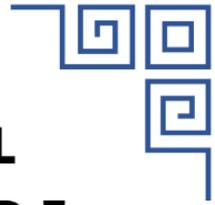


2023
DEVOTIONAL
READING GUIDE



TAKE THE
NEXT
STEP

January 1 – April 28, 2023



FOLLOW



GROW



LOVE



GO



Welcome to Bacon Heights!

The ministerial staff is committed to shepherding this congregation by providing tools and resources to help you on the journey called *life*. Part of growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ is reading the word and applying the truths that are found in the Bible.

We hope that this guide will provide an easy daily Bible reading plan that you can follow each day that you are able. You will get to know our staff a little better as you read the devotions prepared by each one, and understand their unique ministry perspective.

Come join us on the journey!

Sammy Elliott, Lead Pastor
Mike Lewis, Pastor of Operations
Luke Kilmartin, Student Pastor
Dana Kluzek, Children's Pastor
Janyth Brannon, Preschool Pastor

WEEK 1

January 1 Seeking God

January 2 1 Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 29:11-13

January 3 Isaiah 40:25-28

January 4 Psalm 19:1-2; Romans 1:19-20

January 5 John 1:1-4, 14-18

January 6 Proverbs 2:1-5

There are many things that we seek after, and many of those pursuits come with great intensity. Yet, the instruction given by Solomon in Proverbs has a different longing: the seeking for God and His wisdom.

To understand the things of God begins with seeking after the heart of God. To grow in the knowledge, insight, and understanding of what is more precious than treasure is to seek after His Presence above and beyond all other pursuits. To incline our hearts to truly grasp what God teaches us in His Word is more satisfying than any form of value expressed in our world. Where do we begin? We begin with the fear of the Lord, and that is where we find the knowledge we need to live each day faithfully.

Father God,

May we pursue wisdom and understanding,
being devoted only to You.

The treasure we can gain is seeking the life

You have called us to.

Amen

Luke Kilmartin, Students

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WEEK 2

January 8 The Goodness of God

January 9	Psalm 84:11
January 10	Exodus 33:12-23
January 11	Psalm 145
January 12	Psalm 107
January 13	Romans 5:1-8; 8:31-32

Begin your week in the scriptures by asking the Lord to “teach me your ways so I may know you.” This was Moses’ request of God in Exodus 33:13 (NIV). You’ll discover it is a prayer that the Lord is eager to answer.

It is interesting to notice the difference between God in Exodus 33 and God (in the flesh) in the New Testament. In Exodus 33:18, Moses asked to see God’s glory. God’s response to that was “...you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” (Exodus 33:20) Demonstrating many of the attributes found in Psalm 84 and 107, God did *not* give Moses what he asked for. Because God remained somewhat distant, Moses was able to go on living.

Compare that to Jesus in the New Testament. God not only allowed his face to be seen (in human form as Jesus Christ), but to be beaten, spat upon, and pierced with thorns as He died to give us peace with God (Romans 5:1 – NLT). We can take that a step further. The God who could not be seen face to face in the Old Testament came to die to take our punishment for sin and to fill our hearts with His love by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell within us.

This should lead us to exclaim along with the writer of Psalm 107 “give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever.”

Mike Lewis
Operations

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WEEK 3

January 15 The Sovereignty of God

January 16 Isaiah 44:6-8

January 17 Colossians 1:15-20

January 18 Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28-29

January 19 Matthew 6:25-34

January 20 Revelations 19:11-16

Sovereignty: Someone who is above all, superior, the greatest, the chief, the supreme power, the ranking authority, one without equal, one who is excellent. Someone who possesses absolute control.

Consider these brief answers to two questions that surface regarding the sovereignty of God:

1) If God is really in control and above all things, sovereign over all of history's circumstances, then why does He allow evil, pain, and suffering?

Nothing will enter your life that God does not either decree or allow. Nothing will ever enter your life that, if you are willing to trust in him, he cannot work out for your good.

2) If God is Sovereign over all people and events in history, doesn't that make a sham of human responsibility?

The Bible teaches that God is sovereign and that man is responsible. This tension will always exist. To minimize either does injustice to both.

Take some time to behold the sovereignty of God. His sovereignty should move all of us to worship Him as THE supreme God.

Sammy Elliott
Lead Pastor

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WEEK 4

January 22 The Holiness of God

January 23 Exodus 3:1-6

January 24 Isaiah 6:1-8

January 25 1 John 2:15-17

January 26 Revelations 4:8-11

January 27 1 Peter 1:13-16; Hebrews 12:24

In Exodus, chapter 3, we read the familiar story of Moses and the burning bush. The ground around the bush was referred to as *holy ground*. After this passage, the word *holy* becomes one of the central descriptors of God in the Old Testament. The one true God is the only being in the universe who truly stands apart from this world and is worthy of being called *holy*.

