

SUNGAI WAY-SUBANG METHODIST CHURCH

Being with Jesus

VOLUME 2: APRIL - JUNE 2024

NAME:

Love God Love People

MARK 12:29-31

Make Disciples

MATTHEW 28:19-20

READING SCHEDULE, APRIL – JUNE 2024

BEING WITH JESUS | 2024

	APRIL		MAY		JUNE	
SAT					1	Ezra 8:1-30
SUN					2	
MON	1	Deut 32:48-33:29			3	Ezra 8:31-36
TUE	2	Deut 34:1-12			4	Ezra 9:1-15
WED	3	Romans 1:1-7	1	Romans 12:1-2	5	Ezra 10:1-15
THU	4	Romans 1:8-17	2	Romans 12:3-8	6	Ezra 10:16-44
FRI	5	Romans 1:18-32	3	Romans 12:9-13	7	Nehemiah 1:1-11
SAT	6	Romans 2:1-16	4	Romans 12:14-21	8	Nehemiah 2:1-5
SUN	7		5		9	
MON	8	Romans 2:17-28	6	Romans 13:1-7	10	Nehemiah 2:6-10
TUE	9	Romans 3:1-8	7	Romans 13:8-14	11	Nehemiah 2:11-20
WED	10	Romans 3:9-20	8	Romans 14:1-12	12	Nehemiah 3:1-32
THU	11	Romans 3:21-26	9	Romans 14:13-23	13	Nehemiah 4:1-3
FRI	12	Romans 3:27-31	10	Romans 15:1-13	14	Nehemiah 4:4-6
SAT	13	Romans 4:1-15	11	Romans 15:14-33	15	Nehemiah 4:7-15
SUN	14		12		16	
MON	15	Romans 4:16-25	13	Romans 16:1-16	17	Nehemiah 4:16-23
TUE	16	Romans 5:1-11	14	Romans 16:17-27	18	Nehemiah 5:1-11
WED	17	Romans 5:12-21	15	Ezra 1:1-6	19	Nehemiah 5:12-19
THU	18	Romans 6:1-14	16	Ezra 1:7-11	20	Nehemiah 6:1-9
FRI	19	Romans 6:15-23	17	Ezra 2:1-58	21	Nehemiah 6:10-14
SAT	20	Romans 7:1-13	18	Ezra 2:59-70	22	Nehemiah 6:15-7:3
SUN	21		19		23	
MON	22	Romans 7:14-25	20	Ezra 3:1-6	24	Nehemiah 7:4-73
TUE	23	Romans 8:1-17	21	Ezra 3:7-13	25	Nehemiah 8:1-9
WED	24	Romans 8:18-27	22	Ezra 4:1-16	26	Nehemiah 8:10-18
THU	25	Romans 8:28-39	23	Ezra 4:17-24	27	Nehemiah 9:1-15
FRI	26	Romans 9:1-29	24	Ezra 5:1-2	28	Nehemiah 9:16-37
SAT	27	Romans 9:30-10:21	25	Ezra 5:3-10	29	Nehemiah 9:38-10:31
SUN	28		26		30	
MON	29	Romans 11:1-16	27	Ezra 5:11-17		
TUE	30	Romans 11:17-36	28	Ezra 6:1-18		
WED			29	Ezra 6:19-22		
THU			30	Ezra 7:1-10		
FRI			31	Ezra 7:11-28		

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear SSMCians,

I had the opportunity to spend a few days with my in-laws in Kampung Ranau-Ranau in Sipitang, Sabah. This is Lun Bawang territory that straddles into Merapok in Lawas, Sarawak. The Lun Bawang (called Lun Dayeh in Sabah) occupy the Orang Ulu heartland that straddles both sides of the border.

The story of the Lun Bawang is about God's amazing redemptive grace towards this tribe. They were a tribe of head-hunters, enslaved by alcohol addiction, beliefs in omens and superstitions, and was almost wiped out by the smallpox epidemic of 1904 and 1905. The Rajah Brooke administration considered them incorrigible and actually gave up hope on them.

Remarkably, the Lun Bawang came to faith through Australian missionaries in the late 1920s. They encountered Jesus and the Word of God literally changed and transformed this tribe and the rest is history. One can read the account in the book "Drunk Before Dawn" by Shirley Lees.

As I reflected on this, the growth in our discipleship journey is the sum total of our personal and communal encounters with Jesus and the Word of God. This is best summed up by David Watson in his book "I Believe in the Church." He says, "All Word and no Spirit, we dry up; all Spirit and no Word, we blow up; both Word and Spirit, we grow up." This dynamic interaction is not a one-off event but must be a continuous reality in our lives.

Reading the Word of God systematically and regularly for ourselves is important because the Word instructs, rebukes, corrects and trains us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). To work out the Word with our own strength and ability will only disappoint and dry us up. We have to avoid becoming like the Ephesian church, a Word-centered church, who became a faithful but tired lover of Jesus and had lost her passion! Jesus rebukes them, "You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." (Revelation 2:4-5)

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

We must seek and allow God the space to work in us. To encounter Jesus through the Holy Spirit brings “times of refreshing from the presence of the LORD” (Acts 3:19). It renews and energises us. Therefore, let us be in the right posture for renewal and encounters with Jesus our Saviour and Lord. We need both, the Spirit and the Word, not one over the other.

For BWJ Vol.2 2024, we will be reading through Romans, Ezra and Nehemiah. As you read the Word of God, may you encounter the God of the Word. As I shared with the church family in January, we need to REDISCOVER Jesus is Lord, RECALIBRATE our lives, and desire RENEWAL through the right posture and attitude.

Mercy, peace and love from God our Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit be yours abundantly.

Love God, Love People, Make Disciples.

Pastor Robin Liew and the Leadership Team

INTRODUCTION TO THE READINGS

Justification, sanctification, election – the book of Romans discusses these concepts thoroughly. While there can be much to understand (and discuss or disagree upon), the righteousness that is by faith forms the foundation on which our faith-lives are built. May our readings and meditations draw us closer to the One whose grace provided the object of our faith. And may we thoroughly embrace the justification which is ours by faith, while extending that same grace to others who may differ in small or big ways from ourselves.

