

4/4/2022	Mon	HEBREWS 11	<p>This chapter is known as the faith hall of fame. It lists people who persevered through difficult circumstances because they had the faith to believe God would do what he said. The writer points out that they all died without seeing the promised Jesus.</p> <p>The issue of obeying or disobeying God always comes down to immediate vs. long-term outcomes. Today, disobedience could lead to temporary pleasure, but could also lead to later problems. It also means disappointing Jesus, with whom we will spend eternity. Do we have the faith to obey even when the positive, long-term outcomes cannot be seen?</p>
4/5/2022	Tue	HEBREWS 12	<p>The readers are now challenged to persevere when experiencing hardship. The people in chapter 11 had done that, as had Jesus to an even greater extent. The writer refers to these hardships as discipline. Discipline is supposed to make us stronger. Discipline from parents is supposed to make the children better; how much more so discipline from God?</p> <p>Mount Sinai was where the Jews received the Old Testament law; Mount Zion is in Jerusalem. The writer is reminding his Jewish readers that Mount Sinai was a scary place, but the heavenly Jerusalem, or place of God's dwelling, is a place of joy. Those who respond to persecution of Christians by returning to Judaism are leaving a place of joy and returning to one of fear.</p> <p>Most of you are probably not Jewish or tempted to pursue Judaism, but you may sometimes be tempted to return to an old way of life before you trusted Jesus. There were things about that old lifestyle and things about Jesus that caused you to consider him. Why would you go back?</p>
4/6/2022	Wed	HEBREWS 13	<p>Hebrews closes with practical advice about how Christians should act toward others. Their lives should be characterized by love, hospitality, faithfulness in marriage, contentment, and respect for authority.</p> <p>In times of hardship, it can be easy to focus on self-preservation and ignore our treatment of others. Those who strengthen their relationship with God in hardship will be characterized by love for others.</p>

4/7/2022	Thur	LUKE 1	<p>Luke writes the books of Luke and Acts to a man named Theophilus. Apparently there are lots of stories about Jesus circulating, and he decides to track down the people who actually witnessed the events so he can be sure to record the truth.</p> <p>The chapter records two miracle birth announcements and two people praising God for those births. John the Baptist is born first. He is born to a couple who had not been able to have children. Jesus' conception is even more of a miracle since he is conceived by the Holy Spirit. When these events occur, people were not used to miracles happening. Zechariah didn't believe the angel, and it cost him his ability to speak. Mary's story would not have been believed by many. Would you have believed the angel or the story of a teenage girl who is pregnant and says she is a virgin? Believing God is at work isn't always easy.</p>
4/8/2022	Fri	LUKE 2	<p>This is the familiar version of the Christmas story that many read on Christmas day. The God of the universe is born to a poor couple who can't find a proper place to have a baby. The miraculous nature of this birth is confirmed by angels, and the special nature of the boy is confirmed by those in the temple.</p> <p>The humility and love demonstrated by this story is amazing! Becoming like Jesus means we should be loving and humble too.</p>
4/9/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
4/10/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
4/11/2022	Mon	LUKE 3	<p>The ministry of John the Baptist had been predicted in the Old Testament. He was to prepare people for the coming Messiah, who was Jesus. The Jews thought they had a good relationship with God just because they were Jews. John the Baptist makes it clear that God is not impressed with the fact that they descended from Abraham, the father of the Jews. They need to have a heart that is right with God, which should be demonstrated by their behavior. Luke also documents Jesus' ancestry. The Messiah had been promised to be a descendant of Israel's ancient King David. This genealogy showed that Jesus was David's descendant.</p> <p>Like the Jews, people can sometimes think they have a special relationship with God due to something other than trusting Jesus: being a good person, belonging to a church, participating in certain rituals, or coming from a religious family. God isn't impressed by any of that. Just like those from the crowd around John the Baptist, we need to be ready to listen to Jesus.</p>

4/12/2022	Tue	LUKE 4	<p>Just like Matthew, Luke tells of Jesus' temptation. He then tells of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus goes to his hometown of Nazareth and is asked to read from an Old Testament scroll. Jesus lets them know the reading is about him and his ministry on earth. They have been around him since he was a boy and are horrified that one of their own would make such a claim. Jesus moves on to Capernaum, which will be his main location for much of his ministry. Jesus confirms that he is who he says he is by showing his power over demons and disease.</p> <p>The chapter makes it clear that the powers of darkness are real. It could be in the form of temptation or direct power over a person. We need to stay close to Jesus and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to battle Satan and his demons.</p>
4/13/2022	Wed	LUKE 5	<p>Through stories, a number of things are revealed about Jesus. First, he is powerful. He demonstrates his power over fish and disease. Second, he is compassionate. Leprosy was a terrible skin disease that caused its sufferers to be avoided for fear of catching the disease. When Jesus touched the man, it was probably the first time he had been touched by a non-leper in years. Jesus also showed compassion by asking a tax collector to follow him. Tax collectors were hated and considered to be the worst of sinners. Third, he demonstrated that he was God. He did this by forgiving the sins of the paralyzed man and claiming to be the groom. The view was that eternity with God was going to be a huge wedding reception. The groom was now present, so it was inappropriate to be fasting.</p> <p>In the midst of all of these great demonstrations of Jesus' power, Luke tells us in verse 16 that Jesus would go off alone to pray. If Jesus had all this power, but still needed to pray, how much more so for us? You may not be able to heal people every day or even demonstrate amazing levels of compassion, but you could go off alone and pray.</p>

