# The Church Grows ROOTED ACT VII

As we continue reading through the Bible this year, we've come to Rooted: Act VII. This is a reflection guide to accompany the Act VII reading plan and sermon series focused on the Apostle Paul's journeys around the Roman Empire and his correspondence to the people in churches that form these communities.

Over the next five weeks, if you miss a day, just pick up where you left off or skip ahead. Keep going! It is good to be on this journey together.

# The point isn't to accomplish a task; the point is to spend meaningful time in Scripture.

The Bible is the living word of God, meant to shape us as we read it. Full of thought-provoking and life-changing material, the redemptive arc of the Bible points to the core message: that a man, Jesus, who was fully God, came to live among us, die on our behalf, and rise in a cosmic act of love and redemption so that we can have a restored relationship with God and others. We believe He will return to bring the culmination of His hope for His people and creation. The Church around the world lives this hope together in community.

Find out how to go deeper in your faith this season:



CHURCHBCC.ORG/ROOTED

# **DAILY READING GUIDE**

MAY 19 - JUNE 22

### THAT YOUR LOVE MAY OVERFLOW

🗆 May 19	Sunday Worship
🗆 May 20	Acts 16
🗆 May 21	Acts 17:10-34
🗆 May 22	Philippians 1
🗆 May 23	Philippians 2
🗆 May 24	Philippians 3
🗆 May 25	Philippians 4

### WEEK 4 SUSTAINED LIVING

□ June 9Sunday Worship□ June 10Acts 24, 25□ June 11Acts 26, 27□ June 12Colossians 1□ June 13Colossians 2□ June 14Colossians 3□ June 15Colossians 4

### WEEK 2

WEEK 1

### LIVING THE SHARED STORY

🗆 May 26	Sunday Worship
🗆 May 27	Acts 18, 19
🗆 May 28	Acts 20, Ephesians 1
🗆 May 29	Ephesians 2, 3
□ May 30	Ephesians 4
🗆 May 31	Ephesians 5
🗆 June 1	Ephesians 6

## WEEK 5 PRESENT SUFFERING & COMING GLORY

🛛 June 16	Sunday Worship
<b>June 17</b>	Acts 28, Romans 1, 2
🗆 June 18	Romans 3–5
🛛 June 19	Romans 6–8
🗆 June 20	Romans 9–11
🗆 June 21	Romans 12–14
🗆 June 22	Romans 15, 16

### WEEK 3

### **SHAPED BY HOPE**

Sunday Worship
Acts 17:1–9; 21
Acts 22–23
1 Thessalonians 1–3
1 Thessalonians 4, 5
2 Thessalonians 1, 2
2 Thessalonians 3

### (NOW) QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1. Notice what you feel drawn to and away from in the text.
- 2. Open your heart to see yourself and your community in this reading.
- 3. Where do you sense God is leading you through this reading today?

# THE CHURCH GROWS UNDER PAUL'S TEACHING

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF READING PLAN

Throughout the book of Acts and the letters of Paul, the spark ignited by Jesus' death and resurrection becomes a flame burning brightly among the nations. Paul's missionary journey expands the Good News of life in Christ to all people – Jews, Gentiles, and to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). **The flame grows as new, multiethnic communities of faith are established—men and women, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, marked not by social status but by their commitment to follow Jesus and by God's presence dwelling in them through the Holy Spirit.** 

In his letters to these churches, Paul addresses practical and philosophical questions of theology related to the health and wellbeing of their specific communities. At their core, the letters invite the early Church, living under the rule of the Roman empire to ask, "What does it mean to live with Jesus as Lord?" As we read Paul's journeys and letters today, we too are invited to consider what faithful living in our context looks like and how the outworking of Jesus' kingdom continues with us.

In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, we get perhaps the most robust collection of his theology—his understanding of the Gospel that he first preached in his mission to the world outside Israel. Altogether, the second half of Acts and these letters illustrate the legacy of the early Church and invite us to find our place in the unfolding story of God's faithfulness to all people.

