

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer

GETTING ACQUAINTED

BOOKS, MATERIALS

Required:

- Disciple Bible Study Manual
- A good study Bible (NIV, NRSV, TNIV, Life Application, New Interpreter's Study Bible with the Apocrypha)
- *The Apocrypha* (unless it is included within your present Bible)

Useful Resource Materials (not required):

- A Bible dictionary and a Bible Atlas (Maps)
- *The Message* - paraphrased version of the Bible by Eugene Peterson or
- A contemporary English version (CEV) or New Living translation of the Bible

Schedule

Roster: Correct any wrong information; what is **best phone number for emergency calls**

E-mail: preferred mode of communication – weekly newsletter

EXPECTATIONS FOR DISCIPLE BIBLE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

- Read and prepare as much as you can. Don't stay away from class because you haven't gotten the reading completed. You will learn from our discussions. The lesson guides have been prepared to help steer you through the studies each week.
- Strive for regular attendance

JOYS AND CONCERNS: be faithful to remember these requests in prayer. We support each one of the group by being a "stretcher bearer."

SNACKS: Sign up sheet available to bring simple snacks to class: coffee cake, fruit. Keep it simple!

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Week 1: Redeem the Inheritance

GATHERING AND PRAYER (page 6)

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Family**

Theme Scripture

In ancient Israel, descendants were the way your memory lived on. There was only the concept of the body being raised from the dead at some future date, so Israel placed great importance on descendants. Women unable to bear children were a great tragedy. (You will remember there are several important women in the Bible who despaired of ever having children!) In Genesis 28:14, God promised Abraham, *“Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All people of the earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.”*

DVD Excerpts from the movie: *The Book of Ruth*

- Ruth has a thematic lesson for the reader which is summed up in the Jewish word *chesed* (*HEH-sed*): *loving kindness or steadfast love.*
- In what ways are the lives of Ruth and Naomi changed as a result of *chesed*?

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

The time frame of *Ruth* is the period of the judges. The judges were military heroes or deliverers who led the nation of Israel against their enemies during the period between the death of Joshua and the establishment of the kingship, about 1380 – 1050 B.C. During this time the government of Israel was a loose confederation of tribes gathered about their central, The Ark of the Covenant. Without a human king to guide them, the people tended to rebel and fall into worship of false gods time and time again.

In **Deuteronomy 24:10-22**, God gave Israel laws about loans to one’s neighbor, being kind to the poor, not taking advantage of hired men by withholding wages, not depriving the alien or the fatherless or the widow of justice. It commands the farmer to leave the edges of the fields for the poor to harvest.

Now we turn to the story of Ruth, a little foreign girl who came out of paganism and idolatry in the land of Moab. Without this little book, we could not connect the house of David with the tribe of Judah. It is a very important link in the chain of the Scripture that begins in Genesis and

goes right to the stable in Bethlehem. Turn to Matthew 1:11 and trace the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Boaz (husband of Ruth), Jesse, David, Solomon and then to Joseph and Mary.

Ruth 1 The land of Moab

- Situated along eastern border of the southern half of the Dead Sea. Moabites were the descendants of a son of Lot, but were pagan people and the god Chemosh was worshipped.
- Naomi (which means “pleasant”) bore two sons: Mahlon (“unhealthy”) and Chilion (“puny”).
- In ancient Israel, what was the plight of widowed women?
- Why does Naomi encourage her daughters-in-law to go back to their people?
- Why does Naomi insist she should go back to Bethlehem?
- Why does Ruth choose Naomi instead of her own people (**Ruth 1:17**)

Ruth 2 In the Field of Boaz

- **Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10 (called the Levirate Law).** The purpose of the law was to provide an heir for the dead brother, thereby preserving his name and estate. The law was also designed to provide for the welfare of widows.
- Boaz means “strength.” What kind of man was he?
- What is happening in Ruth’s life? God’s plan? Boaz’s plan?

Ruth 3

- What Mosaic Law is Naomi using to guide her daughter-in-law

ENCOUNTER THE WORD Ruth 4

1. How is the concept of **chesed** illustrated in this chapter?
2. In what ways was God working behind the scenes in this story?
3. How might we apply these concepts to our lives today?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Maintaining family is hard work. Family is constrictive, demanding, and not always convenient for us. Caring for others can be exhausting and painful. Staying connected is not easy. It is all we can do to look after ourselves.

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we take family seriously, giving high priority to family responsibilities, even extended family, often at considerable sacrifice. We reach outside family to include others.

These statements are point/counterpoint. In what ways does the Mark of Faithful Community provide answers to the Human Condition?

The Radical Disciple found in each lesson focuses on thoughts and actions relevant to the weekly theme that require stretch in terms of commitment to discipleship. It will call you to action or call you to reflection. This week's The Radical Disciple is found on page 14 of the Study Manual. Turn to this page and silently contemplate the questions. Put your reflections in to a phrase or a statement:

LECTIO DIVINA

(Read each line and contemplate on each word and thought. Re-read each line and rethink what these words mean in your life)

Shout praises to the Lord!

With all my heart I will thank the Lord when his people meet.

The Lord has done many wonderful things!

Everyone who is pleased with God's marvelous deeds will keep them in mind.

Everything the Lord does is glorious and majestic
and his power to bring justice will never end.

---Psalm 111

THE APOCRYPHA

The Apocrypha formed an integral part of the King James Version of 1611 as they had of all preceding English versions from their beginning in 1382. They are seldom printed as part of it any longer, still more seldom as part of the English Revised Version, and were not included in the American Revision.

This is partly because the Puritans disapproved of them; they had already begun to drop them from printings of their Geneva Bible by 1600, and began to demand copies of the King James Version omitting them as early as 1629. And it is partly because we moderns discredit them because they did not form part of the Hebrew Bible and most of them have never been found in any Hebrew forms at all.

...The books were all part of the Septuagint....and the great Latin Bible edited by St. Jerome about A.D. 400, the Vulgate, which became the Authorized Bible of western Europe and England and remained so for a thousand years. But Jerome found that they were not in the Hebrew Bible, and so he called them the Apocrypha, the hidden or secret books.

...The Catholic English Old Testament of 1610, however, followed the Vulgate arrangement and left them scattered among the books which we include in our Old Testament. It still contains them, but on the Protestant side both British and American Bible Societies more than a hundred years ago (1827) took a definite stand against their publication, and they have since almost disappeared.

Great values reside in the Apocrypha: the Prayer of Manasseh is a notable piece of liturgy; I Maccabees is of great historical value for its story of Judaism in the second century before Christ, the heroic days of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers, when Pharisaism had its rise. The additions to Esther impart a religious color to that romantic story; Judith, Susanna, and Tobit, while fascinating pieces of fiction, were meant by their writers to teach important lessons to their contemporaries. Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus are among the masterpieces of the Jewish sages.

