

SUNGAI WAY-SUBANG METHODIST CHURCH

Being with Jesus

VOLUME 3: JULY - SEPTEMBER 2024

NAME:

Love God Love People

MARK 12:29-31

Make Disciples

MATTHEW 28:19-20

READING SCHEDULE, JULY – SEPT 2024

BEING WITH JESUS | 2024

	JULY		AUGUST		SEPTEMBER	
SAT						
SUN					1	
MON	1	Neh 10:32–39			2	2 Thes 2:13–17
TUE	2	Neh 11:1–12:26			3	2 Thes 3:1–5
WED	3	Neh 12:27–47			4	2 Thes 3:6–12
THU	4	Neh 13:1–14	1	Mal 3:8–12	5	2 Thes 3:13–18
FRI	5	Neh 13:15–22	2	Mal 3:13–18	6	Est 1:1–8
SAT	6	Neh 13:23–31	3	Mal 4:1–3	7	Est 1:9–15
SUN	7		4		8	
MON	8	Hag 1:1–4	5	Mal 4:4–6	9	Est 1:16–22
TUE	9	Hag 1:5–11	6	1 Thes 1:1–3	10	Est 2:1–11
WED	10	Hag 1:12–15	7	1 Thes 1:4–10	11	Est 2:12–18
THU	11	Hag 2:1–5	8	1 Thes 2:1–6	12	Est 2:19–23
FRI	12	Hag 2:6–9	9	1 Thes 2:7–12	13	Est 3:1–6
SAT	13	Hag 2:10–14	10	1 Thes 2:13–16	14	Est 3:7–11
SUN	14		11		15	
MON	15	Hag 2:15–19	12	1 Thes 2:17–3:5	16	Est 3:12–15
TUE	16	Hag 2:20–23	13	1 Thes 3:6–8	17	Est 4:1–11
WED	17	Mal 1:1–5	14	1 Thes 3:9–13	18	Est 5:1–8
THU	18	Mal 1:6–9	15	1 Thes 4:1–8	19	Est 5:9–14
FRI	19	Mal 1:10–14	16	1 Thes 4:9–10	20	Est 6:1–6
SAT	20	Mal 2:1–3	17	1 Thes 4:11–12	21	Est 6:7–14
SUN	21		18		22	
MON	22	Mal 2:4–5	19	1 Thes 4:13–18	23	Est 7:1–7
TUE	23	Mal 2:6–9	20	1 Thes 5:1–3	24	Est 7:8–10
WED	24	Mal 2:10–12	21	1 Thes 5:4–8	25	Est 8:1–10
THU	25	Mal 2:13–16	22	1 Thes 5:9–11	26	Est 8:11–17
FRI	26	Mal 2:17	23	1 Thes 5:12–13	27	Est 9:1–16
SAT	27	Mal 3:1	24	1 Thes 5:14–15	28	Est 9:17–32
SUN	28		25		29	
MON	29	Mal 3:2–4	26	1 Thes 5:16–18	30	Est 10:1–3
TUE	30	Mal 3:5	27	1 Thes 5:19–28		
WED	31	Mal 3:6–7	28	2 Thes 1:1–4		
THU			29	2 Thes 1:5–10		
FRI			30	2 Thes 1:11–12		
SAT			31	2 Thes 2:1–12		

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Greetings in Jesus' name!

SSMC is now into her 49th year! We were established as a church on 24th May 1975. We praise God for His constant faithfulness and amazing grace toward us all the time. It was amazing to see how God moved hearts of young and old alike to give generously and sacrificially toward missions at our recent Anniversary Gift Day. The amount of RM1,410,344.84 collected will be disbursed to field workers and missionaries, mission organisations and ministry partners in Malaysia and overseas for the expansion of God's work. Praise the LORD!

We were reminded on Gift Day to focus on outcomes, not outputs. Our BWJ Q3 readings will take us through the book of NEHEMIAH, HAGGAI, MALACHI, ESTHER and 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS. Reading BWJ is the OUTPUT. Obedience, transformation, growth and the approval of God is the OUTCOME. These happen when God's truths and principles are applied to life. Jesus said, *"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."* John 14:21

Our goal is accountability not to the content (OUTPUT) but accountability for changed lives (OUTCOME). Let us remember this. Therefore, share with others what is happening in your personal journey. Support, encourage and inspire one another as we journey together in our community of faith.

At present, the pulpit preaching and the DG Word dovetails with BWJ. We need to decide to continue, or to break for a season, or to adopt some other study material all together. Please pray for the Leadership and Christian Education (CE) Team as we review BWJ. Grace and peace.

Love God, Love People, Make Disciples.

Pastor Robin Liew and the Leadership Team

INTRODUCTION TO THE READINGS

As we complete the book of Nehemiah and move on through Haggai and Malachi, there may be some familiarity in the picture being painted of the remnant of God's people. Israel and Judah are left with a remnant, and the glory of the former house seems like it will never again be achievable. The same sinfulness remains, despite attempts at reform. The exile – God's ultimate punishment for Israel's sin – was behind them, yet its root causes were not. As we read Scripture thousands of years later, let us dwell on the repetitiveness of sin, the fleetingness of righteous repentance and reform, and the need we all have of a Messiah. May we be, like the Macedonian church of Thessalonica, a 'model' to believers everywhere. And may we learn to see, as the Jews in Susa and Persia did in the story of Esther, the God whose invisible hand and power are more than sufficient in the face of our unfaithfulness and faltering attempts at righteous living.

The provided questions for each day's readings are intended to prompt reflection while providing some historical or scriptural context for better understanding. The pronouns "I", "me", and "my" are liberally used to reflect the personal nature of these reflections. We encourage those who are able to communally read (either in families or other gatherings) to substitute "we" and "our" pronouns where appropriate. The noun "faith communities" is used to represent the communal gathering of people of faith, otherwise traditionally referred to as the church. As always, Scripture reigns supreme, and none of the material provided here claims to that level of authority which belongs only to Him who authored Scripture.

May we reflect the faith, hope, and love for which Paul commends the Thessalonians.

Yours truly,
Ng Oon-Ee (Christian Education)

This edition of Being With Jesus has seen significant contributions from various disciples in the body. Special thanks to the Christian Education team for their efforts and time in preparing this material, as well as to Rosalind for setting all of it in place (literally). Much appreciation to Zachary Singkee for providing the visual design.



