

**One Year Bible Blog – Monthly Notes - www.OneYearBibleBlog.com
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Notes & Group Questions for January 1 - 31 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)

OLD TESTAMENT (Daily reading schedule at: www.OneYearBibleBlog.com)

1/1 - BOOK OF GENESIS OVERVIEW:

Author: Moses

Date: ~1420 B.C.

Content: The book of Genesis was written to explain how everything began; in fact, the very title Genesis means “origin” or “beginning.” It explains that God created the universe, how man was created and placed in a perfect environment, how sin began, and how God provided salvation for lost man. The beginning of human history is described, the beginning of arts and crafts, how human languages began, and where the various nations came from. The focus then shifts to the beginning of the Hebrew people with Abraham, followed by the histories of Isaac, Jacob and his sons, and the book ends with Joseph in Egypt.

Theme: The main idea that runs through the book is that although God made everything good, man’s sin has spoiled it. God has not given up, but is now in search of man to save him. The overall control of God is stressed, and special attention is given to how God directs history for the good of his people and their salvation. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers “The One Year Bible Companion” p. 1)*

1/1 - Moses is the author/compiler of the first five books of the Old Testament, also known as the Pentateuch, or the books of the Law. It is believed that these five books were written by Moses during Israel's 40 years in the desert after the exodus from Egypt - which was likely between 1446 B.C. and 1406 B.C. The book of Genesis is foundational to understanding the rest of the Bible. It is a book of relationships - between God and his creation; between God and humans; and between humans themselves. In Genesis, God pledges his love and faithfulness to humans through covenants. It is a narrative that continually demonstrates faith.

1/1 - In Genesis chapters 1 & 2 we read about the Creation account and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The 6 days of creation have main 2 lines of thought by various scholars: 1. they were 6 literal 24 hour days or 2. they were 6 figurative days of an undefined timeframe, which could even be millions of years. One quick note about the location of the Garden of Eden. It is believed to have been near where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet, in what is now southern Iraq.

1/1 - Today we read this incredibly powerful verse in Genesis chapter 1 verse 27: *“So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them.”* **Q: Do you believe that you are made in the image of God? Is this a powerful thing to reflect upon? What might this mean for your life this new year, knowing that you are made in the image of God? Does this give you a sense of possibility for your life? A sense that you are made for a great purpose in this life?**

1/1 - Chapter 2 verse 3 is beautiful: *“And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from his work of creation.”* A day of rest. One day a week. **Q: If God did this, think we should too? :)** 6 days of work and play and 1 day each week of resting in God. I confess I like the concept a lot more than I actually put it into practice. **Perhaps 2011 can be a year of new beginnings where a Sabbath day of rest enters our lives each week? How are you doing on taking a Sabbath?**

1/2 - In Genesis chapters 3 we read about The Fall. Chapter 3 is a foundational chapter of the Bible to understand. From this chapter our history goes forward with sin passed on to every man and woman through the seed of Adam. This sets the stage for God’s pursuit of men and women in Genesis, followed by the Exodus from Egypt, the Laws, the judges, the kings, the prophets - and ultimately the final solution to the Fall: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (ultra-Cliff Notes version here... you'll get the full version of all of this over the next 363 days... :-)) It is through belief in Jesus as Messiah that we are saved from what began here in Genesis chapter 3. **Q: What is your reaction to reading about The Fall in Genesis today? Is it painful to read about The Fall after reading about The Creation yesterday? If Satan was able to deceive Adam & Eve back then, do you think he still deceives people today? What is our remedy from the lies and deception Satan might throw our way? Do you believe reading and studying God's Word on a daily basis might be one remedy? What are some other remedies? (prayer, going to church, being in**

a small community group with others, etc.?) Do you believe Jesus has saved us from The Fall?