4/14/2022	Thurs	LUKE 6	<p>Here there are a couple of incidents which take place on the Sabbath. The Old Testament law taught that a person could not work on Saturdays. As we also saw in Matthew, the Pharisees were the strictest followers of these rules, so they are upset when Jesus and his followers do things on the Sabbath they felt were work. Jesus points out an event from their history where the law was ignored to feed hungry people. Luke then records a similar, or maybe the same, sermon Matthew did. Jesus is teaching that following God requires more than just rule following. Sometimes people dismiss Jesus' more extreme teaching by coming up with hypothetical examples in order to dismiss the entire teaching, like when Jesus says to love your enemies. A person says, "Does that mean if someone were to ..., I would still need to love them?" That then becomes an excuse for not loving people who have done things far less offensive. It would be good to rethink some of those attitudes of hate, avoidance, revenge, judgment and lack of forgiveness.</p>
4/15/2022	Fri	LUKE 7	<p>This chapter emphasizes that what matters is the acceptance or rejection of Jesus. Jesus heals the servant of a non-Jew, so whether or not one is Jewish doesn't matter. Jesus raises someone from the dead, so the severity of the problem also doesn't matter. Further, he forgives a sinful woman, so how sinful someone is doesn't matter. In fact, he says that more sin makes a person more thankful. Finally, he responds to John the Baptist's questions, so it is important even for a great prophet to accept Jesus.</p> <p>The same is true today. Our acceptance of Jesus is the starting point of a relationship with God. Nothing in our background can prevent us from entering a relationship with God through trusting Jesus, and nothing can allow us to have a relationship with God in any other way.</p>
4/16/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
4/17/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection

4/18/2022	Mon	LUKE 8	<p>Jesus tells some stories that illustrate ways to handle God's Word. One emphasizes that we need to listen to it and do what it says. The next tells us we should be making it known to others. There are a few incidents where Jesus performs miracles with interesting twists. In one case, the fishermen are afraid of the water and the teacher is not. In the next, the man who would be considered crazy accepts him and the sane people don't. In the last, Jesus is delayed in his response, so it appears all is lost. It actually opens the door for an even greater miracle.</p> <p>It's hard to imagine there were people who rejected Jesus when faced with all these miracles! Even his own family rejected Him. Jesus' response says obeying the Word of God matters more than family. What is standing between you and obeying God?</p>
4/19/2022	Tue	LUKE 9	<p>Jesus takes a number of steps to strengthen his followers. He sends them out for ministry on their own; asks them about who he is; prepares them for his death; and challenges their pride and willingness to sacrifice for him. Despite their time with Jesus, their maturation is still incomplete.</p> <p>Many become impatient with themselves and their own failings. Yet our development has been overseen by leaders far more flawed than Jesus. When we fail to "get it" sometimes, we need to realize we aren't alone.</p>
4/20/2022	Wed	LUKE 10	<p>In the last chapter, Jesus was preparing 12 followers for ministry. In this one, he is developing 72 and asking them to pray for more. The message of Jesus is designed for growth. The responses to the message vary, but it is available to everyone, and everyone needs to hear it. The stories of the Good Samaritan and Mary and Martha illustrate misplaced priorities. All are doing good things, but the Samaritan and Mary do the more important things. If God wants more people telling the good news of Jesus, that's what is important. We can get distracted by doing good things that keep us busy, or we can do the important things.</p>

4/21/2022	Thur	LUKE 11	<p>Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. Many have memorized this prayer and use it often. He then goes on to do battle with demons, which turns into a battle with his opponents. Their opposition to Jesus causes them to draw illogical conclusions about why Jesus has power over demons. The people who opposed Jesus the most were the religious leaders, so Jesus has harsh things to say about them. Jesus' harshest words weren't for people who seemed like the worst sinners, they were for those who were experts on the Bible but didn't live according to it.</p> <p>Jesus said something interesting about demons leaving a person and then coming back. If a person tries to overcome something evil, whether a demon or a sinful habit, they run the risk of it returning and being even worse than it was the first time. The evil needs to be replaced by something more powerful. When Jesus died on the cross, he replaced our sin with his righteousness (1 Corinthians 5:21). When we trust Jesus, our tendency toward sin is replaced by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9, 10). Are you relying on just getting rid of evil in your life or are you relying on God's provision of a replacement for the evil in our lives?</p>
4/22/2022	Fri	LUKE 12	<p>Everyone wants to be respected by others and live a comfortable life here on earth, but Jesus teaches that it is God's view of us and our eternities that matter most. When we keep our eyes on God and eternity, it changes our view of what we are experiencing; an injustice suffered here matters less and hanging out with the right people becomes less of a priority. On the other hand, being a person of Godly character and helping others matter more.</p>
4/23/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
4/24/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection

4/25/2022	Mon	LUKE 13	<p>Just like us, Jesus' disciples are disturbed by events in which seemingly innocent people die in unfortunate ways. Jesus uses this to teach that everyone will eventually die, and it is best to be in a good relationship with God. Luke then begins to tell of the ways Jesus was warning the Jews that they do not have exclusive access to God. The fig tree was not safe just because it was a fig tree - it needed to bear fruit. People are not safe just because they come from a good religious background - they need to have a relationship with Jesus. Jesus is going to call people from far and wide regardless of their history.</p> <p>It's good to know we have access to God regardless of our background. It's what enables any of us to trust Christ and receive all the benefits of a relationship with God. But there is a warning here not to take our relationship with God for granted. We have it based on our trust in Jesus, not because it is owed to us.</p>
4/26/2022	Tue	LUKE 14	<p>The chapter today centers on banquets. For Jews, the Sabbath was a day when no work was to be done. The Pharisees are unhappy that Jesus heals someone on a day of rest. It's kind of funny that healing on the Sabbath was a bad thing, but throwing a party and making all your servants prepare a meal was good. In Jesus' day, heaven was thought of as a great banquet. Jesus is again teaching that his banquet will have people at it whom you would not expect. It is people's acceptance of Jesus that matters, not their status.</p> <p>Everyone gets their priorities backwards sometimes, just like the Pharisees. We get offended by someone appearing to break a minor rule and overlook our own breaking of bigger ones. Before we start reacting to someone else's failure, it's good to ask ourselves, "What would be the loving response in this situation?"</p>
4/27/2022	Wed	LUKE 15	<p>Jesus tells three stories of people who become obsessed when something of value is lost. In the case of the sheep and coin, it was physical value, and in the case of the son, it was relational. Jesus lets us know that God is the same way. He cares deeply for those who are lost.</p> <p>If we want to be like Jesus, we need to care for the lost just like Jesus does. It's tempting to spend all our time with those who already know Jesus because we have so much more in common with them, but we need to be willing to enter even uncomfortable relationships because of God's love for everyone.</p>

