



THE BIBLE



ANNUAL FOCUS

September 2019–September 2020

WILLIAMSBURG COMMUNITY CHAPEL

Annual Focus:

The Bible: God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center.

Key Passage:

Deuteronomy 31:9-13

Description the Focus:

In one of Moses' final acts as the leader of God's people, he gave instructions to those who would be responsible for leadership in Israel after his death. He instructed them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing" (Deuteronomy 31:10-11). Moses goes on to make it clear that the broadest possible audience should be included in this exercise, "Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns" (Deuteronomy 31:12a). .. Finally, he tells everyone why he is making this mandate as one of his final acts before his death, "... that they may hear, learn to fear the LORD your God and be careful to do all the words of this law. . ." (Deuteronomy 31:12b). In other words, Moses wants to ensure long after he is gone that all of God's people, at least every seven years, are offered an opportunity to listen to, learn from, and live by God's Word.

From September of 2019 through the beginning of September of 2020, the Chapel family will assemble to listen to God's Word from Genesis to Revelation. We will learn from more than 40 authors, who wrote 66 books, over 1500 years telling one unified message: God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus Christ at the center. We will live by God's Word, considering each week how to put Jesus at the center of our lives and live as new creations in Him.

Finally, may we see ourselves as part of the Bible's story. God's redemptive work, to which the Bible witnesses, continues today, and we get to be a part of that work. So let us fully embrace the heart of why Moses gave this command to God's people, that those "... who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God. . ." (Deuteronomy 31:13a), and in so doing, may we all find Jesus Christ not just at the center of the Bible, but at the center of our lives, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Origins of the Focus:

During my [Travis'] 2017 Sabbatical, I used a reading plan designed by 19th century Scottish minister Robert Murray M'Cheyene to make sure I was in God's Word each day. One day, I came across a passage of Scripture with which I was wholly unfamiliar: Deuteronomy 31:9-13. In this passage, Moses makes it clear that after God's people enter the land God promised and settle in its various regions, they must assemble in one place every seven years to review all that God revealed to them in the Law. I made a note in my Bible on that very day to figure out a way to apply this instruction as a church.

As I spoke with the elders about this passage of Scripture and my desire to apply it one day in my pastoral ministry, we agreed that the time was right and certainly in line with Moses' instructions to set this year apart to listen to, learn from, and live by the whole Bible as God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption and new creation with Jesus Christ at the center.

Pastoral Perspective on the Focus:

Even as our society has become increasingly secular and the number of people who identify as "nones" (those who claim to have no faith) is growing, interest in the Bible continues to be high. This should not surprise us as we read in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God has "... put eternity into man's heart . . ." In his book, *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor argues that "echoes of eternity" continue to ring loudly in our culture's collective ears. Questions of ultimate meaning, purpose, and justice persist in our culture and people want to know how the Bible addresses these topics. This reality demonstrates the study of the Bible as an *evangelistic* opportunity.

As a church we believe, "In the inspiration of all the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit, and that they are the final authority for our faith and practice" (The Chapel's Statement of Faith). Yet, even with this high view of the Bible, we all know our understanding of the Bible, its structure, content, and application needs deepening. We need to grow to "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only," as James 1:22 instructs. This reality demonstrates the study of the Bible as a *discipleship* opportunity.

Finally, "getting people into God's Word and God's Word into people" has always been a hallmark of the Chapel. This year's Annual Focus coincides with the second year of a three-year journey we are calling the *Next 40 Campaign*. The goal of the *Next 40 Campaign* is to move *everyone together* in the direction Jesus has always called His church, toward deeper engagement in His mission in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Taking a year to focus on what has always been central to the Chapel's approach to ministry will help unify our congregation and demonstrate a real commitment to move into the future

with an *everyone together* approach to our life as a family of faith. This reality demonstrates the study of the Bible as a *unifying* opportunity.

Goal(s):

The entire Chapel family would listen to, learn from, and live by God’s Word as revealed in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and share God’s story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center with others.