NEHEMIAH

1 JUL, MONDAY

Nehemiah 10:32-39

Providing for God's House

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In today's passage, Israel covenants to giving money, labour, crops, livestock, and even their firstborn sons (see context in Exodus 13:13). What is the overall purpose of these offerings? 2) Christian worship no longer involves altars and regular prescribed sacrifices, yet the principle of giving to God's house remains (1 Timothy 5:17-18). How does my faith community practice communal pooling of resources for the purpose of God's work (both inward and outward-focused)?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) What ministry or servant of the Lord do you know who may need your practical support (whether financial or otherwise)?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

2 JUL, TUESDAY

Nehemiah 11:1–12:26

Populating Jerusalem

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The context of today's passage makes clear that Jerusalem needed more residents. What are the possible economic, social, or security reasons for this? 2) What was the process used to select the new residents (contrast Nehemiah 11:1 with 11:2)? Are these residents a form of tithe by Israel to the city of God? 3) Today's passage describes a settled city, where the temple worship is provided for the new walls and gates are adequately guarded. What is my call today in the kingdom of God? Am I called to remain, or to go?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

3 JUL, WEDNESDAY

Nehemiah 12:27-47

Dedicating Jerusalem's Wall

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The dedication of the completed wall involved special arrangements for Levites – musicians and singers – to lead choirs in thanksgiving. What is the place of music and singing in my personal walk with God? 2) The celebrations start with ceremonial purification – likely the blood of sacrificed animals – in Nehemiah 12:30. What (or who) is purified? Is there a difference between this purification and the Aaronic one from Exodus 40:9-16?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The conclusion of today's passage describes the practical systems set up for the temple service and those who serve. How does my faith community provide for the carrying out of God's work and the practical machinations of regular gathering?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

4 JUL, THURSDAY

Nehemiah 13:1-14

Broken Promises

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The name Tobiah has already been mentioned in the early chapters of Nehemiah (see the readings from the second week of June). Why would this man have been given a room in the temple (in disobedience of God's law)? 2) The promises (Nehemiah 10:37) and systems (Nehemiah 12:17) providing for the Levites had been neglected. Why did this happen? (See Nehemiah 13:13 for a possible reason) 3) What can cause me to neglect my promises and responsibilities before God? How can I and my faith community remain faithful in this regard?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

5 JUL, FRIDAY

Nehemiah 13:15–22

Keeping the Sabbath

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Another broken promise was regarding the keeping of the Sabbath (see the reading of June 29). What is the basis of Nehemiah's rebuke against the nobles of Judah? 2) Nehemiah exercises authority in compelling restrictions so that the Sabbath law would not be broken. Are such actions (exercised by the dominant religious practice) translatable to my community and nation today? 3) Nehemiah appointed his own men, and then later on consecrated Levites (Nehemiah 13:22) as Sabbath guards. Certainly other guards were available and already serving in that role daily. What principle is Nehemiah observing here?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

6 JUL, SATURDAY

Nehemiah 13:23-31

Unfaithfulness in Marriage

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The final broken promise Nehemiah observed was that of intermarriage with neighbouring tribes. What response does Nehemiah undertake (compare with the response in Ezra 10:3)? 2) Is intermarriage between races or nationalities sinful and against God's law? Is the core issue a racial one, a cultural one, or linguistic (as implied by Nehemiah 13:24)? What is the defining divine gift to Israel which would have been inaccessible to children who 'did not know how to speak the language of Judah'? 3) Are the children of my faith community brought up in the 'language' of Christianity (not English!)? Do they know Scripture, the history of Christ's church as well as their local church, and the significance of our rites and rituals?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

7 JUL, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER



HAGGAI

8 JUL, MONDAY

Haggai 1:1-4

The Time Has Not Yet Come

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the specific context of the prophecy in the book of Haggai (see Ezra 4:24-5:2)? What have the returned exiles been doing for the past two decades? 2) What is the attitude of 'the people' with regards to completing the building of the temple? Am I or my faith community currently having the same attitude with regards to the work of the Lord in us and through us? 3) What is God's contention with 'the people'? What does His question through the prophet Haggai reveal about Israel's capabilities and resources?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

9 JUL, TUESDAY

Haggai 1:5-11

Give Careful Thought to Your Ways

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the situation of post-exilic Israel according to today's passage? Do I recognise myself (or my past) in these descriptions? 2) What is God's 'diagnosis' of Israel's condition? What is the reason for the unproductive and unfulfilling labour of Israel? 3) Are Israel's conditions (withheld rain, blown away produce) a punishment from God? Is God vindictive or unjust in His discipline?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

10 JUL, WEDNESDAY

Haggai 1:12-15

Fear the Lord

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage simply says that the people 'feared the Lord'. What does this imply about the past twenty years that the building of the temple was halted? 2) Twice in today's passage Haggai refers to 'the whole remnant', implying a small and insignificant body. Could their small numbers have contributed to Israel's attitude and delay? How does the fear of the Lord help even a 'remnant'? 3) God's message in Haggai 1:13 is reassuring and clear. What is the effect on Israel? Do I fully know God's presence with me today?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

11 JUL, THURSDAY

Haggai 2:1-5

Be Strong

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage depicts the second prophecy of Haggai. How long has it been since the start of the rebuilding (see Haggai 1:15)? 2) Why does God repeatedly say (through Haggai) to 'be strong'? Where is the strength in a remnant of a people and a temple which 'seems like nothing' (Haggai 2:3) compared to the former temple? 3) What is God's reassurance to the people who fear Him and have obeyed Him in coming together to build His temple?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

12 JUL, FRIDAY

Haggai 2:6-9

Greater Glory

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) God promises to 'once more' shake the heavens and the earth (see Exodus 19:18). What did it mean to Israel for the temple to be 'filled with glory' (2 Chronicles 7:2)? 2) How could Haggai 2:9 be true with a physical temple which 'seems like nothing' compared to the first temple? What is it which is 'desired by all nations'? 3) A few hundred years from the time of this prophecy, 'in this place I will grant peace' saw its fulfilment when Jesus sat in His Father's house and eventually taught there. How did Jesus grant peace to the nations?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

13 JUL, SATURDAY

Haggai 2:10-14

It Becomes Defiled

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The priests were responsible to know the Law, and in today's passage Haggai quizzes them on the 'spreading' of consecration and defilement. Which of these is 'contagious' according to the Law? 2) Today's passage does not explicitly state why Israel is defiled, but it implies that Israel has become defiled by contact/contagion. What is the remedy for such defilement, and how does that directly link to God's commands regarding the rebuilding of the temple?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) It is natural to be calculative with others, even with ourselves. Have I extended this calculativeness to God and His instructions? How does today's passage affirm God's promise to the exiles in Babylon in Jeremiah 29:10-13?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

14 JUL, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

15 JUL, MONDAY

Haggai 2:15-19

From This Day On

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage repeats the refrain of Haggai 1:5-11 (see reading of July 9). What is the situation of a farmer who has no seed left in his barn? 2) Sometimes, pain and failure is necessary for us to 'give careful thought' and turn to the Lord of all creation. Am I (or someone I know dearly) facing trials meant to turn our hearts to the God of all blessing? 3) Is God's blessing similar to that of a vending machine, automatically deposited if the right amount of obedience and/or repentance is deposited? How can I avoid this idea (and other prosperity gospel related theology) while recognising that God does bless those who obey and repent?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