4/28/2022	Thurs	LUKE 16	<p>This chapter begins with a strange story in which Jesus seems to be saying dishonesty is a good thing. What he is really saying is that this dishonest man was smart enough to prepare for his future, while many good people fail to prepare for eternity. An illustration of this can be found in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man makes himself comfortable now and ignores eternity, while Lazarus does the opposite.</p> <p>So what is your eternity going to look like: separation from God, barely making it in or are lots of people going to tell stories of how you invested your energy in eternity?</p>
4/29/2022	Fri	LUKE 17	<p>Jesus begins with some teaching on how we should be concerned about other people's sin. If we love other people, we won't want them to pursue self-destructive behaviors. But we are also supposed to forgive, so this concern is never done in a judgmental way. He then goes on to challenge people not to expect God to be impressed by our good deeds or forget to thank him for the things he does for us.</p> <p>These are all difficult challenges. We have a tendency to either go to the extreme of thinking everyone is responsible for his or her own sin, so someone else's action are not our business or to think we have the right to judge everyone else's behavior. We are supposed to love others enough to help them not make mistakes, but judgment is not a part of that. We also tend to do the opposite of what Jesus says about thankfulness. We want God to be thrilled with each of our acts of obedience and sacrifice for him but then don't thank him for what he does for us.</p>
4/30/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/1/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/2/2022	Mon	LUKE 18	<p>For some, prayer is an odd idea. God knows what we want, so why do we need to ask for it? Jesus goes a step further and says not only should we ask, we should ask repeatedly. He also continues to turn things upside-down by teaching that people who would traditionally be believed to be closer to God really are further away and those that would be thought further from God are closer.</p> <p>When it comes to prayer, God wants us to understand that what we are asking for belongs to God. For us to expect to get things from God without asking assumes that God owes us things. When we ask, and ask repeatedly, we acknowledge the nature of the relationship between us. We are requesting that the God of the Universe provide something we do not deserve.</p>

5/3/2022	Tue	LUKE 19	<p>The story of Zacchaeus illustrates that it is the end of the story that matters. Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax-collector, so he had lived his life taking advantage of people. When he meets Jesus, he turns his life around. Jesus also illustrates that he has left us here on earth to accomplish things for him. Jesus then enters Jerusalem to move toward his arrest, trials and death. At this point he is welcomed, but that will quickly change.</p> <p>We can feel reassured that God accepted Zacchaeus. No matter what we have done in the past, we can still turn to God and make our relationship right with him!</p>
5/4/2022	Wed	LUKE 20	<p>The Pharisees show their true nature here; they are more interested in people's opinions than in knowing the truth. Jesus follows up with a story about servants who are unfaithful to their master. The story sums up the relationship between God and the Pharisees. They are leaders among the people, but are rejecting Jesus, the Master's Son. Rather than turn from their rejection, as Zacchaeus did, they and some other leaders, called the Sadducees, continue trying to trap him into saying something the people won't like.</p> <p>The Pharisees weren't purposely trying to oppose God; they were so blinded by their strongly held beliefs they couldn't see they were wrong. We need to be open to the teachings of the Bible so we don't make the mistake of holding onto a belief that is wrong.</p>
5/5/2022	Thurs	LUKE 21	<p>Like the story in chapter 19, Jesus again teaches that he expects us to use what he has given us for his use. The widow wasn't given very much, but she gave it to God. Jesus then begins to tell of what will happen after his death. Some of his predictions refer to the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred about 40 year later and others refer to the time before Jesus returns. In both, he is predicting dark times ahead.</p> <p>Although we are challenged to give our best to God, we must also realize that, in the end, it will take Christ's return to make everything right. That is not to discourage us; we do what God says because he told us to. The outcome is always in God's hands.</p>

5/6/2022	Fri	LUKE 22	<p>The Feast of Passover is the time God chooses for his Son's death. The Passover was a holiday Jews celebrated to remember a time when the people of Israel killed lambs and put the blood on the doorways so they would not be put to death. Jesus is about to be killed so we can have eternal life. His celebration of the Passover is our model for how we celebrate communion in Christian churches today. The failings of two of Jesus' disciples are described here as well. Judas betrayed Jesus, and Peter denied knowing him.</p> <p>Probably everyone makes mistakes like Judas and Peter did at times. Judas' rejection of Jesus continued until he committed suicide, but Peter returned to Jesus. We would all love to avoid making mistakes in our relationship with Jesus, but thankfully, Jesus' death covers all of our mistakes if we accept him.</p>
5/7/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/8/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/9/2022	Mon	LUKE 23	<p>Jesus could not be put to death by the Jewish courts because the Romans had placed that restriction on the Jews. So, Jesus had to be tried by the Roman governor, Pilate. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent but had him crucified anyway. Like the Pharisees, he was more interested in the opinion of the people than doing the right thing.</p> <p>Jesus was subject to a series of unfair trials where he was accused of things that were not true. For most, this would be a difficult thing to endure, but Jesus suffered in silence. He was prepared to die on our behalf. He was willing to be humiliated for us. What are you willing to sacrifice for him?</p>
5/10/2022	Tue	LUKE 24	<p>Jesus rises from the dead and ascends into heaven. Some find it hard to believe this could have happened, but look at the reaction of his disciples. They had to have been convinced of the truth of it or they would not have continued to be followers of Jesus. All of them suffered for their faith, but all continued to believe in Jesus.</p> <p>We follow a living Savior. Just as he had victory over his own death, he will have victory over our sins and deaths. One day we will see it for ourselves, but today we accept it by faith.</p>

