

Covenant's Annual Plan

2020-2021

The Council recently affirmed using an annual plan for the 2020-2021 church year - meaning our adult ministries, children's ministries, student ministries and worship ministries will all be focusing on the same theme throughout the year.

Having all of our "discipling ministries" focused on the same theme will allow us to reflect on, discuss and apply the biblical principles we are engaging together as we deepen our relationship with God, prepare the soil for spiritual transformation, nurture our soul, and focus together on God's mission and preferred future.

This coming church year, we will be focusing on "Re-imagining Church" (a study of the early church in Acts); the specific monthly and weekly themes are listed below along with the themes for Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. To enhance our spiritual formation together, you are invited to participate in the following opportunities:

One

To deepen your personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you are encouraged to set aside 15-30 minutes a day (either all at once or cumulative throughout the day) to focus on God through silence and solitude, investing in Scripture and prayer, and engaging in the spiritual disciplines.

To assist in your personal discipleship, Covenant Church will provide a "Daily Word" each weekday. This may consist of a daily devotional, a Scripture passage for personal reflection, or a short reflection from a fellow journeyer. If you are not currently receiving this, please call or email the church office.

Two

Leaders (i.e., Council members and staff), in signing the "Leadership Covenant," have committed to both being a mentor and to being mentored. "Mentoring" is defined as an intentional, regular meeting (at least monthly) with a mentee for the purpose of spiritual growth. Anyone can be a mentor or a mentee. If you would like to be mentored, please ask someone you know and trust to be your spiritual mentor.

While mentoring sessions are individually focused to meet the needs and interests of the mentee, Covenant Church will support mentors by providing specific topics and questions for discussion. If you are a mentor, call the church office and we will add you to the list.

Three (to Twelve)

Small groups are ideal place to hold each other accountable for our spiritual growth. These groups may be men or women's groups; couple, non-couple, or mixed groups; member and non-member groups; and/or ministry groups.

Covenant Church will provide materials to enhance your discussions and time together. If you'd like to join a small group this fall, you may call the church office, tell us what kind of group you'd like to be a part of, and we will assist you in joining or forming a small group or you can form your own group and just let us know, or, if you are already in a small group, just call the church office and we'll make sure you have access to the materials.

Covenant Church will also provide two weekly zoom "small groups." You can join the Tuesday group (7.17am - 8.17am) or the Thursday group (7.17pm-8.17pm).

Corporate Worship

Our weekly worship service will introduce the theme for the week/month; the liturgy and hymns will underscore the theme.

With everything focused on the same theme, families will be able to carry on a discussion around the table; members in different groups will be able to discuss the theme together; and we will be able to encourage and support each other's spiritual journeys.

Re-imagining Church

(An Annual Theme for Covenant Church)

August - Introduction

23 “The Church is Born” (Acts 1:1-8)

The church is God’s primary instrument to advance his Kingdom and has been entrusted with the eternity-altering message of the Gospel. Sadly, we have forgotten whose we are and why we are here. We’ll take about God’s design for his Church focusing on the Holy Spirit, community, how to get along together, how to spread the gospel, and how to stay focused on God.

30 “Hurry Up and Wait” (Acts 1:1-5)

Change is hard; the only thing more difficult is waiting for change. Acts brings mega changes. The disciples lived in liminal space (between the ascension of Jesus and His return). While the disciples waited they yielded; they anticipated; they prayed, and they came together. And while they waited, God birthed His Church.

September - Embracing the Holy Spirit

06 “Being Filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:6-8)

Acts 1:6-8 provides the thesis for the book of Acts and the Church’s mandate. The adventure begins when God sends his Spirit. Who is the Holy Spirit? What does he do? Believers, Jesus followers, are to be filled with the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit assists us in keeping the main thing the main thing.

13 “Coming Back” (Acts 1:8-14)

Jesus returns to His Father. Two angels promise Jesus is coming back; will we be ready? The disciples come back to Jerusalem; will they/we be obedient? The disciples come back to prayer; they prayed in one accord. Interestingly, the early church seldom talks about the church; instead, empowered by the Spirit, they talked about Jesus.