16 JUL, TUESDAY

Haggai 2:20-23

Empires Will Fall

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Despite God's miraculous fulfilment of his promises to the exiles, Israel is still a subjugated nation by successive empires, with an administrative governor and no independence to be God's nation. Is this situation permanent and unchanging? 2) God's promise in Haggai 2:22 would have seemed preposterous to post-exilic Israel, given the military might of Persia (famed for their scythed chariots) who had defeated Babylon. Yet the Persian empire (and those who followed it) is no more. How can I have faith in the Lord's enduring power?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Do I feel small and helpless in the face of larger and stronger enemies? How would Haggai (and Paul, see 2 Corinthians 12:9-10) counsel me?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	



MALACHI

17 JUL, WEDNESDAY

Malachi 1:1–5

I Have Loved You

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Malachi is writing about 80 years after the prophecies of Haggai. The temple has been completed, yet Israel remains subject to Persia. What is the question that Israel has for their God? 2) God's answer to Israel's question spans the entire book of Malachi, but He begins by comparing them (Jacob) to Edom (descendants of Esau). How is God's continuing wrath against Esau related to His love for Jacob? 3) What is the significance of Malachi 1:5 to a conquered Israel who exists in subjugation to a vast empire?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

18 JUL, THURSDAY

Malachi 1:6–9

Contempt for God's Name

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In today's passage God compares the honour He is due with the contempt He is actually shown. What specific actions are the priests undertaking which show contempt for His Name? 2) God compares Himself to a father, a master, and the governor, though none of those are in any way comparable to His greatness. What contemporary authorities and influences do I have who may be receiving honour beyond that of the Lord of heaven and earth?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) What is the purpose of the offerings? How does Malachi 1:9 illustrate both God's just anger as well as his loving mercy?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

19 JUL, FRIDAY

Malachi 1:10-14

Useless Fires

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How do I imagine the inside of God's temple (where sacrifices were made) to appear? Would it be clean and spotless, as commonly shown in artwork? Where would the blood of the sacrifices be? 2) Are the priests in charge of the sacrifice justified in saying 'what a burden' with regards to their daily service? What does this tell me about their attitude and heart of service? 3) How long have I been participating in regular worship of the Lord my God, creator of heaven and earth? Am I at risk of holding His Name in contempt?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

20 JUL, SATURDAY

Malachi 2:1-3

Honour

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is God's primary concern in today's passage? Why does He warn the priests? 2) What is the opposite of honour? How does the graphic verse in Malachi 2:3 (probably referring to the internal organs and intestines of Leviticus 4:11-12) illustrate this opposite? 3) Do I care more about God's honour or my own? How do I demonstrate this in my worship (personal, communal, and lived-out)?
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

21 JUL, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

22 JUL, MONDAY

Malachi 2:4-5

Covenant with Levi

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) God reminds the priests of what they already knew – their tribe had been uniquely set apart for service to God (the line of Levi and the priestly line of Aaron the Levite appear to be conflated here). What is God's desire here? 2) The covenant with Levi is not specifically laid out in scripture (Numbers 25:10-13 may be what is being referenced here), but today's passage makes it clear that the covenant is a blessing for the Levites. What was God's expectation from the Levites?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) What is my covenant as a disciple with God? Am I walking in this covenant in reverence and awe?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

23 JUL, TUESDAY

Malachi 2:6-9

The Lips of a Priest

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How do Malachi 2:6-7 describe the ideal priest of the living God? 2) How had the priests of the remnant of Israel acted contrary to the description in today's passage? In particular, what partiality could priests in charge of sacrificial offerings have shown? 3) The last 3 day's readings (Malachi 2:1-9) have a finality to them – I will rebuke (vs 3), I have caused you (vs 9). Yet the nature of warnings is that they provide the opportunity to repent and reverse course. What repentance is God calling me to today?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

24 JUL, WEDNESDAY

Malachi 2:10–12

Unfaithfulness in Community

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage repeats the charge of intermarriage that Ezra and Nehemiah had tried to deal with. What different perspective on intermarriage does Malachi bring in Malachi 2:11? Who is the victim of this sin? 2) How does marrying 'women who worship a foreign god' desecrate the recently rebuilt temple? What does this mean to us today who are not citizens of a homogeneous theocracy? 3) What is the solution for communal unfaithfulness according to Malachi 2:12? Can there be any compromise or middle path on the sin of idolatry?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

25 JUL, THURSDAY

Malachi 2:13-16

Unfaithfulness in Marriage

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Intermarriage with women who worship a foreign god is easily understood as being unfaithful to God. How is unfaithfulness to my spouse unfaithfulness towards God? 2) The Hebrew word for partner has the sense of seamless joining (as with the sewing of the temple curtains). What picture does this paint of the act and effect of divorce? 3) God's attitude towards divorce cannot be read purely in a prohibitive sense. What does today's passage say about positive actions which are required towards my spouse? How can I (if married) strengthen my marriage today?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

26 JUL, FRIDAY

Malachi 2:17

Be Careful What You Wish For

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Can the infinite and omnipotent creator of heaven and earth be wearied? What meaning beyond the literal is being put forth in God's 'complaint'? 2) Israel's words are best understood from a self-centered perspective – they are asking where God is when injustice or evil is committed against them. What new Godly wisdom do Christians today have on this matter (2 Peter 3:9-10)? 3) The folly of a self-centered perspective is the blindness that comes with it. What is Israel forgetting when they call for justice and punishment of those who are evil?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

27 JUL, SATURDAY

Malachi 3:1

God Will Send His Messenger

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The word for 'messenger' in today's verse is spelt 'malaki'. Almost certainly, post-exilic Jews would have read the beginning of Malachi 3:1 as a self-reference by the prophet. How is the prophecy of Malachi preparing the way before the Lord? 2) Those of us living the year of our Lord also know that the beginning of Malachi 3:1 refers to John the Baptist (as testified by Jesus in Matthew 11:7-14). How did John the Baptist prepare the way before the Lord?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The final messenger in Malachi 3:1 is 'the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire'. Who is this messenger? What covenant does He bring?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

28 JUL, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

29 JUL, MONDAY

Malachi 3:2-4

Who Can Stand?