5/11/2022	Wed	ACTS 1	<p>Acts is a continuation of the book of Luke. The book of Luke covered the time period from the birth of Jesus to his death, resurrection and return to heaven. Acts continues the story of what happens following Jesus' return to heaven. Luke tells his readers that Jesus promised he would return, but in the meantime, the message of Jesus was to be spread throughout the world. Many see verse 8 as an outline for the remainder of the book. Jesus' followers spend some time in prayer and studying the Old Testament, ultimately determining that they need to replace Judas with a new Apostle. When Jesus returned to heaven, his followers stood around looking up. They needed to be reminded to get to work doing what Jesus had told them to do, which was spreading his message throughout the world. When people are going through tough times, they often long for Jesus to return. Sometimes, they even make the mistake of predicting when Jesus will return. However, when Jesus returns, our opportunity to reach others for Jesus ends. In tough times, we long for him to return, but when we think of the friend or loved-one who still needs Jesus, we wish he would hold off a bit longer. Since we don't know when he will return, let's reach as many as we can while we can.</p>
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5/12/2022	Thurs	ACTS 2	<p>According to Leviticus 23:17, Jews were required to come to the temple on Pentecost from wherever they lived. So devout Jews living in many nations were present for the events Luke records here. Since they were from different nations, they spoke different languages. In chapter 1, Luke let his readers know of the importance of the coming of the Holy Spirit in enabling Jesus' followers to reach others with the message of Jesus. This can be seen very clearly here. One of the ways is that Peter, who has previously been afraid to risk his reputation by defending Jesus, is now preaching openly about him. Another is that the people listening to Jesus' followers were all able to hear the message in their own language. These followers were all from Israel and didn't speak those languages, yet they were able to speak in languages they had never learned. As a result of Peter's and the other Apostles' preaching, 3000 trusted Jesus that day. This was the birth of the church. They immediately began to meet together both in large gatherings in the temple courts and in people's homes.</p> <p>Even today, when people trust Jesus, they receive the Holy Spirit. Not so we can feel superior or have special powers that impress others, but to enable us to reach others with the message of Jesus. It's a privilege we should not take for granted nor an obligation we should ignore.</p>
5/13/2022	Fri	ACTS 3	<p>In a similar pattern as was seen in Jesus' ministry, Peter and John use miracles to confirm what they are preaching is from God. The man who was healed would have been seen by everyone entering the temple over a period of many years. His physical limitations would have been known to all. The man does not go through a slow process of healing and building up muscles, but immediately begins to leap. This makes Peter's audience much more open to hearing what he has to say. Peter is careful to make sure everyone knows what he is doing is in the name of Jesus.</p> <p>God still does miracles today. Sometimes it is healing some type of physical problem. At other times it is turning someone's life around. When he does this, it is important that we recognize and tell others it was done in the name of Jesus. Obviously the healing benefits the person who is healed, but the greater healing is spiritual; their sins are forgiven and they spend all of eternity with God!</p>
5/14/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/15/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection

5/16/2022	Mon	ACTS 4	<p>The attention Peter and John are getting from the people also attracts the attention of the religious leaders. Persecution of the new church now begins. The leaders are surprised Peter and John are not intimidated by their authority and superior educations, but Peter and John are relying on God's power and don't need to be fearful. The persecution also causes the church to draw even closer together. They begin helping each other in self-sacrificing ways.</p> <p>Our faith in God should lead to a lack of fear. We can boldly stand up to those who may seem to have superior power or intellect. We can also take the risk of being generous because we know God will care for us in the future.</p>
5/17/2022	Tue	ACTS 5	<p>In the midst of all the generosity described in chapter 4, Ananias and Sapphira decide they want to appear generous without actually being generous. The church is in its infancy, so problems like this threaten to destroy the church even before it gets off to a healthy start. God deals very harshly with Ananias and Sapphira for their lying. Even this causes the church to continue to grow.</p> <p>Deception from within the church and persecution from outside the church are not able to prevent the church from moving forward.</p> <p>Trying to look like we are godlier than we actually are is a common problem. It's easier to do the right things when someone is watching and less honorable things when no one is looking. God isn't impressed by that kind of godliness, and it threatens the unity of Jesus' church. It would be better to be honest about our failing than to pretend we don't have any.</p>

5/18/2022	Wed	ACTS 6	<p>In this chapter, the church begins to organize around specific tasks that need to be done. With growth, the amount of work needing to be done grows too. In those days it was difficult for older widows with no children to support themselves. In the Jewish culture, it was common for these widows to be supported by the community. The widows from Jerusalem were already being cared for, but the Helenistic, or Greek-speaking, widows were not. The Apostles didn't want to be distracted from their main duties to address the problem of these widows, so they delegated the responsibility to those who could be trusted to take care of the issue well. One of these trusted people is Stephen. He not only helps widows, but is spreading the message of Jesus as well. Since the Apostles were too popular for the religious leaders to arrest, they went after Stephen instead.</p> <p>Churches still organize in this way today. The Senior Pastor can't do it all, so some of the work that needs to be done is given to other staff or volunteers. The task isn't delegated to someone else because the Senior Pastor is too important to do the job. Instead it is done so the job he is uniquely suited for continues to get done while someone else does what is best for that person. We should all be involved in the ministry of the church and do our jobs in ways that honor God.</p>
5/19/2022	Thurs	ACTS 7	<p>Stephen gives a summary of the history of Israel at his trial. It demonstrates that he is a good Jew who listened to all his lessons at synagogue. However, he uses that history to remind his fellow Jews they have a history of disobeying God and not listening when God sends prophets to try to correct them. He lets them know they are doing that now by rejecting Jesus and his followers. Stephen is executed by a hysterical mob for his boldness in telling the people what they needed to hear. Luke also introduces Saul, who will play a major role in the rest of the story.</p> <p>Doing what God wants and speaking on his behalf does not always lead to a happy life. We would like for everything to turn out well when we obey God, but God may have different plans. The story does have a happy ending with Jesus standing to welcome Stephen to heaven. We have a similar ending waiting for us.</p>