20 “Moving On” (Acts 1:15-26)

The only thing that stays the same in the early church is the constant change. Peter tells the disciples everything that happened (happens) is part of God’s plan; he invites them to embrace God’s preferred future. Peter outlines the qualifications for discipleship. Accepting the present (they are an unimpressive group with an unimpressive track record; they are huddled in fear, confused, and overwhelmed), they anticipate a future marked by preparation, obedience, being together, and prayer. They will need to move on into the unknown, and to do so, they will have to change course.

27 “In You” (Acts 2:1-13)

The Holy Spirit is poured out on Pentecost. When the Spirit moves, the Church is stirred. And God informs/reminds his world the Church is in the eternity business (Will there be people in heaven because of what you/we did here on earth?). Peter stands up and talks about Jesus. The real miracle here is no the wind and fire; the real miracle is God moving in and taking up residence in our life. The first word in the text that goes with “in you” is power; the second word that goes with “in you” is complete. God calls us to make an eternal difference in someone’s life; in doing so, we change the course of history.

October - The Church’s Rule of Life

04 “Devoted to the Apostle’s Teaching” (Acts 2:14-42)

Gospel teaching is a mark of the community; gospel teaching begins where people are; gospel teaching engages everyone; Gospel teaching is founded on God’s Word; Gospel teaching pulls no punches; Gospel teaching offers eternal hope. Gospel teaching is the catalyst for spiritual transformation and Kingdom building, a defining mark of the Church, and only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. We must meditate on God’s Word, personalize God’s Word, respond to God’s Word with confession; and “eat the Word” (make it a part of us). We can’t just be informed believers; we must be transformed believers.

11 “Devoted to the Fellowship” (Acts 2:42)

Unity is a high mark of the Church, a precious gift from God, and a grace worthy of our full devotion. Anything less incurs God’s wrath. To enhance the fellowship of faith, believers are called to do some loving, do some forgiving, do some thinking of others, so some joining, and bless their community. As the gatekeeper of the Kingdom, the Church is called to share the faith, offer grace, and provide hospitality. The Church is to be a community/city on a hill so the whole world can see.

18 “Devoted to Breaking Bread” (Acts 2:42)

Being devoted to the breaking of bread means this is more than a periodic event, it is a lifestyle. The “table” is a familiar place in our lives, a gathering place for family, a place where food is shared, a place to feast, marked by faithfulness, where forgiveness is offered, and where favor is extended. The early church provided all of these; they provided real comfort food; they transformed lives. Breaking bread is an opportunity to be who God has called us to be - to bring living bread to His world.

25 “Devoted to Prayer” (Acts 2:42)

Acts gives us a window into the prayer life of the early Church; prayer was the life-blood of the Church. Why, if we really believe God answers prayer, do we pray so little? God invites us to use the two primary gifts he has entrusted to us: prayer and his Spirit. Prayer reminds us of our dependence on God; invites us into God’s will, unleashes God’s power and promotes unity. God longs to bless his Church in ways we have yet to imagine; we just need to ask.

November - The Church's Mission

01 "Search and Rescue" (Acts 3:1-10)

This passage outlines five characteristics (marks) of Jesus's followers (disciples): First, they prioritized prayer. Second, they were willing to walk into the fire (temple). Third, they have "beggars" in their life. Fourth, they share Jesus Christ. Fifth, they were constantly on a search and rescue mission for the Kingdom. On God's ultimate search and rescue mission, he sent Jesus to save his people; now he sends you and me.

08 "The Rest of the Story" (Acts 3:11-4:22)

Having focused on the "marks" of the disciples, we now focus on the message. It is about change. It's time to repent and change our ways. What do we need confess and change in our life? Repentance is not a one-time event; it is a lifelong process. There is no good news without repentance. The full story is that with Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, there is no hope. The disciples, filled with the Spirit, have a holy boldness. The early church's mission strategy was going, growing and blessing.

