

## Reading Schedule for May 29 – June 4, 2017

This week will conclude our reading through the Book of Acts. I hope you agree with me that reading Acts every year is a very helpful practice. I truly believe that God wants to continue what he began in the early church still today. What we see in Acts can be repeated and enhanced, as it has been throughout church history. Pray with me that God will continue his advancement, as in the early church, with us today at New Harvest.

**May 29 – Acts 26:1-32:** “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?’” (v.28) This is exactly what Paul wanted to see happen in Agrippa’s life. Paul shows such strength and confidence as he speaks with King Agrippa. Paul continues to risk his life for the sake of the Gospel. The king had absolute authority to do anything he wanted to Paul. It may seem insane to risk so much to gain what seems to be so little, but as we follow Christ and represent him in this world, we are called to make similar risks. Paul is a great example to us. May the inspiration of his message and personal testimony stir you to share yours as well. How do you respond to this inspiring chapter?

**May 30 – Acts 27:1-26:** “After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.” (v.21) I like what the Life Application Bible says about this verse: “Why would Paul talk to the crew this way? Paul was not taunting them with an ‘I told you so,’ but was reminding them that, with God’s guidance, he had predicted this very problem. In the future, they listened to him,” as we will read tomorrow. Paul always displayed such boldness and confidence in the Lord. This was the work of the Holy Spirit. I am seeing this as a theme through the Book of Acts. We are called to Spirit-led boldness. This is not a time in history to shrink back. We graciously and respectfully share the message with complete confidence that the Gospel is the way to salvation. In a world with many messages about religion and belief in God, we must stay strong to the good news found in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. How would you evaluate your boldness?

**May 31 – Acts 27:27-44:** “The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.” (v.44) This conclusion is the accomplishment of God’s word to Paul. He said that all would survive if they followed his instructions. In verse 31 we see Paul’s boldness again. Paul was confident in the One God who could take care of them. God touched the centurion’s heart about Paul’s life and had the power to save him. The others were ready to kill all the prisoners. This is another example of trusting in God no matter what the circumstances may look like. All 276 were saved because Paul trusted in God and spoke his Word confidently. I am emphasizing this theme of confidence in the Lord. The Book of Acts is meant to inspire such confidence. What stands out to you in this reading?

**June 1 – Acts 28:1-16:** “The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged.” (v.15) This is a very interesting statement that has shaped my personal opinion

about the second coming of Christ. This may not be convincing to you, but it has solidified my understanding of the church meeting Christ in the air – the event called the Rapture. The word used for “meet” is to move to the person and escort them to the destination. We will meet Jesus in the air and escort him to the destination, which will be the culmination of the age and the victory of Jesus. This same word is used in I Thessalonians 4:17 when it says that the believers will meet with the Lord in the air and be with him forever. This has nothing to do with the text, besides the fact that the people escort Paul into Rome. But it has an interesting secondary meaning because it is the same word used about Jesus’ second coming. How do you respond to the reading today?

**June 2 – Acts 28:17-31:** “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (v.31) This is again a very important wrap-up to the whole book. He proclaimed the Word of God boldly. He lived his life with confidence. He had Spirit-led boldness. The Book of Acts is about the spread of the Gospel. The book ends abruptly because it is meant to continue. We can continue the story of the Book of Acts as we spread the Gospel. It is the same message that we Christians are to take to our world so that many more may hear and believe. That is why I wanted us to read the Book of Acts because we are on a mission. How has God used the Book of Acts in your life?

**June 3 – Philemon:** “. . . no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.” (v.16) Onesimus was Philemon’s rightful slave who had run away. But he had come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. That meant that Onesimus and Philemon were both members of God’s family, and equal in Christ. The status of a Christian as a member of God’s family transcends all other distinctions. Philemon needed to forgive Onesimus and embrace him as a brother. Obviously, this would be challenging for him to do. I think it is very relevant and shows the necessity and power of forgiveness. Paul asks Philemon not to punish Onesimus, but to forgive and restore him as a new Christian brother. How do you respond to this short letter?

**June 4 – Jude:** “To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.” (vv. 24 & 25) I think you realize that I like benedictions. The blessing that we studied in II Corinthians is very special to me. This has a similar ring to it. It is more complicated, but equally powerful. It is sometimes called a Doxology, but I think of it as a blessing. It is assuring them that God is able to keep them strong. It is a focus on lifting up the Lord and worshiping him. Jude encouraged the believers to remain firm in their faith and trust in God’s promises for their future. I think this is worth meditating on. Ask God to reveal himself to you through these last two verses. What phrase or words stand out to you? Why are those important?

**Prayers: Pray for those graduating from high school and college. This is a special accomplishment, and we want to especially remember Madi, Olivia and Alexis.**