

Reading Thru the Bible with Heart & Mind

Several years ago, Scott Engle, a teacher at St. Andrew United Methodist Church in Plano introduced a 12 month plan to read through the Bible in a year ... thanks to his efforts, I now invite YOU to join *us* at First United Methodist Church WINNSBORO us as we read *Thru the Bible* together! By reading only one story or key passage each day, we can really digest the meaning of the scripture but here are Scott's tips that might help make this meaningful:

- Read the story or passage twice during the day, once in the morning and once in the evening. This will help you to keep the story in your heart and mind throughout the day, living with it and letting it work within you.
- Keep some index cards with your Bible. Write down each day a phrase or a few words that catch your eye in the passage. Keep this card with you and glance at it once in awhile during the day. For example, you could set it on your desktop so it catches your eye from time to time.
- Find a discussion partner, someone with whom you can talk over the stories several times during the week. This might be your spouse or a friend. Sharing your thoughts and hearing those of someone else is a key way of getting into the story or passage.

January 1: *Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a* The first account of creation. You can think of this one as being written from God's perspective. What does it reveal about God, our world, the problem with our world, and the solution?

January 2: *Genesis 2:4b – 2:25* The second creation account, this one from the humans' perspective? What are key emphases found only in this account?

January 3: *Genesis 3* The story of the humans' rebellion against God. What is the nature of the rebellion? What is its result? What do we learn about ourselves in this story?

January 4: *Genesis 4* Cain murders his brother. Why? What is the result? Again – what does story tell us about God and about ourselves?

January 5: *Genesis 6:9-22* Why the flood? Why Noah? How does this story make you feel about God?

January 6: *Genesis 9:1-17* In the story of Noah, we are introduced the notion of a covenant between God and humanity. Why a covenant? What does God covenant to do? Are any requirements placed on Noah or humanity?

January 7: *Genesis 11:1-9* The tower of Babel. The flood does not enable the renewal of God's creation. God will take another way.

January 8: *Genesis 12:1-9* God chooses one person, Abram, through all of the cosmos will be renewed and restored. Note that all humanity will be blessed through Abram.

January 9: *Genesis 12:10-20* The story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt is a tale that will be repeated twice more in Abram's family. What does this brief story reveal to you about each of the key players? What is the point of this story? See chapters 20 and 26 for the other stories.

January 10: *Genesis 15* This is the great chapter on the covenant the God makes with Abram. What does God covenant to do? What does Abram covenant to do? Notice the statement of Abram's faith in v. 6 and the manifestation of God in v. 17.

January 11: *Genesis 16* The story of Hagar and Ishmael. Who rescues Hagar? What promises are made?

January 12: *Genesis 17* God gives Abram a sign of the covenant they have made. What is asked of Abram this time? Why are they renamed Abraham and Sarah? What promise does God make?

January 13: *Genesis 18:1-15* Sarah laughs at the idea she would have a baby. Why is she afraid to admit it? What do you make of the visitors?

January 14: *Genesis 18:16-33* Abraham negotiates with God over the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. How would you characterize the relationship between Abraham and God? What does this tell you about God?

January 15: *Genesis 22: 1-19* God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Spend some time with the details of this carefully-crafted story. What does this tell you about the nature of faith? About God? About Abraham?

January 16: *Genesis 24* A wife is found for Isaac. What does this story lead you to expect from Abraham's family? Why is so much time taken with this story? This is the longest chapter in Genesis.

January 17: *Genesis 25:19-34* Abraham and Sarah have twin sons, Esau and Jacob. What sort of future does the birth story prepare us for?

January 18: *Genesis 27:1-40* Jacob and his mother scheme to steal Esau's blessing. Who comes out well in this story? Poorly? What is the moral to this story? Why would the Israelites pass on this story from generation to generation?

January 19: *Genesis 28:10-22* After fleeing Esau's wrath, Jacob has a dream of a ladder linking earth and heaven. What is the place of dreams in the Bible? In your own life?

January 20: *Genesis 29 – 30:22* A long passage telling the story of how Jacob ends up with twelve sons. They will be the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. Why did Jesus choose twelve disciples and why did the disciples feel compelled to replace Judas Iscariot?

January 21: *Genesis 32:22-32* While Jacob tries to sleep before confronting the feared Esau, he wrestles with God! What is your reaction to this strange story? What's the point?

January 22: *Genesis 33:1-17* Jacob and Esau meet. What surprises you most about this reconciliation? Do you think it will be lasting?

January 23: *Genesis 34* This is the story of Dinah's rape and its aftermath. What are we to make of this story? What does it reveal to us about Abraham's family? What most surprises you in this story?

January 24: *Genesis 37* This chapter begins the long narrative about Joseph. Here, he dreams of greatness but is sold into slavery by his brothers. As you read these stories, ask yourself what they reveal about God and about Israel.

January 25: *Genesis 41:37-57* Joseph rises to power. How do we account for this remarkable ascension? How will Joseph use his power?

January 26: *Genesis 45* In a very touching scene, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

January 27: *Genesis 49:29 – 50:26* The story concludes with tears and forgiveness. Abraham's family, the people of God, are in Egypt and there they will stay. The book of Exodus opens centuries later with the people enslaved by the pharaoh.

January 28: *Philippians 1:3-11* What does Paul pray for here? What are his reasons for thanks? How does this prayer compare to your own or to our congregational prayers?

January 29: *Philippians 1:12-18a* What is Paul's proclamation? How does he view his own imprisonment?

January 30: *Philippians 1:18b-26* How does Paul feel about this life and the next? Why do you think he speaks of a desire to depart (die) and be with Christ? Why does he stay?

January 31: *Philippians 1:27-30* How does this passage speak to our public behavior? What do these new Christians have to fear from their opponents?

CHECK BACK FOR THE FEBRUARY QUESTIONS IN A FEW DAYS

February 1: *Philippians 2:1-4* This is about the community of believers being unified in everything. Why is this important? How unified is St. Andrew? How could we be more unified?

February 2: *Philippians 2:5-11* What does this passage say to you about Jesus? What is most surprising? Most difficult? How do we get "the same mind that was in Christ Jesus?" What does Paul mean?

February 3: *Philippians 2:12-18* What does Paul mean by "work out your own salvation"? Aren't we saved by grace? Why must the Philippians "hold fast the word of life" for Paul to "boast on the day of Christ"?

February 4: *Philippians 2:19-30* Paul turns to practical matters. You'll meet Timothy, one of Paul's closest associates and the recipient of two of Paul's NT letters.

February 5: *Philippians 3:1-11* What is the true basis for confidence? What do you think are some of the biggest dangers that test your faith? What is the rubbish that Paul speaks about?

February 6: *Philippians 3:12 – 4:1* Press on to the goal! What is the place of imitation and role models in the practice of the Christian faith?

February 7: *Philippians 4:2-9* Read slowly through Paul's urgings to rejoice, embrace gentleness, and give up our worries. Look upward and keep doing.

February 8: *Philippians 4:10-23* In his closing words, Paul contrasts living in plenty and in want. How do you think we'd do without our own plenty?

February 9: *Exodus 1-2* This is a longer reading, but ask yourself, "Where is God in this?" When does God hear the cries of the slaves? What effect does the groaning have on God? What is conveyed by God's absence through most of these two chapters?

February 10: *Exodus 3* Moses meets God at the burning bush. He is given a mission, despite his objections. He is also given God's name. The revealing of God's name is a big moment.

February 11: *Exodus 7:8-25* Aaron and Moses arrive in Egypt and confront Pharaoh. The first plague befalls Egypt. What do you think we are supposed to make of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart? What could be gained?

February 12: *Exodus 12* It is time for the tenth and final plague – death of the first-born. God institutes the Passover. The blood of a lamb spread on the doorway protects the homes of the Hebrews. How does this relate to Jesus' Last Supper and our own practice of Holy Communion?

February 13: *Exodus 14* The crossing of the Red Sea. What makes this the great salvation event for the Jews? Why does God save them? Note that the people have not yet been given the Ten Commandments. The sequence here is grace, then law.

February 14: *Exodus 16* The people whine about being in the wilderness. "We'll starve!!" How does God provide food for them? What is most surprising about this? What lesson are they to learn? You might also read John 6:22-59. Jesus is the bread of life.

February 15: *Exodus 19:9b-20:21* The people are consecrated and made ready to receive God's Law. Look carefully at the Ten Commandments. Does anything surprise you? How would you summarize them?

February 16: *Exodus 23:1-12* What does God expect of the Israelites? How well do we do at living up to this instruction?

February 17: *Exodus 32* While Moses is on the mountaintop with God, the people rebel and fashion a calf made of gold, which they worship and credit for their salvation. The ancient rabbis saw here the story of Israel's greatest sin. Why would they see it this way? Do we make "golden calves?" What does Moses' intercession say about God and prayer?

February 18: *Exodus 33:12-23* Moses intercedes again and God promises that his presence will go with the Israelites. There is much in these chapters about the dramatic presence of God. How is God present with you? Is it ever dramatic?

February 19: *Exodus 34:1-9* Moses makes two new tablets after smashing the first set. God claims to abound in steadfast love and faithfulness. Is this your own experience with God? Have there been times when it seemed to you that God was not faithful?