CONTENTS

The First Book of Esdras	The Book of Baruch
The Second Book of Esdras	The Story of Susanna
The Book of Tobit	The Song of the Tree Children
The Book of Judith	The Story of Bel and the Dragon
The additions to the Book of Esther	The Prayer of Manasseh
The Wisdom of Solomon	The first Book of Maccabees
Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Sirach	The Second Book of Maccabees

From *The Apocrypha* translated by Edgar J. Goodspeed
Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc.

DISCIPLE 4
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Week 2: The Dream Restored

GATHERING AND PRAYER (page 16)

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Heritage**
Theme Scripture

Question to ponder: Does heritage have importance in your family history? Do you have information on your family ancestry? In what ways does this information affect your family dynamic?

DVD

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL:

1 Chronicles 1-9

- Skim through these chapters to get a feel of these family trees. Have you ever been involved in working on gathering information on your own family tree?
- The list of the kings of Judah suggests that 1 and 2 Chronicles were written shortly after the return of the Jews from exile.
- Contrast and compare the importance of genealogy in our own society with that of the Israelites.
- How does knowledge of family history contribute to a people's culture?

1 Chronicles 28:9-10; 20-21

- What was the Chronicler's theological significance of David's charge to Solomon?
- Why was David not allowed to build the Temple?
- What was the importance of the tribe of Judah in the Chronicler's story?

1 Samuel 16:1-13

- How does this story demonstrate God's tendency to "call the least" for his purpose?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

1 Chronicles 13-18

- What is David's key contribution to creating a central place of worship in Israel?
- Bought the threshing floor in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice
- 15:1-3....Ark of the Covenant
- 18:9-11....stockpile huge amounts of stone, lumber and precious metals
- In what ways has our congregation inspired and guided our community as a place of worship?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Now, and who we are now, is what matters. We can't live in the past---in fact we want to be free of the past. Besides, people who look backward tend to sentimentalize the "good old days," offering us little value of our own time. We want no claim on us by either the past or the future. Free to be, in the here and now! That's us.

What criteria are we to use as we decide what to value from the past and from the present?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we value the power of memory and heritage to form us into God's worshiping people, obedient in the present and responsible to the future.

The Radical Disciple

The radical disciple recognizes that a name always brings with it a heritage and a heritage always makes claims. To take the name Christian is to accept the heritage and the demands behind the name. To take the name *disciple* is to accept the requirements that go with the name. The radical disciple intentionally lives up to the name.

- What heritage and what demands come with the names *Christian* and *Disciple*?

LECTIO DIVINA

Happy are those whom you choose,
Whom you bring to live in your sanctuary.
We shall be satisfied with the good things of your house,
The blessings of your sacred Temple.

Psalm 65:4

3. In what ways can actions of these ancient peoples be applied to what we experience in our world today? As members of the faithful church, what is our responsibility to acts of apostasy in our society?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD: 2 Chronicles 7:12-22

Read the passage aloud. Discuss the following questions:

1. What is God's message about faithfulness and the turning away from faith?
2. Consider the Chronicler's theology: what does this passage show about the message the Chronicler wanted to convey to the people? Put your ideas in a sentence and share with the group:
3. **Radical Disciple:** Recognizing the human tendency to self-seeking that so often undermines the desire to seek God, the radical disciple practices prayer and repentance as disciplines of faithfulness – not once but continually. How can we prevent the human tendency of self-seeking?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: We pretend to be self-sufficient, able to live freely, without boundaries. We're drawn by the claim of culture that the right choice is having many choices, that the way to live fully is to have it all.

"Be all you want to be," "You can have it all," "You can never be too rich or thin" "He who dies with the most toys....wins!" these are some of the "catch words" in today's society. What are the contradictions included in the human condition or in these statements?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we freely choose to be bound together as the people of God.

What are the individual responsibilities of being "bound together as people of God?"

LECTIO DIVINA

Turn to us, Almighty God!
Look down from heaven at us:
Come and save your people!
--Psalm 80:14

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Week 4: To Build Again

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Rebuild**

Jeremiah walks through the destruction of Jerusalem: **Lamentations 1** (.....How !!??)

- 1 How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!
She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave....
- 5 Her foes have become her masters.....
- 6 All the splendor has departed from the Daughter of Zion....
- 8 Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean....
- 10she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary.....
- 11 All her people groan as they search for bread.....
- 16No one is near to comfort me.....My children are destitute.
- 19 I called to my allies but they betrayed me....
- 22you have dealt with me because of my sins. My groans are many and my heart is faint.

Theme Scripture (Page 32)

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SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

Timeline

- **586-538 – Exilic Period** when large numbers of Jews lived outside of the Promise Land
- **539-530 – Cyrus** replaced Babylonian king, make Persia a world power, permitted Jews to return to their homeland to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy
- **533-522 – Cambyses** is thought to be the Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 4:7, 11, 23 who stopped work on the temple
- **522-485 – Xerxes** – waged war with Greece; Esther became his wife
- **464-423 – Artaxerxes** – very favorable toward dispersed Jews. Authorized Nehemiah, his cupbearer, to rebuild Jerusalem
- **423 – Persia defeated by Alexander the Great** – the rise of Greek power – later power shifted to Rome and the Roman Empire

The *Radical Disciple* on page 32 of the Study Manual states, “...a radical disciple is one who is at the direction of God in a way that is unusual...” . Using Scriptures and Study Manual, describe these three “Radical Disciples” citing examples of dependence on God expressed in actions, words, prayers, confessions:

Ezra (Ezra 7: 6-13, 20, 25-26 & Study Manual)

Nehemiah (1:3, 5, 11, 17, 4:6, 8, 16, 6:15, 8:2, 8 & Study Manual)

Cyrus (not all ideas will apply) Ezra 6:1-14, 19 & Study Manual)

ENCOUNTER THE WORD: Final Reforms in Nehemiah 10:29, 13:26, 30

Read the passage aloud, then respond to the following ideas:

1. What is asked of God’s people to ensure their future?
2. As 21st century people, what do we say to this passage?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Sometimes an opportunity comes along to take a bold action or an unpopular stand that requires total commitment, great risk, and uncertain outcome. We hesitate, then stay put. The obstacles are too great, the cost too heavy. We play it safe.

In what ways do we relate to this statement? Is there an occasion when you took an unpopular stand?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we stand ready to hear rather than not hear, ready to do rather than not do in order to respond to God’s call and direction.

I will accept this Mark of Faithful Community challenge by

Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love your God with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep the words I am commanding today in your heart.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (Shema)

LECTIO DIVINA

Praise him in heaven his mighty fortress,
Praise our God!
His deeds are wonderful, too marvelous to describe.
Praise God with trumpets and all kinds of harps.
Praise him with tambourines and dancing,
with stringed instruments and woodwinds.
Praise God with cymbals, with clashing cymbals.
Let every creature praise the Lord.
Shout to the Lord!
---Psalm 150 CEV

*Readings in the Apocrypha next week

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Week 5: For Such a Time As This

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Prevail**

Theme Scripture (Page 40)

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SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

1. Review Esther 1-10 and daily reading notes for days 1-3. What do the following characters contribute to the story?

Vashti

Mordecai

eunuchs

Haman

2. Compare the familiar book of Esther with the Greek version found in the Apocrypha. What are the differences or additions found?