- The entire Chapel family would be able to share the story of the Bible in five seconds (know the title to the Annual Focus).
- Most of the Chapel family would be able to share the story of the Bible in five minutes (know how the books of the Bible are grouped into sections, the big idea for each section, and its outline).
- A large segment of the Chapel family would be able to share the story of the Bible in 50 minutes (know how the books of the Bible are grouped into sections, the big idea for each section, its outline, and the basic content the outline represents).

ANNUAL FOCUS RESOURCES:

Chapel-wide Small Group Study:

- ***The Essential 100, Scripture Union***
Each fall we ask everyone who calls the Chapel their church home to engage in a Chapel-wide small group study. *The Essential 100* was developed by Scripture Union President Whitney T. Kuniholm. He longed for a way to connect his kids to the Bible and started developing a short list of “essential passages” for them to read. That list continued to expand to 100 passages that tell the grand narrative and message of God’s Word. This year’s Chapel-wide study will help us *begin* to listen to, learn from, live by, and discuss in community foundational stories from the Bible. The word “begin” is used intentionally. Our hope is that many will choose to keep reading through the entire list of 100 stories to help complement and fill in the gaps between what we study during Sunday morning worship.
- bible.com/reading-plans/25-the-essential-100

Chapel Resources:

- wcchapel.org/annualfocus
Moses commands God’s people to gather and read through the whole Law every seven years (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). In order to cover the whole Bible in one year, this year’s Annual Focus will look at the big picture, grand narrative arc of Scripture. But over the past seven years the Chapel family has studied almost every

section of the Bible already! On this website you will find many of our previous sermon series organized in a helpful way so that anyone can dig deeper into any section of the Bible.

- **Deuteronomy 31 Forums**

Throughout the year we will host opportunities for more discussion when we come to particularly difficult sections of Scripture.

- **The Cutting Room Floor: Deuteronomy 31 Edition**

Chapel staff will produce at least one episode per month in audio and video format to talk about things that were not covered in the Sunday morning worship services, walk through important stories, and dive deeper into key themes from each section of the Bible.

- **Mini Bible College: mbc.icm.org**

Developed by the Chapel's late Pastor Emeritus Dick Woodward, the Mini Bible College consists of more than 215 audio lessons supported by printed booklets. Dick's teachings emphasize both a devotional and practical application of God's Word. The Mini Bible College has been translated into 31 languages and is currently being used around the world to broadcast God's truth. Mini Bible College lessons can be accessed by visiting <http://mbc.icm.org> or by downloading the Mini Bible College app on your mobile device.

Other Resources:

- **CASKET EMPTY: *God's Plan of Redemption through History***, Carol M. Kaminski and David L. Palmer

A wonderfully clear, compelling, and memorable way to understand the grand narrative of the Bible with Jesus at the center. This two-volume set of books offers a more thematic approach to walking through the entire Bible that complements our Annual Focus' "table of contents" approach.

- ***The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name***, Sally Lloyd-Jones

A walk through foundational Bible stories for Children. This is a great resource for parents who are looking to engage pre-school and elementary age children with the Bible.

- ***The Gospel of our King: Bible, Worldview, and the Mission of Every Christian***, Bruce Riley Ashford and Heath A. Thomas

A simple, brief, and accurate overview of the Bible and its implications for missional living.

- ***The Book of God: The Bible as a Novel***, Walter Wangerin

An adaption of the Bible as a novel to aid in reading large portions

of the Bible with an understanding of the compelling story line of Scripture.

QUOTES:

What the Bible says about the Bible:

- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).
- “I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word (Psalm 138:2).”
- “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).
- “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Helpful perspective while reading:

- “The more you compare Scripture with Scripture, the more the meaning of the Bible becomes apparent. The parts take on meaning in light of the whole...although we have about forty different human authors, the sixty-six books are ultimately the result of one primary Author, the Holy Spirit, who coordinated the entire message. His Book is integrated. It hangs together.”
—Howard Hendricks, *Living by the Book*
- “The goal of Bible study is not simply to determine what it says and what it means, but rather to apply it to one’s life. If we fail to apply the Scriptures, we cut short the entire process and have not finished what God wants us to do...Heart appropriation, not merely head apprehension, is the true goal of Bible study. Only in this way can believers grow spiritually.”
—Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*

HOW TO ORGANIZE AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE IN A YEAR:

While there are many ways to structure an overview of the Bible in a year, the approach to this Annual Focus emphasizes the structure of the Bible as it has been, through God's Providence, arranged, preserved, and passed on by the Church. In other words, as opposed to a chronological or thematic approach, the Bible's table of contents plays the key role in the outline of this Annual Focus along with the working definition of the Bible as God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center.