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Where is the God of justice? This question is always reasonable (in a rational frame) to ask in the face of injustice and wrong-doing (i.e. all the time). What warning does today's passage have for those who demand justice be done? 2) To this day, Christians can implicitly assume that calling for justice and righteousness is something that will primarily fall on others. Who is God looking to purify and refine according to Malachi?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Does today's passage imply that I should avoid the complaints of Malachi 2:17? What other interpretation can I have of Malachi's description of the day of the Lord's coming?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

30 JUL, TUESDAY

Malachi 3:5

Put You on Trial

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Who is God speaking to in today's passage (indeed, in the whole book of Malachi and generally in Scripture)? 2) Is the list of sinners (and sins) in today's verse unique to the church (or unique to idolaters outside the church)? What is the common characteristic of those on trial, according to Malachi 3:5? 3) While some of the sins listed can feel 'outdated' to modern 21st century minds, some are depressingly familiar. How can I (and my faith community) translate God's disapproval of adultery, perjury, wage theft and oppression of the powerless and foreigners into action?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

31 JUL, WEDNESDAY

Malachi 3:6-7

Return!

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Greek philosophy held that heaven (and God Himself) are unchanging and static. As with many other Greek ideas, this influences how we understand Malachi 3:6. What other word describes something which is immutable and does not act or respond? Is this an accurate description of the living God? 2) If God is a static and abstract figure, Malachi 3:7 talking about God returning to Israel would be nonsense. How else can I interpret 'I the Lord do not change' (see also Numbers 23:19)? 3) One clearly unchanging aspect of God is His faithfulness (2 Timothy 2:13). This faithfulness is on full display in today's passage. How is God faithful to me?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

1 AUG, THURSDAY

Malachi 3:8-12

Bring The Whole Tithe

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What need does God (Psalm 50:10) have for money, crops, and other tithes? 2) Why does God charge Israel with robbery? What is the value of tithing and material offerings to an infinite God? How do my own offerings reflect my values and heart? 3) Some churches misuse this passage (and other similar ones) to extract wealth from faithful congregants for the benefit of a few leaders. How can my faith community both give generously and ensure integrity and honour in the handling of God's wealth?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

2 AUG, FRIDAY

Malachi 3:13-18

Futile to Serve God?

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The complaint of Malachi 3:14 is familiar to most people of faith. What experience have I had of the prosperity of those who wilfully ignore God's righteous Law? 2) God charges the complainers with arrogance. How is it arrogant to recognise unjust blessing and prosperity and bemoan the unrewarded lives of the faithful? 3) Among the complainers of Israel, 'those that feared the Lord' gathered, and God recognises them. Am I counted among those who fear the Lord? Am I alone?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

3 AUG, SATURDAY

Malachi 4:1-3

The Day Is Coming

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) While God has many complaints about Israel in the book of Malachi, the post-exilic remnant primarily have just one complaint about God – that justice is not upheld. What is God's promise in today's passage? 2) Post-modernism is correct in stating that it is not possible (in our own wisdom and intelligence) to cleanly separate good and evil. Yet the Lord Almighty is clearly able to separate the arrogant and evildoer. Is it wise for me (even in light of the new covenant) to prescribe judgement before the coming day of judgement?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) What is God's promise to those who are disappointed and disillusioned, but yet revere His Name? Am I looking forward to that Day?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

4 AUG, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

5 AUG, MONDAY

Malachi 4:4-6

Moses and Elijah

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) God highlights two giants of Jewish history in today's passage. What does Moses represent? Why is this reference to Moses so important given the context of the entire book of Malachi? 2) Malachi 4:6 seems disconnected from the rest of the book, as the only family discord so far mentioned is that of divorce. Clearly God points ahead in time (hundreds of years into the future) here. Who does Elijah represent? 3) The book of Malachi ends the Old Testament. When is the next account in Scripture involving both Moses and Elijah together (Matthew 17:1-3)? How did Jesus provide a final answer to the complaints of post-exilic Israel in the book of Malachi?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	



1
THESSALONIANS

6 AUG, TUESDAY

1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

Measure of a Church

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What personal connection did Paul and Silas have with the Thessalonian church (Acts 17:1-10)? How did they continue to support the church even when not physically present? 2) What are the three specific areas Paul commends in the Thessalonian church? 3) What is the measure of a church's success or failure? Are quantitative measures (attendance, giving, serving) or qualitative measures (as mentioned by Paul today) more useful? What measures does my faith community use?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

7 AUG, WEDNESDAY

1 Thessalonians 1:4–10

A Model Church

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul continues to commend the Thessalonian church in today's passage. What does he say about the initial approach taken by the believers when presented with the gospel? 2) What actions grew out of the faith, love, and hope of the Thessalonian church, according to 1 Thessalonians 1:8? 3) Why does Paul refer to the Thessalonian church as a 'model to all believers'? Is my own faith community such a model?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

8 AUG, THURSDAY

1 Thessalonians 2:1–6

Paul's Accountability

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul is addressing criticism centred on deceitfulness and financial greed (Thessalonica was prosperous as the capital of Macedonia). Are these criticisms true of some teachers and preachers who claim to bring the gospel (see also Titus 1:11 and 2 Peter 2:3)? 2) 3 times in today's passage Paul uses the phrase 'you know' in reference to the Thessalonican church. What does this say about Paul's accountability and transparency during his time in Thessalonica?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Paul also defends himself and his ministry in Thessalonica by relying on God's testimony and witness. How can God's testing of our hearts (especially those who lead) increase in relevance in the scandal-filled church of today?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

9 AUG, FRIDAY

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

Paul's Parental Care

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul continues his defence by highlighting the pastoral care he had shown the Thessalonian church. Both maternal and paternal roles are mentioned – what care role do I currently serve in my faith community? 2) What can I learn from Paul about extending pastoral care to others within my faith community? 3) Paul's care is not focused merely on inward-looking protection and nurture – he is intentionally raising disciples who 'live lives worthy of God'. How am I engaging in discipleship and disciple-making today?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

10 AUG, SATURDAY

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

The Work of God's Word

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) One measure of the value of a pastor's work is what happens to the church after they are gone. Did the Thessalonian church continue in faithfulness after Paul's departure? 2) Paul testifies to two important factors in the continuing faithfulness of the Thessalonian church – firstly the Word of God. How is this Word at work in the Thessalonian church as well as in my own? 3) Another factor Paul credits is that the Thessalonian church 'became imitators' of older Jewish churches, including experiencing similar persecutions (and responding similarly). How can the global church encourage these imitations without falling into the trap of exporting fallen cultural markers alongside God's timeless and perfect gospel?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

11 AUG, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

12 AUG, MONDAY

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

Explaining Paul's Departure

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) From Acts 17:1-10, it is clear that Paul and company were forced to 'abandon' Thessalonica abruptly. What criticism would Paul have faced for this act (considering the increased persecution after that time)? 2) Paul emphasizes his longing to see the church in Thessalonica. To whom does he attribute blame for not being able to be reunited with them? 3) Being unable to go to Thessalonica, Paul sends another teacher, the young Timothy. What lesson can I learn here about continuing ministry and lasting impact?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