1/2 - In Genesis 3:1-4 in today's readings we are first introduced to the devil in the Bible, who clothes himself as a snake. The devil is often referred to as the "great deceiver", and in this chapter you can see why. I think an important thing for us to realize today is that the devil continues to work in our world. He continues to deceive men and women. And, unfortunately, he is good at what he does. I have a hunch that probably a few people reading this blog do not believe in the existence of the devil. I will admit that early in my Christian walk, I did not believe in the devil's existence. However - thankfully, I was disciplined by a godly man who counseled me through Bible passages that prove his existence - chapter 3 of Genesis certainly being one. In fact, one interesting thing my friend said to me at this early stage of my Christian walk was this - "The devil's greatest trick is to make you think that he does not exist." This is a very powerful statement. Please consider it. **Q: Why would this be his greatest trick?** Because if you believe there is no devil, then you may believe there is no evil, and you then may believe that there is really no sin or nothing you can do wrong, and then you may come to believe that there is no moral code. **You see the slippery slope of not acknowledging and realizing the existence of the devil and evil?**

1/2 - The other problem of not realizing the existence of the devil or evil is that you can more easily be tempted and enslaved to bad habits and sins. So - I know I'm going on quite a bit here about this point - **Q: I just want to encourage you to ask yourself - do you believe in the existence of the devil? Do you believe in the existence of evil? Of temptation? Of sin?** There is a remedy and solution to protect and keep you from all of this - and that is Jesus. But, it's possible that you may not run into the loving and saving arms of Jesus if you don't believe in the devil or evil. Second to last point - a book that did help open my eyes in a big way to existence of evil in our world today is [Frank Peretti's "This Present Darkness"](#). It is a Christian book and one that I believe will really bring home the seriousness of evil and temptation in our world today. You may want to check it out if you have questions on all of this. Also, C.S. Lewis, in the intro to his incredible book about evil and temptation in our lives called ["The Screwtape Letters"](#) writes this: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or magician with the same delight." A great quote... and a great reminder to not have an excessive nor unhealthy interest in the devil or evil - this is of course extremely dangerous! And the bottom line is of course to turn your eyes and gaze toward God and Jesus for ultimate protection - and I do believe reading the Bible each day is one of the best ways to do exactly this!

1/2 - In verses 12 and 13 we see Adam and Eve passing the buck on why they sinned. Check out Adam's words in verse 12: *"but it was the woman you gave me who brought me the fruit, and I ate it."* At first glance you might think that Adam is just blaming Eve in this verse, but note that he is also blaming God! "the woman YOU gave me..." Adam was blaming God and Eve - anybody but himself. **Q: How often do we do this in our lives? Blame others for our mistakes?** Verse 15 is a prophetic verse that carries forward to Jesus: *"From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* This last sentence refers to Jesus ultimately defeating the devil through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection!

1/2 - In Genesis chapter 4 we read about the first murder of humankind - Cain killing his own brother Abel in a premeditative way. This is a clear demonstration of The Fall and how sin lives in the hearts of men and women - and can only be redeemed and forgiven today through faith in Jesus and through God's grace. Many of you probably asked yourselves, why didn't God look with favor on Cain's offering? Commentaries I've read suggest that Cain's offering was a careless or thoughtless offering whereas Abel's offering was a choice or generous offering. And God saw the motivation and heart attitude of both men as they brought their offering. It seems that God is looking straight into Cain's heart as he says this in verses 6 and 7: *"Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked him. "Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it."* That is a scary thought - sin waiting to attack and destroy. In the NIV it translates *"sin is crouching at your door."* Let us be watchful and prayerful to not be overtaken by sin, but to respond correctly to the grace and strength given us through Jesus. **Q: How do you combat the "sin crouching at your door" in your life?**

1/2 - Genesis 4:17 - *"Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch."* - brings up the big question of "Where did Cain's wife come from?" The short answer to this is that his wife was a sister, niece, great-niece, or family member of some sort, which brings up the next question about why was there inter-family marriage in the Bible. Let me refer you to 3 great website links to give

you more in-depth answers on these questions. Please do read the [short answer at this link](#), the [long answer at this link](#), and another [short answer at this link](#) to these questions regarding Cain's wife.