Using the table of contents as a guide the Bible has been arranged according to the following outline – OT: 5, 12, 5, 5, 12; NT: 4, 1, 21, 1.

The Old Testament (5, 12, 5, 5, 12)

- 5 Books of Torah, 12 Books of History, 5 Books of Poetry and Wisdom, 5 Major Prophets, 12 Minor Prophets

The New Testament (4, 1, 21, 1)

- 4 Gospels, 1 Book of History, 21 Letters, 1 Book of Revelation

Each section of books will comprise a sermon series, with the Major and Minor Prophets being combined into one series (both sections cover approximately the same historical time period and deal with similar subject matter: what led to the exile(s), life in exile, the return from exile, and expectations for the future).

Each section of books will receive a title and an outline to give us “handles” with which we can grab on to the big idea of each section as well as its major themes.

- The outlines will attempt to show where the section starts and ends, along with the major events that transpired or the major figures God used along the way.
- The outlines will follow the pattern, “*From ____ to ____ through ____.*”

Outline for the year:

After an introduction from Deuteronomy 31:9-13 we will move through eight sermon series:

I. 5 Books of Torah: *God creates the universe and calls a people.*

- *From creation and rebellion to the edge of the Promise Land through Abraham's family, Exodus and wilderness*

II. 12 Books of History: *God forms His people into a nation.*

- *From the Promise Land to God's faithfulness in a foreign land through judges, prophets, kings, and the temple*

III. 5 Books of Poetry and Wisdom: *God provides wisdom for everyday life.*

- *From life's big questions to the celebration of true love through praise, instruction, and the search for meaning*

IV. 5 Books of Major Prophets and 12 Books of Minor Prophets: *God Speaks to His people in trouble.*

- *From rebellion to expectation through exile and restoration*

V. 4 Gospels: *God takes on flesh and dwells with His people.*

- *From expectation to redemption through Jesus Christ*

VI. 1 Book of History: *God sends His people on mission.*

- *From persecution in Jerusalem to proclamation in Rome through the power of the Holy Spirit*

VII. 21 Letters: *God calls His people into community in the Church.*

- *From announcing the Gospel to defending the Gospel through applying the Gospel to every aspect of life.*

VIII. 1 Book of Revelation: *God triumphs over evil to live with His people forever.*

- *From challenges in the Church to the new creation through evil's ultimate defeat*

SERMON SERIES DATES AND DESCRIPTIONS:

ANNUAL FOCUS KICK OFF

September 8: *The Bible* – Deuteronomy 31:9-13

SERIES 1

9/15-11/3 (8 weeks)

5 Books of Torah:

God creates the universe and calls a people.

From creation and rebellion to the edge of the Promise Land through Abraham's family, Exodus, and wilderness

The Hebrew word, "Torah," literally means "Instruction." The Torah is instruction for living in God's world. These instructions include narrative, poetry, and laws. In light of this section of Scripture containing many of God's commandments, the word "Torah" has also been translated as "Law." However, while law giving is one theme of the Torah, its contents are much broader than lists of laws. As the first section of books in the Bible, it holds the keys to understanding the Bible as a whole. As a book's ending often makes sense only in light of its beginning, so the conclusion of the Bible can only be understood if one understands the Torah.