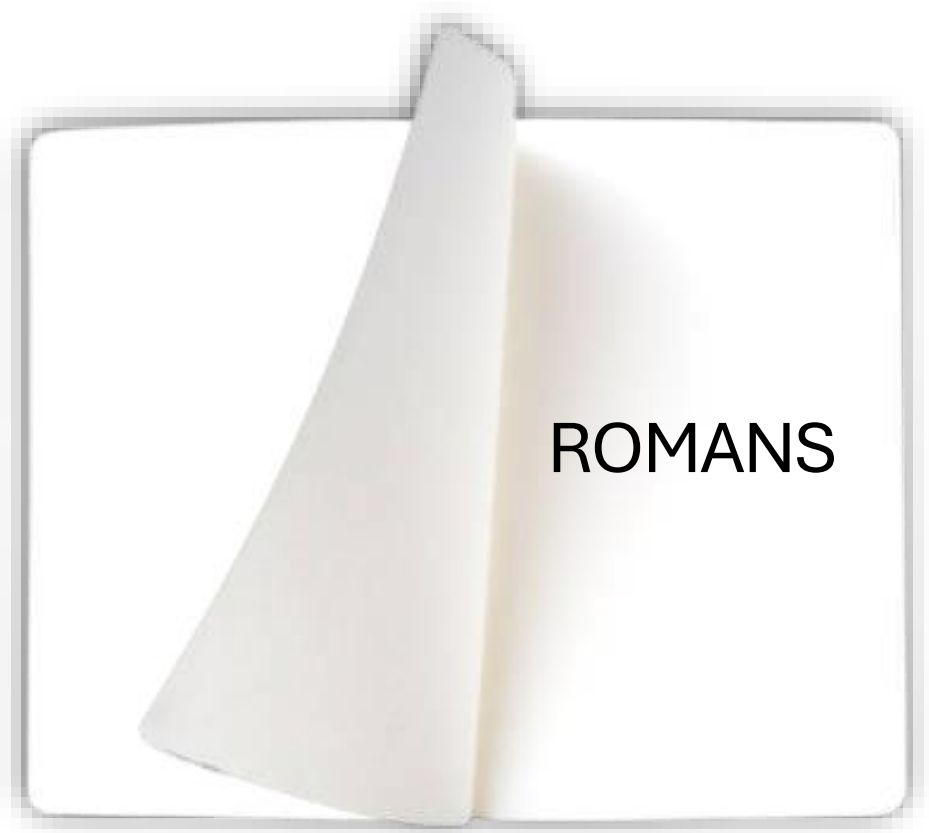
We will also be reading through Ezra and Nehemiah, which in their own ways are stories of redemption as well as the consequences of persistent and unrepentant sin. As we encounter the remnant returning from exile, the dire situations they find themselves in, as well as their efforts (fumbling or otherwise) to make right with the Lord who chose them, may we be reminded of our own utter dependence on Him.

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 our hearts be set on the Word, may our minds focus deeply on it, and may our hands find works to do which befit our Lord.

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 her valued contributions to the final copy and Zachary for the cover design.



3 APR, WEDNESDAY

Romans 1:1-7

Called to Belong, Called to be Holy

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How many times is Jesus Christ, the Son, mentioned in today's passage? What does this tell me about the gospel (good news) of God? 2) Who are the readers Paul is addressing? What calling have they (and we) received? 3) The phrase 'holy people' is plural in today's passage (as it is throughout the New Testament). This same phrase can alternatively be translated as 'saints'. What does this tell me about the nature of Christian holiness?
<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?	

4 APR, THURSDAY

Romans 1:8-17

Paul's Introduction

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul has not (yet) visited the church in Rome. What does today's passage (especially verses 11 and 12) tell us about Paul's attitude towards someone else's ministry and fruit? Is mine the same? 2) How many times does Paul write about himself (using the word 'I') in today's passage? Is Paul being self-absorbed here? How do the three "I am" statements in Romans 1:14-16 indicate Paul's motivations? 3) Romans 1:16-17 can be read as a summary of the entire letter to the Romans. What is my understanding of Godly righteousness today? May God give me a right understanding.
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

5 APR, FRIDAY

Romans 1:18-32

The Nature of Sin and God's Wrath

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The first few words of verses 24, 26, and 28 indicate a connection or consequence leading from the root of verses 21-23. What does this teach me about the root of sin (1 Timothy 6:10 notwithstanding)? 2) Today's passage 'classifies' three areas of sin – heart, hands (actions), and head (mind). How am I living righteously before God in each of these areas? 3) Romans speaks of a future (being revealed) wrath of God, yet today's passage makes clear that – in the present moment – God has 'given over' the wicked to the consequences of their wickedness. Why has He not executed the deserved punishment (Romans 1:32) on those who are wicked?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

6 APR, SATURDAY

Romans 2:1-16

The One With No Excuse

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Yesterday's passage is often used to justify criticizing (or even legislating against) sinful and wicked people both within and without the church. What clear rebuke and advise does Paul have in verse 4? 2) Does Romans 2:5-11 teach justification by works? Clearly not (as the rest of Romans will show)! What, then, does Paul intend to say to the Christ-followers reading this letter? 3) The last section of today's reading re-emphasizes that God's righteous standard is the same for those who heard the law and those who did not. Paul is showing how all of us are lost and in need of a Saviour. What should this knowledge prompt me to do?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

7 APR, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

8 APR, MONDAY

Romans 2:17-28

Those Who Rely on the Law

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Romans 1:6 seems to indicate that Paul is writing to Gentiles, but today's passage addresses Jews. Historically, Jews had been expelled from Rome by Claudius – 10 years before Paul wrote this letter (see Acts 18:1-2) – and they would just have been starting to return at this point in time. How would this have affected the demographics of the Roman church?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) What are the two 'markers' of Judaism that Paul mentions in today's passage? How useful is the possession of these two 'markers' in earning God's favour?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Are the gospel and the sacraments that we have today comparable to the 'markers' of Judaism Paul referred to? If so, what lesson can my faith community take today from verses 24 and 28-29?
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

9 APR, TUESDAY

Romans 3:1–8

God's Faithfulness

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Some Jews believed their identity to be advantageous in gaining God's favour – this is clearly disproved in yesterday's passage. What, then, are the advantages the Jews have as God's chosen people? 2) The central tenet of today's reading is the faithfulness of God (juxtaposed against the unfaithfulness of His people). This faithfulness is inherent to God's person, and is proven in judgment (see also Psalms 51:4). Disregarding the contradictory 'human' arguments in today's passage, how should I respond to God's perfect faithfulness?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The believing Jew was zealous, knowledgeable, and strictly religious. Yet as this part of Romans shows, these characteristics did no guarantee God-alignment. Do I and my faith community emphasize these characteristics to our own detriment?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

10 APR, WEDNESDAY

Romans 3:9–20

All Alike, Under the Power of Sin

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage is justified by lengthy quotations of Scripture (as it is written). This is a rabbinical practice which both Jesus and Paul used. Does this indicate that this part of the letter is primarily intended for Jews? 2) How many times is the universality of unrighteousness (no one, all) emphasized in today's passage? How does this apply to me? 3) What does Romans 3:20 tell me about the purpose of Paul emphasizing our unrighteousness before God?
<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?	

11 APR, THURSDAY

Romans 3:21–26

All Alike, in the Righteousness of God

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) These 5 verses summarize the good news of Christ Jesus. Who is this gospel intended for? 2) Verses 24-25 speak of justification (a legal term), redemption (a term with economic connotations), and the sacrifice of atonement (a religious term, alternatively translated propitiation). How do all these terms come together to describe the shedding of Christ's blood? 3) How have I been given (and received) this justification, redemption, and sacrifice of atonement? How can I encourage others in my spheres of influence to receive this as well?
<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?	