What additions did you find?

Which account is more powerful? Why?

3. On page 45 of the Study Manual, we find the following quote used at Passover Seder:

Not one only [Pharaoh] has risen up against us, but in every generation some have arisen against us to annihilate us, but the Most Holy, blessed be He, always delivered us out of their hands.

Why do Jews need Esther? Why do Christians need Esther?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD:

Esther 3

Read the passage aloud, then respond to the following ideas:

1. As 21st century people, in what ways does this passage have relevance for our society?
2. What claim does this passage place on me?
3. **The Radical Disciple:** The radical disciple confronts in self and others' attitudes and language that stereotypes any group and cause or allow persecution to continue (page 45). Are you up to this challenge?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Being different can bring trouble, can even be dangerous. Better to keep what we believe to ourselves. Certainly don't want to offend anyone by what we say or do. Being serious about beliefs seems to rub people the wrong way. We want to get along with others, especially people in power. Better lie low.

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we act in God's name when God seems silent. We stand up to persecution on God's behalf---whatever the form, wherever it occurs.

Today, I will begin to be an "Esther" by

LECTIO DIVINA

Save us by your might; answer our prayer,
So that the people you love may be rescued."

-----Psalm 60:5 TEV

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Week 6: The Approaching Kingdom

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Rescue**

Theme Verse: (read under Scripture and Study Manual)

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SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

Radical Disciple (page 46): *“The radical disciple actively resists faith-denying elements in the culture....”* What faith-denying elements do we struggle with in our culture? In what ways can we relate to Daniel?

Daniel’s commitment to regular worship and prayer made him an easy target for those who sought to destroy him. This story has some contemporary messages for today’s world. Begin by reading the theme verse:

- Read **Daniel 6:25-27 (theme verse on page 46 of Study Manual)**. Recall the events which led the king to this admiration of Daniel’s God. What message does Daniel’s story have for us today?
- Why is it that religious practices, even unobtrusive acts such as prayer, seem to make other people uncomfortable or threatened?
- How would you describe today’s idols? When and how are we tempted to bow down to them?
- In a secular society, there is pressure to conform. How do you experience this pressure? What are the solutions for handling such pressure?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD Daniel 3

- In Chapter 1 of Daniel, we learn that the young captives from Judah were called by new names, Daniel (Belteshazzar), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and (Azariah) Abednegol. The Babylonian custom was to change a name when a career changed:

these four were given servant names of Babylonian gods. Similarly, the African slaves were often given English or “Christian” names. What was the purpose of eradicating the essence of their heritages?

- What equipped these young men to make their response of faith to Nebuchadnezzar’s edict that every one fall down and worship the image of gold (v.8-27)?
- What parallels do you see between the Joseph story and the Daniel story?
- **Maccabees 1-2:** Again the Jews suffer at the hands of a pagan ruler. What atrocities were committed? In what ways might this story might inspire us or equip us for today’s world?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Because we assume our times and systems are forever, we make the necessary tradeoffs to fit in. Whether we recognize it or not, we all tend to conform --- *in small ways*, ----every day. (Italics added)

In what “small ways” DO we conform?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we actively resist faith-denying elements in our culture, whatever the cost.

Question for contemplation: It seems unlikely that we would face a situation in which we would be asked to die for our faith. A question we should ask ourselves, *would* we be willing? *Could* we take that step of faith?

LECTIO DIVINA

Lord, I have come to you for protection; never let me be defeated!

Because you are righteous, help me and rescue me.

Listen to me and save me!

Be my secure shelter and a strong fortress to protect me;

You are my refuge and defense.

----Psalm 71:1-3 TEV

DISCIPLE 4
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Week 7: The Beginning of Knowledge

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Wisdom**
Theme Verse

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WISDOM THOUGHT

In the Hebrew Bible, wisdom --- *hokmah* in Hebrew and *Sophia* in Greek ---means many things:

- Artistic or technical skill of the farmer sailor, artisan, diplomat
- Cleverness/cunning
- Art of living
- Religion or faith or fear of the Lord

There are two major Wisdom themes – “The Two Ways”

- **Act/Consequence**
- **Reward/punishment – you get what you deserve**

Proverbs 11:21 Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished,
But those who are righteous will go free.

Proverbs 12:7 Wicked men are overthrown and are no more,
But the house of the righteous stands firm.

We see this Two ways in the New Testament:

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked.
A man reaps what he sows

Romans 8:6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is
life and peace

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

1. Psalm of the Week: **Psalm 1**
Pray aloud together, look for what other images might replace *trees* and *chaff*, yet keep the meaning of the psalm’s message.

2. Read **Psalm 1:6** ; read **Our Human Condition**. Consider the study manual statements:

*Wisdom is the way things really are.
Wisdom contains the character of God in the stuff of existence.*

Folly represents invitation to evil in general. Choices have consequences.

3. In terms of your own knowledge and experience, what truths do you see in each of these statements?
4. Share with the group a Proverb that has special meaning for you and why.

ENCOUNTER THE WORD Proverbs 3:1-12; 3:21-25

In groups of two, paraphrase one of the passages. Listen for the message. Share with the whole group.

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community (Re-read)

Human Condition: We don't like being told what to do, how to live. We resent the notion that anyone knows more about how we should act than we do. The old sayings probably aren't true anyway. We sure don't want to be bossed around, much less be disciplined by anyone else. We're not worried about consequences; we'll beat them.

Many people live by this creed. Read the following creed of the faithful:

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we listen to wisdom and try to incorporate those insights into daily behavior.

As a Disciple Bible Study student, you are following this premise through daily study and daily prayer. In what ways has this helped you to listen to wisdom and incorporate the insights into your daily behavior?

The Radical Disciple practices *Discernment* (choosing the right path to wisdom and deciding which teachings apply in a given situation) and *Discipline* (staying on the path in making decisions informed by wisdom along the way). How is this working for you?

WRITE YOUR OWN PROVERB _____

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Week 8: The Path to Life

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Instruction**
Theme Verse

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SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

The Form or Style of Proverbs

Review page 64 in the Study Manual for the structures of Proverbs and examples. The form and structure make Proverbs very poetic in style for all of these techniques are used in poetry and literature. Some techniques, such as opposites, observation, and fact countered by another fact, are used in persuasive writing.

Scripture for Days 2-6

Proverbs by their nature invite underlining or marking because they speak to our situation, call up a memory or beckon us with their wisdom.

- Identify a Proverb and share what it means to you. Review the section on “Form or Style.” Did this information aid in the understanding of the Proverb?

Example: Proverbs 19:21

Many are the plans in a man’s heart,
But it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails. (Opposite form)

This is a reminder that we are frail human beings, and ultimately God’s plan is best !

Example: Proverbs 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not turn from it. (Word order reversed)

This Proverb should be every parent’s mantra. Sometimes children will resist and fight against what is best for them. Parents have to remember their God-given duty to guide their children along a right path.