1/2 - In Genesis 4:19 polygamy enters history: *"Lamech married two women--Adah and Zillah."* Polygamy clearly went against God's divine intention of monogamy in Genesis chapter 2:24 - *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."* God's original plan early on in the Bible is monogamy in marriage. We will see many cases of polygamy this year as we read through the One Year Bible - this is humankind thwarting God's will - which we will also see in many ways throughout our readings this year. I think sometimes we can get hung up on the "strange stuff" we read about in the Bible - but one important point to make is this - The Bible records both God's will and teachings, and people's sin. So if we happen to read about people's sin in the Bible, as we do here in verse 19 with Lamech's polygamy, please don't confuse this with this being God's will. It's people's sin. And we'll see this again in the Bible - fortunately we have a loving God who sent his son, Jesus, to save us from our sins.

1/3 - In Genesis chapter 5 we read about the genealogy from Adam to Noah. You will note that there are some long life spans here in this genealogy. These life spans are often interpreted to be either literal or symbolic - and many evangelical commentaries will say either is possible. Those who believe these ages in this genealogy are literal believe this is the case because of a few reasons: 1. the human race was more genetically pure in this early time period, so diseases did not shorten life spans; 2. no rain had yet fallen on the earth - until the next chapter - so the expanse of water above the earth protected people from environmental factors; and/or 3. God gave people longer life spans so they would have time to fill the earth - per Genesis 1:28.

1/3 - In Genesis 6 we read about the Flood. Most evangelical commentaries say that this was a literal flood that covered the entire earth, while some do say that it's possible that it was a flood that covered the Mesopotamian region of the earth. More seem to go with a literal flood covering the entire earth. Chapter 6 verses 5 & 6 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Now the LORD observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and he saw that all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil. So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them. It broke his heart."* I think it was this last sentence that really stood out to me - It broke his heart. God's heart was broken over our behavior. I love realizing that God has this type of compassion and care for what we do. What we do matters to God! When we are obedient and faithful and loving, God rejoices! When we are not, it breaks his heart. I hope it encourages you to know that God did not just create you and doesn't really care whether you do well in this life - he is rooting for you! He wants you to run the race well and receive the prize! **Q: How does Genesis Chapter 6 verses 5 & 6 in the days of Noah stand out to you?** *"Now the LORD observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and he saw that all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil. So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them. It broke his heart."* **Is there any correlation to the days of Noah to our modern day? In what ways do you think God's heart is broken over our world today?**

1/3 - In Genesis 6:4 we read about the Nephilim. Bob Deffinbaugh with Bible.org says this about the Nephilim: *"According to this view, the 'sons of God' of verses 2 and 4 are fallen angels, which have taken the form of masculine human-like creatures. These angels married women of the human race (either Cainites or Sethites) and the resulting offspring were the Nephilim. The Nephilim were giants with physical superiority and therefore established themselves as men of renown for their physical prowess and military might. This race of half human creatures was wiped out by the flood, along with mankind in general, who were sinners in their own right (verse 6:11,12)."*

1/4 - Yesterday's Flood readings in Genesis were about judgment - today's readings are about redemption! Chapter 8 verse 1 stood out to me: *"But God remembered Noah and all the animals in the boat."* I like that phrase "But God remembered" - but I have a hunch that it is a bit understated in God's love and compassion for Noah and all of creation. Verse 11 is interesting in that if you were ever wondering where our modern day peace symbol of a dove with an olive branch comes from originally - now you know - God's peace symbol to Noah here in Genesis 8:11!