12 APR, FRIDAY

Romans 3:27-31

Faith Apart from the Works of the Law

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The truth of Romans 2:5-11 naturally leads us to consider that the solution is righteous works, which deserve to be boasted about. This would merely replicate Jewish boasting about the Law and Circumcision. What does Paul say about earning justification? 2) The word 'faith', like any other word, has many meanings and connotations. In the context of today's passage (and Romans 3:22, 24), is faith a personal decision to 'believe' or 'accept' Christ's sacrifice on my behalf? Can I boast about my faith?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Does justification by faith (which is universal, for both Jews and Gentiles) nullify or uphold God's divine law? What implications does my answer have for my actions as an individual, as a member of Christ's body, and as an active participant in my community and nation?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

13 APR, SATURDAY

Romans 4:1–15

Justification by Faith – From Abraham to David

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Justification by faith apart from works runs counter to expectations of both Jew and Gentile (even until today). Paul harkens back to the patriarch Abraham – quoting Genesis 15:6. Did Abraham earn his righteousness? 2) Paul also quotes from David in Psalm 32:1-2 to show that there is a covering of sin, such that even one who is guilty would be forgiven. Who do I know of who is beyond such forgiveness and cannot receive covering of sin? 3) Finally Paul shows that circumcision comes after Abraham's faith credited as righteousness, as a sign and seal rather than as a cause. What obvious implications does that have for myself as a Gentile believer?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

14 APR, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

15 APR, MONDAY

Romans 4:16-25

Abraham – Father of Us All

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How does Paul connect the Jewish patriarch Abraham with me – a Gentile who has no blood relation to him? How am I 'descended' from Abraham? 2) What was the object of Abraham's faith (as described in Romans 4:18-20)? How did Abraham's faith contrast with physical facts and reality? 3) Do I have the same object of faith as Abraham (see Romans 4:24-25)? Is my faith dependent and conditional on scientific and provable concepts?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

16 APR, TUESDAY

Romans 5:1-11

Fruit of Justification

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What are the blessings I have received from the justification that is through faith (Romans 5:1-5)? 2) What is the proof that Paul gives for the love of God which provides for this justification of sinners? 3) How does Paul extrapolate from God's actions towards sinners to His actions towards the reconciled? What confidence do I have in this?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

17 APR, WEDNESDAY

Romans 5:12-21

Christ is Not Like Adam

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What does today's passage say about the nature and relationship between sin and the Law? 2) Repeatedly in today's passage, Paul says the phrase 'just as' and then continues with 'so also' (vs 18, 19, and 21). What equivalences is Paul drawing here? 3) Romans 5:15 (and the verses around it) emphasize that Christ is not just an opposite counterpart to Adam, He is 'much more', just as the gift of God's grace is 'much more' than the trespass of Adam. What mindset do I have when considering sin and grace?
<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 APR, THURSDAY

Romans 6:1-14

Dead or Alive?

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the mindset and value system which would lead me to increase sinning that grace may increase? How does my own mindset and value system compare? 2) Paul emphasizes (by analogy) a deep truth – 'we are those who have died to sin'. How does a dead body behave or react? What stimuli or attraction would be effective on one who is dead? What is my own relationship to sin? 3) Paul's main focus is not sin (to which we are dead) but Christ to whom we are alive. Romans 6:11-14 provides clear instruction on how to live out the truths we learn in today's passage. How does Paul's earlier teachings on justification by faith provide necessary context to these actions?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

19 APR, FRIDAY

Romans 6:15-23

Slaves of the One You Obey

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The second analogy Paul uses (in today's passage) calls for the reader to imagine themselves as slaves. Would this have been an easily understood illustration (see Romans 6:19) for the church in Rome? Is this an illustration that my 21st century mind can still easily understand?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Romans 6:16 speaks of 'offering yourself as obedient slaves', indicating that the form of slavery in mind was different from modern connotations of the word. What agency do I have in choosing my slave-master (see also Romans 6:18)?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Paul compares the benefits (or wages) of sin with the gift of God. How am I proclaiming this gift to those nearest and dearest to me?
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

20 APR, SATURDAY

Romans 7:1–13

Dead to the Law

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Romans 7:1 indicates that Paul has a specific audience in mind for this third analogy – 'those who know the law'. Who is the primary audience for today's passage (see also Romans 3)? 2) Paul speaks of being 'released' from the Law – freed from the written code that was the bedrock of Jewish religious practice. Does this make the Law obsolete, mistaken, or even sinful (see also the context of Romans 6 discussion on holiness)?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) How am I today to observe the Law (Romans 7:6)? Can my obedience provide for my justification or sanctification?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

21 APR, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

22 APR, MONDAY

Romans 7:14–25

To Do or Not To Do – Which Law?

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage is a tongue-twister (and brain-twister). What are the conflicts that Paul describes in Romans 7:14-19? 2) What is the source of these conflicts, according to Romans 7:20-23? 3) Is today's passage a general description of the Christian experience? Or is it a continuation of Romans 7:1-13 and hence primarily for those who held firmly to the Law? How can the exultation of Romans 7:25 apply to either and both cases?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

23 APR, TUESDAY

Romans 8:1-17

The Law of the Spirit

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The full impact of Paul's words regarding justification and sanctification can be felt in today's passage. What is the great prophetic truth that Paul begins this section of Romans with? 2) Romans 8:3-8 compare 'those who live according to the flesh' with 'those who live in accordance with the Spirit'. Which am I, according to Romans 8:9? 3) How is my identity reflected in my 'mind-set' (literally, what my mind is set on)? Is this mind-set the product of my own will and self-control Romans 8:14-15)?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

24 APR, WEDNESDAY

Romans 8:18–27

Waiting for Our Glory

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage expands on Romans 8:17 – that we may share in His glory. This waiting involves both suffering (vs 22) and weakness (vs 26). What is Paul's assertion concerning the magnitude of these sufferings as compared to the coming glory? 2) My sufferings are accompanied by hope, since I have the first fruits of the Spirit. How does this combination of sufferings and hope prevent me from falling into triumphalism or despair in my Christian walk?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) What sort of weakness does Paul refer to in today's passage? How does the Spirit address this weakness specifically? How does my faith community allow and encourage this work of the Spirit?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

25 APR, THURSDAY

Romans 8:28-39

Inseparable

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Romans 8:28 is (understandably) a popular verse for many believers. How can the full context of Romans 8:28-30 give me a clearer (and less child-like) understanding of how God works for my good? 2) Romans 8:29-30 is a central verse in the theology of predestination (or election). How can Romans 3:27 and similar verses apply directly to our selection by a sovereign God? 3) Romans 8:33-39 repeatedly emphasizes one central point – nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! How has this been true for me? How have I seen this demonstrated in my faith community?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

26 APR, FRIDAY

Romans 9:1–29

Thy Will be Done

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul has – at various points in this letter – written specifically to believers from Jewish backgrounds. In today's passage, he begins with a lament over his (and their) brethren who are cut off from Christ. What is my own heart regarding those who are not in Christ? 2) Paul's lament over Israel leads directly into a discussion on God's sovereignty in choosing the objects of mercy (and the objects of wrath). How does today's passage contradict the mistaken assumptions of first century Jews regarding God's favour?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) How does the doctrine of election follow naturally from what Paul has written so far about justification and sanctification? What does this say to me about my own salvation and that of my faith community?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

27 APR, SATURDAY

Romans 9:30–10:21

Two Forms of Righteousness

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage show's the conclusion of Paul's treatise on God's sovereignty – that by divine will those who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it. What is Christ's role here (Romans 9:33 and 10:4)? 2) The two forms of righteousness that Paul lays out are merit-based (keeping of the Law) and provision-based (freely given by divine sovereign will). Why is this absolutely good news for all men – Jew or Gentile? 3) The doctrine of election can lead to spiritual fatalism and inaction. How does Romans 10:12-15 (and indeed, all of this letter) challenge me to faith-demonstrating action, especially in proclaiming the gospel?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

