

2023
DEVOTIONAL
READING GUIDE



TAKE THE
NEXT
STEP

April 30 – Sept. 1, 2023 #2



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

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WEEK 18

April 30 Psalms of Thanksgiving

May 1	Psalm 23
May 2	Psalm 66
May 3	Psalm 92
May 4	Psalm 136
May 5	Psalm 146

As you read these psalms, take time to engage and live in the words of the psalmists. Psalm 66 begins with an all-out worship service of God. “Let the whole earth shout joyfully to God! Sing about the glory of his name, make his praise glorious. Say to God, ‘How awe-inspiring are your works!’” (66:1-3a)

The psalmist extends an invitation to the reader: “Come and see the wonders of God; His acts for humanity are awe-inspiring.” (66:5) He starts a list of all the things that God has done and offers his thanks and worship to God.

Finally, the psalmist ends by saying: “come and listen, all who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.” (66:16) The psalmist can’t help but tell others about His God and all that God has done for him.

Take some time to write down those things that you are grateful for. Reflect upon all that God has done for you, in you, and around you. Create a gratitude list.

Allow that gratitude list to drive your worship. Bring your thanksgiving and worship to God. If you have an

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opportunity, tell someone what God has done for you. Share your gratitude toward God with others.

Sammy Elliott
Lead Pastor

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WEEK 19

May 7 Psalms of Lament

May 8	Psalm 3
May 9	Psalm 13
May 10	Psalm 28
May 11	Psalm 55
May 12	Psalm 60

Trusting in God during difficult times can be especially hard. When you feel like everything is closing in on you and you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, God can provide you peace if you will just let Him.

The Bible says that God has a plan for us, but it doesn't say that things will always be easy. Psalm 3 speaks of being surrounded by enemies. It is exactly during those times that we need to focus on God the most. Satan will use those moments to distract us from God's plan if we let him.

Peace is a gift. We need to ask God for peace during the hard times and remember that He is in control.

Dana Kluzek
Children

WEEK 20

May 14

May 15	Proverbs 1
May 16	Proverbs 2
May 17	Proverbs 3
May 18	Proverbs 4
May 19	Proverbs 5

King Solomon teaches his son in the book of Proverbs to seek wisdom at all cost.

As parents, we have the privilege and responsibility of shaping our children into godly adults. It is the parents' obligation to teach and instruct their children to know who God is and to help them live a godly life that is pleasing to Him.

As part of the Family Ministry team at Bacon Heights, we do our part in coming alongside parents to help you with this. We love on your children and spend time pointing them to Jesus. We use some wonderful, hands-on curriculum to help them know who He is, that He loves them, and that they can put their trust in Him.

It is a privilege and an honor that we regard wholeheartedly as we walk this journey with you and your family!

Janyth Brannon
Preschool

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WEEK 21

May 21

May 22	Proverbs 6
May 23	Proverbs 7
May 24	Proverbs 8
May 25	Proverbs 9
May 26	Proverbs 10

Seeking wisdom and learning is an ever-constant pursuit. We must never stop seeking to nourish the mind, heart, and spirit. As Solomon shared from experience and a lifetime of observation, “teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.” (Proverbs 9:9)

Is there anything preventing us from seeking the Lord and His wisdom? Are there things in our daily lives that help us seek His knowledge, wisdom, and understanding and cultivate a heart of learning that is centered on humility? Do we live with a habit of continuous spiritual development?

Father God,

Thank You for the gift of instruction, learning, and the wisdom that You give us for daily living in faith. So often we have hampered our own growth by refusing to add learning to our pathways. Our reverence and fear of You reveals that what we think we know is insufficient. Fill us with wisdom, insight, and learning for the seasons and days ahead. May we be faithful to grow as You have called us to do.

Amen

Luke Kilmartin
Students

WEEK 22

May 28

May 29 Proverbs 11

May 30 Proverbs 12

May 31 Proverbs 13

June 1 Proverbs 14

June 2 Proverbs 15

The NIV Life Application Bible describes Proverbs as *a textbook for teaching people how to live godly lives through the repetition of wise thoughts*. As you read the passages for this week, you will certainly find this to be true. One of the concepts that we see repeated is that of the “fear of the Lord.” A proper understanding would be *reverential awe and respect for God*. It can also be explained as *a continual awareness that our loving heavenly Father is watching and evaluating everything we think, say, and do*.