In the Torah, God creates the universe and calls a people. God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center moves *from* creation and rebellion *to* the edge of the Promise Land *through* Abraham's family, Exodus, and wilderness. We see Jesus at the center of story as the Apostle Paul writes that the law contained in the Torah was meant to preserve God's people for Jesus' arrival, "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came" (Galatians 3:24). He is the offspring of the woman who bruises the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). He is the one through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

September 15: *Creation and Rebellion* – Genesis 1:1-2:3

September 22: *Abraham's Family* – Genesis 15:1-21

September 29: *Joseph's Story* – Genesis 37:1-28

October 6: *The Exodus* – Exodus 1:8-10, 2:23-3:14

October 13: *Israel at Mt. Sinai* – Exodus 19:16-20, 20:1-17

October 20: *The Day of Atonement* – Leviticus 16:1-22

October 27: In the Wilderness – Numbers 13:17-33

November 3: Moses' Final Instructions – Deuteronomy 1:1-8, 30:1-10

SERIES 2

11/10-12/29 (8 weeks)

12 Books of History:

God's forms His people into a nation.

*From the Promise Land to God's faithfulness in a foreign land
through judges, prophets, kings, and the temple*

The Historical Books provide a “God’s eye” perspective on the history of God’s people, Israel. These books span an approximately 1,000-year time period. They cover the history of and provide historical context for everything that follows them in the Old Testament. These books show how God works through ordinary events and how God supernaturally breaks into the natural world. Whether God uses ordinary or extraordinary means, the Historical Books are clear: God is powerfully at work in history for God’s redemptive purposes. Though Israel suffers defeat as it attempts to inhabit the Promise Land, though Israel’s culture spirals downward under the leadership of Judges, though God’s people reject God as their true King, though wicked rulers are enthroned as kings and queens, though foreign armies deport God’s people, though the temple is destroyed and, even when God’s name is not mentioned as Esther attempts to save God’s people in Persian exile, the narrative stresses this point at every turn: this remains God’s story. It is all His-story.

In the Historical Books, we see God form His people into a nation. God’s story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center moves *from* the Promise Land *to* God’s faithfulness in a foreign land, *through* judges, prophets, kings, and the building, destruction, and rebuilding of the temple. We see Jesus as the center of the story as the true Rest the Promise Land was intended to offer (Hebrews 4:1). He is the True King that is to reign over the everlasting Kingdom God promised to Israel’s king David (2 Samuel 7:13). When Jesus died on the cross the curtain of the temple, which separated the dwelling place of God’s presence from the world, was torn from top to bottom so that all those who place their faith in Him might become the true picture of God’s presence that the temple only foreshadowed, “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

November 10: *Entering the Promise Land* – Joshua 1:1-11

November 17: *Israel Defeated* – Joshua 7:1-13

November 24 – **Series Break:** *Eastside Sunday*

December 1: **1st Sunday of Advent:** *Waiting for the King: Judges and Ruth* – Matthew 1:1-5; Ruth 1:1-18

December 8: **2nd Sunday of Advent:** *Waiting for the King: Saul and David* – Matthew 1:6; 1 Samuel 8:1-22

December 15: **3rd Sunday of Advent:** *Waiting for the King: Solomon to Asaph* – Matthew 1:6-7; 1 Kings 3:1-15

December 22: *Waiting for the King: Josiah to Exile* – Matthew 1:8-11; 2 Kings 22:1-20

December 24 – **Christmas Eve Services:** *Waiting for the King: The True King Arrives* – Matthew 2:1-15

December 29: Guest Speaker – Michael Simone

SERIES 3

1/5-2/2 (5 weeks)

5 Books of Poetry and Wisdom:

God provides wisdom for everyday life

From life's big questions to the celebration of true love through praise, instruction, and the search for meaning

The Books of Wisdom and Poetry show God's people grappling with humanity's most difficult questions, profoundest longings and highest aspirations. Their content transcends cultures and historical context to deal directly with the concerns of the universal human condition. The Hebrew word for wisdom is connected to the concept of skill. Wisdom has been defined as, "the art of skilled living" (Bruce Waltke). These books were written to instruct people who are struggling to live well, worship well, love well, suffer well, or die well. They reveal a better way, a more prudent way, a wiser way – God's way.