1/4 - In Genesis chapter 9 verses 8 through 17 we read about the first major covenant of God's in the Old Testament called the Noahic Covenant. There are 6 more major covenant's that we will get to later this year - The first Abrahamic covenant, The second Abrahamic covenant, The Sinaitic Covenant (Moses on Mt. Sinai), The Phinehas Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. So - Covenants are a big deal! God is a God of covenants! This one is laid out in all 10 verses but can basically be summed up in verse 11: *"I solemnly promise never to send another flood to kill all living creatures and destroy the earth."* And the rainbow is given as a sign of The Noahic Covenant. **Q: How did reading about the flood affect you? Is there any way you can see the flood as an act of mercy from God?**

1/4 - Genesis chapter 9 verse 3 is intriguing. I forgot to mention this in previous day's posts - but, I read a commentary on the Garden of Eden and even thereafter that early descendants of Adam & Eve were strictly vegetarians - God had given Adam & Eve the fruits & plants in the Garden to eat - and then Adam's son's cultivated the ground for plants / food. But here in verse 3 God is now saying that it is okay to eat animals' meat for food: *"I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables."* Very interesting. We'll get more details on clean and unclean animals per the Law in our OT readings early this year.

1/4 - In the remainder of chapter 9 we read about Noah's son's Shem, Ham and Japheth. Initially I asked myself, why is Noah so upset with Ham? The answer lies in verse 22: *"Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked and went outside and told his brothers."* The last 3 words of this sentence were the issue - Ham told his brothers his father was naked. Instead of discreetly just covering up his father on his own, he broadcast the issue to his brothers. **Q: Are there times in our life where we could discreetly take care of problems of others, or could confront the individual directly about the problem, but instead we broadcast what someone else's problems are? Is this the right thing to do? Is this the godly thing to do?**

1/4 - There is a lot of interesting stuff going on in the genealogy in chapter 10, which is typically called The Table of Nations, but I'll just quickly point out verses 21 & 22: *"Sons were also born to Shem, the older brother of Japheth. Shem was the ancestor of all the descendants of Eber."* Shem becomes translated in the future as Semites - i.e. Semitic peoples. And Eber is translated in the future as Hebrew. So, you can see that Shem's lineage is going to be the one from where Israel comes from.

1/5 - In Genesis chapter 11 we read about the tower of Babel. I probably should not confess this, but I will - verse 4 made me smile and laugh at myself a bit, which really shouldn't be funny. This verse reminded me of myself at times: *"Let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies--a monument to our greatness!"* This verse is obviously not one that made God happy, as we see in subsequent verses. And I guess I have to ask myself - are there times my life or areas of my life where I am attempting to build something that will be a "monument to my greatness"? And I'm afraid that the answer is too often yes. Or it surely has been in the past. I pray that I'm turning over the desire to "be great" over to God more and more these days. I pray that I am not seeking glory for myself - but seeking glory for God. But, I am afraid that sometimes I revert back to wanting to build a "monument to my greatness" in my work or volunteer activities or maybe even personal relationships. And this is pride. It was this pride that brought about the building of the tower of Babel - and it was because of pride that God stopped the building of the tower by giving the human race different languages. **Q: In your life – have you ever sought to build monuments of greatness for yourself? How have you refocused your life to seek to only glorify God?**

1/5 - We are introduced to Abram & Sarai in Genesis chapter 12. This is significant in that it transitions our Old Testament readings from being about the world at large to being primarily about a specific man, Abram, his family, and his descendants. Verses 2 and 3 are an amazing promise from God to Abraham: *"I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."* This is a powerful promise that we will see played out throughout the rest of our Old Testament readings - and into the New Testament this promise continues and is fulfilled in Jesus - and continues in us as spiritual descendants of Abram today. I heard somewhere once that one way to paraphrase this promise is "I will bless you, so that you will be a blessing to others." And I think about that today for our own lives. If we have been blessed by God, is it possible that we have been blessed in part so that we will be a blessing to others? **Q: How do you believe that you been blessed by God? How are you passing along that blessing to others in your life? What are some new ways in 2011 that God might be calling you to be a blessing to others?**

1/5 - The brief story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt is a foreshadowing of what we will see later in Genesis and into Exodus - the descendants of Abram going into Egypt to escape a severe famine - and then ultimately leaving Egypt to the north "with all their household and belongings" (verse 20). I also was intrigued in our Matthew readings a couple of days ago that Jesus as a child went into Egypt, when Mary & Joseph fled Herod's decree to kill all boys 2 & under around Bethlehem. Egypt plays quite a supporting role in the Bible!