15 "Praying the Believer's Prayer" (Acts 4:21-31)

Peter and John go to the temple to pray, are arrested, and thrown into prison. In prison they pray for boldness - boldness they derive from God's sovereignty and from Jesus' name. They find power in praying together, and God answers their prayer. They connected prayer and mission. Following Jesus requires boldness. Changing the world requires boldness. Proclaiming the gospel requires boldness. Boldness requires prayer.

22 "All In" (Acts 4:32-5:11)

God calls his church to be Spirit-driven. All believers are to be one in heart and mind. Unity is the work of every believer. A miracle took place in the early church: the Spirit came and Jesus' followers got united behind his mission; they took their eyes off themselves and focused them on the world. Sadly, we see primarily self-driven churches today that don't understand God's creative power, his awesome holiness, or his marvelous grace. We, like Ananias and Sapphira, think we can fool God. Are we all in - heart, voice, hands, feet - even our wallet. Are we all in together.

Thanksgiving - "Giving Thanks in Troubled Times" (1 Chronicles 29:10-13)

Advent Series - Making Room for Jesus

Nov 29 Making Room for Jesus - Hope (Revelation 22:1-5)

Dec 6 Making Room for Jesus - Peace (Luke 2:8-14)

Dec 13 Making Room for Jesus - Joy (Luke 1:5-25, 57-80)

Dec 20 Making Room for Jesus - Love (Luke 2:1-11)

Dec 25 (Christmas) Making Room for Jesus - Presence (John 1:1-5, 10-14)

Dec 27 TBA

January - Spirit-Empowered Leadership

03 "The Fear Factor" (Acts 5:12-42)

When we long more for the applause of heaven than the applause of men, we'll find the courage to follow where Jesus' leads and when God sends. The basic source of fear is always internal - battling feels of inadequacy, confusion, and insecurity. Courage grows as we're willing to let go of being comfortable. Courage prevails when God's vision and our passion intersect. Courage rises when our cause is greater than our circumstances, when Christ's resurrection and life push aside our circumstances and discouragement.

10 "Choosing Leaders" (Acts 6:1-7)

In the early church, the answer to the conflicts in the church was providing good leadership. The process of getting good leaders focused on discernment. Christ's church is to be built around spiritual calling and giftedness; when the church functions together as a body, the church grows.

17 "Needed: Super Heroes" (Acts 6:8-7:53)

The early church began to distinguish itself from their Jewish heritage. Change - doing things God calls us to do - requires courage - God chose an ordinary believer to do an extra-ordinary thing be a super hero. The price for Stephen was his life (but he understood even his life was not his own). He was willing to die for Jesus. People become "heroes" when God calls them and they respond in obedience.

24 "Engaging the Real World" (Acts 8:1-24)

Engaging the world is hazard to the church and its members. Following the death of Stephen, the persecution of the church increased. But instead of hunkering down, God used this "tragedy" to push his church out of their comfort zone and into the world. The Church renewed their mission. Being on Christ's distinguishes real followers of Jesus' from the counterfeit ones. The mission brought the church together.

31 "Hearing God" (Acts 8:26-40)

Philip hears God and follows his direction; the result is a "divine appointment." Philip "comes alongside" and listens; he follows the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The result is a conversion; the result of this conversation is an entire nation impacted for Jesus. God longs to empower us by his Spirit to help build his kingdom.

February - The Marks of a Believer

07 “A Come-to-Jesus Moment” (Relationship with Jesus) (Acts 9:1-19)

Every believer, including Saul (Paul) is a *transformation story* possible only by God’s power and grace. Saul came face-to-face with Jesus and he was transformed. In turn, he became a transforming presence wherever he went. The story of Paul becomes the story of every believer - Going, Growing, and Blessing! We are a story of God’s transforming grace. We need to tell our story.