With that definition in mind, Proverbs 15:16 (NLT) caught my attention: “Better to have little, with fear for the Lord than to have great treasure and inner turmoil.”

This is an example of a proverb that can be relatively simple to interpret. In essence, you and I are better off with less money and fewer possessions with an awareness of God’s presence (resulting in inner *peace*) than we would be with abundant money and possessions resulting in inner *turmoil*.

Is your life characterized more by inner peace or inner turmoil? If you answered “turmoil,” pray that the Lord would give you an accurate assessment of your relationship

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with your *physical* treasure and re-orient your life around *spiritual* treasure – the awareness that your loving heavenly Father resides within you and is eager to guide your every thought, word, and action.

Mike Lewis
Operations

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WEEK 23

June 4

June 5	Proverbs 16
June 6	Proverbs 17
June 7	Proverbs 18
June 8	Proverbs 19
June 9	Proverbs 20

There is no thematic collection of the proverbs. Each chapter and often each proverb stands on its own. However, in Proverbs 16-20, one topic continues to surface. Specifically, it is the use of our words for good or bad. Several of the proverbs in these chapters talk about gossip and lies while others emphasize honesty and the use of encouraging words that give life.

Think on this:

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” (18:21) Consider your words. Do the words you use give life or bring death? Do they lift up or tear down? There is POWER in our words. They can give hope, but they can also bring destruction.

How do you use your words? The writer of Proverbs 18:21 says that you will eat the fruit of the words you use.

Make it a priority this week to speak life into those around you: your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and even acquaintances. Use your words for good, not evil.

Sammy Elliott, Lead Pastor

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WEEK 24

June 11

June 12	Proverbs 21
June 13	Proverbs 22
June 14	Proverbs 23
June 15	Proverbs 24
June 16	Proverbs 25

Consider Proverbs 24:3. It is probably a familiar verse to most. In the International Children's Bible it reads like this: "It takes wisdom to have a good family. It takes understanding to make it strong."

Being in Children's Ministry for 25 years, I definitely understand the importance of the family. The family is the most important institution in the world. It existed before cities, governments, temples, and churches. It is in the home that children develop character, values, and goals. And in the home, they should learn about God.

Today, Satan is attacking the family as never before! As always, our best defense is the Word of God. What can you do to help your family be strong in the Lord? Use Deuteronomy 6:5-9 as your guide. Families are always busy these days! Take the time to figure out how you can use moments each day to teach your children or grandchildren about God. If your family works together and pursues God together, imagine how strong you will be!

Dana Kluzek
Children

WEEK 25

June 18

June 19	Proverbs 26
June 20	Proverbs 27
June 21	Proverbs 28
June 22	Proverbs 29
June 23	Proverbs 30

There are over thirty different topics talked about in these five chapters.

Proverbs tells us we need to look to God for wisdom and that fools reject godly wisdom. We are not to gossip or be a busybody. We are not to be boastful, arrogant, or prideful. We are not to be jealous or let our anger get out of control, nor should we become hot-tempered or speak hastily.

We are to be a faithful and trusted friend who speaks godly counsel into others. We are encouraged to find this same kind of friend because iron sharpens iron. We are to be selfless in giving our best to the Lord as we help those in need.

These chapters instruct us to be godly people who seek wisdom. Be encouraged and challenged this week to be a good friend and helper to everyone and live a life pleasing to God.

Janyth Brannon
Preschool

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WEEK 26

June 25

June 26	Proverbs 31
June 27	Galatians 1
June 28	Galatians 2
June 29	Galatians 3
June 30	Galatians 4

Approval can be a powerful tool in the reasons why people do what they do, think how they think, and pursue what they choose to pursue. There are certain things that sound or look spiritually savvy but have nothing to do with the gospel of Christ Jesus. Paul knew the church needed to be corrected and re-centered on the core - Jesus.

We are surrounded by things that sound spiritual but have nothing to do with Jesus. In all we do, may we keep our focus on Jesus, who is the good news (the gospel). In a distorted world so quick to turn away from truth, may we remember that our deliverance comes only through Christ, who is the truth.

Father God,
May we seek the approval of no one else
But Christ our God and King,
Knowing that the gospel is His good news
That brings us through every distorted thing.