13 AUG, TUESDAY

1 Thessalonians 3:6–8

Encouragement by Timothy

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Timothy was sent to bring encouragement and care to the Thessalonican church. What did Timothy bring back to Paul? 2) 1 Thessalonians 3:6 expresses a familiarly human joy – that of connection, fond remembrance, and shared affection. With whom do I find such joy in my faith community? 3) The rest of today's passage expresses a deeper joy centred in the faith and testimony of the Thessalonican church. Who is it who encourages me with deep joy in this manner today?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

14 AUG, WEDNESDAY

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Paul's Prayers

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Having been encouraged, does Paul now check off his 'list' – Thessalonica church, done! – and move on to the next task? 2) Why does Timothy's report increase Paul's desire to see the Thessalonian church again? How does Paul act on this desire? 3) Paul does not pray only for a clear path to visit, he also prays (more importantly) for the faith, love, and hope of the Thessalonian church. Who can I pray for in this manner today?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

15 AUG, THURSDAY

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Control Your Own Body

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) This section of 1 Thessalonians covers a range of instructions and teachings. The phrase 'control your own body' can also mean 'live with your own wife'. Is Paul teaching a medieval-like ascetism with regards to sexual immorality? 2) The second principle (1 Thessalonians 4:6) is community focused, where the first is self-focused. Why does Paul focus on 'not taking advantage of' rather than 'not tempting'? What principle should my faith community apply when it comes to self control regarding sexual immorality?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8 gives the principle and purpose behind Paul's instructions on this matter. How is God calling me to live a holy life today?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

16 AUG, FRIDAY

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

Love One Another

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul writes about love for one another, but starts off by commending the Thessalonians. What does this say about their current practice of love? 2) What is Jesus' standard of love (John 13:34)? What is the 'level' or 'extent' of love that the Thessalonians (and myself) are to show to each other? 3) The Thessalonian church demonstrated their love practically (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). How does my faith community demonstrate love for one another 'more and more'?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

17 AUG, SATURDAY

1 Thessalonians 4:11–12

Mind Your Own Business

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the relationship between 'living quietly', 'minding your own business', and 'working with your hands'? How does the context of 1 Thessalonians 5:14 help to understand why Paul is dealing with this matter in today's passage? 2) Today's society sometimes idolizes work as a goal, identity, and purpose in and of itself. What is the purpose of work according to Paul's letter? 3) Society also often idolizes celebrity and notoriety, even when gained through sinful or anti-social means. How does Paul's instructions for 'winning the respect of outsiders' contrast to this?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

18 AUG, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

19 AUG, MONDAY

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Hope About Death

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul's previous instructions cover practical topics, with practicable actions and visible results. What is different about today's passage (requiring faith in what we do not yet see)? 2) What is Paul's (and our) belief about death, those who have died, and the coming of the Lord? What is the basis of that belief? 3) The purpose of today's passage is encouragement (vs 18) and hope (vs 13). Who can I share this encouragement and hope with today?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

20 AUG, TUESDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

Eschatology

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Eschatology – the study of the end times – has fascinated believers for centuries (since Matthew 24:3). What theories or theologies am I aware of regarding the return of our Lord? 2) What is Paul's own eschatological theology, according to today's passage? How does this echo Jesus' own teaching in Mark 13:32? 3) It can be easy to overreact to wild 'prophecies' of specific dates or times for the Lord's coming, or to treat eschatology as meaningless to the rational believer. Does Paul hold to that view in writing this letter to the Thessalonian church?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

21 AUG, WEDNESDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

Those Awake Are Not Surprised

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Regarding the day of the Lord, Paul's primary emphasis is not on prediction, but preparation. What analogy does Paul use here to describe the prepared disciple? 2) This is not Paul's only use of military imagery (see also Ephesians 6:11 and 2 Timothy 2:3-4). What characteristics does Paul emphasize here which are specific to the Thessalonian church (re-read 1 Thessalonians 1:3 as well)? 3) How does the comparison between those who are awake and sober (children of the light) and those who sleep and get drunk (those who belong to the night) apply to me today? Which of these metaphors is closer to my life?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

22 AUG, THURSDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11

God's Appointed

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul concludes his teaching about the Lord's return by talking about predestination. Who is Paul's intended audience? 2) Does God's appointment (and sovereignty) negate the sobriety and actions Paul advocated in yesterday's reading? Why or why not? 3) 1 Thessalonians 5:11 provides a simple summary of Christian community (and of the Thessalonian church in particular). Who is it who has most recently encouraged me in my faith?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

23 AUG, FRIDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Regard for Leaders

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What are the characteristics of leaders in the church according to Paul? Are all these characteristics popular or likeable? 2) What does Paul urge the Thessalonican church to do with regards to their leaders? 3) Paul focuses on the actions and conduct of the leader, rather than their authority or relative hierarchy. How does this help the church to 'live in peace with each other' (1 Thessalonians 5:13)?
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

24 AUG, SATURDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:14–15

For Each Other

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's instructions begin with three specific categories of believers who need attention (1 Thessalonians 5:14) – what instructions does Paul give regarding each category? 2) The rest of Paul's instructions are general and apply to all the believers. How can patience, forgiveness, and genuine care build up my faith community? 3) What is one action I can take for someone who is in need of help and care today?
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

25 AUG, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

26 AUG, MONDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Commands on Attitude

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage begins with a command to 'rejoice always'. How can joy be commanded (see also 1 Thessalonians 1:6)? 2) The second command is to 'pray continually'. This is not a one-off command, Paul states likewise in other letters (Colossians 4:2, Ephesians 6:18). How do I participate in the continual prayers of Christ's body? 3) The third command is to 'give thanks in all circumstances'. What difference does it make that the translation here uses the word 'in' instead of 'for'? Why can believers always give thanks, no matter what happens?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

27 AUG, TUESDAY

1 Thessalonians 5:19–28

Between Credulity and Cynicism

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Spiritual gifts can be divisive, and cautious believers sometimes view their exercise with some suspicion (even contempt). What is Paul's message to such believers? 2) Other believers can obsess over the exercise of spiritual gifts, especially in combination with the celebrity of a well-known person of faith. What is Paul's message to such believers? 3) How can I and my faith community avoid both credulity and cynicism with regards to the unprovable, uncontrollable, and unpredictable ways the Spirit can work in prophecy and other manifestations?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	