As we journey together with Paul and the early Church over the next five weeks, our readings will layer chapters from Acts with six of Paul's letters. Each devotional is written in the form of a letter and includes an introduction of the passage and a personal reflection. As we read, **let us discover our role in stoking the flame of hope that Jesus has for His people and creation through the Church in the world today.** 



**Paul:** At the beginning of Acts, we meet Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of Jesusfollowers. But, after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, his life changes, and he becomes Paul the Apostle, a herald to Jesus' rule as the Jewish Messiah and the risen king for all nations. From Jewish synagogues to Gentile marketplaces across the first-century Roman Empire, the Apostle Paul invites people to the new family of Jesus—the Church.

**Silas, Timothy, Apollos:** some of Paul's co-workers on his missionary journeys.

# THAT YOUR LOVE MAY OVERFLOW

### **OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS**

Paul writes this letter to the Philippians from prison under Roman custody. In it, he thanks the Christians in Philippi for their support, but he is also concerned about disputes within the Church and harassment from outside of it. Phillipi was a Roman colony and a highly prosperous and respected city. Paul reminds the Church there that they are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) and, therefore, can live joyfully and hopefully in the midst of their sufferings.

### **REFLECTION ON PHILIPPIANS**

Faith is a marathon, not a sprint; perhaps it's more like a "tough mudder!" It is indeed a lifelong journey with Christ, and it's sure to be full of obstacles, messiness, teamwork, failures, and accomplishments. The journey of faith will call upon our strengths, weaknesses, wisdom, and relationships to press on toward the goal, "the prize of the heavenly call" of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12, 14).

Paul's letter to the church in Philippi uses the analogy of a race to portray the essential unity, interdependence, and perseverance needed for Christ's kingdom to thrive through His people, the Church. Athletes in the ancient Greek Olympic games were symbols of these characteristics. Paul invites his hearers past and present to, in a like manner, champion the flame of faith as citizens in the kingdom of God.

I ran a "tough mudder" race once. At one point, I was wading neck deep through a pool of thick mud. At another, my shoulder was a stepping stone for my teammate's soiled sneaker to get up and over a towering wall. To finish, our team held hands as we hurdled over a line of fire! Afterwards, we celebrated our feat over a nice cold beverage, reflecting on moments when we all wanted to quit, had laughed, needed to learn something new, or had to rely on one another. We literally could not have done it without each other. I think that is Paul's point in Phillipians. As the Church, we are meant to journey together, "standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). The promise is that, when we do this, we will experience that, in fact, we CAN do all things, however muddy or towering the road appears at the time, through Him who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

Grace and peace, Nathan Nelson Pastor of Mission & Outreach

- 1. What stage of the race of life do you find yourself running right now? Are you enduring a challenging season, hurdling over an obstacle, celebrating a milestone? Name it to Christ in prayer.
- 2. Who are you "running" alongside? Prayerfully consider how these relationships sustain you. Do you have the opportunity to uphold someone else in this "race?" If so, take a step toward that this week.
- 3. In what ways do you feel "of one spirit" with your faith community? Are there places you feel dissonance? Invite God to reveal Himself to you in both places.



# LIVING THE SHARED STORY

### **OVERVIEW OF EPHESIANS**

The letter to the Ephesians can be divided into two main sections. The first half describes and celebrates God's victory and reconciliation in Christ. The second half teaches Christians how to live out God's victory and reconciliation in cultures that oppose God's teachings. One of Paul's main points is that, because of what God has done in and through Christ, Christians are to avoid the destructive behaviors in their surrounding culture and, instead, are to imitate Christ's love and wisdom.

### **REFLECTION ON EPHESIANS**

I have a photograph that I love from about 10 years ago. It's from a magic show at an after school program. Adults and kids are gathered in a dining room facing the magician who has just unveiled his next trick, and the looks on everyone's faces are pure wonder and joy. They seem to say, "I don't know how that just happened, but I love it!"

I feel this same wonder and joy as I reflect on the mystery Paul reveals in Ephesians: separate stories become a shared story through Jesus. Jewish people with the heritage as the chosen, covenant people of God and non-Jewish people shaped by a different culture of gods, rulers, and imperial power are brought together as a new family in Christ. How does this happen?! The power and mystery of the Gospel brings together stories that seem like impossible partners. There are barriers galore to this kind of convergence, but by God's grace, Jesus tore down the dividing wall, AND through the Holy Spirit a new, multiethnic community is formed.