1/6 - Chapter 13 verse 9 stood out to me today as Abram was trying to settle the arguments between his and Lot's herdsmen over pastureland: *"I'll tell you what we'll do. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want that area over there, then I'll stay here. If you want to stay in this area, then I'll move on to another"*

place." I guess what I really like about this is Abram is giving Lot the first choice of the land. It seems like Abram is confident that he will personally be okay with whatever 2nd choice is left-over to him because he is in a relationship with God. **Q: What is a time in your life that you let someone else take the first choice, and you took the "leftover" and it turned out to be a blessing overall?**

1/6 - Chapter 14 verse 14 also stood out in regards to Abram's character: *"When Abram learned that Lot had been captured, he called together the men born into his household, 318 of them in all. He chased after Kedorlaomer's army until he caught up with them in Dan."* I don't know about you... but I'll be honest. If my nephew got captured by a band of marauding kings and their army, I'm thinking I might just let my nephew go and chalk it up to very bad luck on his part... But not Abram! When he heard the news that Lot had been captured, it looks like he did not even blink! He called together his household immediately and they were off and running after Kedorlaomer's army. Yes, they were chasing after an army... again, I'm not so sure I would do this... though, hopefully, maybe I now would if I can keep in mind Abram's character here.... **Q: What about you? Would you chase after an army? Is there maybe someone in your life who has been "captured" by something - an addiction, a sadness, some bad luck - and will you go chasing after that person and help to free them from the "army" that has ensnared them?**

1/6 - In verses 17 through 20 in chapter 14 we read about Melchizedek. And I definitely would like to get others opinions on this - Who was Melchizedek? The reason I ask this question is due to Hebrews Chapter 7. (Hebrews 7 is well worth the read at this point in our Genesis journey.) My thinking currently is that Melchizedek was a very great priest - but I don't believe he was Jesus Christ preincarnate. But, again, I'm willing to listen to others on your thoughts on this. My thoughts on this is that Hebrews 7 seems to be saying that Jesus is "like" or "in the order" of Melchizedek - but not quite saying Jesus is Melchizedek. I read there are 4 basic theories on who Melchizedek is - 1. simply a king of Salem and Abram was showing him respect, 2. Melchizedek was a standard title for the kings of Salem. 3. He was a "type of Christ" and he illustrates a lesson about Christ. or 4. He was Jesus preincarnate in a temporary body form. **Q: Who do you think Melchizedek was?**

1/6 - Genesis chapter 15:9-21 is the first Abrahamic Covenant. It was an unconditional divine promise to fulfill the grant of the land to Abram and his descendants. Verses 5 & 6 in chapter 15 are powerful: *"Then the LORD brought Abram outside beneath the night sky and told him, "Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that--too many to count!" And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD declared him righteous because of his faith."* It is believed that in the dark night sky of the ancient near east Abram could have seen up to 8,000 stars in the sky. And verse 6, the preceding sentence to this one I think is important for each of us to consider. **Q: How do you know that you believe God's promises in your life today? What are God's promises for you? How do we demonstrate faith that God's promises for us through his son Jesus are true?**

1/7 - In Genesis chapter 16 we get another potential Jesus sighting in the OT! :) (Similar to our "potential" with Melchizedek yesterday.) I'll keep you posted on all our "potential" Jesus sightings in the Old Testament - as seen by some commentaries. Some believe that the angel that appears to Hagar in the desert could be Christ pre-incarnate. Why? Because the angel seems to be speaking in the first person, as if the angel is God - (and Jesus is God) - but yet the angel is not described as God the Father. Check out verse 10 on this point - *"I will give you more descendants than you can count."* Next point is that later in this chapter Hagar seems to be giving the angel a bit more credit of the angel "just being an angel", as you'll see here in verse 13: *"Thereafter, Hagar referred to the LORD, who had spoken to her, as "the God who sees me," for she said, "I have seen the One who sees me!"* I guess I can see how some commentators go down this path... **Q: Why or why not do you think Jesus could have been preincarnate in the Old Testament?**