2
THESSALONIANS

28 AUG, WEDNESDAY

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Growing Faith

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The second letter to the Thessalonians comes a few months after the first. Does Paul still consider the Thessalonian church to be a 'model church'? 2) The language used in today's passage implies increasing persecution and trials. How have these affected the faith of the Thessalonians? 3) Paul notes increase in both the vertical faith of the Thessalonian church, as well as the horizontal love for one another. How is my faith community growing in both directions today?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

29 AUG, THURSDAY

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Reassurance and Comfort

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul makes three points in today's passage about God's justice. What does he first have to say about what awaits the faithful (vs 5, 7, and 10)? 2) Paul also states in no uncertain terms the fate of those who are causing the suffering of the believers in Thessalonica. Would this have been comforting to them? 3) Finally, Paul notes that the root of both the Christian's reward and the condemnation of those who do not know God is in God's own character (vs 6). How does the nature of Jehovah Tsedek (or Tsidkenu, meaning justice or righteousness) allow me to patiently trust in Him?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

30 AUG, FRIDAY

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Good Works and Deeds

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Having commended the church of Thessalonica, Paul now prays for them to be even better. Are they already 'worthy of His calling'? If so, why does Paul pray for God to make them worthy? 2) Works and faith are sometimes seen as contrasting (theologically), but here Paul clearly places faith as the impetus towards good works. Can good works save me? Since I am saved, what works would I then do? 3) Paul reminds the Thessalonican church that goodness and worthiness have a purpose, the glorification of Jesus' name (and of the believers in Him). Whose glory am I seeking in my life and actions?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

31 AUG, SATURDAY

2 Thessalonians 2:1–12

Fake News

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage addresses something we are very familiar with today – fake news, allegedly from Paul (vs 2)! What falsehoods and rumours have recently taken root in my faith community? How can we avoid being 'unsettled or alarmed'? 2) Paul's words in today's passage pre-supposes teaching that he has already done with the Thessalonian church regarding the end times. The identity of the 'man of lawlessness' and 'the one who holds it back' are unclear to us today. What should my attitude be towards this teaching (see also the readings on August 20)?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Is Paul trying to provide 'clues' as to the time and events surrounding the Lord's coming? How does 2 Thessalonians 2:8 provide a firm foundation on this matter?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

1 SEP, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

2 SEP, MONDAY

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

Stand Firm

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The fake news of yesterday's passage is understandable in the context of a church facing severe persecution (suggesting the end is near). In that context, Paul now urges believers to stand firm. What does he first remind the Thessalonians of in verses 13 and 14? 2) Scriptural mention of election or pre-destination is almost always pastoral in nature, to 'foster assurance, holiness, humility and witness' (John Stott, IVP 1991). What does Paul ask the 'chosen firstfruits' to do in verse 15? 3) The instruction to 'stand firm' can be encouraging or daunting, depending on the heart of the recipient. How does Paul's prayer in verses 16 and 17 address this?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

3 SEP, TUESDAY

2 Thessalonians 3:1–5

Pray For Us

Context

Questions
to ponder

- 1) Paul has repeatedly told the Thessalonian church that he 'always prays' for them. What does he ask for in today's passage?
- 2) Have I the humility to ask those that I care for (spiritually or physically) to pray for me? Why or why not?
- 3) What specific prayers does Paul request? Are they focused on material gain or preferential outcomes? Have my prayer requests been primarily of the 'shopping list' variety?

Head

What can I
understand?

Heart

How do I respond?

Hands

What must I do?

4 SEP, WEDNESDAY

2 Thessalonians 3:6–12

The Idle Busybody

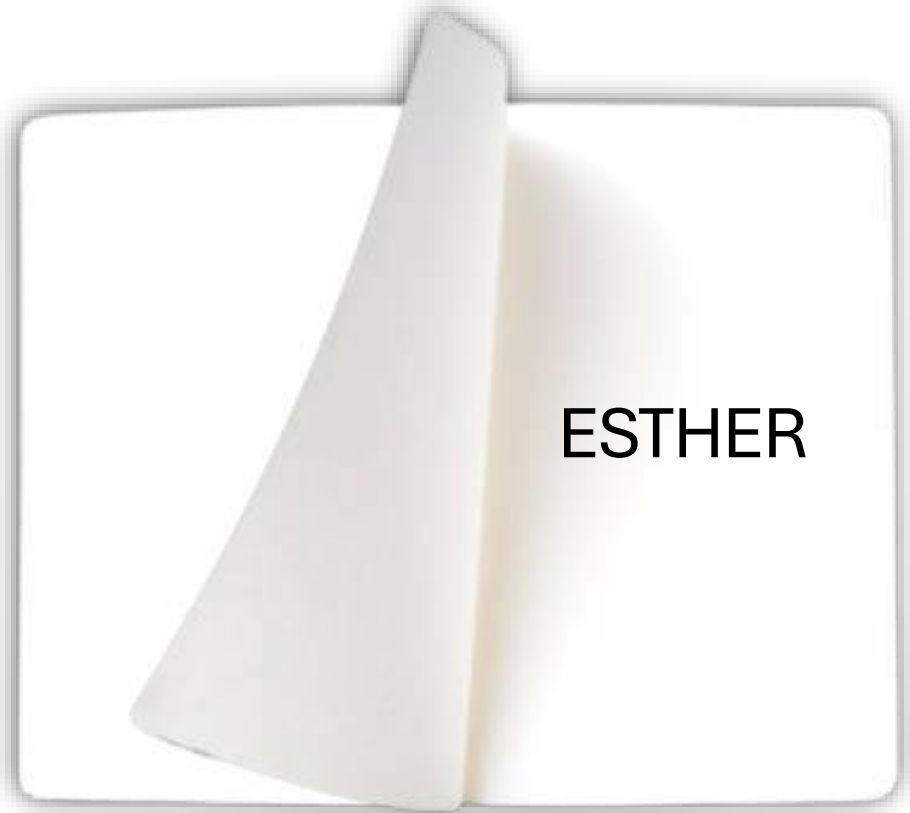
Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians had already referenced idleness (1 Thessalonians 5:14), but today's passage is much more forceful. How had Paul earned the authority to speak regarding hard work and labour? 2) The problem of idleness was likely prompted by the false teachings addressed in 2 Thessalonians 2 – that Jesus had already come. What reason is there to continue working if I believe I am living in the end of time? 3) Paul's instructions to the church are harsh – withdrawal of fellowship (vs 6) and food (vs 10) from the idle busybodies. How can I understand this within the context of Paul's other letters which advocate providing generously to those who need it? Can 2 Thessalonians 3:10 be used to advocate against communal provision of necessities and care?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

5 SEP, THURSDAY

2 Thessalonians 3:13-18

Strict But Not Harsh

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What does Paul emphasize in verse 13 for all believers? 2) 2 Thessalonians 3:14 primarily refers to the idle busybodies of yesterday's passage. What reaction is Paul hoping to provoke in these individuals? Is there a process for such action to be taken within my faith community? 3) 2 Thessalonians 3:15 tempers the harsh instructions of this chapter. How does this illustrate Christ-like grace and mercy even in the implementation of justice and discipline?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	