5/20/2022	Fri	ACTS 8	<p>The persecution of the church becomes more widespread and organized with Saul as a leading persecutor. One of Stephen's colleagues in chapter 6 is Philip. He preaches in Samaria and to an Ethiopian. This means the message of Jesus has crossed racial barriers. Samaritans were Israelites who had married non-Israelites and also did not practice the same form of the Jewish religion as those in Jerusalem. The Ethiopian was a convert to Judaism, but was probably black. Like Ananias and Sapphira, Simon wants to personally gain from his relationship with Christ and is dealt with harshly for his mistake.</p> <p>Early on in the story of the church, it is established that the church was not to be limited to those of one race. The church has spread to many places and people groups since that day, but the job is still not done. Jesus is for everyone. We may still struggle with accepting those who are different from us, but that is our problem, not God's.</p>
5/21/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/22/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/23/2022	Mon	ACTS 9	<p>Saul had at least heard of the miracles that surrounded the church as well as the preaching of Jesus' followers, but still did not believe. God needed to make a bold move to capture his attention. Even before Saul trusts Jesus, God says Saul will take his message even further, to those who are not Jews. The one persecuting others becomes the one persecuted.</p> <p>We may have those in our lives whom we can't imagine coming to Jesus. God may have a plan that is unavoidable for that person. Don't ever give up on anyone!</p>

5/24/2022	Tue	ACTS 10	<p>This is the story of the first non-Jew, called a Gentile, coming to Christ. The Jewish Christians did not think this was possible. They had spent their entire lives avoiding Gentiles and seeing them as enemies of God. Similar to what God had to do to convince Saul to trust Christ, God had to do something bold to convince Peter that Gentiles could be Christians. Just like Jews avoided Gentiles, they also avoided certain foods. God lets Peter know he can declare anything to be clean. Though Peter needed some convincing, he obeyed God and led a Gentile to Jesus. This may seem like a strange transition to us today since most Christians are Gentiles. That's how it is with change; once the change is made, it's sometimes hard to remember why it was controversial. We live in a world that is changing and sometime we need to change to address the needs of a culture that has shifted. Changes like that can be controversial, but necessary. The central message of Jesus doesn't change, but how we make him known does.</p>
5/25/2022	Wed	ACTS 11	<p>The story from chapter 10 is repeated to those who are struggling to accept that Gentiles could follow Christ without converting to Judaism first. The message of Jesus also spreads to areas outside of Israel. This is because the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem is causing Christians to move to new places. It's interesting that persecution causes the church to expand. The Christians were comfortable being near each other and not branching out into new areas. Lack of comfort can be a way God gets us to do something new. It would be better if we did what he wanted without him making us uncomfortable, but God will do what it takes to cause his plan to be carried out.</p>
5/26/2022	Thurs	ACTS 12	<p>Until now, it has been the religious leaders who have been persecuting the church. Now Herod, a political leader, joins the persecution. He executes James, making him the first of Jesus' original followers to give his life for his faith. Peter is then arrested and will probably be executed as well, but is miraculously delivered. The story is a humorous one with people praying he will be released, but not believing it when he is. It comes full circle when Herod is the one who dies. He believes he is a god, but the real God has the final say on that. Days may seem dark when the powerful oppose God and his people, but be assured that God is stronger than any earthly power. There may be difficult days while we wait for God to act, but we can pray for deliverance and should not be surprised when he answers.</p>

5/27/2022	Fri	ACTS 13	<p>Today marks a transition in Acts. Instead of the message of Jesus spreading because of persecution, the message spreads because of a purposeful strategy. Saul is now being sent as a missionary along with Barnabas. Saul also begins to be known as Paul. This chapter starts a pattern which will be seen in the rest of the book of Acts. Paul's preaching always begins with Jews in the synagogue, but when there is resistance, he takes the message of Jesus to Gentiles as well. This journey begins on the Island of Cyprus and then moves to Antioch, in what we call Turkey today.</p> <p>Paul probably found it easier to talk to Jews than Gentiles. They were raised with similar traditions and believed the same Old Testament teachings. We see Paul relying heavily on the Old Testament when he preached to Jews. But he doesn't stop with his fellow Jews; he moves to those he formerly hated. Jesus isn't just for those we naturally like; he wants us to love everyone and take his message to all of them.</p>
5/28/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/29/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
5/30/2022	Mon	ACTS 14	<p>Paul and Barnabas go to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, all cities in present-day Turkey. They then circle back to each of the cities they previously visited on their way back to Antioch in Syria, which is not the same Antioch as in Turkey. They follow the pattern of going to Jews first and then to Gentiles. They also perform miracles to demonstrate that the message they are preaching comes from God. Despite these demonstrations of God's power in them, there are many who reject the message. The people in Lystra react in a different way; they think Paul and Barnabas are gods. Unlike Herod, whom we read about in chapter 12, Paul and Barnabas are horrified at this reaction. They want everyone to know that the power comes from God. It doesn't take long for the people to turn on Paul and Barnabas.</p> <p>The people were excited when they saw they could benefit from God's power in Paul and Barnabas, but didn't really turn to Jesus. Since their excitement was not true faith, it didn't continue. As Christians, we should be in our communities doing the things Jesus would have done. Some may get excited about us doing things for them, but unless they turn to Jesus in faith, the effect will only be temporary. That doesn't mean to stop doing good things, but it does mean that we should always be pointing people back to Jesus.</p>

5/31/2022	Tue	ACTS 15	<p>Change is often hard. The church began in Jerusalem where most people were devout Jews. All of Jesus' original followers were Jews as well. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was referred to as God's chosen people. If a person wanted to have a relationship with God, they needed to worship the God of Israel. In effect, they had to convert to the Jewish religion. So now there are Jewish Christians who have been raised in that tradition who can't understand how a person can have a relationship with God without first embracing the Jewish religion. With many non-Jews, or Gentiles, coming to Christ, a dispute arises. Undeniable stories of Gentiles coming to Jesus and showing evidence of their faith are used to prove that Jesus can save anyone - Jew or Gentile. Most Christians today are not of Jewish descent, so we can be glad for the outcome of this dispute. However, today we can be guilty of adding requirements for coming to Jesus based on tradition. We fall so in love with a particular style of music, dress, ceremony or lifestyle we begin to insist that the person must adopt our way of life before trusting Jesus. Nothing could be further from the truth. People's lifestyles should change after coming to Christ as they grow in their relationship with God, but those changes are not based on tradition and preferences; they are based on how God would have them live.</p>
6/1/2022	Wed	ACTS 16	<p>At the end of chapter 15, we are told that Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways to again travel around spreading the message of Jesus. Paul teams up with Silas, and we will be reading about their travels through chapter 18. They return to cities Paul visited before. Paul's plan was to continue to preach in the region we call Turkey, but God directed him to Macedonia, which is on the Greek Peninsula. In Philippi, Paul again starts his ministry with Jews, but because there are so few Jews in Philippi, they don't even have a synagogue. This means Paul's ministry is now going to almost exclusively involve Gentiles. In Philippi, Paul and Silas are arrested but have a great opportunity to lead their jailer to Jesus before they are released.</p> <p>The simplicity of Paul's message to the jailer is a great favorite. The message is simple, but believing in Jesus, for many, is not so simple. We don't need to complicate the message. Our challenge should be for people to trust Jesus for the forgiveness of their wrongdoing.</p>