- Review the Thirty Wise Sayings in the three translations. What is some good advice that might be written on a “Wisdom Wall” for others to take note?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD Proverb 31: Hymn to a Good Wife

Who in the world can find a “capable wife” like the woman in Proverbs? Actually she is the *ideal --- the model of perfection*. She is a role model not the portrait of the woman next door.

- Have you known a woman who seems to come close to this Proverbs woman? How did she make you feel?
- As we read her accomplishments, she must *never sleep!* However, the mother of small children often feel that their “lamp does not go out at night” (31:18)
- What are the attributes of this woman?
- What attributes of this woman do you admire?
- What attributes of this woman do you feel you have?
- In what ways can we strive for the attributes of this woman without feeling intimidated?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: We’re not sure which of today’s voices to listen to. We have trouble sorting the false from the true. Actually, unless this so-called wisdom can fit on a T-shirt or a bumper sticker, we’re not interested. We want what’s current, even temporary, not necessarily wisdom.

In our society, there are hundreds of “self-help” books which have been written to help people become more assertive, thinner, happier, a better employee, more successful, more attractive, healthier.....the list goes on. In what ways might the Book of Proverbs contain all this information and more?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we trust God’s wisdom, not the world’s wisdom, in making our choices.

What can be used as our guide to understanding God’s wisdom?

The Radical Disciple goes beyond “being good” to receive reward to living rightly regardless of reward. How would you defend this statement?

LECTIO DIVINA PSALM 119:12, 14-16

I praise you, Lord!
Teach me your laws.....
Obeying your instructions brings as much happiness as being rich.
I will study your teaching and will follow your footsteps
I will take pleasure in your laws and remember your words.

NIV Proverbs 22:17-:18
Sayings of the Wise

- 17 Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise
apply your heart to what I teach
- 18 for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart
and have them ready on your lips
- 19 So that your trust may be in the Lord
I teach you today, even you.
- 20 Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge,
- 21 Teaching you true and reliable words, so that you can give sound answers to him who sent you?
- 22 Do not exploit the poor!
Because they are poor and
Do not crush the needy in Court.
- 23 for the Lord will take up their case and will plunder from those who plunder them.
- 24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man,
do not associate with one easily angered,
- 25 or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.
- 26 Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts;
- 27 If you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.
- 28 Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.
- 29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.
- 23:1 When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony.
- 2 Do not crave his delicacies for that food is deceptive.

CEV Proverbs 22:17-23:18
Thirty Wise Sayings

- 17 Here are some sayings of people with wisdom,
so listen carefully as I teach.
- 18 You will be glad that you know these sayings and can recite them.
- 19 I am teaching them today, so that you may trust the Lord.
- 20 I have written thirty sayings filled with sound advice
- 21 You can trust them completely to give you the right words for those in charge of you
- 22 Don't take advantage of the poor or cheat them in court
- 23 The Lord is their defender, and what you do to them, he will do to you.
- 24 Don't make friends with anyone who has a bad temper
- 25 You might turn out like them and get caught in a trap.
- 26 Don't guarantee to pay someone else's debt.
- 27 If you don't have the money, you might lose your bed.
- 28 Don't move a boundary marker set up by your ancestors
- 29 If you do your job well, you will work for a ruler and never be a slave.
- 23:1 When you are invited to eat with a king, use your best manners,
- 2 Don't go and stuff yourself! That would be just the same as cutting your throat.

The Message
Thirty precepts of the Sages

Listen carefully to my wisdom;
Take heart what I can teach you.
You'll treasure its sweetness deep
Within; you'll give it bold
expression in your speech.

I'm giving you thirty sterling
principles---tested guidelines to live
by. Believe me---these are truths
that work and will keep you
accountable to those who sent you.

Don't walk on the poor just because
they're poor, and don't use your
position to crush the weak,
Because God will come to their
defense; the life you took, he will
take from you and give back to
them.

Don't hang out with angry people;
Don't keep company with hotheads.
Bad temper is contagious---don't get
infected.

Don't gamble on the pot of gold at
the end of the rainbow, hocking your
house against a lucky chance. The
time will come when you have to
pay up; you'll be left with nothing
but the shirt on your back.

Don't stealthily move back the
boundary lines staked out long ago
by your ancestors.

Observe people who are good at
their work---skilled workers are
always in demand and admired;
they don't take a back seat to
anyone.

23
When you go to dinner with an
influential person, mind your
manners: don't gobble your food,
don't talk with your mouth full.

NIV continued

- 4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich: have wisdom to show restraint.
- 5 Cast but a glance at riches and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.
- 6 Do not eat the food of a stingy man, do not crave his delicacies
- 7 for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. Eat and drink, he says to you, But his heart is not with you.
- 8 You will vomit up the little you have eaten and will have wasted your compliments.
- 9 Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.
- 10 Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless,
- 11 for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you.
- 12 Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.
- 13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.
- 14 Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.
- 15 My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad;
- 16 my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.
- 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.
- 18 There is surely a future hope for you and your hope will not cut off.

CEV continued

- 4 Give up trying so hard to get rich
- 5 Your money flies away before you know it, just like an eagle suddenly taking off.
- 6 Don't accept an invitation to eat a selfish person's food, no matter how good it is.
- 7 People like that take note of how much you eat. They say take all you want! But they don't mean it.
- 8 Each bite will come back up and your kind words will be wasted.
- 9 Don't talk to fools---they will just make fun.
- 10 Don't move a boundary marker or take the land that belongs to orphans.
- 11 God All-Powerful is there to defend them against you.
- 12 Listen to instruction and do your best to learn.
- 13 Don't fail to correct your children. You won't kill them
- 14 by being firm, and it may even save their lives.
- 15 My children if you show good sense, I will be happy, and if
- 16 you are truthful, I will really be glad.
- 17 Don't be jealous of sinners, but always honor the Lord
- 18 Then you will truly have hope for the future.

The MESSAGE continued

- Don't wear your self out trying to get rich; restrain yourself! Riches disappear in the blink of an eye; wealth sprouts wings and flies off into the wild blue yonder.
- Don't accept a meal from a tightwad; don't expect anything special. He'll be as stingy with you as he is with himself. He'll say eat! Drink! but won't mean a word of it. His miserly serving will turn your stomach when you realize the meal's a sham.
- Don't bother talking sense to fools; they'll only poke fun at your words.
- Don't stealthily move back the boundary lines or cheat orphans out of their property, for they have a powerful Advocate who will go to bat for them.
- Give yourselves to disciplined instruction; open your ears to tested knowledge.
- Don't be afraid to correct your young ones; a spanking won't kill them. A good spanking, in fact, might save them from something worse than death.
- Dear child, if you become wise, I'll be one happy parent. My heart will dance and sing to the tuneful truth you'll speak.
- Don't for a minute envy careless rebels; soak yourself in the Fear-of-God--that's where your future lies. Then you won't be left with an armload of nothing.