6 SEP, FRIDAY

Esther 1:1–8

Wealth and Pride

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The book of Esther begins with incredible opulence. More than half a year of feasting. What do these festivities say about King Xerxes? 2) The story of Esther mainly features two proud men exercising their power and privilege and two humble Jews struggling to act rightly. Which of these characters am I more similar to? 3) Esther is famous for being one of the two books of the Bible which do not mention God (the other being Songs of Solomon). Even prayer is not mentioned in the earliest translations. Is it possible for God's work to be visible even when He is not attributed or named?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

7 SEP, SATURDAY

Esther 1:9–15

Declined

Context

Questions
to ponder

- 1) Why did King Xerxes summon the queen from her banquet? What motivated him, and what did he want to accomplish?
- 2) Why did Queen Vashti refuse to come? Why didn't she fear defying the king's command?
- 3) Kings are accustomed to being obeyed, and Queen Vashti's refusal makes King Xerxes furious. What is his next course of action?

Head

What can I
understand?

Heart

How do I respond?

Hands

What must I do?

8 SEP, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

9 SEP, MONDAY

Esther 1:16–22

The King's Edict

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The source of King Xerxes' anger is the queen refusing to appear before him. What is her punishment? 2) The fear of the king's advisors is that Queen Vashti's conduct would 'become known to all women' and prompt disrespect and disobedience. Their solution is to write an edict. To whom would this edict be sent? 3) Those who are obsessed with control and the appearance of respect often act in ways which invite disrespect. Can respect be legislated by law or commanded by a spouse? How does this work in my family?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

10 SEP, TUESDAY

Esther 2:1–11

Two Hidden Jews

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The proposed search for a new queen was also an enlistment to the king's harem (effectively slavery or bondage). Did Hadassah seek out this role? 2) Mordecai and Hadassah were descended from the Jews who were carried away into exile, and now Hadassah is 'taken to the king's palace'. Was she merely a powerless victim of circumstance? 3) King Cyrus' decree allowing Jews to return was at least 50 years before the time of King Xerxes. There is no Scriptural explanation provided for why Mordecai and Hadassah remained. Would either of them have regretted not returning?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

11 SEP, WEDNESDAY

Esther 2:12–18

Esther Wins Favour

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) It has been four years since Queen Vashti was deposed (Esther 2:16). How many other young women besides Esther would have been taken and used during that period? 2) Queen Vashti had been deposed for standing up for herself and refusing the king. How does Esther's attitude (Esther 2:9, 2:11, 2:15) contrast with that of the former queen? 3) Scripture records repeatedly that Esther 'won favour' of everyone who saw her. Was this favour won by her beauty, her obedience (or submissiveness), or was there another unseen and unmentioned Hand at work?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

12 SEP, THURSDAY

Esther 2:19–23

Conspiracy Thwarted

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Esther has continued to be obedient to Mordecai's instructions from Esther 2:10. What was the danger that she (and Mordecai) faced? 2) Mordecai is probably a low-ranking official or employee at the palace, and he happens upon a plot to murder King Xerxes. This act is recorded but immediately forgotten by King Xerxes. Which greater King was at work in this seemingly coincidental occurrence? 3) Mordecai appears to be working diligently 'for the peace and prosperity of the city' he is in (Jeremiah 29:7). Am I also diligent in the earthly roles I have?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

13 SEP, FRIDAY

Esther 3:1–6

Haman Promoted

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Roughly five years later (Esther 3:7), Haman is promoted. What does today's passage (and the entire book of Esther) make clear about Haman's attitude and personality? 2) The king had commanded all to bow to Haman. Bowing was a common middle eastern practice, and not forbidden to Jews (1 Kings 1:16, 1 Samuel 24:8, Esther 8:3). Why would Mordecai have refused to bow? 3) In the course of today's passage, Mordecai's secret is revealed (Esther 3:4). On learning this, the enraged Haman starts planning collective punishment on Mordecai's people for the perceived slight of one man. Is such violence and vindictiveness still apparent in our world today? What would Jesus do?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

14 SEP, SATURDAY

Esther 3:7-11

Haman Schemes

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Are Haman's words in Esther 3:8 entirely truthful? Are they entirely untruthful? 2) Haman offers a bribe (the value is huge, 340 tonnes of silver, roughly half the tax revenue of the Persian empire) to convince King Xerxes, and succeeds in his goal. Where is the protector of the Jews? What is He doing? 3) Esther 3:7 shows Haman casting lots (a common middle eastern superstition, comparable with feng shui practices locally). How does Proverbs 16:33 apply here?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

15 SEP, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

16 SEP, MONDAY

Esther 3:12-15

Signed, Sealed, Delivered

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) King Xerxes' signet ring signs off the fate of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire. What is the difference between the reaction of the King and Haman with that of others (Esther 3:15)? 2) The author of Esther (traditionally Mordecai, though Ezra and Nehemiah have also been suggested) notes the date of the dispatch down. What significance would this date have had to the Jews (Exodus 12:1-11)? 3) Oppression by an impossibly strong nation state can lead to hopelessness. Yet even those without God have risen up against stronger oppressors, and even won. What comfort does the believer have, even when faced with impossible odds?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

17 SEP, TUESDAY

Esther 4:1-11

For Such A Time As This

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Esther 4:1-3 and 4:16 records Jewish reactions to what is happening, but prayer is conspicuously missing. Why is there no record (here or elsewhere in Esther) of any Jew praying? 2) In Esther 2:22, Esther has direct access to King Xerxes, but this is evidently no longer the case. What is the risk that Esther is taking in approaching the King? 3) It is easy to ascribe Esther's hesitation to fear for herself, but throughout this story, she has consistently been obedient, silent, and submissive in order to survive. Now Mordecai is asking her to act riskily and decisively (perhaps for the first time in her life). How does this context deepen the meaning of Esther 4:16b?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

18 SEP, WEDNESDAY

Esther 5:1–8

Banquet Invitations

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Despite the risk, Esther is obedient to Mordecai. What preparations does Esther make to approach the King? 2) The King 'was pleased with her', perhaps due to her preparations and beauty, certainly due to divine influence. Yet Esther does not immediately make her request. Two banquets in succession are held. Why does Esther do this? 3) Even though Esther had not been called to the King's presence for 30 days, his favour was still obviously on her (Esther 5:3). Who is it who was responsible for this favour?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