The primary method wisdom literature uses to instruct God's people is poetry. Hebrew poetry is often crafted with parallel lines that ask the reader to consider the relationship between the two lines and come to a fuller understanding of their meaning when read together. From this we see that embedded in the very style of writing deployed by the authors of biblical wisdom literature is a challenge to ask a lot of questions. Wisdom literature invites us to think slowly and carefully about what we are reading and to reflect on its message in relation to our lived personal

experience through the prism of God's wisdom. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Proverbs 9:10).

In the Books of Wisdom and Poetry, we see God provide wisdom for everyday life. God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation, with Jesus at the center moves *from* life's biggest questions to the celebration of true love *through* praise, instruction, and the search for meaning. We see Jesus at the center of the story as the personification of Wisdom through whom God created the world (Proverbs 8:22-31 and John 1:1-4). He is the One worthy of the hallelujahs that end each section of the Psalms and the great five psalm hallelujah to close out the entire book (Psalm 146-150). He is the One in whom our souls find their True Love (Song of Solomon 3:4). And He is the One who was faithful through greater suffering than Job. Though Job trusted in the face of death, Jesus trusted to the point of death, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15).

January 5: *The Mystery of Suffering* – Job 2:7-3:1

January 12: *A Song for the Sabbath* – Psalm 92

January 19: *The Art of Skilled Living* – Proverbs 1:1-7

January 26: *The Search for Meaning* – Ecclesiastes 1:1-15

February 2: *True Love* – Song of Solomon 2:16-3:5; 4:15-5:1; 8:6-7

SERIES 4

2/9-26 (3 weeks)

5 Books of Major Prophets and 12 Books of Minor Prophets:

God Speaks to His people in trouble.

From rebellion to expectation through exile and restoration

The Prophetic Books tell God's people the truth when they are in danger. They call God's people to repentance as the only viable option in the face of sin. In the midst of war, national collapse, social breakdown, famine, and all varieties of human sin at its worst, the Prophetic Books proclaim God's promises and faithfulness. Walter Brueggeman summarizes their message in three words, "Reality, grief, and hope." These books reveal to God's people the reality of the painful situation in which they find themselves along with how they arrived at such a desolate place spiritually and physically. They plead with God's people to grieve over their sin and repent, turning back to God who has never turned from them. Finally, they unwaveringly proclaim the hope that God will restore His people, execute ultimate justice, and defeat their enemies.

While it can be overwhelming to try to keep track of the various dates for biblical figures and events, two dates are key to understanding what we read in the Prophetic Books: 722 B.C. and 586 B.C. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians defeated the northern ten tribes comprising the kingdom of Israel and sent God's people into exile throughout their empire. In 586 B.C., the Babylonians completed their conquest of the tribe of Judah, the remnant of God's people that comprised the southern kingdom. The Babylonians destroyed God's temple and sent a major portion of Judah's society into exile in Babylon. The Prophetic Books fall into three broad historical categories: before the exile, during the exile, and after the exile. When reading the Prophetic Books it is helpful to ask the question, what is the situation the prophet is addressing? Are they speaking to people before the exile, urging them to understand the reality of their situation? Are they speaking to people during the exile, helping them to grieve over their sin and repent? Are they speaking to people after the exile, offering hope that God will indeed fully restore what was lost?

In the Prophetic Books, we see God speak to His people in trouble. God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center moves *from* rebellion *to* expectation *through* exile and restoration. We see Jesus at the center of the story as the One who prophets declared would enter fully into the reality of our trouble, "...there came one like a son of man" (Daniel 7:13). He is the one who knows ultimate grief, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief..." (Isaiah 53:3), since he endured the ultimate exile, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Finally, Jesus is the fulfillment of the hope the prophets held out before God's people for restoration. He is the Leader born in Bethlehem that would defeat God's enemies (Micah 5:1-5). He is the One who establishes the new covenant with God's people, written not on tablets of stone, but on their hearts, and in Him all people may know God (Jeremiah 31:31-40). Jesus Christ is the one Isaiah told us about when he wrote, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