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 9: Destined to Die

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Futile**
Theme Verse

DVD

LIFE IN A FALLEN WORLD

This book is about life in a fallen world. Ecclesiastes says we can deny it, fight it, hide from it, even try to make sense of it. But we can't escape it. The only meaningful response is to live in it one day at a time, respecting God and cherishing the "stuff" of which life is made --- food, family, work ---- all of which are gifts from the hand of God. ---*World In Life Bible*

Several passages in this book suggest that King Solomon is the author. With his life largely behind him, the author is taking stock of the world as he has experienced it between the horizons of birth and death.....the latter portion which, of course, he cannot see. He has discovered that human wisdom, even that of a godly person, has limits. It cannot find out the larger purposes of God or the ultimate meaning of man's existence. ----*NIV Study Bible*

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

Read and discuss the following scripture assignments:

About Wisdom: Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

What is the Teacher's opinion about Wisdom? What is your opinion?

About Folly: Ecclesiastes 2:12-23

Paraphrase what the Teacher has to say about Folly. Agree or disagree? Why?

More about Wisdom: Ecclesiastes 7:5-14

Identify any messages of hope contained in this passage. Respond.

About Obedience: Ecclesiastes 8:1-9

Summarize the ideas contained in this passage. What response would you give?

About Wisdom and Folly Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

What is the Teacher's judgment about wisdom and folly? What is your opinion?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

We learned the word *vanity* (Hebrew word *hebel*) can be defined as *vapor, emptiness, meaningless*. If as the writer of Ecclesiastes observes, “All is vanity,” why does the Teacher now say “stand in awe of God”?

Is the Teacher looking at life for the possibility that it may have meaning in and of itself? If so, why are his conclusions?

The Radical Disciple reminds us to relax in faith, to seek contentment rather than excess, to listen more than we speak, to find meaning rather than getting, to let go of the need to have final answers, *to trust God*.

- In today’s world, how can we *relax, listen, let go of need, and trust* more?

Read Qoheleth’s final word: **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

- **How do you respond to the Teacher’s statement?**

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: We live as if tomorrow were a sure thing. We accumulate. The next new experience, the next new possession --- we gather them around us to distract us from the fact that nothing lasts. That we’re going to die.

Some people are uncertain about or fear death; some people say they have no fear of death. For Christians, what is God’s promise about death?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we accept life’s mystery in all of its forms, and we accept death as a part of life.

In general, what have you found in our study of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes to comfort you about the mysteries of wisdom, folly, life and death ?

The Radical Disciple: Relax in Faith. Seek contentment rather than excess. Listen more than you speak. Find meaning in giving rather than getting. Let go the need to have final answers. Trust God.

In what ways do these statements sound like Proverbs? Where do you find truth?

LECTIO DIVINA: Psalm 39:4-7

Please Lord, show me my future. Will I soon be gone?

You made my life short, so brief that the time means nothing to you.

Human life is but a breath, and it disappears like a shadow.

Our struggles are senseless; we store up more and more without ever knowing who will get it all.

What am I waiting for? I depend on you, Lord!

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 10: Life is a Gift

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Enjoy**

Theme Verse

ECCLEIASTES – LIFE IS A GIFT

Last week was a look at the “dark” side of Ecclesiastes, but now we turn to a more “positive” side of the Teacher’s wisdom. Remember, ancient wisdom thought focused on the “Two Ways”: acts have consequences (good or bad) and reward or punishment (you get what you deserve). In our own little world, the good aren’t always rewarded and the bad aren’t always punished. It doesn’t always happen in ways we can see. Yet, because of our belief in a Divine Power who had created the universe and who requires obedience, *all* will have to answer to actions someday ---- some time.

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

In groups, read each passage. Do you agree with the Teacher’s position? What does the Teacher not know or include in this passage? How does your own knowledge of God affect your response to this passage?

Is toil meaningless? Why or why not? Ecclesiastes 2:22-26

Are riches meaningless? Why or why not? Ecclesiastes 5:13-20

Is there any Justice? Why or why not? Ecclesiastes 8:14-17

What does the end of life hold? Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

Ecclesiastes 11

Be adventuresome

Be generous while you have plenty

Do not toy with maybes and might-have-beens

Live life to the fullest

Banish anxiety

Fear God and keep his commandments

God will bring every deed into judgment.....

both good and evil.

How do we accept these premises, acting with resourcefulness and generosity yet without anxiety over the results?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Only five more days until the weekend. Only eleven more months until vacation. Only twenty more years until retirement. We're preparing. One of these days we'll be able to enjoy life.

Only 51 days until Christmas..... Under what conditions have you made some of these statements? Have you ever said, "When _____ is here/completed/over, I will _____?"

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we receive life as a gift, live it now, enjoy it, and thank God for it.

Will you accept the challenge of **The Radical Disciple** on page 78 of the Study Manual?

Starts the day with a prayer of thanksgiving,

avoids complaining,

expresses thanks to others,

reflects satisfaction in work done,

gives help and receives,

extends friendship,

ends the day with prayer of gratitude and trust,

knows each day is a gift.

LECTIO DIVINA

Psalm 8:3-5

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and
crowned him with glory and honor.

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 11: A Just Complaint

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Calamity**
Theme Verse

DVD

WHO WAS JOB?

1 Samuel, Luke, Ezekiel mention Job along with Daniel and Noah and are viewed by Scripture as historical figures. There is no compelling reason to view Job as fictional. Even his name “*Iyyob*” occurs in documents dating from 1800 BC, the era which the setting of the book seems to match. One point to remember: whatever powers Satan seems to possess in this story, he remains subject to God and stands today as an enemy defeated at the cross. As you read, look for attitudes in friends, and an explanation of suffering which you can understand.

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

Job had lost livestock (a way of measuring wealth), servants, children and families, but “in all this Job did not sin in what he said” (2:10).

Through role play, step into the shoes of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Job. Present each friend’s counsel for Job and Job’s reply. Agree or disagree and give reasons.

Job 1-2

Set the Scene of Job’s Story

The story assures us Job was blameless and upright, a righteous man who feared [revered] God and turned away from evil. Job was a good man, a man of faith and integrity.

Eliphaz’s First Speech

Job 4-5

Those who are evil have trouble; humans are fragile; God finds fault. Ask God for help, he rescues the needs. You are fortunate if God correct you.

Job’s Reply to Eliphaz

Job 6-7

My grief is huge! I have never disobeyed God. What have I done wrong? Stop accusing me? Let me die – why do You test us?

Bildad's First Speech**Job 8**

God made your children pay for your sins; God doesn't reject an innocent person nor help a sinner!

Job's Reply to Bildad**Job 9-10**

What you said is true; no one is innocent in God's eyes. God is wise and powerful and works miracles. I am not guilty but what does it matter? God you know I am innocent!

Zophar's First Speech**Job 11**

God knows when someone is worthless and sinful! Turn to God, pray, give up your sins; your troubles will go away – those who are evil lose their way.

Job's Reply to Zophar**Job 12-14**

You all think you have the answers: I have always lived right. Every creature is in God's hand; He can do anything! I know what you know. God may kill me but I trust him.

