

# RHYTHM:

a weekly reflection guide for students

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## **What is Rhythm?**

*Rhythm* is a weekly lectionary reflection guide designed with students in mind! Each week you'll find lectionary readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, New Testament, and Gospels, along with different types of questions and readings to reflect on. Rhythm will help students connect with God and each week's readings in various ways, challenging students to put what they're hearing into practice throughout the week.

Rhythm is broken up into five sections, each with a unique purpose. In *We Read*, students are guided in reflecting on an initial reading of the week's passages. In *We Think...* students are encouraged to engage scripture on a deeper level by asking questions about the text. *We Feel* invites students to engage their emotions, bringing their feelings into conversation with God's word. In *We Believe*, students are invited to connect what they've read in scripture to the larger Wesleyan theological heritage. Finally, *We Practice* guides students in discovering the practices they might use to help develop a rhythm of life shaped by scripture and the community of faith to which they belong.

*Rhythm: A Weekly Reflection Guide for Students* can be used in a small group setting, as a guide for youth group time, or even with adults! We hope you find Rhythm as something that leads you and your students into a deeper faith.

## **We Read...**

Following God costs us something. When we say yes to a relationship with Christ, we give up many things - such as the desire to live for ourselves alone, the parts of our hearts that draw us towards sin, and the hours of the week that we now spend with Jesus. When we say yes to a relationship with Christ, we also say yes to walking in the ways that God has commanded us. We give up serving other masters, like selfishness, pride, and popularity, but we're invited into something so much greater. Everything we do comes with a cost to us, but we have to decide if it's worth it. Everything we choose will cost us time, energy, money, and so on. Only one choice can lead us to good news and a full life, though.

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

<sup>15</sup> Look here! Today I've set before you life and what's good versus death and what's wrong. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the LORD your God's commandments that I'm commanding you right now by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments, his regulations, and his case laws, then you will live and thrive, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and so are misled, worshipping other gods and serving them, <sup>18</sup> I'm telling you right now that you will definitely die. You will not prolong your life on the fertile land that you are crossing the Jordan River to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth as my witnesses against you right now: I have set life and death, blessing and curse before you. Now choose life—so that you and your descendants will live—<sup>20</sup> by loving the LORD your God, by obeying his voice, and by clinging to him. That's how you will survive and live long on the fertile land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors: to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

### **Psalms 1**

- <sup>1</sup> The truly happy person  
doesn't follow wicked advice,  
doesn't stand on the road of sinners,  
and doesn't sit with the disrespectful.
- <sup>2</sup> Instead of doing those things,  
these persons  
love the LORD's Instruction,  
and they recite God's Instruction

day and night!  
<sup>3</sup> They are like a tree  
 replanted by streams of water,  
 which bears fruit at just the right time  
 and whose leaves don't fade.  
 Whatever they do succeeds.  
<sup>4</sup> That's not true for the wicked!  
 They are like dust  
 that the wind blows away.  
<sup>5</sup> And that's why the wicked  
 will have no standing  
 in the court of justice—  
 neither will sinners  
 in the assembly of the righteous.  
<sup>6</sup> The LORD is intimately acquainted  
 with the way of the righteous,  
 but the way of the wicked is destroyed.

### **Philemon 1:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> From Paul, who is a prisoner for the cause of Christ Jesus, and our brother Timothy.

To Philemon our dearly loved coworker, <sup>2</sup> Apphia our sister,  
 Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church that meets  
 in your house.

<sup>3</sup> May the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

<sup>4</sup> Philemon, I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers <sup>5</sup> because I've heard of your love and faithfulness, which you have both for the Lord Jesus and for all God's people.

<sup>6</sup> I pray that your partnership in the faith might become effective by an understanding of all that is good among us in Christ. <sup>7</sup> I have great joy and encouragement because of your love, since the hearts of God's people are refreshed by your actions, my brother.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to command you to do the right thing, <sup>9</sup> I would rather appeal to you through love. I, Paul—an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus—<sup>10</sup> appeal to you for my child Onesimus. I became his father in the faith during my time in prison. <sup>11</sup> He was useless to you before, but now he is useful to both of us.