February 9: *Before the Exile: Isaiah* – Isaiah 6:1-13

February 16: *During the Exile: Ezekiel* – Ezekiel 1:1-3; 37:1-14

February 23: *After the Exile: Zechariah* –

Zechariah 9:9-12; 11:12-13; 12:10-13:1, 7-9

February 26 – Ash Wednesday: *How?* – Lamentations 1:1-3

SERIES 5: LENT
3/3-4/12 (7 weeks)

4 Gospels: *God takes on flesh and dwells with His people.*
From expectation to redemption through Jesus Christ

The Gospels report the good news that God has come to rescue His people in Jesus Christ. Our English word “gospel” is derived from the Greek word for “an announcement of good news” that was often a royal proclamation about a ruler’s sovereignty over a kingdom. The Gospels announce that Jesus is the world’s True King. They describe what life in His kingdom looks like. They call people to follow Jesus the King through a process called discipleship. They make it clear that discipleship is not a personal matter alone but that all disciples participate in the mission of the King. Disciples do not merely read the Gospels, they become announcers of the gospel themselves by reflecting life in the kingdom in all they do and inviting others to trust Jesus’ Lordship in their lives. The Gospels culminate with Jesus’ death and resurrection. The King takes on all the forces of darkness and chaos that have wrecked humanity since the third chapter of Genesis. The King offers His life on behalf of His people. He defeats evil, sin, and their ultimate consequence, death, through His resurrection so that all who place their lives under His Lordship through faith may live a new life in Him.

The Gospels tell the same story from four different viewpoints. While each account of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and commissioning of His disciples contains a variety of important themes and points of emphasis, it is helpful to know the main thrust of each book as one reads:

- *Matthew* is the Gospel of teaching. When reading Matthew look for large sections of Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom. There are five of them, (Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25) to draw the reader’s attention back to the five books of Torah and show that one greater than Moses has arrived!
- *Mark* is the Gospel of action. When reading Mark look for the word, “immediately,” and watch Jesus as He acts out what life in the Kingdom is all about.
- *Luke* is the Gospel of songs and stories. The early chapters of Luke reveal people responding to Jesus’ arrival with joyful song. Later in Luke, we read more parables than any other Gospel. A parable is a short story meant to tease the mind into active thought and reflection about God’s Kingdom. When reading Luke, slow down when you reach a song or a story. Pause and consider the joy that comes from knowing the King of kings. Take time and allow Jesus’ stories to tease your mind into active thought and reflection on His Kingdom.

- *John* is the Gospel of signs. John's Gospel tells us what happened during the life of Jesus, why it happened, and what it means. He repeatedly speaks of "signs" that point to the meaning and purpose behind the actual events of the Gospel. Just like you would while hiking a trail, when you see a "sign" in John's Gospel, ask yourself: *To what does this sign point?* What is John trying to communicate about the meaning of what is happening and why it must happen this way? One note: John identifies the first two signs and then wants you to keep your eyes peeled for the rest on your own.

In the Gospels, we see God take on flesh and dwell with His people. God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation moves *from* expectation to redemption *through* Jesus Christ, the center of the whole biblical story! Matthew, Mark, and John all begin with references to Genesis, the first book of the Bible. This is intentional to show that all you have read up to this point, from creation and fall to exile and expectation for restoration is about to be fulfilled in Jesus. The Gospel of Luke begins and ends in the temple pointing to Jesus as the living embodiment of God's presence come to His people. Matthew takes a break 12 times in the narrative to make sure the reader knows that what Jesus does fulfills what is in the Old Testament, and in Luke 24:27, we see Jesus plainly tell the disciples that the Bible is all about Him, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). At the center of the Gospel of Mark is the profession of Jesus as the Christ or Messiah, the long-awaited anointed King descended from David to whom God promised, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). And John makes sure we know what happens when we place our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, "that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

March 1: *Matthew's Gospel of Teaching* – Matthew 5:1-20

March 8: *Mark's Gospel of Action* – Mark 1:1-45

March 15: *Luke's Gospel of Stories* – Luke 10:25-37

March 22: *John's Gospel of Signs* – John 6:1-15

March 29: *The Bread of Life* – John 6:22-71

April 5 – Palm Sunday: *The Triumphal Entry* – John 12:9-26

April 9 – Maundy Thursday: John 13:1-15; Luke 22:14-23

April 10 – Good Friday: John 18:1-14

April 12 – Easter: *Back to the Garden* – John 19:41-20:18

SERIES 6
4/19-5/3 (3 weeks)

