

## Reading Schedule for May 15-21, 2017

Quite honestly, one of my favorite stories in the Book of Acts is this first one, as Paul and Silas are in prison. It is so convicting for me to see them in this dungeon, praying and singing songs to the Lord. In fact, the whole Book of Acts has been inspiring to me. I know why I need to read this book every year; because I can lose focus. The expansion of the kingdom of God is of primary concern to the Lord. May the missionary work of Paul inspire you today.

**May 15 – Acts 16:16-40:** “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.” (v.25) You know I had to refer to this verse since I mentioned it in my introduction. Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten and placed in stocks in the inner cell. Sometimes both wrists and ankles were placed in stocks. Despite this dismal situation, they praised God, praying and singing as the other prisoners listened. The application is obvious; we can live above our circumstances. It is possible to give thanks in all situations. Their example is meant to be convicting. It sure is convicting to me. How do you respond to their example?

**May 16 – Acts 17:1-15:** “Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (v.11) I know several churches that have used the title “Berean” as the name of their church. The people in Berea opened the Scriptures for themselves and searched for truths to verify or disprove the message they had heard. I have found that people who seriously pursue God’s truth through his Word are some of the strongest and most resilient believers. Too many believers are casual about their understanding of God’s Word, and are too often influenced by the whims of culture. Jesus said that, “You are truly my disciples when you hold to my teaching and this will allow you to know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Our reading today compares two groups of people and the affirmation is given to those who pursued God’s Word with diligence. How diligent are you in investigating the message of the Bible and applying it to your life

**May 17 – Acts 17:16-34:** “Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.” (v.22) Immediately, Paul addresses the people of Athens with a point of connection. They may have not even perceived themselves as religious people, but Paul helps them realize that they actually were spiritually-minded. His approach to teaching in Athens was different than at other times. He tried to establish common ground by emphasizing what they agreed on about God. When he had their attention, he then shared the message of salvation found in the one who was raised from the dead. He was not afraid to push them to the edge. And they pushed back. Nonetheless, a few did respond to the message and became followers through believing in Jesus. Even if only a few believe, it is worth the effort. What do you learn from Paul’s example of speaking to the people of Athens? How is God stirring you to be on mission for Him?

**May 18 – Acts 18:1-28:** “Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.” (v.8) We have spent two years studying the letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. The reason we were so invested is because this is one of the primary churches where pagan people became followers of Christ. Paul made every effort to build on that foundation. The Corinthians ebbed and flowed, and Paul never gave up. He invested a year and a half in serving them. The Lord promised him that He had many people the

city (v.10). In my Bible there is a list of many significant people who came to faith in Jesus Christ from Corinth, and the Lord used that to establish a church through the message of Paul and the new Christian leaders who would be used by God to further the mission. My affection for the Corinthians is very strong as I have so deeply identified with their repentance. Week after week for two years I have looked at the underbelly of their spiritual lives, and yet I am uplifted by their return to faith and their willingness to put Christ first. How has our study about the church in Corinth affected you?

**May 19 – Acts 19:1-22:** “When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” (v.6) The story of the Gospel coming to Ephesus has this point of contention. Much has been made about this passage and others in Acts that depict believers speaking in tongues. Some have uncomfortably dismissed these historical events. Others have promoted that it is the only way to be sure that the Holy Spirit is in your life. This issue affected the church in Corinth as well. During our study in 1 Corinthians, we learned that speaking in tongues was a gift. In a list of spiritual gifts, it is always last. It should be thought of as a spiritual gift. The significance of it being displayed in Ephesus was for God’s very purpose to connect the Jews to the Gentiles, as they had a similar experience to that of Pentecost. But how should we understand speaking in tongues? The way to understand it appropriately is to see it as a spiritual gift. But the main point of the Book of Acts was the spreading of the Gospel, and this gift was used by God as a sign that the Gentiles were entering the body of Christ. How are you inspired by this story of Paul coming to Ephesus?

**May 20 – Acts 19:23-41:** “The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.” (v.32) This is another experience of opposition and the devil inciting people to oppose the Gospel. For a moment there it appeared as if it would all come crashing down, and yet the governing authorities did protect Paul and his team. It was time for Paul to move on, just as he had to in many of the cities where he was preaching the Gospel. He always left a sincere group of believers, appointing leaders to oversee and give direction to the church family there. Many believed that Ephesus became the strongest group of believers in the Greek world. Some have suggested there were over 5,000 believers gathering in the name of Christ by the time Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians. How do you respond to this reading today?

**May 21 – Acts 20:1-12:** “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.” (v.7) I am going to take a small piece in this inspiring story of Paul bringing the young man back to life and focus on the first day of the week. On March 5 I spoke on the principle of “sevening.” The early church believed in the principle of the Sabbath, and yet they gathered on the first day of the week to be in fellowship, share communion, worship the Lord, and hear his Word. In fact, in this particular story, Paul spoke until midnight. After preaching a message March 5<sup>th</sup> on honoring Sabbath rest, I know that it is a big step to adjust to this principle. But I have done so, and several have told me that they have done so, and it has all been for the enrichment and blessing of their lives. Why not give it a try?! How do you respond to the principle of one in seven being a day or worship and rest?

**Prayers: Pray for our mission as a church, and our individual boldness to share the message and love of Christ with those around us.**