

Discussion Questions

We encourage everybody to discuss Biblical Literacy with their communities. Jesus and his disciples learned together in community and we want to do the same. We have compiled some questions to help guide you through the year of studying as you learn and grow together.

Week 1

Genesis 1 – 31, Psalm 1 – 9

In Genesis 1 – 2, what struck you as significant about God’s original intention for humankind and creation?

In Genesis 3 – 11, in what ways do you identify with the continual failures of humankind’s ability to live up to God’s original plan?

To Abraham, God made an unconditional promise to make the world right and good again? What hope does this promise to Abraham give you for you and your community?

Week 2

Genesis 32 – 50, Psalm 10 – 16

What parts of the story simply don’t make sense or have been frustrating to read? (Note: In discussing these together, try to balance helping each other wrestle with difficult texts along with becoming comfortable with discomfort and imperfect understanding. It’s okay and even necessary to admit when we don’t grasp a part of the Scriptures and to not get too hung up. Keep reading.)

Genesis begins with the people of God living with him in the garden, but ends with the death of Joseph and the people of God facing slavery in Egypt. What do you think you as a reader are meant to be feeling?

Week 3

Exodus 1 – 21, Psalm 17 – 23

Moses, a man who seems to have trouble with anger and doubt, is called by God to be the deliverer of Israel. In what ways do you relate as an imperfect person yet called by God?

At this point in the story, Israel is enslaved and God appears to be absent. When have you felt disappointed with life and God’s role in it and felt frustrated or hurt by his absence?

Just as God freed his people from slavery in Egypt, Jesus has set you free. In what ways have experienced this freedom?

Week 4

Exodus 22 – Leviticus 4, Psalm 24 – 30

The people of God have a terrible pattern of sin and self-destruction. In what ways can you identify with this pattern in your life?

Unlike the people of God in Exodus, we now have direct access to the presence of God because of the work of Jesus on the cross. In what ways can we help each other to embrace this new reality?

God continues to be faithful to his promise to Abraham (Gen 12v1-2) and make the people of God a blessing to the nations. In what ways can we be a blessing to our city and the nations?

Week 5

Leviticus 5 – 23, Psalm 31 – 37

What parts of the story simply don't make sense or have been frustrating to read? (Note: In discussing these together, try to balance helping each other wrestle with difficult texts along with becoming comfortable with discomfort and imperfect understanding. It's okay and even necessary to admit when we don't grasp a part of the Scriptures and to not get too hung up. Keep reading.)

Just as the animals sacrificed in Leviticus, Jesus is our "sacrificial lamb" that takes away our sin, making us holy. What practical steps can we take to remain holy?

In Leviticus, the people of God used ritual sacrifices to essentially say, "Thank you" and "I'm sorry." How can we express these same sentiments in our relationship with God?

Week 6

Leviticus 24 – Numbers 16, Psalm 38 – 44

Can anyone offer a one-sentence summary of Leviticus? To help you answering, think about: "If the author of Leviticus wanted his hearers to come away with one thing, what would it be? Why did he work so hard to keep and record and pass along this text?"

If you try to imagine being a part of Israel at this time, how would you have responded to some of these commands? Do you think you would have obeyed? Would you have loved them or hated them?

A number of the Israelite's rebellions were born from their lack of trust in God. Can you relate to their experience? How has your trust in God been challenged?

Week 7

Numbers 17 – 34, Psalm 45 – 51

In Numbers, God’s holy presence is their leader and guide as they travel through the desert. As followers of Jesus, how have you allowed the Spirit to lead you this week?

When the spies saw the Promised Land they feared for their lives and wanted to return to captivity in Egypt. How can fear tempt us to return to what God has saved us from?

While God remains faithful to his people and his promises he will honor your choices and let you live in rebellion if you choose it. Take a moment in listening prayer to ask to God how you may be misaligned with the way of Jesus.

Week 8

Numbers 35 – Deu 16, Psalm 52 – 58

How would you summarize Numbers in a sentence or two?