1 Book of History: *God sends His people on mission.*
*From persecution in Jerusalem to proclamation in Rome
through the power of the Holy Spirit*

The book of Acts tells the story of how the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed in the Gospels continues to be established through the power of the Holy Spirit by Jesus' followers on mission in a new historical movement called "The Church." Acts is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. At the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus' disciples are instructed to wait in Jerusalem until they are "clothed with power from on high." In the first chapter of Acts, Jesus' disciples ask Jesus when the kingdom will be restored to Israel; that is, after all, what all pious Jews in the first century believed the Messiah would do. It is at this point that Jesus informs them that the reason they are waiting in Jerusalem is not so that the kingdom may be restored in Jerusalem, but that from Jerusalem, His Kingdom might reach the whole world, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The disciples had Israel and Jerusalem as its capital on their minds, while Jesus had the end of the earth on His.

Luke uses Jesus' geographic paradigm for how the Kingdom will spread as a way to organize and outline his writing. The action starts off in Jerusalem with the birth of the church (chapters 1-8). Persecution moves the mission to Judea and Samaria (chapters 9-12). The church then begins to send missionaries throughout the Roman Empire to be Jesus' witnesses just as he promised they would be. Ultimately, the mission reaches the symbolic end of the earth as a convert to the movement named Paul is arrested for his witness about Jesus and sent to Rome for trial (chapters 13-28). Although by the end of the book it appears the witness has reached the end of the earth in Rome, the abrupt ending of Acts makes the reader wonder if the story is really over. Luke's hope is that everyone who reads the sequel to his Gospel will ask, "How can I be Jesus' witness in my Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and even to the end of the earth?"

In the book of Acts, we see God send His people on mission. God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center moves *from* persecution in Jerusalem *to* proclamation in Rome *through* the power of the Holy Spirit. We see Jesus at the center of the story because Luke tells us right from the beginning that his Gospel was what Jesus "...began to do and teach" (Acts 1:2). What follows is everything Jesus continues to do through His disciples and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself makes this clear when He knocks Saul of Tarsus, who would

become the Apostle Paul, to the ground and says, “I am Jesus who you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5).

April 19: *The Witness of Philip* – Acts 8:26-40

April 26: *The Witness of Peter* – Acts 10:1-43

May 3: *The Witness of Paul* – Acts 17:16-34

SERIES 7

5/10 – 7/19 (11 weeks)

21 Letters: *God calls His people into community in the Church.*

*From announcing the Gospel to defending the Gospel
through applying the Gospel to every aspect of life*

The 21 Letters in the New Testament are the explanation and application of the Gospel for the earliest churches and believers. Like letters today, the Bible’s Letters were the personal communication between one person or group and another. Unlike letters today, however, the letters we find in the New Testament contained such clarity in their explanation of the Gospel, and such insight in their application of the Gospel, that people could discern that these were more than human compositions. They understood that in addition to everything that came before in the Old Testament, these too were “breathed out by God” (1 Timothy 3:16). Churches began to circulate the letters, and they were ultimately recognized as the authoritative witness to true life in Christ and life in the church together.

Each of the 21 letters in the New Testament addresses a different audience or issue in the church. As you read, look for clues as to whom the author is addressing and ask, “what are the problems that have arisen in the community?” This will help you apply the letter accurately to your life, church, or the world today. (A good study Bible can be a valuable tool to assist you as you read. The *ESV Global Study Bible* is available free online). Though the 21 letters are written by six different authors (Paul, the unknown author of Hebrews, James, Peter, John, and Jude) to more than a dozen church communities, there are key themes that appear again and again throughout this section of the Bible: That God has made us alive in Christ through faith. Our lives must reflect that God has made us alive in Christ through obedient, transformed living. Jesus has united us with Himself and other believers in the church. When we know Jesus, we can suffer well and even experience joy in all circumstances. Right teaching is necessary for right living and healthy churches and therefore the Gospel must always be guarded and defended. The church is Jesus’ Body, Bride,

and Household in the world, and it requires a great deal of effort to express that reality clearly to a watching world.

