

### Reading Schedule for August 7-13, 2017

Do you like grace or freedom the most? It really doesn't matter because Galatians is about grace and freedom. Most would suggest that Christian freedom was launched by the Apostle Paul through this letter. He also defined our status as followers of Christ. This will be a marvelous week of reading as we wrap up the second half of Galatians.

**August 7 – Galatians 3:23-4:7:** “Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” (v.6) You probably know that the word “Abba” is really the Aramaic word for father. To suggest that the Spirit says, “Father, Father,” is not the intent of what this verse means. It is affirming the personal and approachable name of God. I am sure that you have heard that Abba can mean Daddy, but that seems too casual to me. This is about praying to God, and it shows us how intimate prayer can be. We are God's children and we can address him as a father. Even as Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer, beginning with these words, “Our Father,” we know we have a loving father who cares for us. What do you learn about your identity in Christ from these verses? What stood out to you?

**August 8 – Galatians 4:8-20:** “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you . . .” (v.19) You hear the heartbeat of the Apostle Paul. It may sound too extravagant to say that I have that same heartbeat for you. I know for sure that I have had that heartbeat for my children, and now I have it in an equal way for you, my church family. The Catholic tradition has the idea of calling the pastor “Father.” The Apostle Paul called himself a spiritual father to many of those he led to Christ. Nonetheless, I have a deep spiritual concern for you and your growth in Christ. In Romans 8:29 we see clearly that God's goal for us is to be conformed to the image of Christ. This is Paul's heartbeat as well. How are you doing on your journey toward Christlikeness? How do you respond to the reading today?

**August 9 – Galatians 4:21-31:** “Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.” (v.28) This is very interesting reading as the Apostle Paul is comparing Hagar to Sarah. People connected to Hagar, so to speak, are slaves to the Law. But as people of faith, we are connected to Sarah, the free woman. There were religious people who insisted on keeping the law in order to be saved. They were called the Judaizers. They believed in Jesus Christ, but they added the law to it – both must be fulfilled. This is still being a slave. That is why the Apostle Paul said, “You are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.” (4:7) What does it mean to be a child of freedom?

**August 10 – Galatians 5:1-12:** “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (v.1) This verse, along with others, are used to show the theme of Galatians as freedom in Christ. Christ died to set us free from sin, and from a long list

of laws and regulations. We are free not to sin, and we are free to live unselfishly at the same time. Freedom does not mean to just do what I want to do; freedom propels us forward. People were trying to influence the Galatians to subject themselves to the demands of the law again. The Apostle Paul preaches freedom. What does that mean to you? How do you respond to this reading today?

**August 11 - Galatians 5:13-26:** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (vv. 22 & 23) I want you to memorize these verses. The characteristics of the Holy Spirit are listed here. A good translation for this verse could be, “And the Holy Spirit will produce in you this kind of fruit . . .” The main emphasis is being under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. He will take care of the fruit. If we know him, love him, and grow in him, we will imitate him. Does that make sense? Which of these qualities do you notice in your life because of the work of the Holy Spirit? Which of these characteristics would you want the Holy Spirit to produce more of in you? How do you respond to this very powerful reading today?

**August 12 – Galatians 6:1-10:** “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” (v.1) This has been a theme verse for me as a pastor. I have seen people caught in sin time and again. I don't perceive myself above other people, but I do feel called to help rescue the wandering sheep. This coincides with Matthew 18:15-17 because it is in the context of realizing that someone is caught in sin. A very interesting phrase is “gently restore.” This means we go to them in humility and with a desire to make a connection that will produce repentance. This can be wearisome work, and so do not give up on people too quickly. The Lord never does. What stands out to you in this helpful instruction?

**August 13 – Galatians 6:11-18:** “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.” (v.15) I remember this verse because it uses the same terminology as 2 Corinthians 5:17. I have memorized that verse because it tells me that I am a new creation in Christ, and the old is gone and the new is come. The message given here is, “Don't be caught up in the external.” Beware of those who emphasize actions that we should or should not do. May your focus be on the health and condition of your heart. Living a good life without an inward change leads to a shallow and empty spiritual walk. Fan the Holy Spirit within and good things will happen. Focus on what it means to be a new creation in Christ. How would you define that title? What does it mean to you to be a new creation in Christ? How has our reading through Galatians helped you?

**Prayers: Pray for another special summer event as we gather this coming Sunday for worship, baptism, and a picnic meal together at the Keizer Rapids Amphitheater.**