February 20: *Exodus 25:10-22* God gives Moses the instructions for building the ark of the covenant. God tells him that it is above the top of the ark that God will meet him. Think of this as the place where heaven and earth met. Where does God meet you?

February 21: *Exodus 40:16-38* Moses sets up the tent called the Tabernacle and places the ark behind the screen. God's glory filled the tabernacle. What do you imagine this looked like to the Israelites? Why does the book end here?

February 22: *John 1:1-18* The Word becomes flesh. What are three main themes that John wants us to grasp in this prologue to his gospel?

February 23: *John 1:19-33* John the Baptist offers his testimony to Jesus. Such testimony plays a big part in John's gospel, for the overarching question is: "Who is Jesus?" How would you respond to someone who asked you that question? What do you think John means when he calls Jesus the Lamb of God? Why has the Lamb of God come?

February 24: *John 1:35-51* How do these men respond to their encounter with Jesus? Who offers testimony here? What do you make of Jesus' response in v. 51? You might check Genesis 28:12 and Daniel 7:13-14.

February 25: *John 2:1-12* Jesus goes to a wedding in Cana. Why do you think that his mother, Mary, wants Jesus to do something about the wine? Why doesn't Jesus want to? Why does he do it?

February 26: *John 2:13-24* Jesus cleanses the temple in Jerusalem. You might read Jeremiah 7:1-15 as background. What is Jesus trying to accomplish by interrupting the temple activities? Why does John put this episode at the beginning of Jesus' ministry?

February 27: *John 3:1-21* Nicodemus visits Jesus during the night. What is Jesus trying to convey to Nicodemus? Why is it so hard for Nicodemus to understand Jesus? Why does Jesus think Nicodemus ought to "get it?"

February 28: *John 3:22-36* Jesus and John the Baptist. More of John's testimony to Jesus. Verses 31-36 are from the narrator. Why so much emphasis on testimony?

March 1: *John 4:1-30* Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well. What sort of healing do you think she needs? What is the point of their conversation about worship?

March 2: *John 4:31-45* What is the food that Jesus has to eat after his encounter with the Samaritan woman (v. 33) and how does it nourish him? The Samaritans are not Jews. When many of them come to belief, what title do they give Jesus? What is its significance?

March 3: *John 4:46-54* Jesus heals the son of an official. What makes the official different from so many who come to Jesus seeking help or reassurance? What surprises Jesus? What gifts are the official and his family given by Jesus?

March 4: *John 5:1-18* Jesus heals a crippled man on the Sabbath. What does this story reveal about Jesus? About God? Note that "the Jews" is John's way of referring to the Jewish leaders, not to all Jews. After all, Jesus was Jewish.

March 5: *John 5:19-46* Typically, Jesus delivers a discourse after the confrontation with the Pharisees. What do the Father and Son share? What do you think Jesus means when he says that the hour is "now here, when the dead will hear the voice of God" (5:25)? What and who testifies to Jesus?

March 6: *John 6:1-21* Jesus feeds thousands (it is five thousand men) with a few loaves and fishes and he walks on water. What does the miracle of the feeding have in common with our practice of Holy Communion?

March 7: *John 6:22-71* Jesus takes the OT imagery of God's feeding his people and reshapes it around himself. It will be helpful to read Exodus 16. Why do people reject Jesus? He is even abandoned by some of his followers!

March 8: *John 7:1-24* Chapter 7 is a series of episodes depicting the rising opposition to Jesus. How bad do things get? Find three statements by Jesus that you think many of the people would have found most upsetting.

March 9: *John 7:25-36* Why do people think Jesus can't be the Messiah?

March 10: *John 7:37-52* Why don't the temple police arrest Jesus? It is important to see how much Jesus' messiahship differs from the people's expectations.

March 11: *John 8:1-11* The Pharisees bring a woman before Jesus on charges of adultery. What do you think this story is about? Is it a morality play?

March 12: *John 8:12-20* To whom is Jesus speaking when he claims to be the “light of the world?” In Jewish law, two witnesses are needed. Who is Jesus’ second witness?

March 13: *John 8:21-30* What does Jesus mean by “the Son of Man must be lifted up”? Compare this to 3:13-14. Are there people who believe in Jesus as a result of what he says and does or is he rejected by all?

March 14: *John 8:31-59* What does Jesus mean when he says that the Jews are not Abraham’s children if they reject him? What is the significance of Jesus’ statement, “Before Abraham was, I am” (8:58).

March 15: *John 9:1-12* Jesus heals a blind man. What do you think Jesus means by, “he [the man] was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him”?

March 16: *John 9:13-34* The Pharisees investigate the healing. Why? What do you think of this trial? What is the healed man’s response to his interrogators? Why do you think the Pharisees refuse to believe?

March 17: *John 9:35-41* The story of this blind man is one of fearless faith. He doesn’t understand everything, but who does. The man clings to what he knows is true and embraces Jesus as Lord. Is this story about physical blindness or spiritual blindness?

March 18: *John 10:1-19* Jesus takes upon himself the image of God as the Good Shepherd. Why do those who oppose him (“the Jews”) think he must be possessed by a demon?

March 19: *John 10:22-42* Jesus’ revelation of his relationship with God culminates in v.38: “The Father and I are one.” Why do you think that so many do not believe? Why do some believe?

March 20: *John 11:1-16* Why do you think Jesus delays in going to Lazarus? What do you think he does for those two days? Why is Jesus glad that he wasn’t there when Lazarus died?

March 21: *John 11:17-27* Why is Martha and later Mary so caught up in “If only . . .”? What does Jesus mean by saying that those who believe in him will never die? Why does Jesus weep?

March 22: *John 11:28-44* Again, why is Jesus deeply disturbed? How does this resuscitation of Lazarus show the glory of God (v. 40)? Does Jesus ever pray for Lazarus’ raising? How does this raising differ from Jesus’ resurrection?

March 23: *John 11:45-57* The Jewish high council passes a death sentence on Jesus. What is the irony in Caiaphas’ talk of letting one man die? What does this scene say about Jesus’ later appearance before the Jewish authorities after his arrest?

March 24: *John 12:1-11* Mary’s anointing of Jesus foreshadows his burial. What do you find most surprising in this scene? Why do the chief priests want to execute Lazarus?

March 25: *John 12:12-50* Jesus enters Jerusalem as the triumphant returning king, using OT images and references to stake his messianic claims.

March 26: *John 13* Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for what is to come. Why do you think he uses foot-washing? Why don’t the disciples stop Judas?

March 27: *John 14* This chapter begins Jesus' last and longest discourse. How would you summarize what Jesus has to say about (1) where he is going and (2) the promise of the Holy Spirit.

March 28: *John 15:1-16:4* What does the image of Jesus as the true vine and we as the branches convey to you? What does it mean to abide in Christ? What does Jesus mean when he says it is better to be hated by the world than to be loved by it?

March 29: *John 16:5-33* How could Jesus' going away possibly be to the disciples' advantage (16:7)? How is it that the disciples' sorrow will turn into joy?

March 30: *John 17* This is Jesus' farewell prayer on behalf of his disciples. How would you summarize this prayer? Note that Jesus is praying for his future disciples as well (17:20). Why does he do this?

March 31: *John 18:1-27* What is the reaction of the arresting party to Jesus' answer, "I am" (see v. 6 and footnote)? Why is so little made of Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities?

April 1: *John 18:28-38a* Jesus is taken before Pilate. Why do you think that Pilate is reluctant to execute Jesus? Do you think that Pilate is concerned about the possibility of taking an innocent life?

April 2: *John 18:38b – 19:16* Why are the Jewish leaders so anxious to crucify Jesus? Why do you think the crowds have turned on Jesus so quickly? Note the damning admission of the Jewish leaders in v. 15. They were to have no king but God!

April 3: *John 19:17-19:42* Who is with Jesus as he hangs on the cross? Where are Peter and the others? Why do the soldiers plan to break Jesus legs? Why do they not go through with it?

April 4: *John 20:1-18* What does Mary think has happened to Jesus' body? Why might someone take it? Why do you think Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener?

April 5: *John 20:19-31* Jesus had promised his disciples that another one, the Holy Spirit, would come after him. Here, the Holy Spirit arrives. What have the disciples told Thomas about Jesus? Thomas' confession in v. 28 is the first time that someone calls Jesus "God" in the gospel.

April 6: *John 21:1-19* Why do you think the disciples returned to fishing? What could they be waiting for? Why does Jesus challenge Peter three times?

April 7: *John 21:20-25* After having read through the entire gospel, who do you think is "the disciple whom Jesus loved?" What is the larger meaning of this final story?

April 8: *1 John 1* This beginning is similar to John's gospel. What about the claim by some that there is no such thing as sin?

April 9: *1 John 2:1-17* Who is our advocate before God? What is the new commandment? Is it really new? How should we behave toward our fellow believers?

April 10: *1 John 2:18-3:10* What is an antichrist? What do they teach and proclaim? How do we guard against being deceived? Why do you think John has such strong words against sin and those who sin? What could he mean when he says that all who abide in God don't sin? Don't we all sin?

April 11: *1 John 3:11-4:6* Why does the world hate believers? What is love? How would you contrast "truth and action" with "word and speech" (3:18). What does it mean to "test the spirits?"

