

Study Guide for the Week of February 3, 2008

This study guide is designed to help you to become more familiar with the Bible. Study these passages on your own, with a friend, or with a group. If you or someone you know needs a Bible, please take one from under a chair in the Worship Center. They are there for you to take home and use! Sermon manuscripts are available at www.spwired.com.

Monday, February 4 – Today we'll read a couple of the "psalms of lament" – these are also sometimes known as "complaint psalms" where the psalmist is writing out of intense sorrow, pain, or a sense of abandonment from God. **Read Psalm 13, verses 1-4.** What is the Psalmist feeling? Have you ever felt like this? This is a classic lament psalm. Now, **read verses 5 and 6.** The psalmist, despite his present circumstances, still puts his faith in God and he remembers what God has done in the past. Why do you think the Psalm ends this way? Why do you think psalms like this are included in the Bible? In what way might the psalms of lament be helpful to you?

Tuesday, February 5 – Today we'll read excerpts from the story of Joseph, the great grandson of Abraham. Remember, Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery. Once a slave he was falsely accused by his master's wife of trying to rape her. Though he was innocent, he was thrown in prison and remained there for some time. He eventually met Pharaoh's cupbearer who was briefly imprisoned. This man came to know that Joseph could interpret dreams. Upon his release he returned to work for Pharaoh, and later, when Pharaoh had a dream no one could interpret, the cupbearer told Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph is released from prison, and interprets Pharaoh's dreams about an impending famine. Joseph's efforts result in food being saved from the crops to sustain the people through the famine. Eventually, Joseph's own brothers, who assume Joseph is dead, are forced to come to Egypt for food, and there they meet their long lost brother they had sold into slavery. **Read Genesis 45 and 50:18-21.** What does this story teach us about human freedom and how God works through the evil actions of others? The Jewish people exist today because Joseph was in Egypt and saved these brothers. Are there places where you can look back and see that what others intended for evil God used for good in your life? **Read Romans 8:28.** How does this tie in to Joseph?

Wednesday, February 6 – The prophets were often writing warnings of impending judgment, or offering comfort and hope in the face of disaster. Their words of comfort have sustained people of faith for more than 2,000 years. One of the great chapters of comfort and hope in the face of adversity is found in Isaiah, when Isaiah prophesies to the Jewish people after their homeland had been destroyed by the Babylonians and the people had been taken away as captives and slaves to Babylon. **Read Isaiah 40** (if you are short on time just read verses 27-31). The Jewish people were delivered from their captivity, but it would be 50 years before they were allowed to return to the land of Israel. God's deliverance always comes, but not always as quickly as we would like. What does it mean to "wait upon [or hope in] the Lord" (Isaiah 40:31)?

Thursday, February 7 – The Apostle Paul describes some of his life experiences since becoming a Christian in today's readings. **Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-28.** Many people would have turned their back on God in the face of such hardship. Paul offers his perspective on these things and what sustains him in the following verses: **Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-9.** What is Paul's answer to how he faces his own hardship and suffering?

Friday, February 8 – Look over your message outline from Sunday. We learned that God usually works through the influence of his Spirit, guiding people, and working through people. If we watch carefully, we will see opportunities to be a part of God's will and God's providence for others and for our world. We also place our troubles in God's hands, to use them to produce in us perseverance, character and love. These two ideas of being used by God to help others, and tragedy producing character in us, are captured in the book of James. **Read James 1.** James notes how he can have joy in the face of possible death. What might God's word be to you in the verses you have read today?