14 “Peter, Paul and You” (Community) (Acts 9:19-43)

We belong to God. We were created for dependency; we were created for community. God prefers to use humble, broken, bruised and transformed people. We need to learn to trust; we need to learn to wait on the slow work of God. We need to deal with the resulting rejection. We need to be holy, distinguished from the world. We need to realize we are not the *captains of our soul*.

Lent/Easter - Trumpets, Tears and Ashes

Feb 17 (Ash Wednesday - 7:30-8:00 am service) - An Invitation to Lent and Lament (Genesis 3:19)

Feb 21 “How Long?” (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

Feb 28 “Why?” (Habakkuk 1:5-17)

Mar 07 “When?” (Habakkuk 2:1-5)

Mar 14 “Woe!” (Habakkuk 2:6-20)

Mar 21 “Yet!” (Habakkuk 3:1-19)

Mar 28 (Palm Sunday) “The Sorrow of God” (Luke 19:41)

Apr 01 (Maundy Thursday) The Gat-Shemanim (Mark 14:32-42)

Apr 3 (Easter) From Mourning to Joy (John 16:20-23a)

April - The Marks of a Believer (con’t)

11 “Breaking Walls; Building Bridges” (Witness/Justice/Shalom) (Acts 10)

People seldom trust people who are not like them so they build walls to stay separate. Just in its infancy, the church had already begun to build walls. So God intervenes. God’s preferred future for his church is for them to be bridge builders. Bridge-building is costly - it requires facing (and addressing our prejudices). But Peter listens, learns, shares the Gospel, and pays the price. Everyone matters to God.

18 “Balcony People” (Acts 11:19-30)

Here we meet Barnabas, the “son of encouragement,” again. Barnabas is a Greek-speaking Jew from a gentile country with the gift for breaking walls and building bridges. He teams with Paul on mission. A “balcony” person sees the grace of God, believes people can change, provides comfort in crises, lives by the inversion principle, and believes you are worth their time. The church and our world are in desperate need of balcony people.

25 “Surprised by Prayer” (Acts 12:1-19)

Peter is imprisoned; the church prays for his release; God releases Peter; the church is shocked. What is wrong with this picture? The early church invested in intercessory prayer, in corporate prayer, and in fervent prayer. But they lacked expectancy; they never enjoyed God’s answer. Jesus uses everything - including our prayers - to pursue his mission.

May - Where Do We Go From Here?

02 “Letting Go and Letting God” (Acts 13:1-13)

It is impossible to be obedient if we are unwilling to change. Change threatens everything and raises our anxiety levels. But putting our lives in the hands of the eternal potter always results in something magnificent. The Antioch Church was growing (healthy) and God said, “Paul, let go” and “Let’s go...” Are we willing to listen for God’s voice and follow his leading? How pliable is our clay?

06 National Day of Prayer

09 “A Convicting Spirit” (Acts 16:16-40)

There is always resistance (friction) to moving forward. We are either resisting the Spirit or being convicted by the Spirit. And while the Spirit moves among his people, the world watches. As our witnessing goes, so goes the church. The church needs to move from singular to plural, from bystanders to eyewitnesses, from observing to belonging, from spectator to player.

16 “A Mission that Matters” (Acts 17:16-34)

Most believers find the Great Commission intimidating rather than inspiring. Paul models for us effective evangelism - the attitude lesson, the approach lesson, the authenticity lesson, the articulation lesson, the apologetics lesson, the assimilation lesson, and the action lesson - and reminds us of the importance of keeping the main thing the main thing.

23 “In Search of Guidance” (Acts 21)

Where does Paul get his confidence in God’s guidance? He resolves to do God’s will before knowing it; devotes himself to God’s Word; remains attentive to God; prays continuously; listens to God and learns to discern the Spirit. And Paul matured and became more like Jesus.

30 “Acts 29”

The story of God’s hope for the world continues to be authored...in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Imagine the unimaginable. Imagine it has already happened - because it has. God do it again. Use us!