Is there any part of the blessings that God gives Israel through Balaam that you find particularly beautiful, rich, or interesting?

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” –Deu 6v5. Take to meditate on this scripture and express your love to God in prayer together.

Week 9

Deu 17 – Joshua 4, Psalm 59 – 65

The people of God were led out of the wilderness and into the promised land. Can you recognize a time in your life where God has led you out of a figurative “wilderness” and into the “promised land?”

Deuteronomy is Moses recapping the past 40 years since the Exodus to the now grown up children of Israel. Imagine you are listening to Moses give this final address. All you have known is life wandering in the wilderness. You have heard stories from your parents of what God has done for your people, you have heard the Law. What is Moses trying to remind you and the rest of Israel of?

God protected and blessed the Israelites even when they were in rebellion. Looking back, when was there a time when you were not following God yet he continued to bless you?

Week 10

Joshua 5 – Judges 8, Psalm 66 – 72

At this point in the reading, you have completed the Torah (Gen – Deu). What were the major themes, ideas, emotions, or experiences you remember from reading the Torah?

Have someone recap the book of Joshua. What has happened so far and what are the main events and themes of the book?

Israel was called to obey God's commands so that the other nations could see what God is like. In what ways can you as a community display the character of Jesus to people around you?

Week 11

Judges 9 – 1 Samuel 8, Psalm 73 – 79

As you read the book of Judges, what do you think the author's intent was in chronicling this era of Israel's history the way that he did?

Were there any parts of Judges 19 that shocked, provoked, surprised, confused, disturbed, or confronted you?

Why do you think the author of Judges includes this violent, horrific story? What point might the author of Judges be trying to get across to his/her readers?

Is it disorienting to read such a gruesome and awful story in the Bible? What questions does it bring up in you about God, Israel, human nature, or the Scriptures?

Week 12

1 Samuel 9 – 31, Psalm 80 – 86

In Ruth, we see that God cares for us deeply. How is God involved in the day-to-day joys and hardships of your life?

Ruth tells the story of a family this is hurting and broken, but in their faithfulness to God they are restored and made whole. Have you experienced similar restoration through God?

Week 13

2 Samuel 1 – 24, Psalm 87 – 93

One of the hermeneutic guidelines for reading Biblical narrative is to pay attention to the pace of the story, especially noticing when it slows down dramatically to zoom in on a particular time or event. Typically, this indicates a particularly important chapter of the story. Why do you think the narrative slows down so much in Ruth & 1 Samuel after racing through hundreds of years of history in Judges?

Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20 again. What kind of king is Israel supposed to have? Do you think Samuel embodies well the type of king Deuteronomy 17 describes?

God calls us, like Israel, to live differently (or as holy) from the world and the culture around us. With this in mind, in what ways can you identify with Israel's rebellious desire to instead follow the ways of the world?

Week 14

1 Kings 1 – 22, Psalm 94 – 100

Reflect back on your readings in 1 & 2 Samuel. What kind of actions and choices justified the Scriptures' assessment of David as a righteous man and leader?

Think about the fact that Israel's most exalted king, whose life is given more detailed attention than any other Old Testament character, is also the person who created about half of the Psalms (such as the praise song of Psalm 18). What connection can you make between the internal character and heart expressed in the prayers of the Psalms and the external character and heart illustrated in David's life and actions?

How do you relate to this idea of being sinful but still in pursuit of holiness?

Week 15

2 Kings 1 – 22, Psalm 101 – 107

Read 1 Kings 10:14-29. Considering Moses' warning in Deuteronomy 8 and Samuel's warning in 1 Samuel 8, what kind of attitude should we have toward this new era of "progress" and prosperity established under Solomon? Should we celebrate this prosperity as the blessing of God or be concerned that it is the result of a new kind of Jewish pharaoh figure?

If you put yourselves in the shoes of an ancient Jew, who would you prefer as your king: David or Solomon? Would you want the prayerful musician-king who humiliates himself by worshiping God in his underwear, or the kind of global political and economic powerhouse who establishes you and your people above the other nations and exacts from them such wealth that "silver becomes like just another stone," no matter what the cost?