<sup>12</sup> I'm sending him back to you, which is like sending you my own heart. <sup>13</sup> I considered keeping him with me so that he might serve me in your place during my time in prison because

### **We Practice...**

If it is still nice out where you live, take a few minutes this week to go sit by a tree or a nearby stream. Consider how a tree grows or how the water continues to move and flow. This movement and growth are a natural part of these things. Think about how you have grown or changed in the last month, season, or year. How has God helped you in this time? Does following God help you to grow and change?

## Notes

of the gospel. <sup>14</sup> However, I didn't want to do anything without your consent so that your act of kindness would occur willingly and not under pressure. <sup>15</sup> Maybe this is the reason that Onesimus was separated from you for a while so that you might have him back forever—<sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave but more than a slave—that is, as a dearly loved brother. He is especially a dearly loved brother to me. How much more can he become a brother to you, personally and spiritually in the Lord!

<sup>17</sup> So, if you really consider me a partner, welcome Onesimus as if you were welcoming me. <sup>18</sup> If he has harmed you in any way or owes you money, charge it to my account. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, will pay it back to you (I'm writing this with my own hand). Of course, I won't mention that you owe me your life.

<sup>20</sup> Yes, brother, I want this favor from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup> I'm writing to you, confident of your obedience and knowing that you will do more than what I ask.

### **Luke 14:25-33**

<sup>25</sup> Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. Turning to them, he said, <sup>26</sup> "Whoever comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters—yes, even one's own life—cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever doesn't carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

<sup>28</sup> "If one of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't you first sit down and calculate the cost, to determine whether you have enough money to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when you have laid the foundation but couldn't finish the tower, all who see it will begin to belittle you. <sup>30</sup> They will say, 'Here's the person who began construction and couldn't complete it!' <sup>31</sup> Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand soldiers could go up against the twenty thousand coming against him? <sup>32</sup> And if he didn't think he could win, he would send a representative to discuss terms of peace while his enemy was still a long way off. <sup>33</sup> In the same way, none of you who are unwilling to give up all of your possessions can be my disciple.

## Notes

### We Believe...

Paul's letter to Philemon can be frustrating to read 2,000 years later. You might be thinking, How dare Paul send a slave back into slavery! How dare Philemon, a Christian, even have slaves! And those feelings aren't wrong. It's okay to be frustrated and confused with this book. You aren't alone! Let's be clear, God does not support slavery, God does not support harming other people, or treating them as less than human. God has created each of us in God's image, and Jesus calls for us to love our neighbors (all people) as we love ourselves.

So why does Paul do this? First, Paul really believed that Jesus was coming back any day as he was writing these letters. He thought Jesus' second arrival would be in the months or years of his ministry, so he typically encouraged his listeners to find ways to live within the existing systems. He didn't think that they had time to dismantle every broken and unjust system in the time that they had. It was a better use of time to live out the love of Jesus within the existing systems than to spend time fighting and changing them.

It's also important to see that he doesn't send Onesimus back blindly or without any support. Paul was doing his best to live within this system, but he was also striving to embody the love and grace of Jesus. He writes this letter to Philemon, saying that Onesimus should be received back joyfully, with no penalty or punishment, and as a brother. Paul is going to bat for Onesimus and attaches his own word and weight to him. If you harm Onesimus, if you treat him poorly, you're really doing that, Paul. It's a pretty bold move on Paul's part to take on the cost both financially and potentially relationally. He is living out what he believes.

Even if Paul's actions still don't make sense to us, that's okay. You don't have to blindly smile at every passage of Scripture. Wrestle with the hard texts, ask questions, and talk to people around you about what you're reading. However, make sure to also learn the context of what's being said, which will help you gain a deeper perspective.

## Notes

## We Think...

- What stands out to you in these verses? Does anything confuse you or not make sense? How do these verses compare to your own experience in life or the church?
- What are you considering? What questions come to mind?
- How do God's commandments help us have a better life?
- Why does Jesus use such extreme examples in Luke 14?

## Notes

## We Feel...

- What emotions are you experiencing today? How are you making space for these feelings?
- Where have you seen God today or this week? What is pointing you to God (maybe it is something in creation, a friend or adult that cares for you)?
- What has God made new in your life? In your heart?
- Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother instead of a slave. How does that make you feel?
- What does it mean for you to love the instructions of God in your own life?