Here at the burning bush, God tells Moses not to come any closer and to take off his sandals because he is standing on *holy ground*. This was a sign of reverence in a holy place, one set apart because God was there. These commands kept Moses from entering God's presence unprepared. We also see in verse 6 that Moses covered his face, another sign of reverence.

Take the time to make sure you are fully prepared to enter the presence of a holy God.

Dana Kluzek
Children

WEEK 5

January 29 The Wisdom of God

January 30 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

January 31 Psalm 119:33-37

February 1 James 3:13-17

February 2 James 1:5-8

February 3 Romans 11:33-36

We must carefully choose our sources of wisdom. (1 Cor. 2)
The Holy Spirit illuminates and helps us understand God's Word, which in return provides divine wisdom.

James 3 tells us not use worldly wisdom, which is futile and unproductive.

James also encourages that if any of us lack wisdom, we should ask God, who gives generously.

Janyth Brannon
Preschool

WEEK 6

February 5 The Righteousness of God

- February 6 Psalm 73:1-26
February 7 Romans 12:14-21
February 8 Romans 3:21-26
February 9 Psalm 97:1-2
February 10 1 Cor. 3:10-15; Rev. 20:11-15

Through Paul's letter to the Romans, we find that righteousness is expressed, not through the upholding of the law, but through the redemption by Jesus for all who believe in Him. We have been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Because we all have fallen short due to the severity of sin, we deserve death and can never justify our actions. However, God's manifestation of righteousness in Christ gives us not what we deserve but the gracious gift of being made right.

Father God,
Thank You that despite our fallen nature,
We are made righteous by Your Son,
And that we are justified only by His righteousness,
Which is available to anyone.

Amen

Luke Kilmartin
Students

WEEK 7

February 12 The Love of God

February 13 1 John 3:1, 16

February 14 1 John 4:7-18

February 15 Eph. 3:14-19

February 16 Luke 15:11-31

February 17 John 3:16; Romans 5:8

Throughout the Old Testament God *spoke* through the prophets to tell the world to expect a Savior who would pay the penalty for sin once and for all by laying down His life as a substitutionary sacrifice. Those words were *acted upon* when God “showed his love among us: He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.” (1 John 4:9) Love is best demonstrated through action.

Hesed is a powerful Hebrew word for love that Michael Card has brilliantly defined as “when the person from whom I have the right to expect nothing gives me everything.”¹ I see this definition of love being demonstrated in the story of the loving father in Luke 15:11-31.

When the younger son demanded his share of the estate he was saying to the father “you are now dead to me. Give me my inheritance.” Had you ever noticed that the scriptures reveal that the inheritance was split between the two sons? The older son received his portion of the inheritance *and* continued to live with the father enjoying all of the benefits that went along with that.

The loving father in the story actually goes out to meet both sons but with very different results. The younger son recognizes that he has the right to expect nothing but is given everything (hesed). Luke 15:17-19 reveals that he “came to his senses” and humbly repented. The older brother, however, when invited inside to celebrate, arrogantly remained outside.

To whom do you need to demonstrate love? Perhaps it is someone who has done nothing to deserve it like the prodigal son. First John 4:7, 11 also opens the door for us to demonstrate love to those closest to us who are easy to love. Once you have decided on the person(s) to whom you will demonstrate love, act on that within the next week.

Mike Lewis
Operations

¹Card, Michael. *Hesed and the Mystery of God's Lovingkindness*. (Downers Grove, IL, 2018), 5.

WEEK 8

February 19 The Faithfulness of God

February 20 Lamentations 3:22-26

February 21 Psalm 119:89-96

February 22 Jeremiah 17:5-8

February 23 2 Cor. 12:9-10

February 24 Matthew 11:28-30

Consider the synonyms of the word faithful: Dependable, trustworthy, loyal, staunch, resolute, constant, reliable, true to one's word, keeps one's promises, someone who "comes through for you."

Take the time to **look backwards** to be reminded of His faithfulness. His track record is impeccable. He is faithful to give me strength when I am weak, to provide a way out when I am tempted, to forgive when I sin, to guide when I am lost, to comfort when I am in grief, and to walk with me when I need a friend.

God is faithful. Always was. Always is. Always will be.

This week, enjoy the faithfulness of God. We serve a God who has proven his trustworthiness.

Great is Thy Faithfulness (hymn)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father

There is no shadow of turning with Thee

Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not

As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

Sammy Elliott, Lead Pastor

WEEK 9

February 26

February 27 John 1:1-28

February 28 John 1:29-51

March 1 John 2

March 2 John 3

March 3 John 4:1-26

Have you ever been to a movie in 3-D where you had to wear the 3-D glasses to watch the movie? I'm sure you probably have, and I'm also sure that at some point you took off the glasses to see what the movie looked like without them on. When you do that, everything looks strange and blurry. We don't see in 3-D like God does. Our eyes only see part of the picture, and we can't see people as they really are.