Reflect on the parts of your life where you are currently experiencing prosperity. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you brutal honesty and clarity as to the nature of your prosperity. Do you think you have gained prosperity because you and your part of society have faithfully followed the commands of God to live humbly, justly, mercifully, and lovingly?

Week 16

2 Kings 23, Isaiah 1 – 27, Psalm 108 – 114

Reflect back on your readings in 1 and 2 Kings. What stood out to you most from story after story of kings “doing what was evil in the eyes of the Lord”?

As you read through the stories, did you find yourself hoping for God to bring judgment upon Israel and punish them for their sins, or for God to continue to show them patience and mercy?

How would it have felt, emotionally and physically, to have been a Jew living in Jerusalem during this exile?

Week 17

Isaiah 28 – 51, Psalm 115 – 119v96

How can Israel’s history and the prophets teach us to think about and respond to evil and injustice in our society or community that we haven’t personally committed but have potentially benefitted from? In other words, what should we do with sin that we haven’t overtly committed, but that we are complicit to just by the nature of the community to which we belong?

How does it make you feel to think about owning your community’s sin? Are you able to embrace this idea, or do you feel resistant to it?

Where does your mind immediately go when you think of your community’s sin? Your family, your city, your nation, company, community group, subculture?

Week 18

Isaiah 52 – 66 - Hosea 1 – 10, Psalm 119v97 – 123

Much of Isaiah speaks about the nature of being the “servant of the Lord,” typically referring to Israel’s identity and vocation, as well as a “suffering servant.” Consider Israel’s calling to help God redeem the broken world through living as a holy priesthood and leading the nations to God. How do you think the experience of suffering in exile helped shape this understanding of a suffering servant (Isaiah 52-53)?

How do you think Jesus’ understanding of Israel’s identity and His own unique vocation as the true Israel and Israel’s true king was shaped by these texts in Isaiah?

An ancient Israelite like Isaiah felt a kind of guilt on behalf of his sinful community and expected the entire nation, himself included, to suffer the consequences unless the nation as a whole repented. Have you ever felt like you’ve suffered the consequences of your community’s sin? How did this make you feel?

Week 19

Hosea 11 – Micah 4, Psalm 124 – 130

Read Hosea 11:1-12. What does this chapter show you about the fatherly heart of God over Israel?

What is it like for you to engage with such an emotional God as depicted in Hosea? Does it bother you or comfort you to consider God experiencing heartache, jealousy, and humiliation?

Do you typically interact with God on such emotional terms, or do you find that your relationship tends to assume a pattern where you and/or God are simply calm, cool, and collected?

Hosea married a promiscuous woman not merely as a symbol for what Israel was to God — unfaithful to their covenant — but to actually experience what this felt like for God. Have you ever had an experience where you felt God's disturbed yet gracious heart toward you and your people? How did you feel in that moment, and what did it bring up in you?

Week 20

Micah 5 – Zephaniah 3 - Job 1 – 11, Psalm 131 – 137

Thinking back to how most prophets in the Old Testament are portrayed, why is Jonah's immediate disobedience in v1-3 so surprising?

How is Jonah's character consistent with the character of Israel and its leaders/people throughout the Old Testament?

Like Jonah, are there people or people groups you feel do not deserve God's grace, mercy, and love? Why do you feel they don't deserve it?

Week 21

Job 12 – 37, Psalm 138 – 144

How do you think Job must have been feeling?

What does the book of Job tell us about God?

What does the book of Job tell us about Satan?

Week 22

Job 38 – Psalm 2, Proverbs 1 – 12

Psalm 145 – 150 & 1

Can we love God for God, and not for all his blessings? What about when the blessings go away?

Does the story of Job bring comfort and relief?

Have you ever voiced your anger, pain or doubt to God in times of deep suffering in your life? If yes, what was God's response to you? If you have not, what would it have been like to direct your anguish to God?