28 APR, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

29 APR, MONDAY

Romans 11:1-16

God Did Not Reject His People

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) God's sovereignty and Israel's overall rejection of the gospel naturally leads to the central question Paul starts today's passage with. How does the Jew Paul understand God's seeming rejection? 2) If justification is grace-given (through faith) as Paul has been explaining, what does that say about those who have rejected the gospel? Is their rejection one of their own works, or of the sovereign design of God? 3) Is my understanding of God's sovereignty (and the theology of election) that it is permanent and unchangeable? What do Paul's motivations in Romans 11:13-14 say about election?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

30 APR, TUESDAY

Romans 11:17-36

Do Not Be Conceited

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Romans 11:25-27 seems to suggest that all Israel will be saved. Who is the 'Israel' being referred to here? What relation does this have with the modern nation-state of the same name? 2) For those of us who are Gentiles, today's passage serves as a stark warning. What does this teach me about the validity of "replacement theology" (the belief that the church has replaced the Jews as God's chosen people and inherited all related promises in the Old and New testaments)?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Today's passage ends with a doxology (literally meaning 'praise'), marking the end of the primary initial section of Romans. How can this doxology help me as I grapple with understanding the teachings of Scripture, especially in this past month with the book of Romans?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

1 MAY, WEDNESDAY

Romans 12:1-2

A New Sacrifice

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) After expounding on the Law, Paul begins the 'instructional' portion of this letter with a familiar instruction concerning sacrifice. What is the justification provided for this instruction? 2) The Old Testament requirement for blood sacrifice has been fulfilled in Christ. Now Paul is instructing a new kind of sacrifice, a 'living' sacrifice. How can a sacrifice remain alive? 3) Romans 12:2 includes in this new sacrifice a transformation and renewal of our mind. How is my intellect and thinking at odds with (and in need of transformation) what Paul has been teaching about God's mercy not relying on works?
<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>	

2 MAY, THURSDAY

Romans 12:3–8

In Christ – One Body

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Romans 12:3 concerns the believer's self-image and self-assessment. How does grace and faith affect how I think about myself? 2) Paul speaks of the One Body of Christ. What does it mean for 'each member' to 'belong to all the others'? How much does my current culture and thinking value independence? 3) What gifts have I been given by God's grace? How am I using these gifts in Christ's Body? What pride can I take in these gifts?
<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 MAY, FRIDAY

Romans 12:9–13

Out-flowing Love

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The phrase 'devoted to one another' indicates the focus of our love-actions. How is the spiritual zeal of Romans 12:11 to be applied in the instruction to love and honour one another? 2) The attitudes of Romans 12:12 are easily recognisable as virtuous. How does the context of love help me understand what joyful hope, patience, and faithful prayer are like (and what they are for)? 3) How are the practical actions of Romans 12:13 an out-working of sincere love? How does my faith community practice 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>	

4 MAY, SATURDAY

Romans 12:14–21

Contrarian Response

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Romans 12:14-15 address the believer's behaviour towards 'those who persecute you'. How does this contrast with my natural response to the joy or mourning of someone I hate (or who hates me)? 2) Romans 12:16 applies to relationships to 'one another' within Christ's body. How does harmony and the lack of conceit look like in my faith community? 3) Paul's instructions against revenge have been interpreted as the basis of a wider theology of non-violence in all circumstances. What should the basis of any non-vengeful or non-violent theology be?
<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?	

5 MAY, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

6 MAY, MONDAY

Romans 13:1-7

Submitting to God's Servant

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Stating that 'existing authorities have been established by God' can seem preposterous. What is the historic context that Paul is writing from? Is the Roman empire (oppressors of the Roman church) a just and equitable authority? 2) Romans 13:5 gives both the 'common' reason for obedience to authority as well as the faith-based reason. Which of these resonates more with me today? 3) The church in Rome (at this point in time) had no say in the selection of their national leaders. This is no longer the case for most of us today. Does this invalidate Paul's instructions? What principles still apply for my faith community in this day and age?
<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>	

7 MAY, TUESDAY

Romans 13:8-14

Fulfilling the Law

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage makes it clear that justification by faith fulfils the Law – as opposed to denying the Law. What is the 'debt' that has been cleared for me when I am justified by faith? 2) Paul cuts to the heart of the Law, that love in action would naturally fulfil the Law. Why do I owe a debt of love to others? How was this debt acquired? 3) While we are no longer under the Law – Paul clearly instructs righteous actions (and avoidance of unrighteous actions) in Romans 13:11-14. Why should I, as a believer, obey what is written here, since my justification is through faith rather than obeying laws?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

8 MAY, WEDNESDAY

Romans 14:1–12

Someone Else's Servant

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) This chapter of Romans deals with disputable matters such as diet and holy days. Much of the dispute would have arisen over Jewish Law (e.g. Sabbath law). How can my faith community identify whether a matter is disputable or indisputable (e.g., that Christ died and rose again)? 2) Paul writes about those with 'strong' and 'weak' faith. Is strength preferable to weakness in this area? Should I aspire to 'strong' faith with regards to disputable matters?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Paul's core teaching here is that we are not to judge (or condemn) someone else's servant (Romans 14:4, 14:12). How can my faith community strive towards diverse unity in Christ – one without judgement and condemnation?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

9 MAY, THURSDAY

Romans 14:13–23

Convictions and Love

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul is certainly not advocating for any specific objective truth regarding unclean foods in today's passage. What is Paul's primary message regarding disputable practices in the church? 2) Love is the exercise of our liberty with the welfare of our brother or sister in mind (Romans 14:15). Is this love to be freely exercised by the believer, or required by leadership/authority within the church? 3) Some children are told to remain silent to avoid arousing the temper of a hot-tempered family member – this is often a form of abuse. How can my faith community avoid using today's passage to bully devout servants of God into 'accepted' standards of behaviour (e.g. in dressing, speech, and manners)?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

10 MAY, FRIDAY

Romans 15:1-13

Christian Unity

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In today's passage, Paul expands on the previous chapter regarding disputable matters, broadening the topic to include the attitudes believers are to hold towards each other. What should my end goal be in my interactions with my brothers and sisters (Romans 15:1-6)? 2) How should I apply Romans 15:7 to believers who differ greatly from me in belief and practice (e.g. political alignment, attitude towards Scripture, gender ideology, theology of blessing and prosperity)? 3) According to Romans 15:8-13, what is the goal of Christian unity (distinct from uniformity)?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

11 MAY, SATURDAY

Romans 15:14–33

Paul's Plans

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul is speaking in today's passage about his goals and plans. What was Paul's primary ambition or goal according to Romans 15:20? How did his plans align with that ambition?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) The plans that Paul share in this letter involve a planned future trip westward to Spain (where he had not yet been). Paul asks the Roman believers for assistance (most likely financial) on this journey. How is my faith community supporting the livelihood of God's servants on the frontier of faith and evangelism?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Paul's tone is measured when asking for support, but this changes when he asks for prayer in Romans 15:30-33. We know from Acts 21 what happened on this trip, and how necessary the prayers of the believers were. How will I engage in intercessory and supportive prayer within my faith community?
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