1/7 - In Genesis chapter 17 we read about the second Abrahamic Covenant! This covenant was is a conditional divine pledge from God to be Abraham's God and the God of his descendents. The condition? Obedience and consecration to God as symbolized by circumcision. In verse 23 I think we see another example of Abraham's prompt obedience to God's will for his life: *"On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and every other male in his household and circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins, exactly as God had told him."* Abraham does not hesitate - does not wait one more day - he and every other male in his household get circumcised that very day! **Q: How are you prompt with your obedience to God's will in your life? Are there some areas in your life where you feel like you might not be so prompt with your obedience?**

1/7 - In Genesis 18 we see some amazing hospitality from Abraham to God and two angels that appear along with God - or Jesus again preincarnate. Hospitality for strangers was important back in Abraham's day. **Q: What is an example of**

how you show hospitality toward strangers today? What are some areas in your life that God might be calling you to show more hospitality?

1/8 - In Genesis chapter's 18 & 19 we get a great look at how God responds to intercessory prayer and also clearly see God's judgment in chapter 19. Ch. 18 Verse 17 is a powerful start to our readings: *"Should I hide my plan from Abraham?" the LORD asked.* I think what we see here and in the following verses is that God obviously really cares for Abraham - as a friend - and as one who has been credited as righteous because of his faith. And I do think this is an important point before we read about Abraham's intercessory prayer to God - that for intercessory prayer really to have any standing before God, we need to be in right relationship with God. If we are being disobedient to God or being unrepentant of sins or bad habits that God wants us to give up, then I think our intercessory prayer for others can lose its effectiveness. Check out James 5:16 for this point: *"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."* Abraham was credited as righteous because of his faith (Genesis 15:6). Hence, his intercessory prayer was powerful and effective. **Q. How do you intercede for others in your prayers today? Do you believe intercessory prayer to be powerful?**

1/8 - In verse 25 we begin to see Abraham's several requests, or intercessions, to God to spare the city of Sodom for the sake of the righteous living in the city: *"Surely you wouldn't do such a thing, destroying the innocent with the guilty. Why, you would be treating the innocent and the guilty exactly the same! Surely you wouldn't do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"* And from here we see Abraham bringing down the number of righteous that would need to be in the city for it to be spared. I don't necessarily see what Abraham was doing here as haggling with God - but, I think he was acting out of compassion for the righteous few in the city - and surely Lot and his family were on his mind during these intercessions...

1/8 - In Genesis chapter 19 there is a lot going on. And I'm sure a few things that jump out at you when you read them, and create a lot of questions in your mind. (Lot offering his two virgin daughters (v. 8) & what happened in the cave (v. 30-36), for examples) **Let me recommend you take 10 minutes and read through Bob Deffinbaugh's "From City Councilman to Caveman: "What a Difference a Day Makes" (Genesis 19:1-38)" [at this link at Bible.org](#).** I think this will answer a lot of your questions on why certain things happened in this chapter, from Bob's perspective. One great quote from Bob at this link above is this: "Lot attempted to live his life in a city and then in a cave. We cannot become one with the world, but neither are we to flee from it. The proper balance between the city of Sodom and the cave is the tent of Abraham. We are to live in the world, but without becoming attached to it or conformed to it. We are to be strangers and pilgrims." I like that! **Q: How do you balance living life in the world, but not of it? What might it look like in your life to live in a "tent" like Abraham, rather than in the "city" or the "cave"?**

1/8 - One verse that immediately stood out to me in chapter 19 is verse 16: *"When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the LORD was merciful."* What struck me in this verse is that Lot hesitated. In the previous verse, the angels say very clearly and strongly - "get out of the city! hurry! God is going to destroy it!" And yet... Lot hesitated. This jumped out at me because in our couple of previous day's readings we have seen how promptly obedient Abraham was to God's commands. When God said to get circumcised and circumcise everyone in the house - it happened that same day! And yet, here we see Lot hesitating on a very clear command from angels... **Q: Do you think we live our lives of faith and obedience to God more often like Abraham or Lot? What is an example of a time you were promptly obedient to God's will and commands for your life? And a time you hesitated? Which worked out better in the long run?**