Job Prays:**Read 13:20-23**

Whole group discussion: What sense do you have of Job's friends at this point?

Continue the role play for the second speeches:**Eliphaz's Second Speech****Job 15**

Your words are not enough to make others turn to God! Do you know more than we do? Your emotions are out of control! No human is pure and innocent. Suffering is for those who sin.

Job's Reply to Eliphaz**Job 16-17**

I have often heard this – it offers no comfort. God has attacked me. Friends reject me but I beg God. I am ready to give up – my friends don't listen and offer empty hopes.

Bildad's Second Speech**Job 18**

Be sensible and listen; sinners suffer! They are gone and forgotten.

Job's Reply to Bildad**Job 19**

You torture me! God has turned everyone against me. I am forgotten. My body may be destroyed but I will see

Zophar's Second Speech

Job 20

You insult me – everyone knows sinful people are happy for a short time then their children pay. God will destroy sinners.

Job's Reply to Zophar

Job 21

*Listen to me. You say God punishes sinner's children, but I say who can tell God what to do? We **all** end up dead. You offer empty words as comfort.*

Whole Group Discussion: How would you describe the attitude of the friends at this point? Which of the explanations for suffering have you heard?

Job not only disputes the cause-and-effect relationship between sin and suffering; he undermines the claim of Psalm 1 that the wicked “are like chaff that the wind drives away.” How do you reconcile that the wicked are not always punished?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

Read Job 3

There can be no question that evil and pain pose a massive challenge to faith in and obedience to God. Theology offers no total solution, but the Bible does give us ground to stand on as we try to live in a world of suffering. Explore the following ideas through discussion:

How would you answer one of the myths about Christianity: “all the evil and suffering in the world proves there is no God”?

What do you learn about Job's feelings from his choice of words? (Note that Job *curses his day of birth not God – 3:1-3*).

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: We want clearly defined rules of cause and effect. If we live a good life, work hard, eat right, exercise, save our money, obey the rules, we surely deserve health and prosperity. We pretend that life as it is meant to be doesn't include anything bad, that life should work so we avoid suffering and pain.

How does our society view suffering and pain?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we recognize the need to ask why when we experience suffering and injustice and are assured of God's presence even when answers do not come.

The Radical Disciple *resists the urge to give pat answers.* The Radical Disciple offers help and love in Jesus' name to those in pain and need. **The Radical Disciple** practices the ministry of *presence* (directly providing help or comfort for suffering).

Describe some concrete ways we can practice *Radical Discipleship of presence*.

LECTIO DIVINA

PSALM 13:1-2

How much longer will you forget me Lord? Forever?

How much long will you hide yourself from me?

How long must I endure trouble?

How long will sorrow fill my heart day and night?

How long will my enemies triumph over me?

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 12: On God's Terms

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Mystery**
Theme Verse

DVD

THE REST OF JOB'S STORY.....

This is a challenging book, to say the least! When we are faced with the extreme tragedy involving a friend, it is so hard to know what to say! We **want** to comfort, yet so many times, we say the wrong thing! We see this clearly with Job's friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Elihu as each offers his personal opinion of why these terrible things have happened to Job. But, Job remains steadfast in his faith in God and in the assurance that he had done nothing to deserve these calamities:

As surely as God lives, who had denied my justice...as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness and my tongue will utter no deceit..." (27:2-5)

In this half of the story, God speaks. Are your questions answered in the "resolution" in Chapter 42?

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

THIRD ROUND OF DISCUSSION

Job 22:5-10, 21 - Eliphaz speaks to Job

Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless? You demanded security from your brothers for no reason; you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked. You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, though you were a powerful man, owning land—an honored man living on it. And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless. That is why snares are all around you. (Does Elihaz have proof of this?) Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you.

Job 23:3-7 - Job speaks

If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out what he would answer me, and consider what it would say...No, he would not press charges against me...and I would be delivered forever from my judge.

Job 26:7-11 (God's Power) *He spreads out the northern skies over empty space. He suspends the earth over nothing. He wraps up the waters in his clouds, yet the clouds do not burst under their weight. He covers the face of the moon spreading his clouds over it. He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters, for a boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of the heavens quake...*

Job 27: 3-6 (Job's declaration) *As long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit. I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it...*

Job 28:28 *...The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding...*

Job 29:2-5 (longing) *How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness. Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me...*

Job 30:20-24 (Job's anguish) *I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind....you toss me about in the storm. I know you will bring me down to death... surely no one lays a hand on a broken man when he cries for help in his distress.*

Job 31: 1, 5-6, 9-10, 13-14, 16-17, 9, 21-22, 24, 35 (Job answers Eliphaz):

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl...If I have walked in falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit, let God weigh me on honest scales...If my heart has been enticed by a woman..., then may my wife grind another man's grain...If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants...what will I do when God confronts me? If I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing or a needy man without a garment...if I have raised my hand against the fatherless knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. If I have put my trust in gold...then these would be sins to be judged. O that I had someone to hear me...let my accuser put his indictment in writing.

Job 32:1-4, 12 (Narrator speaks)

So these three men [Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar] stopped answering Job because he was righteous in his own eyes. Elihu...became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. He was angry with the three friends because they had found no way to refute Job...But when Elihu saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused...

Job 33:1-12 (Elihu speaks)

"Not one of you has proved Job wrong; none of you has answered his arguments. But now, Job listen to my words; pay attention to everything I say. I am about to open my mouth; my words are on the tip of my tongue. My words come from an upright heart...But you have said in my hearing – I heard the very words – I am pure and without sin. I am clean and free from guilt. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles, he keeps close watch on all my paths. But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than Man.

Job 34:5-6 (Elihu continues)

*"Job says, 'I am innocent, but God denies me justice. Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound'..... [God] brings upon him what his conduct deserves. It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice. **Job 36:10-11:** [God] makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity...But if they do not listen they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge.*

Job 38-39: THE LORD SPEAKS

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?...

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know...

Who shut up the sea behind the doors...?

Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place?

Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this.

What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside?...

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow...?

What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth?...

Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?....

Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God...

Who let the wild donkey go free?...Will the wild ox consent to serve you?....Do you give the horse his strength?...Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom?

Does the eagle soar at your command?

Job 40:1-5 (The LORD speaks)

The Lord said to Job, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!”

Job 42 (Narrator speaks)

Then Job answered the Lord: *“I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more.”* The Lord declared his anger at Job’s friends for they had given wrong counsel. He instructed them to sacrifice 7 bulls and 7 rams and to pray with Job. God said *“you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has.”* When Job prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave Job twice as much as he had before....the latter part of Job’s life was blessed more than the first: his stock was restored and he had 7 sons and 3 daughters. Job lived 140 years and saw his children to the fourth generation.

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

The Radical Disciple

We assume life will be good, we will be happy, everything will go right. Sometimes, it doesn’t.

- How would you counsel a friend who has had great misfortune?
- In what ways does the end of Job’s story seem unsatisfying, or illogical, or unpredictable?
- What questions do you have about Job’s story?