April 12: *1 John 4:7 - 5:5* Why is the statement “God is love,” not merely sentiment? What makes it concrete? What might it have to do with our proclamation of the Trinity?

April 13: *1 John 5:6-21* What is eternal life? How might it differ from everlasting life? How can we know that we are God’s children?

April 14: *2 John* This is a cover letter accompanying 1 John. The issue addressed in the letter is Jesus’ true nature. There are some who deny that the human Jesus was identical with the divine Jesus. The Christians claimed that Jesus was fully God and fully human – one person, two natures.

April 15: *Ruth 1* The story of Ruth and Naomi is set during the time of the judges. Why do you think that Ruth decides to go to the land of the Israelites with Naomi? Why do you think Orpah does not? What sort of welcome does Naomi get upon her return?

April 16: *Ruth 2* Why does Boaz show such kindness to Ruth? What is Boaz’ relationship to Naomi? Why does Naomi show such interest in Boaz?

April 17: *Ruth 3* Why is Naomi so set upon Ruth’s getting married? What plan does Naomi devise? What do you think happens on that threshing room floor?

April 18: *Ruth 4* What does Boaz have to settle with his fellow townsmen? How is the marriage of Ruth and Boaz also the redemption of Naomi? Be sure to notice who is among the descendants of Ruth’s baby. Why do you think this brief story is in the Bible?

April 19: *Psalms 14* What is the psalmist’s perspective on those who deny even the existence of God? What does the psalmist await? God takes care of the poor and weak in a world given over to godlessness.

April 20: *Psalms 32* Sometimes it is a very hard thing to accept forgiveness, perhaps because doing so means accepting the wrong that we’ve done to someone. How does the psalmist find joy in God’s forgiveness? This is a psalm of David. How does the story of his adultery with Bathsheba affect your reading of this psalm?

April 21: *Psalms 49* It is so easy to place our trust in our bank accounts and our 401k. What does the psalmist say about the foolishness of trusting in riches? What are three teachings you can take away from this psalm?

April 22: *Luke 2:50-52; Acts 1:1-11* These sections link Luke’s Gospel and his second volume, the book of Acts. Why would Luke use the story of Jesus’ ascension in this way, closing one book and opening the other? What do you think the disciples are still waiting for?

April 23: *Acts 1:12-26* Why is it so important to replace Judas? Isn’t eleven men enough to get the job done? Certainly seems like an odd way to replace Judas. Casting of lots was used by the Jews for other purposes. What was it meant to accomplish?

April 24: *Acts 2:1-13* Pentecost was an important Jewish festival, so the city is packed with Jews from all over the empire. What is the nature of the “tongues” that the disciples speak? Why is Pentecost Sunday such an important day in the Christian calendar?

April 25: *Acts 2:14-41* How would you summarize Peter’s speech for someone? What accounts for his eloquence and his courage? What is the effect of the word preached by Peter? How many Jews come to faith in Jesus?

April 26: *Acts 2:42-47; 4:31-37* These two brief paragraphs paint a picture of the early community life among these followers of Jesus? Do you think Luke is being realistic in his portrait? What would account for their life together? How much like this is our life among the people of God?

April 27: *Acts 3* Why do you think Peter is able to do miracles? What purpose would they serve? Do you think there are people now who are able to do miracles as Peter did them? How does this speech compare to his speech on Pentecost?

April 28: *Acts 4:1-31* Why does the Jewish leadership seize Peter and John? Who is the reason for the power of Peter's testimony? What is the significance of Peter's being called "unschooled?" According to Peter, who is the only person by whom we must be saved?

April 29: *Acts 5:1-16* What a remarkable story. What is the sin committed by Ananias? Was it holding money back or lying about it? What sin does his wife commit? Little wonder that "great fear seized the whole church." What message is there for us in this story?

April 30: *Acts 5:17-42* What purpose is served by the apostles' many healings? Why do the Jewish leaders decide to arrest the apostles? What do they hope to gain? What do you think of Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin? What is the reaction of the apostles to their close call?

May 1: *Acts 6* Why does the church need delegation of responsibilities? What activities do the apostles' hand off to others? How much is this like the way we organize our churches now? Why is Stephen seized?

May 2: *Acts 7:1 – 8:3* What is Stephens' defense of himself? Is it a defense? Why does he tell the story of Israel to answer the charges against him? The man named Saul who holds the coats and zealously persecutes the Christians will become the apostle Paul after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

May 3: *Acts 8:4-25* What is the significance of the Gospel's spread into Samaria? What does Simon the Sorcerer not understand about the Gospel? What does this story convey to you about the gift the Holy Spirit?

May 4: *Acts 8:26-40* Who sends Philip to Gaza? Who tells him what to say? Like so much of the book of Acts, the "protagonist" in this story is God, present in the person of the Holy Spirit. What do you make of Philip's sudden trip? What do you imagine the eunuch experienced when Philip was whisked away?

May 5: *Acts 9:1-31* This is one of the great stories of Scripture. Trace the story of Saul from his encounter with Jesus to his preaching the Good News in the synagogue. It will be fifteen years before Paul begins his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14).

May 6: *Acts 9:32-43* What purposes underlie these healings? How do they move forward the proclaiming of the Good News? What are the parallels in the story of Tabitha to raisings by Elijah, (1 Kings 17:17-24), Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37), and Jesus (Luke 7:11-17)?

May 7: *Acts 10* This is a major turning point in Acts – the first conversion of a gentile. How would you summarize the major issues raised by this conversion? What is the significance that Cornelius is a Roman Centurion?

May 8: *Acts 11:1-18* Why does Peter have to justify his baptizing of Cornelius and his household? Why is this circumcision business so important? Do you think that Peter's story settles the matter among the followers of Jesus, all of whom are Jewish?

May 9: *Acts 11:19-30* Antioch (in Syria, on the Orontes river) was the third most important city in the Roman empire after Rome and Alexandria, Egypt. What do we learn here about its place in the burgeoning Christian community? Who is Barnabas?

May 10: *Acts 12* The James killed here is not Jesus' half-brother who would later become the leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem, write the NT book bearing his name, and be martyred in the early 60's AD. What is the theological significance of Peter's deliverance from prison? Who rescues him? The James in v. 17 is Jesus' half-brother.

May 11: *Acts 13* The next two chapters tell of Paul's first missionary journey. It will take him and Barnabas in southern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) after a stop on Cyprus. Who selects Paul and Barnabas for this trip? What sort of reception do they get in Cyprus and Pisidian Antioch (not the massive city of Antioch in Syria)? Why does Paul talk so much about the Old Testament story in his speech?

May 12: *Acts 14* What reception do Paul and Barnabas get in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe? Why are they worshipped? Notice that Paul is beaten so badly this time that he is left for dead. Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 where he recounts his many sufferings.

May 13: *Acts 15:1-35* The Christian leadership meets in Jerusalem to consider whether incoming Gentile converts must be circumcised to be a Christian. Why do you think this is such a big deal? What does the council decide?

May 14: *Acts 15:36-16:40* Paul leaves for his second missionary journey. Why doesn't Barnabas go with him? Who tells Paul to cross westward into Macedonia? Why? Note the prominent role of Lydia in Philippi. Why might Luke think it important to tell us this story? What do you think brings the jailer to faith in Jesus Christ?

May 15: *Acts 17* Why do you think there is so much trouble every time Paul preaches among the Jews? Why does he go to them first? When Paul preached in Athens, how does it differ from his preaching to the Jews? Why?

May 16: *Acts 18:1-23* How long does Paul spend in Corinth? What couple does he meet there? Why are the Roman authorities disinterested in the charges against Paul?

May 17: *Acts 18:24-19:41* Paul returns home, while Priscilla and her husband stay on in Ephesus. What do they teach Apollos about the Christian message? What does this story tell you about the role of women in the early church? Chapter 19 begins Paul's third missionary journey. Why are there riots in Ephesus over Paul? Who feels threatened by him?

May 18: *Acts 20* Why does Paul have to double-back through Macedonia? Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders is his only speech to Christians in the book of Acts. How would you summarize it? What are two or three key points?

May 19: *Acts 21:1-26* Why are Paul's friends fearful for him on his return to Jerusalem? What do you think is the significance of the purification rite? Why would Paul agree to undergo it? Do you think he believes it is a necessary part of the faith?

May 20: *Acts 21:27 - 22:21* Why is there trouble in the temple? What has Paul done to instigate the disturbance? Why do you think the Romans coming running? What are the key points that Paul makes when defending himself to his fellow Jews?

May 21: *Acts 22:22 – 23:35* Why does the tribune stop Paul's flogging? Why would the Romans take Paul before the Jewish Council? What parallels are there between Paul's "trial" before the Jewish leadership and

Jesus'? Why might Luke want to emphasize similarities? How does Paul divide his accusers? What does Jesus say to Paul about these events? Why do the Romans get Paul out of Jerusalem?

May 22: *Acts 24* Who do the Jewish leadership send to handle Paul's trial before the Roman governor, Felix? What is their charge? What evidence do they have? How would you summarize Paul's defense here? Why do you think Felix doesn't simply turn Paul over to the Jewish authorities and put an end to all this?