12 MAY, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

13 MAY, MONDAY

Romans 16:1–16

Individual Greetings

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<p>1) In ending his letter, Paul takes the time to greet individual believers in the Roman church. There are Hebrew, Greek, and Roman names mentioned. Male and female names are included, as well as 'heads of households' (likely aristocrats with significant wealth), related families, and specific congregations. What does this tell me about the Roman church, and Christ's global body?</p> <p>2) The bearer of this letter, Phoebe, is the only female deacon mentioned in Scripture. Keeping in mind the disputable matters we have recently considered – how should Paul's attitude towards Phoebe inform my faith community's attitude towards all who serve Christ, regardless of gender?</p>
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<p>3) Paul acknowledges many individuals here for their work in the Lord. Who can I acknowledge today for their faithful service to Christ, His gospel, and His body?</p>
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

14 MAY, TUESDAY

Romans 16:17-27

Concluding Words

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul ends this letter with a warning about division-causers who 'put obstacles in your way'. This is in keeping with what he has written throughout this letter. How is the Roman church to react to such persons? 2) Paul does not merely give instruction, he also asserts with certainty that the intention he states in Romans 16:19 will come to pass because of Romans 16:20. How am I to live in view of the certainty of Satan's crushing defeat?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Paul's final blessing in Romans 16:25-27 summarizes what he has written in this letter. Let us declare this blessing over our faith community together!
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	



15 MAY, WEDNESDAY

Ezra 1:1-6

God Remembers, God Provides

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The prophesy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10) was known to the Jews in exile. How would they have felt upon hearing of Cyrus' decree? 2) The book of Ezra emphasizes God's work in the pagan king of Persia, as foretold in Isaiah 44:28-45:5. How did God accomplish this deliverance promised in the book of Isaiah? Does He still work in the same way today? 3) As we will read in the coming week, the 'remnant' of Judah who returns is small in number. How did God provide materially for this remnant, according to today's passage?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

16 MAY, THURSDAY

Ezra 1:7-11

Return of Temple Articles

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The articles listed in today's passage had been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chronicles 36:18). How did God supernaturally provide for their restoration to Israel? 2) The restoration of these temple articles provides a glimpse of the restoration that God intends for His chosen people. Is it a complete restoration (see the list of articles in Exodus 31:1-10)? 3) The 'prince of Judah' Sheshbazzar – meaning `joy in affliction` – is responsible for the articles. How is this name symbolic of the situation of the returning exiles?
<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 MAY, FRIDAY

Ezra 2:1-58

List of Returning Exiles

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) After decades of exile, 'everyone whose heart God had moved' (Ezra 1:5) was returning to Judah. Why would such a detailed list of returnees have been taken? 2) Ezra pays special attention to those returnees involved in the temple worship, foremost of whom would have been the 4,000 men of priestly lineage. Four lineages are mentioned (compare this to the 24 divisions in 1 Chronicles 24:1-19). Why would only a minority of the priests have chosen to return?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The 'temple servants' and 'servants of Solomon' were probably of non-Jewish descent (possibly the Gibeonites who deceived Joshua in Joshua 9 as well as the foreigners whom Solomon employed in the temple in 2 Chronicles 8:7-8). What can I understand from these people's decision to return with the rest of the exiles?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

Handling the Undocumented

<p>Context</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The chaos of the fall of Jerusalem and the period of exile meant some families would have lost their familial lineage records. Were there also included among the returning exiles? 2) The lack of proof was a special hindrance for those of priestly lineage, due to their special role in Judaistic practice. How did Zerubbabel exercise caution and grace in handling these families? 3) What is the first reaction of the leaders of the exiles when they arrive in Jerusalem? What does this say about their priorities after decades of exile?
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	
<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>	

19 MAY, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

20 MAY, MONDAY

Ezra 3:1–6

Altar Rebuilt

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The first communal project was to rebuild the altar of the God of Israel. Why is the altar the first priority (see also Genesis 12:7 and Joshua 8:30)? 2) As important as the altar was to the returning exiles, this rebuilding took place to commemorate the Festival of Tabernacles and only occurred after they had settled into their own towns. What practical lesson can I take from this? 3) Ezra 3:3 is the first mention of opposition. Despite their fear, Israel builds the altar to sacrifice burnt offerings in accordance to the Law. Am I today willing to worship God in the face of opposition?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

21 MAY, TUESDAY

Ezra 3:7-13

Laying the Temple Foundations

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The next order of business was the rebuilding of the temple. Why were Levites, in particular, appointed to supervise the building process? 2) As the foundations were laid, Israel rejoiced with repeated refrains from the Psalms. What (and who) are they celebrating? 3) Ezra 3:12 is particularly poignant in recounting the differing reactions from older Israelites. Those who remembered Solomon's temple wept aloud. What space is available in my faith community for weeping and other expressions of mourning?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

Neighbourly Opposition

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The 'people around' the returning exiles were probably the descendants of those mentioned in 2 Kings 17:22-28. What does Ezra 4:2 make clear about these people and their form of worship? 2) How long did the opposition of these people last, according to Ezra 4:5? Would this amount of time have been sufficient to complete the building of the temple? Why did this not happen? 3) Was there any truth in the accusations made in the letter to Artaxerxes? Was there any falsehood? What was the objective of these accusations?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

23 MAY, THURSDAY

Ezra 4:17-24

Stop Work Order

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What basis is given for the king's decree? Is there any factual inaccuracies or falsehood in the reasoning? 2) The 'enemies of Judah and Benjamin' take action immediately and 'by force'. What would the reaction of the returning exiles have been? 3) The work on the temple is stopped for a long time (probably 15 years). It seems the enemies have won a victory. What is the proper attitude of God's people in these situations?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

24 MAY, FRIDAY

Ezra 5:1-2

Resume Work Order

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Haggai's prophecy began by addressing the motivations of the returned Jewish exiles. Was it only the enemies of Judah and the king's orders which were holding back the building of the temple? 2) Zechariah's prophecy addressed God's sovereign call for the rebuilding of the temple, and included the well-known words – 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit' (Zechariah 4:6). What encouragement would these words have brought to Zerubbabel and the returned exiles?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The change in ruler provided an opportunity for rebuilding to continue. How did the leaders of the Jews respond? Are my faith leaders attuned with God's timing for His work within and without our congregation?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

25 MAY, SATURDAY

Ezra 5:3–10

Investigations Begin

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The restarting of work after many years does not go unnoticed. What action did the new governor take against the Jews? How does this compare with Ezra 4:23? 2) Today's passage makes it clear (Ezra 5:5) who is ultimately responsible for the work not being immediately stopped. How can I take courage when obstacles arise against my obedience to God's commands? 3) The letter set to King Darius contains none of the accusations of the letter of Ezra 4. What does this tell me about the attitude of the governor and his men? What sort of leaders should believers hope for in our nations?
<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 MAY, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

27 MAY, MONDAY

Ezra 5:11–17

The Jewish Case

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In today's passage, the governor lays out the answer given to him by the Jews. How does this contrast with the previous letter sent to Artaxerxes? 2) Contained in this letter are Jewish statements about identity and culpability for their situation. None of these would have been interesting or relevant to King Darius – why do the Jews include them? 3) The primary Jewish argument is contained in Ezra 5:13-16. How is God's grace evident in the governor's addendum of Ezra 5:17?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

28 MAY, TUESDAY

Ezra 6:1–18

The Temple Rebuilt

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The decree from King Darius not only upheld the initial decree of King Cyrus – it enhanced it further. How is God's favour evident in the orders of Ezra 6:6-12? 2) How did all the parties mentioned in Ezra 6:13-14 contribute to the final completion of the rebuilt temple? What is my response to God's grace and favour on my life? 3) The celebrations of today's passage echo the celebrations at the establishment of Solomon's temple, but in a much more humble manner (compare 2 Chronicles 7:10). Is God's grace and restoration only partial or limited?
<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 MAY, WEDNESDAY