19 SEP, THURSDAY

Esther 5:9–14

Haman's Pride and Anger

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Haman is justifiably elated at the invitation, yet Scripture records that he was 'filled with rage' even so. What does Esther 5:11-13 show about Haman's personality and frame of mind? 2) Despite having already secured the death of all the Jews, Haman cannot wait for the date he had chosen (by lot). Who encourages him in his impatience? 3) The pole is set up to roughly 7 storeys high, indicating that Haman's priority was for Mordecai's execution to be publicly visible. How do Proverbs 16:5 and Proverbs 16:18 apply here?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

20 SEP, FRIDAY

Esther 6:1–6

Sleepless in Susa

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Scripture says that the king 'could not sleep'. He had just been drinking wine at Esther's banquet (Esther 5:6) – why wouldn't he have been able to sleep? 2) The king orders for the records to be read to him (perhaps hoping boring recitation would bring sleep). Out of at least 12 years of records, one minor story is read and draws his attention and immediate action. Was this a coincidence? 3) The nature of a king is to order for something to be done, but at this early hour very few officials would have been available. Who is it who had just entered the court? Was this a coincidence? What similar 'coincidences' have I seen or heard of?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

21 SEP, SATURDAY

Esther 6:7-14

The Man The King Delights To Honour

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Haman's pride leads to presumption that he is to be the recipient. How does Haman's answer reveal what is most important to him? 2) Haman carrying out this honour for Mordecai was shameful and grievous to him. How was Mordecai affected (Esther 6:12)? What does this reveal about what is important to Mordecai? 3) The same close people who had advised Haman to build an oversized pole now predict his downfall. Why the change of heart? Is there a concealed testimony to God in their words and responses?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

22 SEP, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

23 SEP, MONDAY

Esther 7:1-7

Esther Presents Her Request

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In today's passage, two of the primary participants have no idea what is about to happen. King Xerxes repeats his query of Esther 5:3 and 5:6. Why does Esther choose this moment to answer? 2) Esther's request shows a clear understanding of the Jew's status as a conquered and subservient people, beneath the king's notice. When she finally reveals her heritage, it is to plead for her people's lives. What is the king's emotional reaction?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) What would the proud Haman have been thinking during the king and queen's conversation (Esther 7:6-7)? Would the words of his wife and advisers have played in his mind? Who is it who orchestrated every coincidence which led to this point?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

24 SEP, TUESDAY

Esther 7:8-10

Haman Executed

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Haman (perhaps drunk, certainly terrified) falls towards the queen (as predicted by his wife and advisers). Even today, this would be a serious breach of etiquette, all the more so at the moment the furious king walks in. Was this planned by Esther? 2) To this point, Haman had had the king's trust and signet ring. How would this have influenced King Xerxes' immediate reaction in Esther 7:8? Was this planned by Esther?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) An attendant speaks up with information which the king had not yet been given – along with important context (Esther 7:9). Was this planned by Esther? Who was in control behind the scenes?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

25 SEP, WEDNESDAY

Esther 8:1–10

Reversal of Fortunes

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) On one level, the story of Esther is one of conflict between Haman and Mordecai. How much has changed in their property and authority within the space of a day? 2) Esther yet again approaches the king, once again risking her life (Esther 8:4). Has the threat to the Jews been averted yet? 3) Just as King Xerxes had given Haman free reign (via his signet ring) to establish the destruction of the Jews, so Mordecai is given free reign (Esther 8:8) to establish new decrees for their protection and vengeance. How should earthly power be rightly used by believers?
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

26 SEP, THURSDAY

Esther 8:11-17

The Second Edict

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Mordecai's second edict sounds very similar to Haman's initial edict in Esther 3:13. What significant differences are there, and what does this imply about justice even in the midst of violence and death? 2) Mordecai's ascension to power is signified by the garments he wore (Esther 8:15). What significance would it have had to the Jews of Susa to see one of their own in that position? 3) The ending of today's passage is interesting – 'many became Jews'. What possible motivations would those 'many' have had? Have I seen people today become Christians for similar reasons?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

27 SEP, FRIDAY

Esther 9:1–16

Violence Met With Violence

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage makes it clear that Haman was not the only one who hated Jews. There remained some who hated and were attempting to destroy the Jews. What difference had Mordecai's edict made? 2) Haman's property had been confiscated, and his sons are now killed and displayed (all he boasted about in Esther 5:11). What does this say about the dangers of pride, especially for those who set themselves against God?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The scale of the violence and killing was immense, yet despite the second edict, Esther records that the Jews 'did not lay their hands on the plunder'. How does this help to justify the actions of the Jews? Do current nation-states and groups which engage in violence and genocide also hold themselves to the same standard?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

28 SEP, SATURDAY

Esther 9:17-32

The Festival of Purim

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The joy of the Jews naturally overflows into celebration and feasting. Why does Mordecai institute these celebrations into an annual festival? 2) The name 'Purim' is the plural of 'pur' (the lot which Haman had cast against the Jews). How did the name also allude to God's deliverance (see Proverbs 16:33)? 3) The festival of Purim is the only Jewish festival to originate directly from an event and royal decree, rather than being instituted by God's command. Why is this specific salvation of the Jews seen as so significant?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

29 SEP, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

30 SEP, MONDAY

Esther 10:1-3

The Greatness of Mordecai

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Esther ends with a few verses on Mordecai's position and exercise of power. What other famous Jewish historical figure is comparable in influence and position? 2) Did Mordecai aspire to the powerful position, responsibilities, and privilege he now holds? Is it permissible for believers to intentionally seek such positions of power and influence? 3) How did Mordecai execute the power he had come to hold? Is there a believer in a position of authority today whom I can pray for to have the humility and diligence of a Mordecai?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

Notes



Notes



Notes



Notes



Notes



SSMC

| 2024

Updated April 2024

key dates.

January	February 18 Feb A date with Ross Paterson, Antioch Missions	March 16 & 17 Mar Equipping Weekend #1: RAK Ministry 29 Mar Good Friday 31 Mar Easter Sunday
April 28 Apr Journeying with Loss & Grief Seminar	May 25 - 26 May 49th Anniversary Gift Day for Missions 25 - 28 May SUPA Camp (8-12 yrs old)	June
July 5 - 8 Jul Silent Retreat 6 - 8 Jul Youth Camp 27 & 28 Jul Equipping Weekend #2: RAK Ministry	August 3 Aug SSMC Family Day 25 Aug DG Sunday	September 14 - 16 Sep Birds & Bees Camp 22 Sep Social Concerns Sunday 29 Sep Youth Sunday
October 13 Oct MSF Sunday 27 Oct Children's Church Sunday	November 24 Nov Baptism & Membership Service	December 25 Dec Christmas Service 31 Dec Covenant Watchnight Service

Dates may be subjected to changes. Please refer to our website / church announcements for updates & more info.

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