May 23: *Acts 25:1 – 25:22* When it seems that Festus is going to hand Paul over to the Jewish leadership, why does Paul demand an audience with Caesar? What gives him the right to make such a demand? Why does Festus need advice from Herod Agrippa? (Bernice is Agrippa's sister, not his wife.)

May 24: *Acts 25:23 – 26:32* How does Paul's speech before Agrippa differ from his other speeches? Do you think that Paul actually thinks that he might help bring Agrippa to belief in Jesus? In the end, what is decided about Paul's guilt? Why must he still go to Rome?

May 25: *Acts 27* Why do you think Luke gives us so much detail about Paul's trip to Rome? Indeed, why does he devote so many chapters to the story of Paul's arrest and trial?

May 26: *Acts 28* On Malta, why do you think that the natives think Paul is a murderer because he is bitten by a snake? Why doesn't Luke tell us more about what happens to Paul in Rome? Why end Acts with Paul under house arrest but still waiting for trial? What do you think happened to Paul?

May 27: *Job 1:1-12* In the opening scene, the reader learns what Job and his friends never do: why the terrible things befall Job. What portrait of Job is painted for us in v. 1-5? What is Satan's job in heaven? Why do you think Satan would want to make a wager with God? Why do you think God would agree with Satan's plan?

May 28: *Job 1:13 – 2:10* How bad does it get for Job? Why do you think God lets Satan attack Job's health? What is the response of Job's wife to all this? What would yours be?

May 29: *Job 2:11 – 3:19* What is the best thing that Job's three friends do when they arrive? What is Job's outlook when his friends arrive? Have you ever experienced anything close to the despair that Job describes?

May 30: *Job 4:1-11* When Job's friend breaks his silence, what is his explanation for Job's suffering? Why do you think Eliphaz is convinced that Job must have sinned? This sets the stage for the friends' attempts at explanation after explanation.

May 31: *Job 19* Here, Job expresses soaring hope (v. 25-27) in the midst of his sorrow. What is the source of that hope? Do you see in v. 25-27 any hints of Jesus and a future resurrection?

June 1: *Job 38: 40:1-9* Finally, God arrives. How would you summarize God's speech to Job? What is Job's first response? And God's? Look over this whole section. Does Job ever get the answers he seeks? What do you do when you don't get the answers you think you deserve? What does this book have to say about why bad things happen to good people?

June 2: *Job 42* In the end, Job is humbled and satisfied. He trusted God when he had it all and he trusts God still. What of Job's friends? Why must Job offer a sacrifice on his friends behalf? Why does God restore Job's fortunes? What is meant by the doubling? Can new children really make up for the loss of Job's first children? Spend a few minutes looking back over this remarkable story. What did you learn about God and the problem of evil?

June 3: *Hosea 1:1-9* Why do you think that God wants Hosea to marry a prostitute? What do the children's names mean? Why these names? Give all this, what do you think God is about to say to Israel?

June 4: *Hosea 2:1-13* Why does God use the imagery of marriage and adultery to describe Israel's (the people of God's) treatment of God? What is their chief failing, their biggest sin? What are the consequences of this sin?

June 5: *Hosea 2:14-23* What do these verses say to you about the nature of God? How could you understand your relationship with God based on these verses? Can you imagine God ever abandoning you?

June 6: *Hosea 3 & 4* What does God ask of Hosea now? What do you make of these juxtaposed portraits of God's accusations and God's love? Why is all this cast in the image of marriage? Any word here about our own marriages?

June 7: *Hosea 11:1 – 12:1* Can you hear God's disappointment and sadness? Verses 11:8-9 are especially remarkable. Keep these in mind the next time you hear people make pronouncements about God's wrath. The Lord is a God of love, not of wrath, as is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The OT passages about God's wrath have to be read in this larger context. The Bible moves forward from an eye for an eye to unlimited forgiveness.

June 8: *Hosea 14* How is this chapter a proper culmination of the entire book? Enjoy and appreciate the beauty of the poetry. These are word-pictures of God's hoped for relationship with his people.

June 9: *Philemon* What do you think are the circumstances of this letter? How does Paul see this slave, Onesimus? How does he want Philemon to see him? What might this letter say about Paul's attitudes toward slaves?

June 10: *Galatians 1:1-10* This is the only one of Paul's letters in the New Testament that does not open with a word of thanks for the letter's recipients. Paul's Greek is not as polite as it comes across in the English translations. Why is he so angry with these Christians?

June 11: *Galatians 1:11-24* Why do you think Paul feels that he must defend his own apostleship? Why does he recount so much of his own story? What surprises you the most about the details of his story?

June 12: *Galatians 2* Read Acts 15 for more on this council meeting in Jerusalem, assuming Paul is describing the same meeting. It isn't hard to imagine multiple meetings over such a contentious issue. What is the nature of the dispute? Why is it so important that the leaders of the movement must meet to resolve it? Why does Paul get angry with Peter (Cephas)?

June 13: *Galatians 3* Paul now mounts his counter-arguments to the false teachers? How does Paul view the Law? What was its purpose? Do you think Paul means that with Christ, anything goes? How is it that you are one of Abraham's descendents? How would you explain this to another person?

June 14: *Galatians 4* How does the story of Sarah and Hagar help us to understand Paul's point? How is it that Sarah's son is born "through the promise?" This passage illustrates that Scripture can sometimes be pretty hard to understand. How do you typically deal with a confusing passage?

June 15: *Galatians 5* We are new creations, free in Christ. But free for what? What is the nature of Christian freedom? What does this have to do with circumcision? Why do you think Paul contrasts the works of the "flesh" (our old self) with the works of the Spirit?

June 16: *Galatians 6* What does Paul say here about how we are to live out the unity given us in Christ? Notice that in v. 11, Paul takes up the pen himself. Notice esp. v. 15. What does Paul mean?

June 17: *1 Peter 1:1-12* What is the source and nature of Christian hope? How is this comforting to those who are suffering? Peter is writing to Christians who are being persecuted in some fashion. Persecution at this time was localized and wouldn't become empire-wide for more than two centuries.

June 18: *1 Peter 1:13-25* Why does Peter begin his instruction with a call to holy living? What place does discipline have in the Christian life? What do you think Peter means by saying that the Christians have been ransomed by the precious blood of Christ? What does this image bring to mind for you? Bear in mind that this is only one of many biblical images of salvation.

June 19: *1 Peter 2:1-10* Who is the living stone? Why a "living stone?" What does Peter's image of Christians as a "spiritual house" mean to you? What is the value of using such images to talk about theology? What do you think Peter means by "chosen"?

June 20: *1 Peter 2:11 – 3:7* Why does Peter urge the Christians to live as aliens and exiles? What would it mean for us to live as aliens in our world? Should we? Do we? Why would Peter tell them to honor the emperor? What can you learn from Peter's household code, this long set of instructions to husbands, slaves, etc.?

June 21: *1 Peter 3:8 – 4:11* How might Peter's advice here help the Christians in their time of suffering and persecution? Are you ready to make a defense of your faith to others (3:15-16)? How can Christians do a better job of defending the faith with gentleness and reverence?

June 22: *1 Peter 4:12 – 5:14* What do you think Peter means when he tells the Christians to be good stewards, trustees, of God's grace (4:10)? What are our responsibilities if God has entrusted his grace to us? Are you a good steward?

June 23: *Psalms 100* Who made you? Whose are you? What is the appropriate response?

June 24: *Psalms 29* The voice of God in a great storm

June 25: *Psalms 71* Prayer for lifelong protection and help

June 26: *Psalms 23* The divine shepherd

June 27: *Psalms 128* The happy home of the faithful

June 28: *Proverbs 3:21-35* The true security

June 29: *Proverbs 4:1-9* Parental advice

June 30: *Psalms 150* Praise for God's surpassing greatness

July 1: *Esther 1* King Ahasuerus is also known as Xerxes, who met the Spartans at Thermopylae. Why does the king want to get rid of Queen Vashti? What do you make of the men's response to Vashti's refusal? A key theme to look for is the inalterability of Persian law. Even the king must not set it aside.

July 2: *Esther 2* This section explains how Esther becomes the Persian queen. In this contest to win the king's favor, how will the "winner" be chosen? What happens to the contestants who get voted off? Who is Mordecai? What plot does he uncover?

July 3: *Esther 3* Who is Haman? Why does Mordecai not bow down to Haman? Why does he hatch a plot to destroy the Jews? What is Haman's plan? Why do you think the king goes along with it? How do the people respond to the edict?

July 4: *Esther 4* Why does Mordecai turn to Esther? How do you think you'd respond if you were in Esther's place? How does Mordecai persuade her to help out?

July 5: *Esther 5:1-6:13* Why doesn't Esther simply plead for the Jews? What are Haman's immediate plans for Mordecai? What does he have built? Why does the king honor Mordecai? How must Haman be feeling about this "triumph" now?

July 6: *Esther 6:14-8:17* What is the final undoing of Haman? Why doesn't the king simply reverse the earlier edict?

July 7: *Esther 9-10* Why do you think that some would still attack the Jews after it is known that they have the king's blessing to defend themselves? This story is the only book of the Bible that never mentions God. Why do you think it is in the Bible?