Ezra 6:19–22

Celebrations

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage is careful to note that the celebration of the Passover was according to the Law (Numbers 28;16). How significant was this to the returning exiles who had not celebrated in this manner for decades? 2) The worshippers focused on holiness, not just of the priests and Levites, but of all those celebrating together. How do the celebrations of my faith community promote the holiness of each member of Christ's body? 3) The overwhelming attitude and expression in these celebrations is joy and gratefulness. What reasons do I have today to express joyful thanks to God?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

30 MAY, THURSDAY

Ezra 7:1-10

Ezra Arrives

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ezra leads another group of returning exiles (this occurs after the rebuilding of the temple). Why is his genealogy presented in today's passage? 2) What is the significant quality that Ezra possesses (which is mentioned twice in today's passage)? Why is his return significant? 3) One recurring phrase in this and the coming chapters is that 'the hand of God was on him'. How is God's hand on me today?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

31 MAY, FRIDAY

Ezra 7:11–28

The Hand of Authority

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Who is the authority who has sent Ezra to Jerusalem, allowed priests and Levites to accompany him, and provided Ezra with material provisions and authority in the Trans-Euphrates? Is it solely the decision of King Artaxerxes?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Much of the instructions in today's passage center around worship and sacrifice at the rebuilt temple. What is King Artaxerxes' motivation according to Ezra 7:23? How does God use this self-interest for the good of His chosen people?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The end of the letter mentions two additional tasks for Ezra which he is well-suited for, concerning the establishment of a religious judicial system and the teaching of God's Law. Why did God provide for these instructions to be given?
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

1 JUN, SATURDAY

Ezra 8:1-30

Practical Preparations

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The name list in verses 1-14 is similar to that in Ezra 2 (implying reunion of family members), all of them volunteers to leave what was familiar to 'return' to rebuilding a city and land. Is Ezra's mission a solo effort, to be accomplished by himself alone with the training and abilities that he had? How does Ezra 8:26-30 show the shared load of responsibilities that Ezra delegated out?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Why were no Levites found among the volunteers? What was the difference with the Levites which may have motivated (or demotivated) their return to Jerusalem? How did God provide, according to today's passage? 3) Ezra 8:21-23 shows the Jews fasting and praying for safety. Ezra had refused to request a military escort for the Jews and the wealth they were carrying. Was this a reasonable decision? Was this a Godly decision?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

2 JUN, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

3 JUN, MONDAY

Ezra 8:31–36

Protected by God's Hand

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ezra is careful to give glory to God for the safe journey of four months (see Ezra 7:9). Have I practiced the discipline of thanksgiving for God's protection on the journeys I travel? 2) The material provisions which had been carried throughout the journey were properly accounted for at the end of the journey. Is my faith community diligent in the 'boring' matters of accounting and material accountability?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The next significant activity by the new wave of returning exiles is to offer sacrifices to the Lord. While we no longer offer animal sacrifice in the new covenant, what other sacrifices do we owe to God as He blesses our obedience to Him?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

4 JUN, TUESDAY

Ezra 9:1–15

The Sin of Intermarriage

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The dreadful sin that Ezra is mourning here is intermarriage. How can I understand the term 'holy race' from Ezra 9:2? Is God only God of a particular ethnicity, based on modern definitions of race? 2) In verses 1 and 10, Ezra repeats the reason that the Jews were forbidden from intermarrying, the 'detestable practices' of the Canaanite nations. How had Israel and Judah's history emphasized the importance of this part of the Law?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Ezra's earnest prayer of repentance does not contain any hint of an excuse or separation (note how he uses 'our' and 'we' pronouns), while also taking the time to acknowledge God's prior mercies in leaving a remnant to Israel. What can I learn about repentance today?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

5 JUN, WEDNESDAY

Ezra 10:1–15

Confession and Repentance

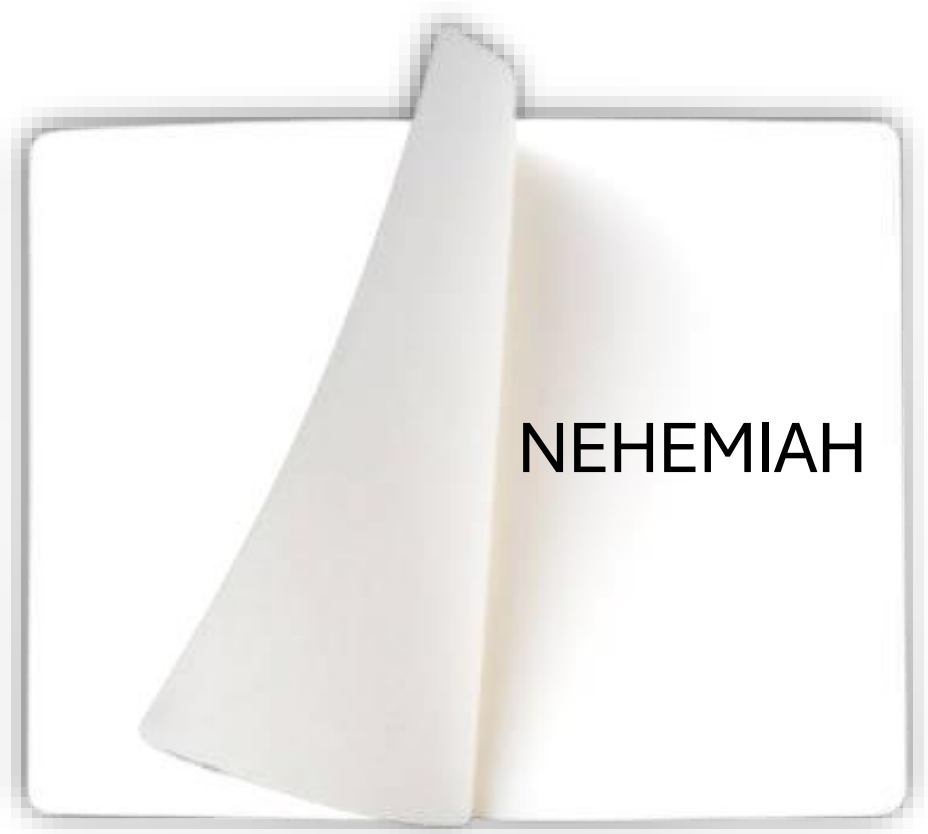
Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Ezra's prayer of confession is 'contagious'. How can I recognise genuine confession of sin in myself and my brethren? 2) The proclamation summoning all the exiles to gather immediately (within three days) indicates the seriousness with which the assembly took this issue. How does my faith community provide space for repentance and restitution for sin? 3) The chosen 'solution' is to send away 'these women and children'. Who proposes and commands this? How can I reconcile this seeming punishing of innocents (especially the children) with Paul's commands on similar matters in 1 Corinthians 7:12-13?
<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>	