Week 23

Proverbs 13 – Ecc 4, Psalm 2 – 8

How can Jesus' life and teachings help show us the connection between faithfulness to God and wisdom for living well?

Are there any gospel stories, parables, or attributes of Jesus that reveal both His faithful reverence for God and His incredible wisdom?

The Book of Proverbs is basically Israel's collection of wisdom sayings that takes the form of advice that a father would give to his son. Consider advice for a moment. What kind of advice do you tend to take in, where do you consume advice, and how much of it do you consume?

Week 24

Ecc 5 – Song of Songs 8, Jeremiah 1 – 9, Psalm 9 – 15

Ecclesiastes, and especially the beautiful poem about dying in chapter 12, invite readers to reflect on the seeming futility of life and inevitability of death. How might thinking about these things invite us into interaction and dialogue with God?

When you read Ecclesiastes, do you find its nihilism depressing, strangely comforting, or both?

How might "meaningless, meaningless" coexist with the rest of the story of Scripture, which says our lives are deeply meaningful to God? How have you seen this tension lived out as you reflect on your own life?

Week 25

Jeremiah 10 – 36, Psalm 16 – 22

Is there any way in which your faith imitates the faith of those whom Jeremiah was challenging at the temple?

Is there any hypocrisy in your faith/religion that warrants rebuke?

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the prophet explains that Israel and Judah have been punished for three interconnected reasons: 1) Committing idolatry; 2) Breaking the terms of the covenant; and 3) Doing evil and injustice rather than righteousness and justice. Jeremiah summarizes the foolishness of the people by saying, “They do not know the way of the Lord, the requirements of their God” (Jeremiah 5:4). In what way do the harsh and challenging words of Jeremiah offer you an invitation to reassess what it is that God requires of you?

Week 26

Jeremiah 37 – Lamentations 3

Psalm 23 – 29

How does walking through the details of Israel’s exile and trying to wrap your mind around the felt experience help shine new light on what you’ve been reading?

Have someone read Psalm 137, a psalm written in exile, aloud. How does a sufficient understanding of the sheer agony of exile help you understand and even empathize with the brutally honest prayers of this psalm?

Week 27

Lamentations 4 – Ezekiel 21, Psalm 30 – 36

What does the idea of lamenting mean to you?

As a Christian, how do you feel the American church generally reacts to grief and pain? Have you ever felt ashamed of feeling anything other than joy?

Mourning with those who mourn in our community is important for followers of Jesus. What piece of either local or global news has affected you the most in the past few weeks and what did it make you feel?

Week 28

Ezekiel 22 – 44, Psalm 37 – 43

How has exploring the Old Testament Jewish conception of God's presence changed or informed your Christian appreciation of the idea that we are each individual temples of God's Spirit in the world? (See 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:18-20, and John 2:19-22.)

What questions does the Old Testament view of God's presence leave you with?

Week 29

Ezekiel 45 – 48, Ezra - Neh. 1 – 9 - Psalm 44 – 50

What strikes you about the tone of Ezekiel 34-48 compared with the tone of Ezekiel 1-33?

Which of the images and promises given in Ezekiel 34-48 do you find most striking and affecting? What is it about this image or promise that is connecting with you in this moment?

Week 30

Nehemiah 10 – Esther 10 - Daniel 1 – 9, Psalm 51 – 57

Imagine yourself post-exile in Jerusalem as you attempt the grueling physical labor of rebuilding the Temple or the walls of Jerusalem, all while regularly facing opposition from outside political forces. How clear does the purpose of your efforts feel? What is the purpose?

Now imagine the rebuilding complete—the ecstasy of being free to worship according to the Law—and yet over time, you see the zeal of others and yourself fading. What motivates you and others to remain faithful to the Law?

Week 31

Daniel 10 – 13 - Haggai 1 – Malachi 4, Psalm 58 – 64

How does hearing the context for Daniel help in your understanding of Ezra and Nehemiah?

How would you describe the way you were previously taught to think about apocalyptic literature? How does the idea that apocalyptic literature is not primarily concerned with end times prophecies but symbolism regarding contemporaneous political events alter this viewpoint?