5/2/2022	Thurs	ACTS 17	<p>Paul and Silas go to Thessalonica, which has a larger Jewish population. As usual, most of the Jews reject the message of Jesus and stir up trouble. That causes Paul and Silas to move on to Beria. The Jews in Beria do not rely on their traditions, but instead study the Old Testament for themselves to see if what Paul is telling them is true. Therefore, they are more open to the message of Jesus. Paul moves on to Athens, which is full of idols to false gods and secular philosophers. Luke points out that when preaching to people like this, Paul no longer relies on quoting the Old Testament, but rather quotes from poets they would hold in high regard. He also uses symbols from their culture to convince them to consider Jesus.</p> <p>We see a couple of important examples in this chapter. The Bereans studied the Bible for themselves to determine the truth. Without a knowledge of what the Bible says, we can easily be misled by those who try to convince us to follow ideas the Bible does not teach. The fact that you are participating in this reading plan shows you want to read it for yourself. We also see that Paul attempts to build bridges between the message of Jesus and the people to whom he is preaching. We can't just tell people what God says without finding ways to help them understand and embrace it.</p>
6/3/2022	Fri	ACTS 18	<p>Paul moves on to Corinth and is reunited with Silas and Timothy. Again the Jews largely reject the message of Jesus, and Paul shakes out his garments to signify he will no longer actively attempt to persuade them. Normally Paul moves on to new locations after a rejection of the message, but God lets him know he is to stay and continue to preach. Paul stays for a year and a half before beginning to work his way home again.</p> <p>Paul wasn't successful with everyone he tried to reach and neither are we. Some people are simply not open to hearing about Jesus. However, God will always open doors of opportunity to continue to reach others for him.</p>
6/4/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
6/5/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection

6/6/2022	Mon	ACTS 19	<p>Paul goes to Ephesus where he finds some followers of John the Baptist who had not heard of Jesus. They are eager to learn of Jesus. As usual, Paul's message meets resistance from the Jews, so he is forced to leave the synagogue. The message of Jesus is so successful in Ephesus, it begins to damages the businesses that make their money off of the worship of Artemis. These craftsmen decide to turn people against Paul, so they can stop the spread of Jesus' message.</p> <p>The reaction of the people who worship Artemis is interesting. First, they seem to be more interested in making money than they are in knowing the truth. Perhaps their real god was money, not Artemis. Secondly, Artemis will suffer if people do not worship her. How powerful can she be if she requires worship in order to be strong? Our worship of God should not be like this. God should not be worshiped for our personal gain. God is powerful whether we worship him or not. We worship him for who he is, not for our benefit or to strengthen him.</p>
6/7/2022	Tue	ACTS 20	<p>Visits to a number of cities are covered in a summary way, probably because Luke was not present for this part of the trip. We are told the story of a man who fell asleep during a sermon. He died as a result, but was then brought back to life. As Paul heads toward Jerusalem, opposition from the Jews makes it clear he will not be welcomed there. His friends do not want him to go to Jerusalem, but Paul feels God wants him to go there, no matter what the consequence.</p> <p>The love people show for Paul is amazing. They travel great distances on foot just to talk with him. How much appreciation do you show for those who have ministered to you? How open are you to listening to a sermon that lasts all night? How much of an investment are you making to expose yourself to the teaching of spiritual leaders?</p>

6/8/2022	Wed	ACTS 21	<p>This chapter is somewhat controversial. It could be understood to be saying that the Holy Spirit is telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem and that Paul participating in a Jewish ritual is not what God wanted. On the other hand, it could be seen as Paul being warned what will happen, but he is not being told by God not to go. What is clear is that the church in Jerusalem is now openly embracing Paul's ministry to Gentiles while still not wanting to close the door on Jews. Paul's desire to connect himself to his Jewish heritage is misunderstood and leads to his arrest. Paul was trying to convince Jews he was still one of them, but his actions were perceived to be against Jewish traditions. Our best attempts at trying to help people can often be misunderstood. We may want to help someone turn away from an incorrect belief or activity, but it may be perceived as close-minded or judgmental. We can't control how people respond to what we do, but we can check our motives to make sure they are based on love and a genuine desire to encourage.</p>
6/9/2022	Thurs	ACTS 22	<p>After Paul's arrest, he is given the chance to defend himself in front of the Jewish crowd. He tells his story of how he came to Christ, with an emphasis on the details that would be more convincing to his audience. They are interested in hearing the story until he acknowledges his ministry to Gentiles. Since the Romans are clueless as to what all the controversy is about, they assume they can whip Paul and get him to give them some information. Whipping Paul might also have gotten the crowd to settle down. The justice system at the time only required due process for Roman citizens, and there would not have been very many of those in an outlying province, like Israel. When Paul informed them that he was a citizen, this sets in motion a legal process that will take us through the rest of Acts.</p> <p>Our stories of how we came to Christ can be powerful things. Our problems and doubts are common to everyone and the longing we have to be loved and forgiven are as well. Each of our circumstances are different, but Jesus is always the solution. Today, look for someone to whom you can tell your story.</p>