Amen

Luke Kilmartin
Students

WEEK 27

July 2

July 3	Galatians 5
July 4	Galatians 6
July 5	Ephesians 1
July 6	Ephesians 2
July 7	Ephesians 3

In Galatians 5:17 Paul reveals that there are two opposing forces at work within us: the flesh and the Spirit. To complicate matters, they each have desires for us that are polar opposites. The flesh desires that we become involved in the sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21 and others similar to them. When we walk by the Spirit, however, our lives become characterized by a host of kingdom values: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23) As Christ’s followers, we have been born again and are destined for an eternity with God in heaven, yet in our time on earth there is a battle raging within us and the ones we love. There is perhaps no better weapon than prayer as we navigate a life that recognizes these forces at work within us.

These words from Paul were originally intended for the church in Ephesus but could easily be prayed for a family member, friend, or any group of people. Pray Ephesians 3:16-19 for a specific person each day this week. I would expect your prayer to look different, but here’s mine as an example:

“Lord, I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen my family with power through your Spirit...and I pray that they may each have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. May they experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Amen.”

Mike Lewis
Operations

WEEK 28

July 9

July 10	Ephesians 4
July 11	Ephesians 5
July 12	Ephesians 6
July 13	Philippians 1
July 14	Philippians 2

I love reading the letters written by the apostle Paul. There is so much to learn and to apply!

Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote Philippians. Joy is one of the main themes in this letter. Paul shares with the Philippians that his joy was still intact even while his circumstances were less than desirable.

Paul communicates his life's message and mission in Philippians 1:21, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Spend some time thinking about this verse: *To live is Christ*. Whether your circumstances are good or bad, this truth still has impact. My life is to live for Christ.

To paraphrase what Paul said, "And if worse comes to worst and I die (which was a real possibility for Paul in prison), then I will consider it gain. Death is an upgrade because I will finally be in the presence of my Savior Jesus Christ."

No wonder Paul was full of joy! While he was still breathing, he was living for Christ (and there is no one better to live for than Christ). And if he died, it was good because he would

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have finished his time here on earth and would get to spend eternity with his Lord and Savior, Jesus. So go live life with joy!

Sammy Elliott
Lead Pastor

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WEEK 29

July 16

July 17	Philippians 3
July 18	Philippians 4
July 19	Colossians 1
July 20	Colossians 2
July 21	Colossians 3

There is so much to be gleaned from all of the Bible readings this week! Many of these verses are familiar to all of us. God led me to focus on Colossians 2:9, “For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.” What an incredible truth! Think about it. The God of the universe took human form!

The familiar Christmas song, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” contains the words: *Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity.* If you want to know what God is like, then take a long look at Jesus because He was God in human flesh. He showed us God’s wisdom, power, majesty, justice, mercy, grace, and love! John 1 starts with “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.” Later, John 1:14 says “the Word became human and made his home among us.”

When kids ask me the question “What is God like?” I always point them to Jesus.

Dana Kluzek
Children

WEEK 30

July 23

July 24	Colossians 4
July 25	1 John 1
July 26	1 John 2
July 27	1 John 3
July 28	1 John 4

John wants us to experience meaningful, intimate fellowship with God through Jesus. He reminds us of several ways we can do this.

John tells us that God is light. Light exposes things to us. To have intimacy with God we must allow His light to expose our sin so we can repent and continue having intimate fellowship with Him.

If we claim to have fellowship with God but walk in darkness God calls us a liar. (1 John 1:6)

John also encourages us to apply the truth of God's word to our lives which enhances our fellowship and intimacy with God.

Janyth Brannon
Preschool

WEEK 31

July 30

July 31	1 John 5
August 1	2 John
August 2	3 John
August 3	1 Peter 1
August 4	1 Peter 2

Peter's charge to the scattered church was to recognize and stand firm in the living hope they had in Christ and to remain faithful to walk in holiness. How incredible that Peter's way of reminding the church to walk in hope was to point them back to Exodus 19. God's promise to the nation of Israel was that He would be their God, and they would be His people.

Sometimes, especially during difficult seasons and circumstances, it can be challenging to remember where our hope comes from. Like Peter's charge to the church who was dealing with persecution, hardship, and trouble, we are reminded that we are His people. The scattered church needed to be reminded that they belong to something and someone greater, and so do we.