In John 4, Jesus didn't see the Samaritan woman like everyone else did. He saw her as another one of God's creations that needed forgiveness.

Remember that all people are created and loved by God so treat them that way!

Dana Kluzek
Children

WEEK 10

March 5

March 6 John 4:27-54

March 7 John 5:1-23

March 8 John 5:24-47

March 9 John 6:1-21

March 10 John 6:22-71

I love the story in John 6 of how Jesus fed the 5,000 because it encourages us that Jesus can take what little we have to offer Him and make it plentiful.

We teach our Preschoolers that Jesus loves them and takes care of them. This story proves it.

The little boy was willing to give Jesus his small amount of food. Even though it wasn't very much, he gave all he had.

Because Jesus gave thanks for this small amount, there was plenty of food to feed everyone. And there was even some left over!

Preschoolers have no trouble believing that Jesus loves them and will take care of them. As adults, we need to have this same child-like faith and trust Jesus with everything that we have.

Janyth Brannon
Preschool

WEEK 11

March 12

March 13	John 7:1-24
March 14	John 7:25-52
March 15	John 8:1-29
March 16	John 8:30-59
March 17	John 9

John 9 contains the story of the man born blind who became the vessel of truth from the biblical lasik procedure done by Jesus. As we continue walking through the gospel account according to John, he describes the conflict between the truth Jesus brings and the traditions of the day (John 7), the liberation of the soul upon recognizing the truth of Jesus (John 8), and that when we see the truth revealed in Jesus, our spiritual blindness is replaced with seeing through the gospel-centered lens for the first time.

This blind man's inability to see was not from a mistake, but from the Lord desiring to use this man's ailment to display "the works of God." Oh that we would walk into this week with our sight restored, our conviction clear, and our story made whole from Jesus' work in our lives. May our response be, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." (John 9:25)

Father God,

May we not assign blame to those who have never been able to see the gospel reality for themselves through the vantage point of self-righteous correction, forgetting that once we were blind, and now we see.

Amen

Luke Kilmartin, Students

WEEK 12

March 19

March 20	John 10:1-21
March 21	John 10:22-42
March 22	John 11:1-37
March 23	John 11:38-57
March 24	John 12:1-19

The *words* and *actions* of an authentic follower of Christ must align. A careful reading of this week's passages will reveal that Jesus and Judas Iscariot both demonstrate this reality. Jesus will provide us with an example (one of many from his life) of how to live as a "Kingdom citizen" while Judas Iscariot will succumb to a temptation that *anyone* may give in to; masking our selfish motives with selfless language.

John 10:19 reveals that opinions about Jesus varied greatly. Was he demon-possessed or was he divine? One could easily find testimonies among first-century Jews supporting both theories. Some would have heard Jesus say "The father and I are one" (John 10:30) and thought he was out of his mind for making a claim that would be grounds for immediate arrest and stoning. Jesus didn't utter these words without plenty of evidence to back them up. Taken together, John 10:25, 38 say that the truth of Jesus' words are proven by the work He does in the Father's name and that His miraculous works will help His listeners know and understand that He and the Father are one.

John 11 provides a timely example of Jesus' actions matching His words. Let's use Jesus' own words to summarize the chapter. Verse 14: "Lazarus is dead." Verse 23: "Your brother will rise again." Verse 43: "Lazarus, come out!" I don't think we can overstate the intensity of the emotions that must have overwhelmed the crowd when Lazarus came stumbling out of the tomb.

Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, must have been among the most grateful. John 12:3 indicates that Mary was so thankful that she used her hair to wash Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. The smell was so strong that it permeated the entire house capturing the attention of Judas Iscariot. "Why this waste?" asked Judas. "It should have been sold and the money given to the poor!" Those words *sound* noble enough, but John 12:6 reveals the true motive behind them. Judas was a thief and "wasting" expensive perfume to honor Jesus represented money that he would not be able to rob from the disciples to use for himself.

Use Psalm 139:23-24 as a prayer and ask the Lord to reveal areas where your words and actions are not lining up. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the courage and discipline to make the necessary changes to be more Christlike in those areas.

Mike Lewis
Operations

WEEK 13

March 26

March 27 John 12:20-50

March 28 John 13

March 29 John 14

March 30 John 15

March 31 John 16

Jesus is nearing the cross. These chapters in the Gospel of John take place with Jesus and his disciples in the upper room just hours before he was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane.