The idea of separate stories becoming a shared story runs deep in the field of restorative justice practices, which we are learning in our Ministry of Racial Justice and Reconciliation (MRJR). Through sharing, listening, and being heard, people have an opportunity to path forward: Restoration.

Paul offers instruction to the Ephesian church for this path forward through proactive habits to grow and mature in faith together. This is instruction for us too, as we lean in with wonder and joy. The restorative power of the Spirit is at work!

Grace and peace,

Teylar Greer

Executive Pastor of Reconciliation and Justice

- 1. Think of a moment when you experienced something unexpected coming together plans, people, relationship, a meal, anything. What did it feel like to be part of that?
- 2. As you read through Ephesians, notice the ways Paul talks about the church as a household, family, and building where God dwells. How do these analogies deepen the idea of how separate stories—Jews and Gentiles—are brought together in the church as one story in Jesus?
- 3. What excites you when you think about the power of the Holy Spirit to bring people who have been at odds with each other together in God's family? Where do you long to see this? What is challenging to imagine? Invite God into these areas of wonder and question.

# SHAPED BY HOPE

### **OVERVIEW OF 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS**

First Thessalonians is likely the first letter we have that Paul wrote. In the two letters he sends to the community, he celebrates the faithfulness of the Thessalonians whose faith was initially flourishing despite intense persecution from those within their city. Locals of this massive and prosperous port city felt threatened by the proclamation of the risen Jesus as the true Lord. In Second Thessalonians, the persecution has intensified, as have the problems Paul addressed in his first letter. He corrects these misunderstandings about Christ's future return and encourages the Church to live faithfully while they wait. Despite the hardships they faced, the church there took root and was a source of great encouragement for Paul.

### **REFLECTION ON 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS**

At this time of the year, my mind turns toward the garden. I have a basket of seeds I've saved through winter, and I have hope that the seeds will do what they are made to do: as they are tended, they will grow, and, come summertime, there will be a harvest.

But what if, on my way to the garden to start the planting, a neighbor stopped me to say I'd missed it, all of it—that the season for planting was over; that the time for harvest had already come? I'd be confused, wondering how this could have happened, unsure now of what to do with my hope. I'd pinch myself to see if I was asleep.

Paul's letters to the Thessalonian church come at a moment of uncertainty about their hope. They have experienced exclusion and persecution at the hands of their neighbors because of their new and growing faith in Jesus. Their endurance has been buoyed in the hope of Jesus' return and of God's kingdom coming into its fullness.

But now they are afraid because of confusing rumors that Jesus has already returned and that God's final justice has already arrived. Uncertainty about the status of their future hope makes them unsure of what to do. Paul writes to clarify: they have not missed it, and their hope still stands! Not only does this provide deep encouragement, but, he says, **this very hope in Jesus is to shape the way they live and work right now.** 

So it is with our hope as we wait for the fulfillment of God's kingdom on earth. Ours is a hope that stands, a hope that shapes the way we live and work right now.

> Grace and peace, *Teylar Greer*

Executive Pastor of Reconciliation and Justice

- 1. What's something that you are waiting for right now? How does hope shape the way you're waiting?
- 2. As you read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, make note of the times when Paul talks about strength, endurance, and encouragement. What do you notice about how the Church is to receive and give these things?
- 3. The Thessalonian church is holding onto hope in Jesus during a time of suffering and confusion. Where do you see and experience suffering and confusion today? How do these letters speak to your situation? Pray this week that Jesus would be near to suffering, that clarity will come, and that the church will come alongside one another in faith, hope, and love.

# **SUSTAINED LIVING**

### **OVERVIEW OF COLOSSIANS**

Paul's letter to the church in Colossae is unlike his other letters in that it's addressed to a group of people he'd never met and a community he didn't start. He'd heard from his co-laborer Epaphras both how well the community was doing but also the cultural pressures they were facing, tempting them to turn away from Jesus. In this letter, Paul describes Jesus as the King and Creator of creation, whose death resulted in reconciliation and peace. Paul invites the Colossians, and readers today, to see that all parts of human life are touched by the loving, liberating rule of the risen Jesus as we live rooted in Christ, participating in His reconciliation.