Have you ever felt embarrassed or uncomfortable about Biblical texts like Daniel or Revelation or Christian ideologies concerning the “rapture” or “antichrist”? Share any stories or reflections.

Week 32

1 Chr 1 – 2 Chr 4, Psalm 65 – 71

How would you describe the posture of God towards Israel? Of Israel towards God?

What is God promising Israel? What is God requiring of them?

Week 33

2 Chr 5 – 31, Psalm 72 – 78

What have you learned from the Old Testament?

Are there any specific books or passages that you've found rich and meaningful? Share them with the group if possible.

How has this journey affected how you think and feel about the Bible and your faith in Jesus? Has trying to read the Old Testament bolstered your faith, left you feeling disillusioned about God, made you even more overwhelmed at understanding the Bible, etc.?

Week 34

2 Chr. 32 – 36 - Matthew 1 – 10, Psalm 79 – 85

Before you embarked on the journey of reading through it this year in YOBL, what would you have said was the overall theme and/or storyline of the Old Testament?

Now having read through the Old Testament over the past 8 months and especially keeping in mind the covenants mentioned above, what would you now say is the overall theme and/or storyline of the Old Testament?

Week 35

Matthew 11 – 24, Psalm 86 – 92

You are probably very familiar with the stories and teachings of Jesus. As you read through them again, did you discover anything new about Jesus that you may not have noticed in previous readings?

When you read the stories and teachings of Jesus, how do they inspire you to change your character and lifestyle?

What practical steps can you take to become more like Jesus?

Week 36

Matthew 25 – 28, Mark 1 – 10, Psalm 93 – 99

Read Mark 1:9-11: Put yourself in the shoes of a Jew in Jesus' day who would have been readily familiar with the above texts and the language of a figure beloved by God, anointed with the Spirit by God, and in a special enough relationship with God to use father-son titles with one another. And look carefully at the characters discussed in such terms in these texts. What specific characters or types of figures would Mark's allusion have brought to mind from these passages?

What does Mark's identification of Jesus as a kind of representation or embodiment of these figures allude to about the identity and purpose of Jesus?

How does Jesus in this wilderness temptation story embody the covenant faithfulness which Israel was meant to live out?

Week 37

Mark 11 – 16, John 1 – 8, Psalm 100 – 106

How have you experienced Jesus so far in these stories? What have you discover about who Jesus is?

Later in Mark's Gospel, he records Jesus speaking directly to those who are failing to recognize the meaning behind his actions, saying, "Don't you understand or comprehend? Is your heart hardened? Do you have eyes, and not see, and do you have ears, and not hear?" (Mark 8:17-18). How might you be susceptible to having eyes but not truly seeing Jesus? Specifically, how might the Holy Spirit want to use this intricate story to point out your inability to recognize God with you in the everyday moments and events of life?

Week 38

John 9 – 21, Luke 1 – 3, Psalm 107 – 113

Read Mark 11v1-10. Read Luke 19v28-40. read Matthew 21v1-11: What stood out to you as you read through each account? What differences did you notice?

What is it like to think about the Gospels as literary accounts which differ in some details? Do these differences make you feel uncomfortable, disoriented, intrigued, affirmed?

Week 39

Luke 4 – 18, Psalm 114 – 119v64

Read Luke 22v39 – 23v46: What part of this story moved you, struck you, or surprised you the most?

What is one way that Jesus' Kingship of self-denial can reshape the way you relate to the world?

In what ways might God be calling you to take up your own cross (i.e. choose martyrdom) today and to give up your fight to preserve your present existence?

Week 40

Luke 19 – 24, Acts 1 – 8, Psalm 119v65 – 122

When you think of the resurrection, what is your initial response? Do you remember the first time you heard the resurrection story?

Read Luke 24:1-35. Read Luke 24:1-35. How does this story make you feel?

Which word or phrase from this story did you find most compelling?