In the Letters, we see God call His people into community in the Church. God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center moves *from* announcing the Gospel to defending the Gospel *through* applying the Gospel to every aspect of life. We see Jesus at the center of the story as each letter is dripping with instruction regarding right thinking about Jesus and right living because of Jesus. The Apostle Paul brings these two great themes in all the biblical letters together when he writes, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:3-8).

May 10: *Paul's Priorities: The Gospel* – Romans 1:1-17

May 17: *Paul's Priorities: Dealing with Differences* – Ephesians 2:11-21

May 24: *Paul's Priorities: Waiting Well* – 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

May 31: *Paul's Priorities: Reconciled Relationships* - Philemon 1-25

June 7: *Hebrews Snapshot – Part I: "The Heir of All Things"* – Hebrews 1:1-14

June 14: *Hebrews Snapshot – Part II: "By Faith"* – Hebrews 11:1-16

June 21: *Snapshot of James – Part I: "Doers of the Word"* –
James 1:19-27

June 28: *Snapshot of James – Part II: "Humble Yourselves"* – James 1:19-27

July 5: *Snapshot of 1 Peter: "A Living Hope"* – 1 Peter 1:3-12

July 12: *Snapshot of 1 John: "God is Love"* – 1 John 4:7-21

July 19: *Snapshot of Jude: "Contend for the Faith"* – Jude 1-24

SERIES BREAK
7/26-8/2 (2 weeks)

July 26: Student Ministry Missions Experience

August 2: VBS Sunday

SERIES 8
8/9-9/6 (5 weeks)

1 Book of Revelation:
God triumphs over evil to live with His people forever.
*From challenges in the Church to the new creation
through evil's ultimate defeat*

The book of Revelation is a disclosure of history's final outcome so that believers and the Church may view the present moment in light of the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises. The Greek which the author of Revelation (John) uses to describe its contents is *apokalypsis* from which we get our English word "apocalypse". The Greek term means "disclosure or unveiling". In Revelation, we see the unveiling of the Messiah's return, heaven and earth re-united, and the new creation that finally and completely establishes the Kingdom of God about which Jesus preached.

Due to its prophetic nature and heavy use of symbolism, Revelation has always been a challenge for believers to understand. However, we must remember that all of God's Word is "profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16). God did not give us a book to confuse us. Rather, though the imagery takes work to unpack, God structured the visions in a clear outline so that every reader could follow the plot line of God's story till the end of time and into eternity through the repetition of the number "7." In the Bible seven symbolizes completeness or perfection, as in the seven days of God's perfect creation. As God brings history to its perfect conclusion, we encounter seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Along with an introduction and the conclusion of the whole biblical story, these "sevens" give you handles to grab on to any part of Revelation and know what you are reading. As you read Revelation, look for the repetition of the number 7 and when you encounter it, slow down and consider the symbolism of what comes next.

In the one Book of Revelation, we see God triumph over evil to live with His people forever. God's story of creation, rebellion, redemption, and new creation with Jesus at the center moves *from* challenges in the Church to the new creation *through* evil's ultimate defeat. We see Jesus at the center of the story for it is only Jesus, portrayed as the lamb who was slain, who is worthy to open the seventh seal of God's scroll. The wedding feast of Jesus, again represented as the lamb, takes place at the culmination of history at the dawn of the new creation. And it is Jesus to whom the final petition of the entire Bible is addressed, "Amen, come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)

August 9: *The Seven Churches* – Revelation 1:1-29

August 16: *The Seven Seals* – Revelation 4:1-2; 5:1-6:1

August 23: *The Seven Trumpets* – Revelation 8:6-13

August 30: *The Seven Bowls* – Revelation 16:1-21

September 6: *The New Heaven and the New Earth* – Revelation 21:1-16



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