

Reading Schedule for August 28 – September 3, 2017

We are in the heart of Philippians. I want us to slow down in chapter 2 and really contemplate what we are reading. I remember preaching on Philippians and finding it to be an especially inspiring letter. I want to be a joyful person, and this is the book about joy. I hope your reading brings you great joy this week.

August 28 – Philippians 1:12-30: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (v.21) This thought about living for Christ, compared to dying and going to heaven, is a fascinating one to me. I enjoy my life here on earth. I am blessed by the relationships I have and the opportunities that God gives me as a pastor. I find myself fairly connected to my experience on earth. I don’t want to die. Paul is clear here that dying would be better. It would mean that I would see Christ face to face, and I would enjoy his continued presence and the eternal fellowship in a perfect environment. It doesn’t get any better than that. But life on earth is full of purpose. I want to live to the fullest as God gives me breath. Don’t you agree?! How do you respond to this truth?

August 29 – Philippians 2:1-4: “. . . not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (v.4) Obviously I could have picked any verse in this short paragraph because it is speaking about the importance of our connection with each other. I did a sermon on these four verses when I began at my first church. I was 30 years old. I had this marvelous vision of a church that would live in harmony. I served that church for 27 months and it was a long 27 months. It has taken 30 years for me to sense a harmony in a church family like I longed for as a young man. I believe we are a harmonious group. There are struggles and challenges, but we believe the best about each other, and we want the best for each other. The key to harmony is thinking about others as important as yourself. Do you agree? What stands out to you in this paragraph?

August 30 – Philippians 2:5-11: “. . . rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (v.7) I know that is not a complete sentence, but I am focusing on the word that the NIV translates as “nothing.” It is sometimes translated “empty.” Jesus the Messiah had everything available to him in heaven and he gave it all up. He limited himself as a human being, which would close him in to time and space and human limitations. There is so much to this truth that these verses are known as a hymn that people sang to the glory of Christ. What do you notice in this hymn? How might you pray these verses in worship? I want you to have time to meditate on this crucial passage in the Book of Philippians.

August 31 – Philippians 2:12-30: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” (v.12) The idea in this verse is to live out your life in light of Christ’s humility and sacrifice. After what he has done for you and me, there isn’t anything we wouldn’t do for him. To represent Christ does not happen automatically. We must train ourselves to be strong and obedient, as well as focused on the purpose that God has given us while we have life on this earth. We do this wholeheartedly because of what Jesus did for us. I am glad that I am saved by grace through faith. But I also have a part in keeping my life as a Christian. So I am challenged by those words, “work out your salvation,” as motivation for me to

do my part in pursuing the Lord and sharing his life with others. Do you agree? How do you respond to this reading?

September 1 – Philippians 3:1-11: “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” (v.10) These words are in line with what I was sharing with you yesterday. Paul is a great example because he gave up everything in order to know Christ. He gave up his status as a leader among the Jews, and he faced persecution everywhere he went. But it was all worth it because of his desire to know Christ and make him known. Do you know that is our mission statement? I want to remind you of this simple truth: “Know Jesus and make Jesus known?” I think that is what he is saying in this verse. These are some of the questions that come to my mind as we read these verses – What are you willing to give up in order to know Christ? Why is it important to spend time with the Lord in prayer and reading his Word? How do you choose your friends in light of knowing Christ? What are your plans and pursuits because of Jesus Christ? Is this statement true of you . . . I want to know Christ! How so?

September 2 – Philippians 3:12-21: “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead . . .” (v.13) This is a marvelous verse because it reminds us that we can’t change the past. The past can be something that teaches us important lessons that will help us into the future but we can’t change the past. You can let go of previous guilt and how you stumbled in sin because of the forgiveness of Christ. But let his forgiveness be effective in you so that you look forward differently now. The Apostle Paul said, “I press on.” What does it mean to press on? How do you understand these challenging words about moving forward in your relationship with Christ and your service to him? There is more in this reading as well. How do you respond to these challenging words from the Apostle Paul?

September 3 – Philippians 4:1-9: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (v.6) This has always been a significant verse for me. I think I have a propensity to worry at times. It is right there, as plain as day, it is a sin to worry. Some people push back when I say that worry is a sin, but that’s helped me because I want to trust God in all circumstances. It encourages me to cast my cares upon the Lord and tell him my needs, and let him take care of them. Proverbs 3:5 & 6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will direct your path.” I think of those verses when I read about presenting my requests to God. I also am inspired by verse 8. I love those verses because they are so relevant to me. How do you respond to this message from the Apostle Paul in these nine verses?

Prayers: What are you thankful for from this past summer? I encourage you to spend some time in thankful prayer with God for his many blessings in your life.