Week 41

Act 9 – 22, Psalm 123 – 129

Retell your favorite stories of Jesus to one another. It is not meant to be a time to exegetically unpack every nuance of a given story. Try to avoid preachiness or moralizing a story of Jesus. Instead, share what is meaningful to you and how the Holy Spirit used it to encourage, provoke, convict, or compel.

What is it about Jesus in this story that you find compelling or memorable?

What is it about this story that particularly connects with you, given where you are now in your life?

Week 42

Act 23 – 28, Romans 1 – 8, Psalm 130 – 136

What have you learned about the early church after reading through Acts?

What are the similarities of the modern church to that of the early church?

Which stories from the book of Acts do you find compelling or memorable?

Week 43

Romans 9 – 16, 1 Corin 1 – 6, Psalm 137 – 143

Considering the opening of Romans, what do you think is the motivation driving Paul's ministry to the Gentiles in general and his writing this letter to the Romans in particular?

How do you feel about the inclusion of the Gentiles with the Jews?

How might you specifically begin participating in radical inclusion and unity in a costly and self-sacrificial way, as Jesus did for you?

Week 44

1 Corin 7 – 2 Corin 4, Psalm 144 – 150

1 Corinthians examines how the value of faith informed and shaped the early Christian community. How does the value of faith shape your community?

Faith requires trust. Considering your current or recent circumstances, in what ways do you trusted in Jesus?

How might Jesus be calling you into further faith? Is there any ambition or desire that he wants you to pursue in faith?

Week 45

2 Corin. 5 – Galatians 6, Psalm 1 – 7

What has stood out to you most about the two letters to the church in Corinth?

What have you learned or observed about Paul as a church leader?

In what ways have the letters to the church in Corinth impacted your life?

Week 46

Ephesians – Colossians, Psalm 8 – 14

How would you summarize the letter to the Ephesians and which themes were most significant to you?

How would you summarize the letter to the Philippians and which themes were most significant to you?

How would you summarize the letter to the Colossians and which themes were most significant to you?

Week 47

1 Thess – 1 Timothy 6, Psalm 15 – 21

When reading through the letters to the church, do you read them as chapter and verse or as a letter? Pick a letter to a church and read it through in its entirety as a community. Hear it as it was meant to be heard, as a letter to the church. Does it affect the way you relate to the instruction and author?

How would you summarize the letter to the 1 Thessalonians and which themes were most significant to you?

How would you summarize the letter to the 2 Thessalonians and which themes were most significant to you?

Week 48

2 Timothy – Hebrews 8, Psalm 22 – 28

Which themes in the letters to Timothy were the most impactful to you?

Compare yourself to the qualifications of leadership set in Timothy 3. In which areas could you improve and grow?

Read 2 Timothy 2v15. Paul writes to Timothy about avoiding false teachings. This verse in particular is about committing yourself to the understanding of Scripture so that you are prepared to correctly communicate the gospel. Has working through the Year of Biblical Literacy given you a great understanding of the Scripture? Do you have more confidence to “correctly handle the word of truth?”

Week 49

Hebrews 9 – 2 Peter 3, Psalm 29 – 35

Hebrews is a dense book. What have you learned and discovered in the letter to the Hebrews that you may not have noticed in previous readings?

Read Hebrews 4v14-16. What does Hebrews teach about the identity of Jesus? How does this impact your relationship with Jesus?

What did Hebrews 11 teach you about faith?

Week 50

1 John – Revelation 9, Psalm 36 – 42

How would you summarize the letter from James and which themes were most significant to you?

How would you summarize the first letter from Peter and which themes were most significant to you?

How would you summarize the second letter from Peter and which themes were most significant to you?

Week 51

Revelation 10 – 22, Psalm 43 – 48

How would you summarize the letters from John and which themes were most significant to you?

How would you summarize the letter from Jude and which themes were most significant to you?

Most find that the book of Revelation is intimidating and difficult to understand. This is typically the case with prophetic writings, especially when they have yet to be fulfilled. What did you learn from reading the book of Revelation? If you found it difficult to comprehend Revelation, can you find confidence in knowing that Jesus fully understands?