July 8: *Daniel 1* Where is the book of Daniel set? When? Who are Daniel and his friends? What choices are they offered? What do you think is the biggest temptation set before them? Why does Daniel reject the royal food? What are the consequences?

July 9: *Daniel 2:1-23* This story sets up a contest between whom? How does Daniel's challenge differ from Joseph's when he has to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 40 & 41)? Who reveals the dream to Daniel? What is his response?

July 10: *Daniel 2:24-49* How would you summarize Nebuchadnezzar's dream? What is the interpretation given to Daniel and passed on to the king?

July 11: *Daniel 3* What do you think is the main point of this story? Do the three young men know the outcome before they go into the furnace? Read 3:16-18. Why do you think they are willing to step into the fire? What does this story say to us about trusting God?

July 12: *Daniel 5* After Nebuchadnezzar was reduced to an animal-like existence (chapter 4), the humbling of the king continues, but this time it is the son, Belshazzar. His empire will not stand because he does not honor the true sovereign. What role does Daniel play at the feast? Can you see how it is we have the expression about being unable to see the writing on the wall? What does the expression mean? What do the words written on the Babylonian wall mean?

July 13: *Daniel 6* Now Daniel is plotted against. Why is he tossed in with the lions? How is Daniel saved? What do you think is the overarching theme of the stories in the first six chapters.

July 14: *Daniel 7:1-14* The literary genre of the book now changes. Chapters 7-12 are apocalyptic writing, very similar to the book of Revelation. Against the threat and chaos of the opening vision, we see the throne of God. The Son of Man (read the translation footnote for verse 13) is presented before God as the one who will defeat the threats and end the chaos. Many times, Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man (see Mark 2:7, e.g.).

July 15: *Mark 1* Jesus begins his public ministry. Why do you think Mark tells us nothing about Jesus' life up to this time? What is John the Baptizer's mission? What are Jesus' first words? What do they mean to you? Does the "unclean spirit" know Jesus' identity? What do you think was Jesus' basic message as he preached throughout Galilee?

July 16: *Mark 2* Chapters 2 and 3 are about growing controversies in Capernaum. What is the nature of these controversies? What are the scribes' concerns about Jesus? What is Jesus' response to these questions? Make a list of the controversies ignited in this chapter? What do you think Jesus was doing in this?

July 17: *Mark 3* Why does Jesus choose twelve apostles, not eleven or thirteen? Why is Jesus accused of being in league with "Beelzebub?" In all, what do you make of the demons in this gospel and the others? There are numerous stories. Could there be any overarching theme across these encounters?

July 18: *Mark 4* From the stories of controversy, we now turn to Jesus' kingdom parables? What is the purpose of teaching in parables? Generally, look for a single key point in each parable. What do you think is that point in the parable of the sower? How about the parable of the mustard seed?

July 19: *Mark 4:35-6:6a* When Jesus goes to Gerasene, there are many elements that the Jews would find horrifying: pigs, graves, and Gentiles? When the bleeding woman is healed, it is not only her body that is healed but her relationship with those who would have ostracized her. What does this tell you about the nature of Jesus' ministry?

July 20: *Mark 6:6b-6:56* What is the mission of the twelve? Why do you think Mark devotes so much space to the story of John the Baptizer's execution? Do you think there is meaning in the fact that the feeding of the multitude is followed "immediately" by Jesus' walking on water?

July 21: *Mark 7* Why do you think Mark explains certain Jewish practices (7:3-4)? What is Jesus trying to teach the Pharisees about Jewish food laws? How does this fit into Jesus' other teachings and actions about the Law?

July 22: *Mark 8:1-26* The feeding of the multitude is the only miracle in all four gospels. Why do you think this is the case? What do you make of the two-stage healing of the blind man at Bethsaida? Couldn't Jesus have gotten it right the first time? What might be the larger message of this story? How could it be related to the disciples' own blindness about Jesus' identity?

July 23: *Mark 8:27-9:13* What do Peter's declaration about Jesus and Jesus' foretelling of his death and resurrection have to do with Jesus' transfiguration?

July 24: *Mark 9:14-50* Here, the disciples argue among themselves about who is greatest. Why do you think it is so hard for the disciples to understand and to live out Jesus' proclamation of the Good News? Is there a message here for our own discipleship? Jesus warns about not putting temptations in front of other people. What are some ways you tempt others to sin?

July 25: *Mark 10* Here we find Mark's story of the rich man who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. How does this telling compare to Luke's story in this background study? Is it exactly the same? Are any changes important? How?

July 26: *Mark 11* When Jesus rides into Jerusalem it is as a returning king, the messiah. He then heads right for the temple. Read Jeremiah 7 for background. What does the fig tree have to do with it?

July 27: *Mark 12* Imagine you are among those hearing Jesus tell the parable of the wicked tenants. Who would think Jesus is talking about? Why doesn't Jesus want to directly address the resurrection question asked by the Sadducees? What is Jesus saying to you and me with his comments about the poor widow's offering?

July 28: *Mark 13* Jesus heads up to the Mount of Olives where he can look on the temple. What do you imagine this chapter is about? Is it only about a "someday" that has not yet arrived? Forty years later the temple

would be destroyed by the Roman legions and has never been rebuilt. Could Jesus be talking about that day in 13:2? How about later in the chapter? Remember that the Son of Man reference is grounded in Daniel 7:13-14.

July 29: *Mark 14:1-31* How does the anointing at Bethany ready us for what lies ahead? Why does Judas betray Jesus? What do you think Jesus means by the “body” and “blood?” What is the connection between this Passover meal and the exodus from Egypt?

July 30: *Mark 14:32-72* Jesus’ emotions are not talked about much in the gospels, making this scene even more dramatic. Why doesn’t Jesus simply escape out the back side of the garden, which would be easily done, so that he could carry on his ministry?

July 31: *Mark 15* What do you think are Pilate’s motives here? Why do the chief priests charge Jesus with insurrection when they bring him before Pilate, not blasphemy? What is the significance of the torn curtain in the temple? Where do you think all the disciples have gone?

August 1: *Mark 16* Why such a brief resurrection account? What do you make of the two endings, neither of which is probably genuine. The longer ending is certainly not original. Might the original ending have been lost? What sort of ending would you write for the gospel?

August 2: *Joel 1:1-12* It is most likely that Joel worked in the 5th century BC. This first section is a lament for the nation, which has suffered terribly in a plague of locusts.

August 3: *Joel 1:13 – 2:17* What response to this suffering does Joel call for? Why? What might this have to do with the coming day of the Lord (2:1)? Why does so much seeming terror surround God’s arrival? 2:10-11 uses dramatic language to convey that the coming day has cosmic implications.

August 4: *Joel 2:18 – 3:21* What is God’s response to the people’s suffering and sin? Remember that for the Jews and other ancient people, bad things happened because God was punishing them. Is God’s arrival a time of terror or is God’s spirit poured out on the people? When Peter rises to preach on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) he quotes from Joel. Why? What is the connection between Pentecost and Joel 2:28-29?

August 5: *Jonah 1* Ninevah was the capital city of Israel’s enemies, the Assyrians and was a big place. It is pretty easy to understand why Jonah runs away rather than be the bearer of God’s message for the city. Why do the sailors cast lots to find out who has displeased the gods. (This is a great example of the ancient belief that the gods were the first cause of all events, even the roll of some dice). How do you think the sailors knew that Jonah was running away from God?

August 6: *Jonah 2* What meaning can you find in Jonah’s prayer of thanksgiving for being saved from the storm? Notice that he prays while still in the fish’s belly. Do you think that God spoke to the fish because of Jonah’s prayer?

August 7: *Jonah 3* This is really the big miracle in the story: not three days in the fish but the entire city actually repenting. They hear and heed the message that Jonah brings! What do you make of God’s changing his mind. This is far from the only instance in the Bible. How would you try to explain this to someone else?

August 8: *Jonah 4* What is Jonah’s reaction to the city’s repentance? Why does Jonah want to die? What is God’s response? What is the point of the worm and the plant? Do you think that the book of Jonah is to be read as history, recounting events that actually happened, or as an extended parable or as something else? What difference would your answer make to your reading of the story or its message and theology?

August 9: *2 John* It has been suggested that 2 John is a cover letter to accompany 1 John. What message do you take away from this letter? Why do you think that it is in the New Testament? How would you summarize its warnings about false teaching? Why would such attention be paid to deceptive teachers?

August 10: *3 John* Here too: why in the New Testament? What are the themes? Notice the attention paid to the doing of good. How we live matters – a lot.

August 11: *Jude* Jude was one of Jesus' half-brothers (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). Notice again the attention paid to false teachers. How do we go about discerning true teaching of Scripture from false teaching?

August 12: *Deuteronomy 1:1-45* This book is cast as Moses' sermon to the people before they enter the Promised Land. It is a restatement of the Law and is foundational to the New Testament. The first two chapters tell the story of the people's journey from Mt. Horeb (Sinai) to the Promised Land.

August 13: *Deuteronomy 1:46-2:25* The story of the peoples' wanderings in the Sinai wilderness. Could you tell someone else the basic story of Moses and the people from slavery in Egypt to their entering Canaan? Why is so much time here spent retelling the story?

August 14: *Deuteronomy 4:1-39* Moses warns the people that they are to be obedient, living out the teaching and instruction God gives them (the Law). What dangers does Moses warn them about?

