

DEUTERONOMY

HPUMC BIBLE READING PLAN

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 7

CONVERSATION STARTER

If money didn't matter, what would your dream job be? Describe the kinds of things you would do and where you would work.

THE LAW AS MISSION, NOT SALVATION

This week's reading ushers in the Civil Laws, which to modern readers can seem out-of-touch or downright cruel at times. But before we move toward judgment of our ancient peers, we must first approach the text with curiosity.

Remember, the Laws of Deuteronomy were not written *to you*. They were to the ancient Israelites thousands of years ago within a different culture. We shouldn't be surprised if they don't make sense to us today. At the same time, the Laws of Deuteronomy were written *for us*. Meaning, we can still glean wisdom from them thousands of years later.

The laws are broken up into two sections:

- Ch. 12-16 are about how the people are called to worship God.
- Ch. 16-26 feature laws about civil and social life, including restoring justice.

Does that sound familiar? Love God. Love others. Jesus says in Matthew 22 that the whole law can be summed up in this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And, "Love your neighbor as yourself." In other words, love God and love others.

It's easy to lose track of this reality when we're reading about laws governing sexual ethics or conquest. But the primary purpose of the law was never about securing Israel's salvation. The Law was never a way for Israel to please God so God wouldn't destroy

them. Instead, the Law was about mission; it was designed to shape and form the people into a community that embodied righteousness, justice, and mercy. Israel was meant to be a nation that would bring blessing to the nations around them through the way they loved God and loved others. This is why so much of the law is about setting Israel apart from other nations and making them distinct.

While we no longer follow the Old Testament law, we do share the same mission to bring blessing to those around us. As modern readers, when we encounter the Law, the goal is to seek out the wisdom of the ancients echoing through generations teaching us what it means to love God and neighbor with all of our heart, soul, and strength.

How do we do that? As we read the Law, we remember these three principles:

- The ancient laws were not written *to you*, but they were written *for you*.
- Don't compare them to our modern laws but with those of Israel's ancient neighbors (Assyria or Babylon).
- Look for the core principle beneath the law—how does it call for Israel to show justice or wisdom? How does it lead them to love God or love their neighbor?

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. How would you describe the Church's mission in the world today? How does that mission work itself out practically in the community?
3. Read Deuteronomy 22:1-12 together as a group. Using the three principles above, what underlying wisdom or justice do you see God inviting the Israelites to practice through the laws discussed in this passage? How might we put this same wisdom into practice today, even if we don't follow the letter of the law in Deuteronomy?
4. Deuteronomy often speaks out on behalf of the most vulnerable or weakest members of society. How are we called to do the same as we seek to restore justice in our own environments?
5. What does it look like for us practically to love God and love others today as we seek to follow Jesus together?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

The joy offered by Jesus is unique in that it can coexist with drudgery and the mundane aspects of our lives. We don't need a flashy, successful, fabulous life to experience joy. We often think the more we have, the happier we will be. It turns out the opposite is true; the more we have, the more it has us. We make room for joy through the practice of simplicity.

This week, resist materialism by spending as little as possible. Only buy essentials—groceries, gas, medical expenses, etc. Eat at home instead of going out. Avoid shopping. Our financial habits tell us a lot about what we value. Pay attention to what this exercise might be unearthing for you as you practice.