The Radical Disciple: The radical disciple accepts life for what it is---a mixture of order *and* chaos, joy *and* despair, good *and* bad, reason *and* mystery---and lives trusting in God’s purpose. Has your view of suffering and chaos changed in any way after reading Job? How?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: We struggle to know how we fit into the scheme of things. We want to know why things happen the way they do. We think if we can learn how life works, we can control the outcome. We are uncomfortable with mystery.

Has the study of Job changed your reaction to this statement? In what ways?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we approach God with a sense of awe, accepting God’s sovereignty, acknowledging life’s mystery, and rejoicing in our place in God’s creation.

LECTIO DIVINA

Psalm 145:8-9

You are merciful Lord!
You are kind and patient and always loving,
You are good to everyone and you take care of all your creation.

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 13: Affairs of the Heart

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Beloved**
Theme Verse

DVD

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL *Song of Songs*

Read the following statements of several commentary sources:

- It is called Song of Songs, possibly indicating that Solomon considered it the most marvelous of the 1,005 songs he wrote. Some think it was written to celebrate marriage to his favorite wife. On the face of it, the poem is a song of praise to the joys of married life.....worthy of a place on God's word, for marriage was ordained of God (Genesis 2:24)

Jews and Christians have seen deeper meanings in this poem. Jews read it at Passover as an allegory referring to the Exodus when God took Israel to Himself as His bride.

Christians have usually regarded it as a song of Christ and the church...In this view, human marriage is a counterpart to and a foretaste of the relationship between Christ and His church.

(---Halley's Bible Handbook)

- Seven references to Solomon and frequent references to the "king" have led the traditional view that Solomon wrote this book. While both Jewish and Christian commentators have viewed this poem as a metaphor of the relationship between God and his people, the *Song of Songs* is best understood as a celebration of the love experienced by a man and woman---the lover and the beloved. Some people have expressed shock that "a mere love song" should be included in the Scripture, but the *Song of Songs* is actually a beautiful confirmation of the gift God has given to human beings. This gift is the capacity to love and be loved in marriage. (*735 Baffling Bible Questions Answered by Larry Richards.*)
- Many parts of Scripture address human sexuality, and a number of divine commands regulate marriage, adultery, divorce, and sexual immorality. Other than this book, however, little is noted in Scripture about whether a man and woman should enjoy or merely endure romance....*Song of Songs* explores

one of the “big issues” of life. It definitively answers the question: should a husband and wife enjoy the amorous dimension of their relationship? The answer is, Yes, indeed! Although people often abuse or distort erotic love, it is a wondrous and normal part of marriage to be savored as God’s gift.....No other Bible book more fully teaches that human beings may enjoy rich and sensual love. On the other hand, this love is suitably expressed only within the marriage of a man and a woman, according to the standards God revealed elsewhere in Scripture. (*Holman Quicksource Guide to Understanding the Bible by Kendell Easley*).

- Jewish teachers often allegorize the book to depict the passionate love of God for Israel. (Read chapter 5 for this allegory of the rejection God’s beloved)
- Read 5:14-15 for an allegoric description of God’s holy place, the Temple
- Eastern thought is a kaleidoscope of images and colors; expressed in functional not descriptive language: the Lord is my *rock* (Psalms); your waist is a *mound of wheat encircled by lilies; your neck is like an ivory tower....your hair like royal tapestry (Song of Solomon)*. Sounds erotic, doesn’t it?
- Western thought lies in descriptive terms: The Lord is always *constant, dependable*. To describe a woman, words like *soft, luminous, shining and lustrous* would be used. See the difference?

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING IDEAS:

Why do you think Song of Songs was included in the canon of the Bible? It almost didn’t make the cut!

In what ways does love grow the more it is expressed, whether to God or to a lover?

How can the church affirm healthy love relationships without buying into society’s notions of love and sexuality?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. This passage is often read during wedding ceremonies. In what ways does this passage speak to the power of love to strengthen the bond of marriage?

How can human love help us understand something of God’s love for us?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

PROVERBS 3:1-6

How does this passage speak to the intimate relationship between God and man?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: We underestimate the need and desire for intimacy. We think of love as a feeling that just comes and goes. We romanticize love and treat sex as an all-consuming end in itself.

What is your impression of our society's view of love and intimacy?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we express and respond to the need and desire for intimacy by imitating God's lavish self-giving to us.

What is your understanding of "God's lavish self-giving to us" ?

The Radical Disciple: *Risking vulnerability in loving and being loved, in knowing and being known, the radical disciple practices lavish self-giving and joyfully received the self-giving of another.*

How are you doing?

LECTIO DIVINA

PSALM 84:10-12

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord bestows favor and honor;
No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.
O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 14: Songs of Faith

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer

Theme: **Hymnbook**

Theme Verse

DVD

The Radical Disciple: This week we are asked to embrace *all* the Psalms, even though some seem negative and unfamiliar such as the laments. We are challenged to memorize a psalm or portion so we have those words when we need them. What is your response to this challenge?

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

The Psalms was the hymnbook/prayer book of Israel

Of the 150 Psalms, only 34 lack information on authorship and these so-called “orphan” psalms are found mainly in Books III and IV (see the Five Divisions below). The information under each Psalm number explains authorship, name of collection, type of psalm, musical notations, liturgical notations and sometimes a brief indication of the occasion for composition

Authorship of the Psalms:

Superscriptions ascribe 73 psalms to David, 12 to Asaph, 11 to the sons of Korah, 2 to Solomon (72, 127), 1 to Moses (90) and 1 to Ethan (89).

Five Divisions of the Book of Psalms

Book I Psalms 1-41

Book II Psalms 42-72 (Psalms of Sons of Korah, 42-49)

Book III Psalms 73-89 (Psalms of Asaph, 73-83)

Book IV Psalms 90-106

Book V Psalms 107-150 (*Hallel* or Praise Psalms 113-118; *Halleluja* or Praise the Lord Psalms 146-150)

Instruments used by Israel in singing the Psalms:

Harp, lyre, flute, pipe, horn, trumpet (straight tube with bell-shaped ending), tambourine, and cymbal

Hebrew Poetry

Acrostic: Each line of the poem starts with a word beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in consecutive manner. An example in the English alphabet would be first word in line 1 beginning with A, line 2 with B, line 3 with C....etc.

Parallelism distinguishes Hebrew poetry. Two lines which say essentially the same thing:

“Praise the Lord, all you nations!
Extol him, all your peoples” (117:1)

Antithetical Parallelism. The second line is a negative expression of the first:

“The Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish” (1:6)

Stair-step parallel. The second line repeats the meaning of the first line but goes beyond it:

“Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him” (18:8)

Word Pairs. Words paired like *day and night*; *sun and moon*, *land and sea*.

