3. What is a time in your life you can think of when your decision to trust God and His ways led to abundance and flourishing?

4. God wants to bless us so that we can bless others! Who is someone you can bless this week? Where might He be asking you to respond in love by serving your neighbors?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Confession sounds like a scary word, but it doesn't have to be a heart-racing endeavor. After all, in order for our brokenness and wounds to heal, we must bring them into the light. Confession starts with being open and honest before God, naming the areas of your life where you've missed the mark. For this practice, we recommend finding a quiet place where you can sit with God without distractions. Start by praying the prayer of confession below, asking God to highlight anything God wants to bring to your attention. Remember, this practice is not about shame, but asking God's forgiveness and reminding ourselves of God's endless mercy.

Lord, we confess our sins before you. We confess that we have fallen short of your glory and your intent for our lives. Open our eyes that we may see ourselves with clarity and truthfulness, that we may have eyes to see all of that within us that is not pleasing to you.

Lord, we confess to you that we have not loved as we ought. We have been impatient with others with whom we could have been patient. We have disregarded those you have called us to serve. We have chosen the selfish way when you have called us to selflessness.

Lord, we confess that we have not tended to the care of our souls. We have been too busy to pray. We have been too quick to speak and too slow to listen for you. We have filled our lives with all kinds of noise instead of patiently waiting like sheep for our shepherd's voice.

Lord, we confess our need of you. We need your grace. We need your patience. We need your guidance. We cannot see beyond the moment. We cannot worship you as we ought. As we begin this solemn journey toward the cross, we call upon your mercy and your love for our salvation. Amen.