August 15: *Deuteronomy 5:1-21* Moses restates the Ten Commandments. Take a few minutes and compare this list to that in Exodus 20. Any differences? If so, what might they mean?

August 16: *Deuteronomy 6:1-9* This is a very important biblical passage. A Jewish prayer, the Shema, begins with the words of 6:4. It is a prayer that Jesus would have learned and prayed as a boy. Why do you think this passage was so cherished by the Jews?

August 17: *Deuteronomy 7* This chapter is about the Israelites being a chosen people. What do you think it means to be chosen? Do you think you have been chosen? What might be the downside of being chosen?

August 18: *Deuteronomy 8* This chapter is a warning about the dangers of prosperity. Why would such a warning be necessary?

August 19: *Deuteronomy 9* This book is filled with blessings and curses. We're fine with the blessings, but what do you make of the curses, the consequences of failing to live up to the promises that make up the covenant? In this chapter, what are the consequences to Israel of rebelling against God.

August 20: *Deuteronomy 10:12-22* What is the essence of the Old Testament Law? How might these verses help us to make sense of Jesus' statement that he came to fulfill the Law, not abolish it?

August 21: *Deuteronomy 11* Chapter 9 was about the consequences of rebellion against God. Here, the focus is on the rewards of obedience. How would you summarize these rewards? What do you think these two chapters mean to us and to our practice of our faith?

August 22: *Deuteronomy 12:1-28* It is easy to blow through chapters like this one. But stop to consider why there are so many warnings about pagan shrines and pagan worship. Why do you think this was so important to the covenant? What does it mean for us today?

August 23: *Deuteronomy 14:3-29* What could possibly be God's theological instruction in verses 3-21? What might God be teaching them? Us? Verses 22-29 are about tithing. How would you summarize these? What do they say about our own giving?

August 25: *Deuteronomy 15:1-18* This is another important OT concept and practice. How does the sabbatical year work? How could we live this out in our modern world? What does this have to do with social justice?

August 26: *Deuteronomy 15:19 – 16:17* Christians don't tend to know much about the Jewish calendar of festivals, but we should. They are important to a better reading of the New Testament. You can learn more about the festivals from a good Bible dictionary.

August 27: *Deuteronomy 16:18 – 17:13* We live in an unjust world created by a just God who has and will put things right. What does this passage teach us about God's justice as it is administered by sinful humans? Throughout these sections, remember the sort of world in which Deuteronomy was written, a world in which an "eye for an eye" represented moral progress over unlimited vengeance.

August 28: *Deuteronomy 17:14-20* Why do you think that God chooses to warn the Israelites about kings? What warnings does God give? What requirements and restraints are placed on the king? Who is to choose the king?

August 29: *Deuteronomy 18:1-8* We don't have much experience with priests, at least the levitical sort (the tribe of Levi was to be the priestly tribe). Why do you think the material needs of the priests are to be provided by the people?

August 30: *Deuteronomy 18:9-22* We don't have much experience with prophets either. How does this passage shape what God means by a prophet? Specifically, what does God not mean by a prophet? What is to be the prophet's vocation?

August 31: *Deuteronomy 19* What might be the modern-day application of these instructions about cities of refuge? Why would respect for property rights be important (19:14)? How could one possibly call "an eye for an eye" moral progress?

September 1: *Deuteronomy 20* Hmm . . . instruction on the conduct of warfare. What here surprises you? What does it say to us about our own warfare?

September 2: *Deuteronomy 21* Most of this chapter (v. 10-21) imposes restraints on the heads of households. Why would this be necessary? What does it say about the patriarchy depicted within the OT?

September 3: *Deuteronomy 22:13-30, 24:1-5* These passages are about marriage and the problems of marriage. Though these come to us from a culture very different from our own, what is there here that could help us grow our marriages to be everything that God hopes they would be?

September 4: *Deuteronomy 26:1-15* What is God trying to teach the Israelites here? This passage is about tithes, offerings, and first fruits. What can we learn here about the relationship of our faith to our own possessions?

September 5: *Deuteronomy 29:2-29* The story of the Exodus, of God's salvation of the Hebrews, is retold yet again. What explanation could we give for returning to this story time and again? What is emphasized in this telling?

September 6: *Deuteronomy 30* This is a chapter of great hope, that after the curse and devastation that lies ahead if Israel proves unfaithful, as Israel does, God will yet renew the covenant and redeem his people. How does this promise play itself out in the New Testament?

September 7: *Deuteronomy 31:1-12* Here, Moses hands over the mantle of leadership to Joshua. Why does Moses not lead the people into the promised land? Why is Joshua chosen? To get the full story, you'll have to look back to the people's first arrival at the borders of Canaan.

September 8: *Deuteronomy 33* These are Moses' blessings on each of the tribes. How would you summarize them? Do any of the tribes seem to be favored? You might try reading Peterson's rendering of these blessings in *The Message*.

September 9: *Deuteronomy 34* So we come to Moses' death. How is he remembered in these closing verses? What do you think is meant by Moses' knowing God "face to face?" Do you think that you will ever know God in that way? Might you ever know God even better than that? Hint – read Revelation 22:1-6.

September 10: *Revelation 1:1-8* For what purpose is John given this book? Why is John the one given the revelation? The blessing in v. 3 is the first of seven. Why is seven such an important number? What might it symbolize? What is said about Jesus in this introduction to the letter?

September 11: *Revelation 1:9-20* Also read Daniel 7:1-14. It too is apocalyptic literature. What is conveyed by calling Jesus the "Son of Man?" Be sure to read the NRSV translation footnote of Daniel 7:13.

September 12: *Revelation 2:1-11* This study looked at the letter to Ephesus. What do you take away from the letter to Smyrna? What is God's word for you in this letter? In what are the Christians of Smyrna rich?

September 13: *Revelation 2:12-29* Note the two-edged sword again in 2:12. What do you think the Christians in Pergamum would have taken from this letter? What is its message for you? Same for the letter to Thyatira.

September 14: *Revelation 3:1-13* In all these questions, we ought to strive hear God's word for us. What do you think Christians have learned from these letters over the centuries?

September 15: *Revelation 3:14-22* What do you think it means to be lukewarm for God? Why would Jesus prefer us to be either hot or cold? Have you opened the door for Jesus?

September 16: *Revelation 4* This is the first great worship scene. John is taken to the throne room of God. Don't get lost in the details and the possible meaning of every symbol. Enjoy this powerful imagery of the worship of God. Is this how we worship?

September 17: *Revelation 5* Look back over the depiction of the Lamb and the words of praise offered to him. What does this say to you about Jesus and his vocation? Why have these proved to be such powerful images in the life of the Church?

September 18: *Revelation 6* As the seals are opened, horsemen come riding out bringing terror and destruction to the earth. What purpose could be served by these images? What message from God is there in this? Remember – "love me or else" as the answer doesn't really work.

September 19: *Revelation 7* Who do you think are represented by these 144,000. Note that the number is equal to 12x12x1000. Is that a clue to the number's meaning? Just as John heard the Lion and saw the Lamb, John hears the 144,000 and sees the great multitude. What might that tell us about this image?

September 20: *Revelation 8-9* We go from seals to trumpets and the horrors compound. But this is not linear, i.e., sequential. For example, all the grass is burned up in 8:7. Then, the locusts(!) are told not to damage the grass of the earth. Again, the question is, “What is the point of all this?” If even God can’t scare someone into loving him, might this be about scaring people into repentance – into recognizing that they’ve been headed in the wrong direction, an “intervention” of sorts.

September 21: *Revelation 10* As the terrors seem about to climax, an angel descends from heaven. What purpose is served by this angel’s announcement?

September 22: *Revelation 11:1-14* The temple here is the people of God, in keeping with Paul’s letters. What you can’t miss here is the very end of 11:13. Finally!! After all that came before, at last there are some who repent and give glory to God.

September 23: *Revelation 11:15-19* Following the repentance of 11:13, we return to the heavens and another worship scene. In some ways, the book could end here . . . but it doesn’t.

September 24: *Revelation 12 – 13* The cosmic story of good and evil, of God and the powers that oppose God, is now retold as a conflict between God and Satan. What powers do you think are represented by the beasts? In Jesus day? In our own? To whom could we “sell out” now?

September 25: *Revelation 14:1-5* We return to the faithful remnant, the 144,000. How would this vision encourage suffering Christians?

September 26: *Revelation 14:6-13* Three angels arrive with messages. How would you restate each message in your own words? How do these help us to understand the purpose of the more dramatic images that John is given?

September 27: *Revelation 14:14-20* The image of the “grapes of wrath” in the Battle Hymn of the Republic is taken from this passage.

September 28: *Revelation 15-16* John now has a vision of seven plagues. There really isn’t much new here, illustrating the repetitiveness of these images of violence.

September 29: *Revelation 17* This is one of the most well-known of the images in Revelation. Given that the great whore is seated on seven mountains (17:9), plainly signifying the seven hills of Rome, what message would you take from this image if you were being persecuted in Asia Minor at the time? As you’ve probably gathered, I believe that the best place to begin interpreting Revelation is with its meaning for those to whom it was written. There is a message for us here, but it’s best to begin with the message to these first-century Christians. Honestly, this is the best approach for all biblical interpretation.