“The sun shall not strike you by day,
not the moon by night” (121:6)

Repetition. Repeated words or phrases which reinforces the idea and adds to the emotion:

“Praise the Lord!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
Praise him in his mighty firmament!” (150:1)

Word Pictures. All poetry delights in figures of speech: metaphors, similes, hyperbole (exaggeration), personification (giving human qualities to inanimate objects). Psalms is rich with such imagery:

“The Lord is my rock,
My fortress and my deliverer” (18:2)

“Good people will prosper
like palm trees,
and they will grow strong
like the cedars of Lebanon.” (92:12)

“Command the ocean to roar
with all of its creatures
and the fields to rejoice with all of their crops.” (96:11-12)

“I will praise you Lord,
for showing great kindness
when I was like a city under attack.” (31:21)

Who is the God of the Psalms?

Read the following passages to discover how David described the Lord God:

The Lord is.....

According to the Psalms

_____	Psalms 8:3, 148:5, 104:5, 104:27-30
_____	Psalms 2:4, 29:7-8, 66:3
_____	Psalms 104:24, 111:10, 139:2-4
_____	Psalms 22:3, 99:5, 111:9
_____	Psalms 51:1, 86:5, 103:8
_____	Psalms 9:10, 40:10, 89:2
_____	Psalms 7:11, 33:5, 146:7

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

Psalm 103

In the **Lectio Divina** pattern, read the Psalm aloud, then discuss the following questions:

- Today, when there is so much emphasis on God's love, grace and mercy, in what ways have we forgotten that God is to be respected?
- What are the changes we need to make in our daily way of living to portray that respect for God to those around us?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Pain, anger, sorrow, disappointment, loneliness---even joy, delight, and love---go unspoken, unexpressed. Wholeness and integrity are strangers. Where is the release ?

Where?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we pray, knowing God welcomes us and knowing nothing we say or feel is outside that welcome.

I am reassured that God is _____.

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 15: Songs of Pain

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Mourn**
Theme Verse

Lamah (why?) is the most frequently occurring question in the Psalms. Nearly one-third of the Psalms are laments: disorientation in individual or corporate life. The structure of the lament reminds us God is there; God hears even when our senses do not let us feel God hears:

- Address
- Complaint proper (suffering - I/we; enemies – they; God does not care)
- Petition
- Motivations (confession of sin, protest of innocence)
- Confession of trust
- Vow of praise

DVD

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

Songs of Pain

Is it okay to be angry with God? Is it okay to cry out with our deepest, inner most pain! **Almost half** of the 150 Psalms are laments!

Use several translations such as *The NIV Study Bible*, *The Message*, or *Word in Life Bible (CEV)*. Read the following Psalms and respond to the questions:

Psalm 39: Psalm of Healing & Forgiveness

In what ways might this Psalm become an individual prayer in times of sorrow, stress, and trouble? What phrases speak to you?

Psalm 94: The Lord Punishes the Guilty

Have you ever felt frustrated by problems in society that just seem to go on and on? Have you said, “Why doesn’t somebody do something? What don’t things ever change?” Sometimes the real question is not “Why don’t things change?” *but* “Why don’t believers change things?” What is your response?

Psalm 131: Submission to God's Will

Many people feel intimidated about approaching God. They feel small, inadequate and unimportant. In This prayer for the lowly of David's how does he appeal to the idea of intimacy with God, not just to impress Him? What has David discovered about finding security with God?

Psalm 121: Confidence in God's Care

Listed as a "song of ascents" this psalm was most probably sung as Israelites traveled up to Jerusalem during annual religious pilgrimages. Picture ascending the brown, dusty hills surrounding the shining city of Jerusalem with the gleaming Temple glistening in the sun atop the highest mount of the city. What do the words of this Psalm reflect of the trust and confidence within the Israelites?

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

Psalm 139: The Lord is Always Near

Perhaps no other portion of Scripture describes with such precision and beauty God's intimate knowledge of each person. This psalm reminds us that God rules over nations and peoples and he also deals with us as individuals! As the leader reads this Psalm aloud, listen in a prayerful attitude.

Silently, respond to the following questions. Write down your responses in the space provided:

- Are you comforted, as David was, by the presence of God?
- As you look around you, do you consciously think about the Lord being right there with you?
- In what ways might you thank him for his ever watchful care and concern?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Being anything other than positive or upbeat, is not acceptable. So we put on a happy face, say all the right things, drive the pain inside, and turn on ourselves.

What are the consequences of taking on the burden of unhappiness and pain all by ourselves?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we take God's Word with us into pain and trouble and let the psalms of lament be our voice.

In your reading this week, have you discovered one or more Psalms that can be your voice in times of trouble, sorrow, pain, and unhappiness? Mark your Bible with these passages so you may easily find them when needed.

The Radical Disciple learns to express the full range of emotions to God. Write a personal lament. Base it on a past or present trouble. Include these elements: a call, description of the trouble, plea for God to respond, statement of trust that God is listening, vow or expression of praise:

DISCIPLE 4
Under the Tree of Life
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Week 16: Songs of Joy

GATHERING AND PRAYER

Opening Prayer
Theme: **Praise**
Theme Verse

DVD

SCRIPTURE AND STUDY MANUAL

We have look at Songs of Faith, Songs of Pain and now we look at Songs of Joy. The Psalms are truly a prayer book for any of these emotions. As we look at the following Psalms, remember that David had composed music for these words and sung them as a form of worship and praise.

- Which of the Psalms speak to you? What words or phrases resonate with you?
- Have you noticed repetitious phrases occurring? What does this say about the writer or the needs of the writer or his joys?

- **Psalm 103: 1-5; 8-10; 17-18.**

David produces a lengthy list of the benefits of God's wonderful love. What words are used to describe these benefits?

Review this list. What is your response to these words which describe God?

- **Psalm 18: 1-4; 6; 16; 19; 25-27; 30.**

When God rescues us from difficult or dangerous times, we owe him our praise. What reassurance do you find in these verses?

- **Psalm 100**

How would you describe the focus of this psalm and its use in worship?

- **Psalm 150**

The psalms conclude with this chorus of praise. Look for ways the psalmist urges us to praise God with things other than our voices.

- **Psalm 122**

Lift together this song of praise as the group reads in unison.

ENCOUNTER THE WORD

Psalm 107: 1-32

- What does one say after having come through great trials and suffering. Look for a response as the verses are read aloud.
- What repetitious phrase occurs in this passage? What does the Psalmist use this repeated refrain?
- After a three-session study of Psalms, what new impressions and knowledge have you gained about this book? What part might this part of Scripture play in your daily Bible study or meditation?

Human Condition versus Mark of Faithful Community

Human Condition: Life is an uphill struggle. Our bodies ache; our jobs are stressful; the weather is uncomfortable. Children are a heavy responsibility; aged parents are a burden. What is there to be joyful about?

Disciples can identify with some or all of these statements. What IS there to be joyful about during these times of stress and discomfort and sadness?

Mark of Faithful Community: Being faithful community, we praise God because God is worthy of praise, whatever our life situation.

If we consider the Apostle Paul as a role model, recall some of the desperate situations in which Paul found himself and his reaction to them. What lessons does he teach?

The Radical Disciple: The radical disciple praises God. Write your own psalm of thanksgiving. Use Psalm 103 as your model:
