

Reading Schedule for May 7-13, 2018

A significant part of our focus for this week will be Paul's ministry in Ephesus. He spent the most time in that city, founding a church that many believe grew to over 5,000 people. Later, Paul would assign Timothy to oversee the ministry in Ephesus. His deep connection with the church made a huge difference, as well as affirming the leadership of elders in that body. It is a great example of how the church can make such an incredible difference for the glory of God.

May 7 - Acts 19:1-22: "A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas." (v.19) It was not a simple task for Paul to rid the people of Ephesus from their superstitions. The people were quick to try to incorporate the miraculous power of God that is demonstrated through Paul. But the most powerful point in the story is that the converts in Ephesus brought their relics of their pagan past and held a massive book burning. In present day currency, the value of these books would be approximately 6 million dollars. God was working powerfully to establish the credibility of the Gospel and the principles of Jesus Christ that would govern that church. The powerful work of the Holy Spirit was much more credible than the superstition of the people in that city. I hope you sense the inspiration of what God was doing there, and how he has the ability to do similar things even in our day. How do you respond to this exciting story of the birthing of a church in Ephesus?

May 8 - Acts 19:23-41: "He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer." (v.22) There are many aspects of this reading that I could emphasize, but I am drawn to the partnership that Paul formed in his ministry. Timothy and Erastus are called his helpers. I think that Paul is honoring the principle that Jesus set forth by sending out disciples two by two. The Bible has many references to the confirmation of two or three on bearing witness to the truth. There is also a sense of protection and support that takes place when we do things with others in partnership. We live in a very individualistic world and do many things on our own. I encourage you to consider the value of doing things together. You remember the principle in Proverbs that says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." I am intrigued by the strength of the partnerships in the Book of Acts. How does that speak to you?

May 9 - Acts 20:1-12: "The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted." (v.12) This is the culmination of the story about the young man who fell to his death. It seems like such an unusual accident, and could have been so tragic. It is interesting that the name Eutychus means lucky, fortunate. Why was he sitting on a window sill – because he was already sleepy and he wanted some fresh air. I might have suggested a longer reading than I have given you today, but I am thinking about the eagerness the people had to receive a message from Paul that was so essential to them in their walk with God. The love and affection that the people had for Paul is clearly seen in their eagerness to be with him, and to hear God's message through him. I think there is a message for all of us in these twelve verses. How might you apply this text to your life?

May 10 - Acts 20:13-38: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." (v.28) This verse has been personally convicting to me, as I have a tendency to extend myself beyond appropriate limits. I want to help people, or someone would suggest the negative side of the desire to help people is people-pleasing. The Apostle Paul encouraged the leaders to be aware of their own life. Keep watch over your own soul, so to speak. This had to do with their own spiritual nourishment, and also their moral purity. The church would only be as strong as the spiritual health of the leaders.

Paul understood that. His own personal journey was essential to the credibility of the Gospel. These words remind me to watch my life carefully. The credibility of my role as a father is based on the authenticity of my life. There are so many areas of life where how I live affects the message I share. It is either positively assisting what I say because of the genuine nature of my life in the Lord, or it is detrimental because I am not walking the talk. In other words, I am not living a life consistent with the message I share. I am not suggesting perfection, but sincere devotion. Does that make sense? How do you respond to the need to pay close attention to your own soul?

May 11 - Acts 21:1-16: "We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem." (v.4) This is the most interesting statement because Paul went to Jerusalem anyway. Either Paul was stubborn and did not submit to God's leading, or those sharing the message were wrong. I think it is interesting to contemplate the fact that these prophecies would actually be the prophet's own interpretation. In the Old Testament if a prophet was wrong he would be punished by death. But in the New Testament we see that the prophecies must be tested. Not everything one says is automatically believed because it comes from a pastor, or someone thought of as a prophet. The body of Christ is meant to work together. I find this storyline very fascinating, and I want you to consider the fact that we are meant to do our lives as followers of Christ together. For example, our elder body works together as we pursue God's guidance through the Holy Spirit. I do not operate in isolation as one voice over all the others, but one voice among the others. Does that make sense? How do you understand this interesting story?

May 12 - Acts 21:17-36: "The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut." (v.30) It seems inevitable that Paul will be defeated. He will be arrested and sentenced to Rome for his trial. The process will unfold in these next few chapters. As difficult as this sounds, it is believed that it was God's plan all along. Paul would speak God's Word in Rome, and before we end the Book of Acts, it will be so. This very moment seems scary, and Paul's life is in jeopardy. But we know the whole book, and God had a plan in this scariest of circumstances. I want you to remember that God is sovereign and his purposes are accomplished even when it seems like things are going from bad to worse. How do you respond to this event and the principle of God's oversight over everything?

May 13 - Acts 21:37-22:21: "'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.'" (v.3) Paul begins to share his testimony. How Paul speaks about his faith and becoming a follower of Christ is how I want you to prepare your testimony. He spoke about what life had been, and what he lived for before he encountered Christ. Then he shares how it came about for him to meet Christ. Then he begins to tell them how this has changed his life. You have a story about how Christ has changed your life. There is an aspect of your life that was without Christ, even if you met him at a young age. Then you share the reality of receiving him into your life, and now how he has changed you into the person you have become. My testimony is about a man in despair. Young adults my age shared Christ with me, and I saw the difference in their lives, and I wanted that. As I received Christ, he changed my despair into joy. What is your testimony?

PRAYER: Pray for Moms. This Sunday is such a big day in the life of the church so pray that mothers will be encouraged and that we show them honor and appreciation for what they mean to us.