

Reading Schedule for May 1-7, 2017

Let me give you a few more hints on making your Bible reading more meaningful. I've purposely made your readings shorter so that you can read slower, with moments of reflection and pause. Plus, I suggest you pick a verse or two, and really focus in on the truth expressed in God's Word. One verse can carry you through the whole day. As I have been instructing people about prayer, I would encourage you to pray the truth and principles that surface in the text. I know the Book of Acts is a narrative, and that makes the instruction of it less identifiable. But still, there are always principles that rise out of the text.

May 1 – Acts 8:26-40: "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." (v.35) We sometimes call Philip the evangelist. That may be true, but I think Philip used the opportunity to the maximum. The person was reading in a strategic place in the Scripture, and Philip spoke truth to him that would change his life. Philip listened to the man's questions and confusion, and he had the opportunity to express the truth of God's Word. I know that I've missed many opportunities to steer a conversation towards the Lord and what he can do. I want to be more like Philip, who was led by the Holy Spirit and was open to God's divine appointment. He did not even suggest to the man that he should be baptized. The man actually wanted to be baptized. The message that I receive from this is to be available, with Spirit led boldness. How do you respond to this story about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch?

May 2 – Acts 9:1-19: "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (vv. 5-6) This is the amazing story of Paul's conversion, who was originally named Saul. He refers to this encounter with our Lord specifically three times in the Book of Acts as his testimony of being changed through personal faith in Jesus Christ. This would be the beginning of God's work in a man's life who would become the most instrumental person in the early church. Verse 16 says, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." We have been studying that truth in II Corinthians, as Paul boasts about his weakness and suffering. He did suffer greatly for the cause of Christ. He would persevere, and his insights about the Christian faith are the outline for our theology of faith. What do you notice in this section referred to as Saul's conversion?

May 3 – Acts 9:20-43: "But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall." (v.25) I referred to this verse because we just read about it in II Corinthians 11:33. This is not the only time he is confronted so that he had fear for his life, but it would happen again in Jerusalem that they would try to kill him and he would have to escape to Caesarea. Without Saul persecuting the church, there was a time of peace and the church was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Many were coming to faith. I remember when I came to faith in Jesus Christ. Quite honestly, I began to speak about him almost immediately. I didn't always know the exact truth of the faith, but I shared my life and my love for Christ openly and boldly. I sometimes long for the freedom and abandonment that I experienced in my beginning days of faith for the Gospel. Do you need a spiritual boost?

May 4 – Acts 10:1-23: "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." (v. 14) This is a very strategic point in the early church.

According to Jewish law, certain foods were forbidden to be eaten. Peter's vision meant that he should not look upon the Gentiles as an inferior people. Before having the vision, Peter would have thought of a Gentile Roman officer as a pagan, and having no possibility of being a follower of Christ. This vision changed his understanding. It is a very important transition, affirming the inclusiveness of the Gospel. This issue would arise in the early church many times, as a group of people called the Judaizers would affirm faith in Christ, but also talk about the necessity of following the law and obeying the Jewish precepts and rules. It is clear that Peter believed the vision so that he released his Jewish biases and affirmed the wonder of the Gospel of grace. How do you respond to this important encounter in Peter's life?

May 5 – Acts 10:24-48: "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.'" (vv. 34 & 35) Peter begins to share the implication of this profound truth that would break the barrier between the Jewish and Gentile conflict. Most of the early believers were Jewish, and they thought it scandalous even to think of associating with Gentiles. But God told Peter to take the Gospel to a Roman, and Peter obeyed despite his background and personal feelings. He then shared the concise message of the Gospel in the following verses. Peter's an inspiration to me, and I hope is an inspiration to you. What stands out to you in these verses?

May 6 – Acts 11:1-18: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.'" (v.18) The intellectual questions ended, and the theological questions stopped with the report that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. This was a turning point for the early church. They had to accept those whom God had chosen, even if they were Gentiles. But joy over the conversion of Gentiles was not unanimous. This continued to be a struggle for a significant number of Jewish Christians throughout the first century. Even today we encounter people who misunderstand the Gospel and want to add religious rules and demands to the freedom of the Gospel. There is a movement in our day that in adhering to the Old Testament requirements, and even the festivals associated with the Hebrew traditions. This is stepping back into the old covenant, and is contrary to the message of Christ, the Apostle Paul and the New Testament Scriptures. Be careful; they are very convincing. What stands out to you?

May 7 – Acts 11:19-30: "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." (v. 26b) Obviously I am drawn to this verse because this is the first time we hear the title "Christian." We have to admit that the name Christian has lost its meaning in our particular time in history. But originally, Christians meant "Christ-ones," or even in the pursuit of Christ-likeness. You will also notice that Paul always partnered with someone else in a ministry that would be built upon the strength of a tandem. Barnabas was his first partner of encouragement. He was ideal for Paul in the beginning because he viewed Paul with total acceptance. They had a very effective ministry in Antioch. How do you feel about being called a Christian? What does it mean to you?

Prayers: Pray for our Student Ministries as students in High School and Mid-High are pulled in so many directions in today's world.