September 30: *Revelation 18* The focus now shifts from the Whore of Babylon to the fall of Babylon, which was obviously Rome in the minds of the first-century Christians. Who are the principal targets here? What might this mean when it comes to recognizing the powers of our own world that, knowingly or not, oppose God and the way of God?

October 1: *Revelation 19* Notice that there is not a description of the climactic battle. Why do you think it is missing? Might it be because the battle isn’t really climactic, but anti-climactic?

October 2: *Revelation 20* The chapter has received a lot of attention over the millennia! Why do you think that Satan, the dragon, is paroled? Might God yet be hoping that Satan repents? In the judgment scene, who are judged? How do you square this image of people being “judged according to their works” with the NT claim that we are saved by grace and grace alone?

October 3: *Revelation 21* Here, we arrive at the grand vision of the “end.” What stands out in your reading of these passages? Do these images differ from your preconceptions of “the end.” Notice that the earth doesn’t blow up and the people don’t go anywhere – God comes here. What does this say about our beliefs surrounding heaven and our life after death?

October 4: *Revelation 22* You might go back and read Genesis 2 first. What is God trying to communicate to us with these images. Note that the book ends as it began: God, Christ – the Alpha and Omega. Might God be wanting us to understand that the “end” is not an event, but a person, not a what but a who?

October 5: *Hosea 2* How would you summarize the messages that God is trying to send regarding his marriage covenant with his people? Why send it in this way?

October 6: *Psalms 45* This psalm is one of two wedding songs in the Bible. Who do you think is the groom here? Who is the bride? What are the parallels to Revelation 19?

October 7: *Matthew 22:1-14* When you come to a parable, it is always helpful to remember that parables have one main point. What do you think Jesus’ main point was in telling this parable in the days leading up to his crucifixion?

October 8, *1 Samuel 1* In the coming weeks, we’ll be reading portions of the book of Samuel. What seems familiar about this story of the birth of a boy named Samuel? What do you think is the theological point of this birth story?

October 9, *1 Samuel 2:11-36* The tabernacle of God was kept at Shiloh, located roughly in the middle of Canaan, until the temple was built in Jerusalem. Eli and his sons are the chief priests of the tabernacle. Thus, the corruption of Eli’s sons is a big deal and Samuel’s divine favor (v. 26) stands in stark contrast.

October 10, *1 Samuel 3: 1 – 4:1a* The wonderful story of Samuel’s call. Why do you think the word of the Lord was rare in Israel at the time (3:1)? What is revealed here about Samuel? About Eli?

October 11, *1 Samuel 5* After winning the Ark of the Covenant in battle, the Philistines come to regret their victory. What does this story reveal about God? Why do you think so much time is spent on this story?

October 12, *1 Samuel 7:3-17* Samuel is now not only a priest and prophet, but also a military commander and judge.

October 13, *1 Samuel 8* The people come to Samuel to demand that they be given a king like everyone else has. What is Samuel’s reply? What does he warn them about? Why have the people rejected God as their king? Does God give them what they want?

October 14, *1 Samuel 9* A man named Saul is identified as the first king. He certainly looks the part. And he’s rich! Saul is God’s choice, yet he will prove himself to be disobedient as his life unravels. What might this say to us about being God’s “chosen?”

October 15, *1 Samuel 9:27–10:8* Samuel anoints Saul as the first king of the united Israel, bringing all twelve tribes under a human king. The Hebrew word for “anointed one” is *mashiah*, which is “messiah” in English and “Christos” in Greek. How might this story deepen our understanding of Jesus as Messiah?

October 16, *1 Samuel 12* Saul’s farewell address to the Israelites. How would you summarize Samuel’s history of Israel. What is God’s message to the people in this address? What is the underlying theology?

October 17, 1 Samuel 13:1-15a This is the turning point in Saul's career and his relationship with God. What does Saul do that is wrong, that draws out God's anger? What are the consequences of Saul's rash act? What is the cautionary word here for us?

October 18, 1 Samuel 13:15b – 14:52 We meet Saul's son Jonathan. How would you describe their relationship? Note that Saul's rashness gets him in trouble again. He is rejected by his own people!

October 19, 1 Samuel 15 What are the circumstances of Saul's third rebuke from God? Saul spares a life yet is condemned. What could possibly be the message for us in a story such as this? Is this about ancient notions of holy war or about obedience?

October 20, 1 Samuel 16 Though Saul is still king, God leads Samuel to a young boy who will be Saul's replacement: David, son of Jesse. What do we learn here about David's character? How would you describe Saul and David's relationship? What do you think is happening to Saul? Were there any clues about this earlier in his story?

October 21, 1 Samuel 17 David and Goliath. What is it about this story that would make it so important to the Israelites? What is happening to Saul amid David's triumph?

October 22, 1 Samuel 18:1-16 We learn of the deep friendship between Jonathan, Saul's son, and David. You'll see that Jonathan understands friendship better than David. Saul's relationship with David continues to worsen. How would you explain to someone Saul's desire to kill David? What do you make of the "evil spirit" in v. 10.

October 23, 1 Samuel 18:17-30 Saul hatches a murderous plot. What is his scheme? Why does it fail? This is an episode to keep in mind. David will send Bathsheba's husband to death in battle.

October 24, 1 Samuel 19 What tack does Jonathan take in trying to get his father to relent in his murderous hatred of David? Does Jonathan succeed? When David goes to Samuel, it will prove to be the only occasion when David, Samuel, and Saul are together. What is God's role in protecting David? How does God accomplish this? What is the underlying message of this story?

October 25, 1 Samuel 20 David now returns to Jonathan for advice and help. Jonathan will help his friend but won't plot against Saul. What warning system does Jonathan set up? Note that the Saul's obsession with David now pollutes the relationship between father and son. Jonathan's faithfulness to David endures.

October 26, 1 Samuel 21 David is on the run. He lies to a priest in order to get help, endangering the priest. Is David's lie justified? Are lies ever justified? Is there a moral to these stories? What about his pretending to be mad?

October 27, 1 Samuel 22 Now we learn that David's seeking refuge with the priests is met by Saul with murder. The priests and their families are killed. Does David bear any guilt here? How could we discern God's purposes at work here?

October 28, 1 Samuel 23 Now Saul resorts to besieging a city to get to David! What is Saul so afraid of? How would you explain his obsession? Jonathan is actually the first person to tell David that he will be king (v. 17). How do you think this would affect David?

October 29, 1 Samuel 24 After being relentlessly pursued by Saul, David foregoes the opportunity to kill Saul. He is dismayed at himself for even considering the possibility. What do you think this reveals about David's heart? What does this story say about how we should act towards those who seek to harm us?

October 30, 1 Samuel 25 Samuel dies. A woman, Abigail, has to restrain David's desire for bloody revenge for an insult. What do you think is the moral of this story? Is there a moral at all? What does it reveal about David? About Abigail? What is revealed here about God? Why do you think that so much time is spent on the telling of this story?

October 31, 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2 David marries Abigail. David seeks refuge by serving the king of Achish. Many Christians, me included, have a very difficult time with passages such as this. David's bloodthirsty seems endless. "Leaving neither man nor woman alive"?? This story reflects the ruthlessness of the times and warns us that David is no saint.

November 1, 1 Samuel 28:3-25 Saul is a despairing, beaten man. Out of his fear on the eve of battle with the Philistines, he turns to pagan practices of black magic. This is the end of Saul's era.

November 2, 1 Samuel 29 Though David and his men are ready to fight with the Philistines against Saul, the Philistine lords don't trust him and send him away. Do you notice that everything seems to work out for David? Here, he doesn't have to fight against his fellow Israelites and yet hasn't betrayed the king of Achish. How would you explain David's good fortune? Is it fortune or is it God at work?

November 3, 1 Samuel 30 After a successful rescue mission, David declares a new equity in the distribution of booty. What is David's principle? How does this compare to Jesus' parable about the workers and wages in Matthew 20:1-16?

November 4, 1 Samuel 31 Bruce Birch suggests that the only appropriate response to this passage is communal silence and grieving, resisting the temptation to explain. Do you agree? Why is it so hard to avoid seeking explanations in the midst of tragedy?

November 5, 2 Samuel 1 1 & 2 Samuel are really one long book. Thus, 2 Samuel 1 picks up right where 1 Samuel 31 ended – and the political intrigue really begins. Why does David order the death of the Amalekite? Why do you think that David mourns for Saul? What does David's lament say about Jonathan?

November 6, 2 Samuel 2 David is made king over Judah, but Abner, a commander in Saul's army, makes Saul's son, Ishbaal, king over all the Israelites except those from the tribe of Judah. The united kingdom of Saul is divided. What will prove to be a seven-year struggle for the united throne begins.

November 7, 2 Samuel 3:1-21 Ishbaal offends Abner, who decides to betray Ishbaal and come over to the side of David. How would you compare the covenant that Abner makes with David to the covenant between Jonathan and David? What's your opinion of Abner and all his dealings?

November 8, 2 Samuel 3:22-39 Abner, the betrayer, is now betrayed and murdered. This is the first of seven murders in 2 Samuel. Joab is at least partly responsible for three more! Note that through all this David's innocence is highlighted for the reader; e..g verses 36-37.

