

Reading Schedule for July 31 – August 6, 2017

I'm sure you realize that I pray about the Reading Schedule and what would be our next pursuit in God's Word. There are four small books that have always been a great inspiration to me. I would like to spend August and September deepening our connection of discipleship and spiritual insight that comes from Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. These letters are sure to be an inspiration to us.

July 31 – Psalm 150: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord."

(v.6) It's this particular verse that came to mind as we entitled our sermon series, "Psalms: In the End, Praise!" It has been suggested that this last verse is really the summary of the whole book. No matter what is happening in your life, or how challenging things might become, in the end praise him because he is worthy. Psalm one began by presenting to us two roads that could be summarized as the way to life and the way to death. If we choose God's way, we will experience blessings and troubles, joy and grief, successes and obstacles. Throughout it, God is at our side, helping us, encouraging us, strengthening us. As the wise and faithful person's life draws to an end, he or she realizes clearly that God's road is the right road, and that he has been with her or him the whole way. In the end, there will be praise. We will enjoy eternal praise in heaven, as you know. This is a fitting way to close our month in the Book of Psalms. How do you respond to this closing Psalm. Read Proverbs 31 and appreciate the significance of a godly woman!

August 1 – Galatians 1:1-10: "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ." (v.10) There is much to contemplate in these first ten verses because they are introducing us to the Apostle Paul, and this is his first letter that he ever wrote. If you have a Study Bible, you will want to read some of the notes that pertain to Paul's reason for writing Galatians Verse 10 could be a tattoo on my arm. So often I have been concerned about the approval and opinions of people. If I get lost in pleasing people, then I am not even sure I am following Christ. Following the Lord will sometimes meet with the approval of people, and other times it surely won't. It is always right to pursue the will of God over the will of man. Do you agree? What stands out to you in these verses?

August 2 – Galatians 1:11-24: "They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'" (v.23) Most of this reading is Paul telling about his conversion and calling. God commissioned him to preach the good news to the Gentiles. You can read about Paul's conversion in Acts 9. There is a three year period where Paul is deepening his connection with the Lord. He is not in a role of leadership or specifically ministering as a missionary; he is growing in his understanding of God and the message of Jesus Christ. Even Paul had to grow to be used most effectively. For example, this letter is not written until 50 A.D., which is approximately 15 years after Paul's conversion. I remember leading a Bible study as a new believer, and God using it. But I came to a point where I felt like I needed more training. God's call on my life was sure, so I entered seminary. I am so glad that I did. It helped me immensely and I loved the training. Train yourself in the ways of the Lord and he will use you. Do you agree? How do you respond to Paul's call from God as outlined in these verses?

August 3 – Galatians 2:1-10: "All they asked was that we should continue to remember

the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along." (v.10) This is an interesting statement and reveals the heart of God. The Lord is always concerned about the broken and needy in our world, and we must too. The focus is on the poor in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had suffered greatly from a severe famine. We will read about Paul asking the Gentile churches to help the poor of the church in Jerusalem. The need for believers to care for the poor is a constant theme in Scripture. I just remind you of God's concern for the poor and our responsibility to help as God leads. As a compassionate church, let us fully engage in meeting the needs of people around us. How do you respond to this reading today?

August 4 – Galatians 2:11-21: "For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group." (v.12) I think this is what Paul was meaning when he said that he wanted God's approval and not the approval of man. He is suggesting that Peter is more concerned about what people thought than standing up for God's truth. It seems he was driven by fear of what James and the others might think. Paul followed Matthew 18:15f because he was confronting Peter for his poor example and his sin of wanting man's approval. Paul would be courageous like this time and again. He is an example to us that we cannot overlook the error we see in other brothers and sisters and think that God is pleased because we ourselves are doing what is right. Rather, in Galatians 6 we will read these words, "If someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." It doesn't appear that Paul was especially gentle with Peter, but his intentions were to restore Peter. What else do you notice in this reading that gets your attention?

August 5 – Galatians 3:1-14: "Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (v.3) This verse has always been compelling to me. The Galatians knew they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed, and it wasn't because they obeyed the law. People still try to get closer to God by following rules, thinking that this will make them more pleasing to God . . . that he will love them more. Now we are called to service, and it is important to obey, but these must not take the place of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us to do the things that God wants us to do. Galatians were being taught by the Judaizers (Christian Jews) who added the law to the Gospel to follow the law. This is his introduction to the importance of grace, as there was tension in the early church between the law and simple faith. What stands out to you in this reading?

August 6 – Galatians 3:15-29: "So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith." (v.24) There is an interesting term in this verse that refers to a tutor directing a student towards what really matters. The law is that tutor showing us that whenever we try to reach God through the law, we fall short. We cannot be saved by keeping the law; we must trust in Christ. The law is like a stick in a tutor's hand whacking the child towards faith and faith alone. I know that is a crude illustration, but it shows that we are saved through faith and faith alone. These are important truths to contemplate as we thank God for his grace.

Prayers: Pray for August; I want you to dedicate this month to the Lord and ask him to grow you and use you for his purposes.