There are so many themes in these few chapters. In John 12, Jesus foreshadows his death as he connects it to his mission. In John 13, Jesus extravagantly serves the disciples as he washes their feet. In John 14, Jesus teaches that He is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. In John 15, Jesus uses the illustration of the vine and the branches to encourage his disciples to remain in the vine and to bear much fruit. John 16 points us toward the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Read these chapters slowly. Take time to reflect upon them throughout the day. Allow them to saturate your thinking. There is so much to absorb in these five chapters alone.

Observe the instruction that Jesus gave his disciples: “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will

know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
(John 13:34-35)

Be intentional in loving those around you. Love unconditionally. Love extravagantly. Love sacrificially and selflessly. Go and love well.

Sammy Elliott
Lead Pastor

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WEEK 14

April 2

April 3 John 17

April 4 John 18

April 5 John 19

April 6 John 20

April 7 John 21

The disciples were experienced fishermen. Their experience had taught them that tossing the net to the other side of the boat to achieve a better result was ridiculous! That is exactly what Jesus told them to do in John 21. The results Jesus had in mind for the disciples when He asked them to cast their net on the other side were amazing. Fishing doesn't usually work that way.

It would also seem foolish of Jesus to ask the most brash and outspoken disciple to be a tender shepherd and wise leader. But, by obeying Jesus, that is exactly what Peter became.

What has God called you to do that might seem foolish or doesn't fit your personality? Be obedient to God and see what can happen!

Dana Kluzek
Children

WEEK 15

April 9 Psalms of Praise

April 10	Psalm 8
April 11	Psalm 34
April 12	Psalm 100
April 13	Psalm 103
April 14	Psalm 145

David vows in Psalm 34:1 to praise the Lord at all times. We praise God when things are going good and when things are at their worst.

When we praise Jesus in good times and bad, this demonstrates our love for Jesus, and that we should trust Him in all our circumstances.

We are reminded in Psalm 103 that the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. He does not treat us as our sins deserve nor repay us according to our iniquities.

We have a God whose love and mercy we cannot fathom and we should follow the example of David in continually praising the Lord.

Janyth Brannon
Preschool

WEEK 16

April 16 Psalms of Wisdom

April 17	Psalm 1
April 18	Psalm 32
April 19	Psalm 112
April 20	Psalm 127-128
April 21	Psalm 133

What is our great delight? Are we considering carefully, as the psalmist did, who we associate with, what we stand for, and at which tables we recline?

There is a distinct difference here between those of wicked counsel, scoffing, and basking in their artificial success of sin, and those who find delight only in the law of the Lord. We are encouraged to take His instruction, counsel, and guidance and meditate on it through the day and through the night. Psalm 1 points us to what we dwell upon with our hearts, with our minds, and with our focus. Are we attempting to dwell in the dominion of destructive behavior, or are we seeking to plant deep roots in the truth of God's Word?

The blessed one who spends time focusing on the instruction of the Lord is like a man "planted by streams of water" where he continues to stay nourished, despite the season or the conditions. It yields fruitfulness and grows into much more without withering or tiring away.

No matter the season, we will find ourselves committing toward a life planted deeply in His Word and His Presence or

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toward an uprooted life among a broken and scattered world. Not every season “produces fruit,” but it does not mean the fruitful process is at a standstill. Delight begins with genuine yearning for truth not just a method. May we not seek to find satisfaction in the methods of the world around us, but instead pursue deeply the delight that is found in the law of the Lord.

Father God,
Would You reveal any habits that are causing us to spiral toward the reality where we exchange truth for sinful cravings. May our delight be in Your Presence and Word, deeply rooted in the only thing worth dwelling on.

Amen

Luke Kilmartin
Students

WEEK 17

April 23 Royal Psalms

April 24	Psalm 2
April 25	Psalm 45
April 26	Psalm 72
April 27	Psalm 101
April 28	Psalm 110

Psalm 72:19 captured my attention as I read this week's passages. It served as a good reminder that the Gospel was intended for every ethnic group on the planet. That has been true going all the way back to Genesis 12:3 where God promised Abraham that "all families on earth will be blessed through you." If we fast-forward to the end of the story we read in Revelation 7:9 that in heaven there is a "vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language."

If you are interested in learning more about each country's evangelization status as well as how you can pray for them, I highly recommend that you check out operationworld.org.

In Psalm 101 David provides us with a sound pattern of godly living. He begins by praising the Lord in verse 1, lives a life of integrity beginning at home in verse 2, and then in verse 6, he demonstrates wisdom by choosing to make faithful people his companions. How easily we could emulate David's example by regularly acknowledging the Lord's presence and provision in our lives, living out our faith in our circle of influence, and choosing fellow believers as our closest companions!

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Use Psalm 72:18-19 to craft a closing to your times of prayer this week. Mine goes like this: “Lord God, may you be praised; may your glorious name be praised forever!”

Mike Lewis
Operations