6 JUN, THURSDAY

Ezra 10:16–44

List of Guilty Men

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The first names on this list of the guilty (Ezra 10:18) are descendants of the high priest, who had himself led the building of the altar and construction of the temple. How do I consider the wickedness of the offspring of godly men today? Is ancestry any guarantee of personal righteousness? 2) The assembly took 3 months to investigate, and eventually identified roughly a hundred men who had married foreign women. This was a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of men who had returned from exile. How are the strong reactions by Ezra and other leaders justified, considering the relatively small number of cases?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Besides the descendants of the high priests, other priests and Levites are named first in this list of the guilty. Why are these names prioritized? What standard do I hold to for those who serve God directly?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	



NEHEMIAH

7 JUN, FRIDAY

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Nehemiah Prays

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What do I know about the history and personality of Nehemiah from today's passage? 2) What was Nehemiah's response and action after hearing of the troubles of the Jewish remnant? What is my response and action when receiving troubling news? 3) What are the elements of Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 1:5-11? What can I learn from him about the character of God, communal repentance, and remembering God's promises?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

8 JUN, SATURDAY

Nehemiah 2:1-5

Nehemiah's Request

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today's passage takes place four months (in prayer) after Nehemiah 1. Is the interaction with King Artaxerxes a coincidence, divine providence, or a planned act by Nehemiah? 2) Why was Nehemiah 'very much afraid' when questioned by the king? What risk was he taking in today's passage? 3) Nehemiah 2:4-5 describes Nehemiah taking decisive action on his prayers, but only after another quick prayer to God. How do I personally practice continuous prayer alongside Spirit-led action?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

9 JUN, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

10 JUN, MONDAY

Nehemiah 2:6-10

At the Pleasure of the King

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is King Artaxerxes' demonstrated attitude towards Nehemiah in Nehemiah 2? To whom does Nehemiah attribute this attitude? 2) After the king's initial positive answer, Nehemiah presses on with further requests. Contrast his requests and statements with those of Ezra (Ezra 8:22). What does this teach me about the diverse ways in which I can obediently carry out God's plan? 3) The final verse of today's passage introduces two men who would repeatedly cause trouble for Nehemiah and the Jewish remnant. Is their presence a flaw in God's gracious provision for Nehemiah?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

11 JUN, TUESDAY

Nehemiah 2:11–20

Laying the Foundation for the Foundation

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Nehemiah first does a personal inspection of the condition of the walls. Why is this done in secret? Are there lessons here regarding the conduct of godly leaders today? 2) The speech in Nehemiah 2:17 summarizes the current situation, provides direction, and provides inspiration (note that just as Ezra had repeatedly done, Nehemiah also recognises the gracious hand of God). What effect does this have on the Jewish leaders?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) How does Nehemiah respond to the 'mocking and ridiculing' of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem? What is the basis of Nehemiah's confidence?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

12 JUN, WEDNESDAY

Nehemiah 3:1–32

Working on the Wall

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The sheep gate was specially mentioned due to its' proximity to the rebuilt temple. How does this affect both those who are assigned to work on it, as well as the special treatment the gate receives? 2) The nobles of Tekoa are specially mentioned in today's passage. Why are they singled out? Does my faith community have those who are too dignified to share in the work of the community? 3) The list of peoples working on the wall is extensive, and even includes the chief priests (verses 1 and 28). Each works nearby to their existing residences or places of work. How does this give a picture of how the church today can engage in 'repair work' in our families, congregations, denominations, and nations?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

13 JUN, THURSDAY

Nehemiah 4:1-3

Ridicule of Sanballat and Tobiah

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Does righteous obedience to God's commands guarantee acclaim from friend and foe alike? Why are Sanballat and Tobiah angry at the rebuilding of the wall? 2) What are the intended effects of Sanballat and Tobiah's mocking words? Who was their intended audience? 3) How can I differentiate between the discouraging mockings of those who are opposed to me and the honest critical feedback of those who intend to edify me?
<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?	

14 JUN, FRIDAY

Nehemiah 4:4–6

Replying to Ridicule

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To whom did Nehemiah direct his replies (of Sanballat and Tobiah's ridicule)? Why does he engage God and not men? 2) Nehemiah's prayers are of an imprecatory nature – does he ever act (or intend to act) on these prayers? What actions does he engage in instead? How can I learn to focus on obedience instead of a retributive response in my actions? 3) What is the result of the ridicule directed towards the Jews? Is my faith community also able to shrug off ridicule and focus on the God-given tasks we are to accomplish?
<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 JUN, SATURDAY

Nehemiah 4:7-15

Threats of Violence

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Those opposing the Jewish remnant begin plotting violence. What similarities and differences are there in the response of Nehemiah and the Jews to this new threat, compared to Nehemiah 4:4-6? 2) Repeated threats can have an effect on morale, with some among the Jews expressing (reasonable) fear. Nehemiah does not respond with platitudes. What lesson can my faith community take from the actions and words of Nehemiah 4:13-14?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Despite the threats, what constant remains in the actions and obedience of Nehemiah and the people of Judah? What constant obedience am I currently engaging in?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

16 JUN, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

17 JUN, MONDAY

Nehemiah 4:16-23

Always Watchful

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In the face of the consistent threats, Nehemiah makes changes to increase physical security. What is the significance of the instructions of Nehemiah 4:16-18? 2) Nehemiah was not just concerned with the ordering of workers and weapons. In Nehemiah 4:20 he reminds all Jerusalem of the ultimate source of their security. Which brother or sister do I know who needs reminding today of God's protective power? 3) Nehemiah and those closest to him set an example in conduct, effectively bringing to life the 200 year old prophecy of Isaiah 62:6-7 (even without a completed wall to guard). Who am I to set an example for in watchfulness and spiritual alertness?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

18 JUN, TUESDAY

Nehemiah 5:1-11

Outcry of the Poor

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The word for 'great outcry' here is also used in Exodus 3:7 of the outcry of the Jewish slaves in Egypt. What is the core outcry being raised in Nehemiah 5:1-5?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) Nehemiah does not find excuses or victim blame. Instead (probably after pondering in prayer), he addresses the root cause of the societal inequality – those of means who were profiting from others' desperation. He directly confronts them for their greedy behaviour which even broached Levitical law (Leviticus 25:35-37) on the charging of interest. What parallels can we draw with modern day inequality within and without the church?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Nehemiah then goes beyond the requirements of the Law and demands the return of what had been taken as collateral, as well as the interest which had been charged (in effect, an impromptu year of Jubilee)! What does this say to me about righteousness and justice in my dealings with other people, especially those of lower socioeconomic status?
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

19 JUN, WEDNESDAY

Nehemiah 5:12-19

Restitution and Justice

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Nehemiah 5:12-13 records the amazing result of Nehemiah's demands – the agreement of the wealthy, and their holding to their promise. Am I able to imagine such obedience and justice demonstrated in my circles of influence or nation? Can God accomplish this? 2) Nehemiah then gives further context to his demands on the nobility and officials by describing what he as governor was doing regarding the legally allotted taxation and authority he had been given. Is my nation led by leaders of this calibre? Am I crying out to God for leaders of this calibre?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Nehemiah has two goals in mind with regards to his conduct as governor, as described in Nehemiah 5:16 and Nehemiah 5:19. What are my own goals with the power, authority, and influence that I wield?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