Father God,
Thank You for calling us to be Your people,
Made to walk in holiness each day in all we face.
May we remember that we were called out of darkness
And into Your loving embrace.

Amen

Luke Kilmartin
Students

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WEEK 32

August 6

August 7	1 Peter 3
August 8	1 Peter 4
August 9	1 Peter 5
August 10	2 Peter 1
August 11	2 Peter 2

First Peter 3:15 (NIV) caught my attention as I prepared this week's devotion but not for the reason you might expect. I realized that for years I have neglected the first sentence in that verse and jumped ahead to the familiar "...always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have..." As it turns out, Peter packed a lot of meaning into the short phrase, "in your hearts revere Christ as Lord."

The word "heart" is used quite often in scripture. While we can make a case from scripture that we need to properly care for the organ that pumps blood through our bodies, that is not the most common meaning behind the word "heart" in the Bible. There are many ways we could describe it, but at this point in my journey as a Christian, I have come to summarize it as *the totality of one's inner being*.

We must also pause and have an accurate understanding of the word "Lord." When I encounter the word "Lord" in scripture I think in terms of *the one who has all power, authority, and control*.

So before we reach the part of 1 Peter 3:15 that calls for us to be ready to provide a logical defense of our faith, we are called to submit to Christ's complete control over our lives with the totality of our inner being. Yielding our lives to Christ in this way should better prepare us to act on the other commands from this chapter, among which are "...love one another, be compassionate and humble, and repay evil with blessing." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

Mike Lewis
Operations

WEEK 33

August 13

August 14	2 Peter 3
August 15	Genesis 1
August 16	Genesis 2
August 17	Genesis 3
August 18	Joshua 5:12-6:27

Have you ever started watching a movie at the midway point? Since you missed the beginning, you don't know the plot. Understanding the beginning gives context to the rest of the story.

Genesis 1-3 is the beginning of the story.

God is creator. He created the heavens and the earth and everything in the earth. Humanity was His prize creation and was created in His image.

In Genesis 2, we see a God who desires the best for humanity. It is not good for man to be alone. God went to work to alleviate this loneliness by creating a helper.

In Genesis 3, we see that God had a close relationship with Adam and Eve. He walked with them in the garden. Adam and Eve's rebellion against their Creator changed the relationship. Their relationship could now be described as distant. They were kicked out of the garden and were estranged from their Creator.

God created humanity for a relationship with himself.
Rebellion against God separated that relationship. From that point on, God set out to reconcile this broken relationship. Now you know the beginning of the story. Knowing that sure helps us follow the storyline of scripture.

Sammy Elliott
Lead Pastor

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WEEK 34

August 20

August 21	Judges 6
August 22	Judges 7
August 23	1 Samuel 17
August 24	1 Kings 18:16-46
August 25	Daniel 3

First Kings 18:16-46 tells the amazing story of Elijah challenging the prophets of Baal. Verse 22 says that Elijah was the only prophet of God left, but there were 450 prophets of Baal. Talk about being outnumbered! I think Elijah was definitely outnumbered, yet still he chose to follow only God. We see in the following verses the results of Elijah choosing to follow only God. He chose to follow God even in the face of danger and death.

What does that “following only God” attitude look like for us in everyday life? We may have good intentions, but sometimes we tend to let the influence of others take us down the wrong path.

Proverbs 1:10 is a good verse to focus on when we feel we are being tempted to follow the wrong path. “My child, if sinners entice you, turn your back on them!”

Dana Kluzek
Children

WEEK 35

August 27

August 28 Mark 1

August 29 Mark 2

August 30 Mark 3

August 31 Mark 4

September 1 Mark 5

Mark takes us on a journey as Jesus teaches His disciples about His identity and character, and what it looks like to follow Him.

Jesus is the pure essence of discipleship, leadership, and service. Jesus wanted His disciples to follow Him exclusively and to bring everything they had in life to Him. He wants us to do the same.

The first part of the vision of Bacon Heights is to FOLLOW. We refer to Luke 5:5 when Jesus asked Simon to let down his nets. Even though Simon had worked all night fishing without catching anything, Simon answered Jesus, "But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

We are to be ready and willing to follow Jesus whenever and wherever He asks.

Janyth Brannon
Preschool

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