### **REFLECTION ON COLOSSIANS**

Have you ever sat in front of a campfire with a healthy amount of crisp, dry logs and watched it burn? There's something mesmerizing in those rolling flames that makes it hard to look away. The church in Colossians was like this! The Gospel itself was growing and bearing fruit (Colossians 1:5-6), and Paul begins his letter with so much encouragement and excitement at how God is moving amongst them.

Yet, to sustain a flame requires ongoing feeding of the fire—connection rooted in the true source: Christ and only Christ. For the Colossians, there was a temptation to think that somehow more than Christ was needed to survive or grow. Paul reminds them—and us!—that, in Christ, we already have "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

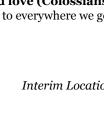
Living our day-by-day lives in the joy of Christ invites us to operate differently from the world around us and empowers us to make radical changes in our relationships. When we do this, we see **Christ continue to transform and reconcile through our circumstances, doubt, pain, and difficult situations.** 

To do this sort of "right-living" calls for intention, and Paul encourages paying attention to Christ's perspective: setting our sights on things above in a way that affects how we act toward ourselves, one another, family, and "outsiders." (Colossians 4:5–6)

To sustain the flame, Paul encourages us to clothe ourselves in a wardrobe chosen by God—one of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love (Colossians 3:12,14). Exposure to Christ Himself brings hope and joy to everywhere we go!

> Grace and peace, *Megan Cowell* Interim Location Director, Bethany West Seattle

- 1. Read The Message translation of Colossians 1:26-28. How has your faith become more "basic" over time?
- 2. Who are the "others" in your context and community? Name them where possible. What makes them so? How does Christ's perspective change your own perspective on the "others?"
- 3. Which aspects of the suggested wardrobe come to you relatively naturally? Which parts are harder for you to "put on?" Prayerfully ask Christ to continue to empower and shape you in these areas.



# PRESENT SUFFERING & COMING GLORY

### **OVERVIEW OF ROMANS**

Writing to Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome, Paul aims to unite a divided community with this robust explanation of the Gospel of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's covenant promises. Paul describes Jesus as Israel's Messiah who brought salvation to everyone who gives allegiance to Him as their true King and through whom God would rescue all of creation. Against the backdrop of their Roman imperial context, Paul instructs Christians in Rome to live both counter-culturally as an expression of their ultimate allegiance to Jesus and as one family that is part of a much bigger story that is calling them to a new way of life.

### **REFLECTION ON ROMANS**

The final chapters of *The Boys in the Boat* describe how the University of Washington men's crew team had made it to the final race in the 1936 Olympics and were one win away from the gold medal. But, before and during their final race, it seemed as if everything that could go wrong was going wrong. Unfavorable weather, unfair lane position, a late start, and a barely conscious lead rower made it seem like there was no way they would win. As I read the book's description of this race, I became a bit anxious and started to doubt that they would be able to pull off a win. I knew they were going to win because I've read the book three times, but I was so immersed in the vivid descriptions of their challenges that I almost forgot about their ultimate victory.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul encourages fellow believers to see their present sufferings in light of the future glory God will reveal to them (Romans 8:18). Even though creation still groans in pain, the freedom that Christ won for us will one day be complete, and we will all be set free to enjoy and participate in God's new creation.

But, just like when I was reading the end of *Boys in the Boat*, even when we know the good promise of God's story, our current sufferings can blind us to God's future glory. **This is why Paul reminds us that God sent His Spirit to not only reorient us toward God's future glory, but also meet us in our present suffering, reminding us that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus.** So may we, by the power of the Spirit, live in light of what God has done, is doing, and will do to liberate His Creation.

> Grace and peace, *Jonathan Nolasco* Associate Pastor, Bethany Green Lake

- 1. According to Romans chapter 8, how does God's Spirit help us in our weakness? Have you had any experiences that confirm this?
- 2. Do you recall a time when your circumstances have felt bigger and harder than the knowledge of God's future glory? If that story is in the past, how did God reveal Himself to you in that season? If it's a present circumstance, is there a way this Scripture is speaking to you?
- 3. How does what we know about God's future shape how we pray in the present?

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<b>BEHIND THE DESIGN</b>
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Upon first look, these graphics show a flame being passed between two torches, which is an allusion to the phrase "passing the torch." On a closer observation, you will see this flame is in the shape of a dove, traditionally representing the Holy Spirit. From its beginning, the church has grown from people sharing the gospel, bringing the light of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