20 JUN, THURSDAY

Nehemiah 6:1–9

From Threats to Deception

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The wall was almost completed, and the enemies of the Jewish remnant continued to plot against them. What is the deception which is first attempted? What would have happened if Nehemiah had agreed to meet outside Jerusalem? 2) After repeated and futile attempts at deception, Sanballat resorts to political blackmail using the power of the Persian empire. How was this threat worse than the previous ones? 3) Nehemiah remains steadfastly focused on the work he had been sent to do, yet today's passage hints at his fear (Nehemiah 6:9). Yet as he has consistently done, Nehemiah meets the threats (and fears) in prayer. Have I learnt to do this myself?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

From Deception to Betrayal

<p>Context</p>	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The plot described in today's passage differs from every previous one – it is perpetrated by a Jew (likely a priest with access to the temple). What is the objective of this deception according to Nehemiah 6:13? 2) Nehemiah 6:12 implies that Shemaiah claimed or insinuated divine inspiration, which Nehemiah discerned was not true. How well can I and my faith community discern what is true when faced with those who claim to share our gospel and faith?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Once again Nehemiah's response, besides decisive action, is centered on prayer, committing those betraying him to God. Have I committed those who intend me harm to God for His action and justice?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

22 JUN, SATURDAY

Nehemiah 6:15-7:3

Success – Yet Still in Danger

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The building of the wall is complete, and in a very short period of time! Does this usher in a time of peace and safety from harm? 2) Nehemiah records that some leaders were (even after the success of the project) beholden to the enemies of Judah, and attempting to influence Nehemiah while spying on him. Just as with Shemaiah in yesterday's reading, the threat was coming from inside the city. How have I seen internal (perhaps well meaning) parties doing Satan's work in causing harm to Christ's body and work?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) In response to the schemes and subversiveness, Nehemiah sets doors, curfews, and guards to ensure the physical safety of the city and prevent evil deeds and communications under cover of darkness. What lessons can we learn here about guarding our faith community and households?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

23 JUN, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

24 JUN, MONDAY

Nehemiah 7:4-73

List of the Exiles Who Returned

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) This list is very similar to the earlier one in Ezra 2:1-67, with some minor differences. What source did Nehemiah use for this list according to Nehemiah 7:5? 2) Lists like the ones in today's passage (especially long ones) are generally skipped when we read Scripture. Why are these lists included in the Holy Scriptures (both old and new)? Could Luke 12:7 provide a possible reason? 3) Lists like these are the product of careful administrative service. The gift of administration is of great importance both to the Jewish remnant and to Christ's body today. Who is currently exercising this gift faithfully in my faith community, and how can I appreciate them personally and before God?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

25 JUN, TUESDAY

Nehemiah 8:1-9

Reading the Law

Context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Recall that Ezra was sent to Jerusalem primarily as a teacher of the Law (Ezra 7:10). Today's passage shows what happened when this was taking place. How long did he read for (Nehemiah 8:3)? Who else was involved during this reading (Nehemiah 7:7-8)? 2) What attitude did all the people have towards the book of the Law and its reading, according to Nehemiah 8:5-6? 3) Why did the people weep as they listened to the words of the Law?
<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 JUN, WEDNESDAY

Nehemiah 8:10–18

Living the Law

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Nehemiah and the leaders of the people instruct a holy day (holi-day) and feasting, and the people now turn to joy. What is the source of their joy according to Nehemiah 8:10 and 8:12? 2) As the Law was read to the part regarding the Festival of the Harvest (probably Leviticus 23:33-43), the people realise that it was the seventh month, and immediately obey. In obedience, their joy increases (Nehemiah 8:17). How do I respond to the proclamation of God's Word?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) The festival was celebrated for a week of continuous reading of the Law. Am I and my faith community able to celebrate Scripture persistently today?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

27 JUN, THURSDAY

Nehemiah 9:1–15

Testimony of Israel's History

Context	
<i>Questions</i> to ponder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Nehemiah 9 describes a worship service, held less than a month after the events of Nehemiah 8. What was the order of worship for this service? Who were its facilitators? 2) In entering this worship service, the Israelites were dressed for the occasion (Nehemiah 9:1) and had set themselves apart (holy, Nehemiah 9:2). What does this say about the honour and respect with which the community was participating in this service?
<i>Head</i> What can I understand?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Nehemiah 9:5-38 is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible. Today's passage covers the initial sections testifying of God's character and great deeds. How much is my worship and praise today based on who God is and what He has done?
<i>Heart</i> How do I respond?	
<i>Hands</i> What must I do?	

28 JUN, FRIDAY

Nehemiah 9:16-37

Confession of Israel's Sin and God's Grace

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The prayer in today's passage summarizes the history of Israel's sin. What is the importance of honest confession of sin? How often do we prefer to cover up our sin? What does this do for our souls and God-focus? 2) The accounts of Israel's sins are prefaced with the phrase 'but they'. Every time, there is another phrase 'But You' describing God's nature and demonstrated grace and mercy. What sin is so great as to separate us from our gracious heavenly Father?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Nehemiah 9:32-33 summarizes what is most important – the character of God. What truth can I proclaim today from this description of the great, mighty, and awesome God?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

29 JUN, SATURDAY

Nehemiah 9:38–10:31

A Firm Covenant

Context	
<p><i>Questions</i> to ponder</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The word 'covenant' is normally translated from the Hebrew 'berith', but in today's passage the Hebrew word is 'amanah' (a word most of us already know) – referring to a solemn pledge of faithfulness. How does 'amanah' follow directly from the confession of yesterday's passage?
<p><i>Head</i> What can I understand?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2) The first covenant is not to return to the sin of intermarriage (see readings from Ezra 9 and 10 on 4, 5, and 6 June). What does this teach me about the outworking of true repentance?
<p><i>Heart</i> How do I respond?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Where the first covenant is focused on family life, the second covenant concerns the keeping of the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year of rest. These would have had a direct impact on commerce, income, and the economy. What principles should I and my faith community continue to observe with regard to the Sabbath day of rest, especially in the context of my income-generating activities?
<p><i>Hands</i> What must I do?</p>	

30 JUN, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Notes



Notes



Notes



Notes



Notes



SSMC | 2024

key dates.

<p>January</p>	<p>February</p> <p>18 Feb A date with Ross Paterson, Antioch Missions</p>	<p>March</p> <p>16 & 17 Mar Equipping Weekend #1: RAK Ministry</p> <p>29 Mar Good Friday</p> <p>31 Mar Easter Sunday</p>
<p>April</p> <p>28 Apr Journeying with Loss & Grief Seminar</p>	<p>May</p> <p>25 - 26 May 49th Anniversary Gift Day for Missions</p> <p>30 May - 1 Jun VBS / SU Sports Camp</p>	<p>June</p> <p>29 Jun SSMC Family Day</p>
<p>July</p> <p>5 - 8 Jul Silent Retreat</p> <p>6 - 8 Jul Youth Camp</p> <p>27 & 28 Jul Equipping Weekend #2: RAK Ministry</p>	<p>August</p> <p>25 Aug DG Sunday</p>	<p>September</p> <p>14 - 16 Sep Birds & Bees Camp</p> <p>22 Sep Social Concerns Sunday</p> <p>29 Sep Youth Sunday</p>
<p>October</p> <p>13 Oct MSF Sunday</p> <p>27 Oct Children's Church Sunday</p>	<p>November</p> <p>24 Nov Baptism & Membership Service</p>	<p>December</p> <p>25 Dec Christmas Service</p> <p>31 Dec Covenant Watchnight Service</p>


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


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