6/10/2022	Fri	ACTS 23	<p>Since the Romans had no understanding of Jewish customs, Paul's first trial is before religious leaders. The Roman commander is probably hoping this trial will help him understand the accusations against Paul. Paul understands there is no way for him to get a fair trial in this court, so he uses his in-depth knowledge of Judaism to divide the court. Since Paul had at one time been a Pharisee and the court is made up of Pharisees and another group, called Sadducees, he sides with the Pharisees and gets them to argue with the Sadducees. It is clear to the commander that he is not going to get answers here. The threat on Paul's life isn't one he needs to worry about, because God has told him he is going to Rome. Now things are put in place for Paul's Roman trial. It is interesting to see the interaction of the things Paul had control over and those he did not. He could control how he responded to the religious leaders and, thus, prevented them from unfairly accusing him. He couldn't control how the commander would respond to the threat on his life, but the commander's response is key to God sending Paul to Rome. Our lives are the same. Our responses to the situations we are in are choices we make, but those situations are generally not of our choosing. Personal responsibility and dependence on God go together. The outcomes of our best intended actions always fit into God's bigger plan.</p>
6/11/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
6/12/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
6/13/2022	Mon	ACTS 24	<p>This trial is before Felix, who is corrupt and more interested in keeping the peace than is doing what is right. Since Felix would be most interested in preventing any kind of unrest, Paul is accused of causing a riot. Paul simply tells the truth. Felix knows Paul is not guilty of breaking any law, but holds him without a conviction for two years in hopes of a bribe.</p> <p>Even in a life-threatening situation, Paul relies solely on telling the truth. His accusers are taking threads of truth and spinning them into accusations that are clearly untrue. Paul even sees a legal trial as an opportunity to encourage people to consider Jesus. When most would be tempted to be defensive, Paul focuses on Jesus. How would you have reacted in this situation?</p>

6/14/2022	Tue	ACTS 25	<p>Festus arrives as the new Roman governor, and immediately the Jewish leaders try to influence Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem. Festus wants to win favor with his new subjects, but Paul appeals to the Roman Emperor. This puts Festus in the awkward position of having to send Paul to Rome for trial when he has no idea of what to accuse Paul. Since Agrippa would have more history with the Jews, he is hoping Agrippa can provide some help.</p> <p>Legal systems within any nation at any time have both good and bad because they are overseen by people who are flawed. Roman law is protecting Paul from assassination, but also allows him to sit in jail for two years without ever having done anything wrong. We can love our country but should always realize our ultimate defense comes from God. At best, a strong, just nation will only benefit us in life. Our dependence on God protects us for eternity.</p>
6/15/2022	Wed	ACTS 26	<p>Agrippa, having lived in the area all his life, is far more familiar with Jewish traditions and with this new movement of followers of Jesus. Agrippa listens to Paul's story with great interest, but Festus apparently thinks Paul is just a religious fanatic.</p> <p>When we tell others of our relationship with Jesus, some will be open to what is being said and some will not. Neither trusted Jesus in the moment. Would one more conversation with Agrippa have made a difference? Is there some set of circumstance that would cause Festus to listen? Only God knows, but we have the responsibility to tell others of Jesus regardless of the outcome.</p>
6/16/2022	Thurs	ACTS 27	<p>Paul is sent to Rome by ship. Luke uses the pronoun 'we,' and the story is more detailed so it's clear Luke was along on the voyage. Even in the midst of a life-threatening situation, Paul never forgot his dependence on God and to care for the others on the ship, including those who were his captors.</p> <p>We often use storms as a way of talking about difficulties in life. Storms make a good illustration because we don't control them, and they can put us in unexpected danger. In the midst of them, we can cling to our own abilities to get through them or we can rely more heavily on God. When we rely on God, it is another way we can lead others to Jesus.</p>

6/17/2022	Fri	ACTS 28	<p>Paul, who has now survived multiple incidents which should have killed him, arrives in Rome and the book of Acts abruptly ends. Paul finally makes it to Rome, which was the desire he expressed in Romans. He can now communicate directly to the Christians what he was only able to do in writing before. Acts probably ends this way because that is what is happening when Luke writes the book. It's a frustrating ending because we want to know if Paul goes to trial and how it turns out. Our best understanding from reading Paul's writings and historical tradition is that he was tried and released, but is later arrested again and executed.</p> <p>Nothing could stop Paul from talking about Jesus. He knew his purpose and could not be distracted. Persecution, rejection, death threats, prison, shipwreck, and his own prejudices toward Gentiles were all endured and accepted to allow him to serve Jesus. If we were all like him, what would our world look like today?</p>
6/18/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
6/19/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
6/20/2022	Mon	1THESSALONIANS 1	<p>Back in Acts 17, we read of Paul, Silas and Timothy founding the church in Thessalonica. Several of Paul's letters, also called epistles, are written to churches Paul founded to address issues that have come up since Paul left those cities. From Acts 17, we see that Paul left Thessalonica abruptly. He probably was concerned he had not spent enough time there to get them well established. According to 1 Thessalonians 3:6, he has received a good report about the church and is telling them how happy he is to hear they are doing well. Faith in Jesus is something that is shared with people all over the world. We can pray for other Christians, no matter where they live and rejoice when we hear they are doing well. Wherever the church exists, it should be representing Jesus.</p>
6/21/2022	Tue	1THESSALONIANS 2	<p>Paul is pointing out that his ministry is motivated by his love for God and his people, not by what he can get out of it. In fact, he has suffered a great deal of loss in order to do what he is doing.</p> <p>One of the ways we can evaluate spiritual leaders is by looking at what Paul says in this chapter. A leader who seems motivated by gaining money, respect, recognition or power is not following in the example of Paul. Paul gave up those things because he wanted to minister to others. If he corrected someone or taught something, it was for the benefit of his listener, not for his own benefit.</p>