November 9, 2 Samuel 4 Now, two men try to please David by murdering Ishbaal and bringing his head to the king. But the king is as displeased with them as he was with the Amalekite and they meet the same end. Why do you think that people fail to grasp David's unwilling to embrace vengeance on Saul and his family? Also, note the story of the five-year old, Mephibosheth. We'll get back to him later.

November 10, 2 Samuel 5 David now assumes the throne of the united tribes. He conquers Jerusalem and makes it his capital. Zion, the city of David, is on the current site of Jerusalem. God leads David in battle against the Philistines. Further, God is the military strategist and David listens. What portrait of David is emerging from these stories?

November 11, 2 Samuel 6 With great joy, David and the people bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Poor Uzzah, who was only trying to support the ark, is struck dead. He isn't be punished by God. He is ritually unprepared to handle the holy ark, a bit like the people being unable to even touch Mt. Sinai in the story of the Exodus. The holiness of God cannot be safely "handled" by the unholy. See also 1 Samuel 5. Finally, why does Michal despise David?

November 12, 2 Samuel 7:1-17 This is a crucial chapter. God makes a covenant with David that someone from his family will forever sit on the throne of Israel.

November 13, 2 Samuel 7:18-29 David praises God and expresses his own unworthiness.

November 14, 2 Samuel 8 This chapter is devoted to David's military successes.

November 15, 2 Samuel 9 We return to the story of Mephibosheth and David's kindness towards him. What is the point of this story?

November 16, 2 Samuel 10 More of David's military victories

November 17, 2 Samuel 11:1-27a We come to the story of David's great sin. How could a person after God's own heart possibly commit such a sin, conspiring to murder the husband of his pregnant, adulterous lover.

November 18, Psalm 51 In 2 Samuel 12, God will send the prophet Nathan to confront David over his sin. The book of Psalms attributes this psalm to David, written at the time of his adultery and murder.

November 19, 2 Samuel 11:27b - 12:1-15a The prophet Nathan tells David a parable. What do you think is the point of the parable? In most cases, looking for a single main point in a parable is the best approach to understanding the parable. Also, parables were meant to subvert the world of the hearer. What is David's response to the parable?

November 20, 2 Samuel 12:15b-25 The son born of David's and Bathsheba's murderous adultery dies. How does the writer of 2 Samuel understand this death? How do you? How does David respond to the death? When David and Bathsheba have another son, who does this child grow up to be? In their household, what consequences do you think will flow from this tragic affair?

November 21, 2 Samuel 13 This story is a prologue to the coming rebellion of David's son, Absalom. What is Tamar's role in this story? Were these events foreshadowed by the story of David and Bathsheba? If so, how? Amnon and Absalom were born to different mothers when Saul was still king (see 2 Samuel 3:1-5). Keeping all the family relationships straight is important though a bit tricky. Tamar is Absalom's full sister but only the half-sister of Amnon. These Old Testament characters are far from models of right behavior. Why did the Israelites hang on to such stories about their ancestors?

November 22, 2 Samuel 14 Joab, David's right-hand man, with the help of a wise woman, Tekoa, comes up with a plan for bringing Absalom back to Jerusalem. What is the plan and how well does it work?

November 23, *2 Samuel 15:1 – 16:14* Though reconciliation between father and son seems to have come, it is too late. Too much has happened in the five years since Absalom first fled. He begins to plot a rebellion against his father. David has to flee Jerusalem!

November 24, *2 Samuel 16:15 – 17:29* Absalom consolidates his control over the kingdom. But David is warned of a pending attack. This is a story of the treacherous turncoat v. the loyal undercover agent!

November 25, *2 Samuel 18:1-18* In the battle between the forces of David and those of Absalom, the son dies. What are the circumstances of his death?

November 26, *2 Samuel 18:19 -19:8a* This is one of the poignant and heart-wrenching scenes in all literature. What do you think accounts for the depth of David's grief, even going so far as to neglect its effect on those who achieved the victory, winning David back his throne? In our lives, how is every event bound up with what came before? How much of this do you think goes back to David's sin with Bathsheba and all that followed?

November 27, *2 Samuel 19:8b-43* David now returns to Jerusalem. What is the theme underlying all these encounters as he crosses the Jordan river and heads to the city? What is the significance of the river in this?

November 28, *2 Samuel 20* Why would the northern tribes follow Sheba the troublemaker? This foreshadows the coming division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon. Joab kills again! This time his victim is Amasa. On his deathbed, David will instruct his son Solomon to make Joab account for his murders of Abner and Amasa. What has David done right through all this?

November 29, *2 Samuel 21* A grim and tragic story, that reminds us that the world of 3,000 years ago was in some ways very different from our own. And we get some more heroic exploits.

November 30, *2 Samuel 22* This is a psalm of thanksgiving and is a duplicate of Psalm 18. A commentator wisely notes that this psalm declares God's reign in the midst of circumstances that suggest God does not reign. What meaning is there here for us and our world?

December 1, *2 Samuel 23* Here, we get another song, this time cast as David's last words, as well as some exploits of David's men. These last chapters (beginning with 21:1-14) are often seen as appendices to the book Samuel. What could be their purpose?

December 2, *2 Samuel 24* This story definitely seems like something tacked on at the end. What do you think is the point of this unusual story? What does it reveal to us about God or about Israel or about ourselves?

December 3, *Isaiah 2:1-5* This passage is about the coming Day of the Lord when all people would come together to live in peace and worship the Lord God.

December 4, *Jeremiah 33:14-16* This passage too is about a coming day when all God's promises would be fulfilled. What were God's promises? Have they been fulfilled? How?

December 5, *Matthew 24:36-44* This passage is often taken to refer to Jesus' second coming. Why do you think that is? If it isn't referring to Jesus' second coming, what might Jesus be talking about? The "Son of Man" reference is from Daniel 7 and refers to Jesus.

December 6, *Luke 21:25-36* This passage echoes the passage from Matthew. What is the parable of the fig tree about? What is its main point?

December 7, Romans 13:11-14 Paul urges the Christians in Rome to be always ready for Christ's return. What does this have to do with Advent?

December 8, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 What does Paul mean by "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

December 9, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 Paul urges the Thessalonians toward love so that they may be blameless when Jesus comes again, with all the believers.

December 10, Isaiah 11:1-10 Jesse was David's father. This is a portrait of the ideal Davidic king. What makes this sort of king ideal?

December 11, Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 The arrival of God's light, the light of Christ in a dark world. What do you think is encompassed by the pardoning of sins?

December 12, Matthew 3:1-12 What is John the Baptizer's vocation? What is his message?

December 13, Mark 1:1-8 How does Mark's portrait of John the Baptizer differ from Matthew's?

December 14, Luke 3:1-6 How about Luke's portrait? You might read all three at the same time? What portrait of John emerges from considering all three depictions?

December 15, 2 Peter 3:8-15a What are we waiting for? The writer uses powerful imagery to describe the magnitude of the Day of the Lord? What does this have to do with Advent?

December 16, Philippians 1:3-11 The "day of Christ" is the Day of the Lord. What is Paul's hope for the Philippian believers? Advent and Christmas are not only about what God has done but also what God is doing and will do!

December 17, Isaiah 35:1-10 What joy at being brought home from exile, being led out of the darkness and into the light!

December 18, Zephaniah 3:14-20 More from the prophets on the joy of God's coming and the redemption of his people.

December 19, Luke 1:47-55 What is most striking to you about Mary's song. What will the birth of her son mean for the world?

December 20, John 1:6-8, 19-28 John's depiction is markedly different from the synoptic gospels? In what ways does John's portrait stand out from the others?

December 21, James 5:7-10 This passage is about patience in suffering. Why would it be an Advent Scripture selection?

December 22, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 This passage is filled with lots of instructions about how to build and sustain good relationships within the community of believers. How could you put some of this teaching to work during this Christmas season?

December 23, Philippians 4:4-7 What will you rejoice about this Christmas? Will you rejoice in the Lord? What do you think that means?

December 24, *2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16* David's family is from Bethlehem, an insignificant little town about 5 miles south of Jerusalem (see 1 Samuel 16). Here God makes a promise to David that God's king will always come from David's family. What does this have to do with Jesus?

December 25, *Luke 1:26-38* The angel Gabriel arrives to tell Mary that she will give birth. What is Mary's reaction? Read carefully. What does her reaction reveal about God's choice of her.

December 26, *Luke 1:39-45* Mary heads out to visit her cousin Elizabeth (see Luke 1:5-25) who is also pregnant. Notice that John, though still not born, leaps for joy when Mary, carrying Jesus, walks into the room.

December 27, *Matthew 1:18-25* Try to come to this familiar story with fresh eyes. If this was the only story we had, what would you know about Jesus' birth?

December 28, *Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19* This is a plea to God for salvation. From what do you need saving?

December 29, *Romans 16:25-27* In Paul's closing doxology of this letter, he speaks of a mystery that has been disclosed. What do you think that mystery is? You might also look at Romans 1:17-18 and 3:22.

December 30, *Hebrews 10:5-10* Like much of Hebrews, this passage is a mystery to many Christians. What do you think is the main point here? How could we become better readers of the book of Hebrews?