6/22/2022	Wed	1THESSALONIANS 3	<p>Paul seems disappointed he had been unable to visit Thessalonica in person. Instead, he sent Timothy who returned with a good report that was very encouraging to Paul.</p> <p>With the communications technology available to us today, it is difficult to imagine waiting for hand-written letters to be walked between cities in order to find out how things are going. On a positive side, keeping in touch required real effort and demonstrated a genuine interest. Are there people you put forth an effort to encourage today? Hundreds of online friends is not the same as investing your life in specific people and having people invest in you.</p>
6/23/2022	Thurs	1THESSALONIANS 4	<p>Sexual immorality is nothing new. As Paul introduced people to Jesus, they were often coming from a background where sexual immorality was encouraged. He is making it clear this was not to be true of those who come to Christ. Apparently, when Timothy brings his report of the church in Thessalonica, he tells Paul they are confused about what happens to people who die before Jesus returns. Paul had taught them about what would happen when Jesus returns, but loved ones had probably died in the meantime, and they wanted to know what would happen with them. Paul assures them they will be resurrected, just as Jesus was.</p> <p>The culture we live in appears to be moving further from God's standards, especially in the area of sex. Though we may struggle with adjusting to these changing attitudes, the New Testament was actually written in a similar culture. We are called to live according to God's standard, regardless of what the culture says, and introduce those in the culture to a God who loves everyone, despite their resistance to God's desires for them.</p>

6/24/2022	Fri	1THESSALONIANS 5	<p>Continuing with the subject of Jesus' return, Paul lets the church know Jesus will come unexpectedly. Those who have not believed in Jesus will feel secure, like people do when they are locked into their homes at night. Then Jesus will return and, suddenly and unexpectedly, that feeling of security will be gone. For those who have believed in Jesus, his return will not cause fear because he will not pour out his anger on us. Paul then concludes his letter with some additional encouragement to continue to behave well.</p> <p>Paul's teaching on Jesus' return should be both a comfort and an encouragement to continue working. We are comforted to know that Jesus' return will bring a victorious ending for those who have trusted in Jesus. However, we need to continue to work to bring others to Jesus, because God's anger awaits those who have not trusted Jesus.</p>
6/25/2022	Sat		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
6/26/2022	Sun		Today is a day for catch-up or reflection
6/27/2022	Mon	2THESSALONIANS 1	<p>2 Thessalonians was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians to the same church in Thessalonica. Paul has gotten word of something going on there which requires a follow-up letter. He is again writing of Jesus' return and is probably clarifying something that had been misunderstood in his first letter. This chapter is acknowledging that they are serving God in an atmosphere of intense persecution. He reminds them that although they are suffering now, God will punish those who reject Jesus.</p> <p>When we go through something in life that is difficult, we can wonder why we are suffering. If the suffering is the result of someone doing something to hurt us, we may wish God would protect us by punishing the other person. We live in the here and now and often want solutions in the here and now. Paul reminds us that God operates in eternity. There are many issues that won't be resolved in this life. Faith means we can serve now and expect God to set everything right in his time.</p>

6/28/2022	Tue	2THESSALONIANS 2	<p>This chapter contains the main purpose of the letter. The Thessalonians are wondering if “the Day of the Lord” had already begun. Paul assures them it has not. He lets them know the Day of Lord will not come until there is a general rebellion against God, led by a “man of lawlessness.” Paul tells us there is always a desire for rebellion against God, but it is restrained by something he does not name. There are those who believe that all Christians will be raptured or taken up from the earth prior to the great rebellion Paul describes here and the restraining force holding back the man of lawlessness is Christians and the Holy Spirit living within them. It appears the Thessalonians knew what Paul was talking about while we guess as best we can with the information we are given.</p> <p>What is clear from the chapter is that there is a great rebellion coming. The Thessalonians were experiencing persecution, but the coming rebellion against God is going to be far worse. As we look at our world today, we see reason for both hope and discouragement. Sometimes we see evil restrained and sometimes not. Imagine a world where evil is never restrained. We should be thankful for the restraint and be part of it, but we also need to recognize that humanity will not ultimately solve its problems. Things will not be set right until Jesus returns.</p>
6/29/2022	Wed	2THESSALONIANS 3	<p>Paul closes out the letter by asking the Thessalonians to pray for him and his ministry. He also warns them against being idle. It’s possible that because they thought the end of the world had come, they no longer needed to put forth an effort to support themselves or continue to reach people who had not trusted Christ.</p> <p>Our work on earth is never done. Until God brings us to himself, we are to continue to do his work and ours.</p>

6/30/2022	Thurs	1COLOSSIANS 1	<p>We read in Acts 18 that after Paul visited Thessalonica, he went to Berea, Athens and then Corinth. Corinth was a major city for trade. It is located on a narrow isthmus, so land-based trade had to go through the city, and it had major ports on both the east and west. During times of the year when sea travel was dangerous, they would drag ships over the isthmus rather than sail around the Greek peninsula. With that much trade passing through, it was also a center for immoral behavior. It was a difficult place for a church to exist without being negatively influenced by those around them. In much of 1 Corinthians, Paul tells them they are living the way God would want them to live. He begins this chapter by thanking God for giving him the opportunity to bring the message of Jesus to them and that they accepted it. However, he has heard reports they are not getting along with each other. Apparently they are even arguing that some are better than others based on who baptized them. Paul tells them these kinds of arguments come from thinking like someone who doesn't know Jesus. Those who have trusted Jesus should get their wisdom from God.</p> <p>It's interesting that people would use baptism as a point of contention instead of unity. God has intended it to be a symbol of us trusting Jesus and no longer relying on ourselves for forgiveness of our sin. How could something like that be used as a source of pride and division? It is so easy to go off target in our relationship with God. Doing something good becomes a source of pride. Warning someone who is headed in a bad direction becomes a source of judgment. We need to keep getting our wisdom from God to avoid these kinds of pitfalls.</p>
7/1/2022	Fri	1COLOSSIANS 2	<p>Paul is contrasting human wisdom and wisdom that comes from God. Paul was highly educated and could have impressed everyone with everything he knew, but instead focused on Jesus. Human wisdom without godly wisdom is a dangerous thing. That's what the people who ordered Jesus' death were like. Paul isn't opposed to a good education, but spiritual wisdom is far more important.</p> <p>Spiritual wisdom should always take priority over human wisdom in our decision-making. Human wisdom is self-centered; spiritual wisdom is God- and others-centered. Which one drives your reactions?</p>