1/9 - Today in Genesis chapter 20 we see that Abraham is not perfect (we have seen this humanness of Abraham earlier in our Genesis readings too). This should be good news for each of us! :) Abraham essentially tells Abimelech a half-truth - and yes, half-lie. The thing to remember here is that Abraham has received incredible promises from God and covenants - and yet, it is apparent that Abraham still has some fear of what will happen to him and Sarah. This imperfection of God's people is something that we will continue to see throughout our Bible readings. God uses imperfect people for his purposes. God does typically use those that love him. But, those that love God do still sin and make mistakes. God partners with imperfect people throughout history. God partners with people like you and me. **Q: Are you perfect? This side of heaven? Will you be made perfect someday? How? Or, by Whom?**

1/9 - In Genesis chapter 21 we read about Sarah joyfully giving birth to Isaac when Abraham was 100 years old! Isaac's name means "he laughs" - which in part came from when Sarah laughed when God told Abraham she would have a son a year prior. We also read about Hagar and Ishmael being sent away. Verse 13 stands out when God is speaking to

Abraham, as he was upset about having to send Ishmael away: *"But I will make a nation of the descendants of Hagar's son because he also is your son."* Ishmael does later become the ruler of a large tribe in Paran and the Desert of Sinai, south of Israel. Then, one of Ishmael's daughter's marries Esau, Ishmael's nephew. From here the lineage of Esau becomes Arabic peoples and eventually the Muslim religion comes from this lineage. It is said that Abraham is the father of the world's three major monotheistic faiths - Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths.

1/9 - In Genesis chapter 22 Abraham's faith and obedience is tested in what most see as the climax of our readings about Abraham in Genesis. Some interesting things to note about this chapter. It is said that much of this chapter foreshadows what happens with Jesus. A father is called to sacrifice his one and only son - a son he loves so very much. The son is taken to a mountain to be sacrificed. On the mountain a "lamb" is sacrificed - a ram in place of Isaac's life - and Jesus as the "lamb" in place of our lives. Hebrews 11:19 has an interesting point to make about these readings in Genesis 22 today: *"Abraham assumed that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead."* In verse 14 we read about the mountain where Isaac was taken and the altar was built - Mount Moriah. Mount Moriah was about 48 miles north of Beersheba, where Abraham and Isaac began their journey - so a 3 day journey at that time makes sense. Some scholars believe that Mount Moriah is the Temple Mount area of Jerusalem, where the first and second temples were located - and also where the Dome of the Rock mosque, built in 691 A.D., is now located. Tons more info on the Temple Mount area, including photos is online here - <http://www.templemount.org/> **Q: What in Genesis 22 stood out to you as you read about Abraham taking Isaac up Mount Moriah? What struck you as interesting or odd about this story? Why do you think this all happened to Abraham and what does it say to us for our lives today?**

1/10 - Today in Genesis chapter 23 we read about the burial of Sarah. I think an amazing thing to note in this chapter is that Abraham is determined to bury Sarah in Canaan, based on God's promise ([Gen 15:9-21](#)) to Abraham that Canaan would be his and his descendant's homeland. Verse 4 stands out in this chapter and I think can speak for us today as well: *"Here I am, a stranger in a foreign land, with no place to bury my wife."* We will see this type of phrase throughout the Old Testament - the idea of being an alien and a stranger. In Abraham's case, he was literally living in a tent - a very temporary structure. But yet, Abraham was confident in God's promise of the Promised Land. And for us today - we are called to be "in the world, but not of the world". In a sense, we are also aliens and strangers. **Q: How are you acting like you are an alien and stranger in this world? How are you looking forward to your promised land with God in heaven? Are there any ways you are maybe getting a bit too comfortable in this world?**

1/10 - Genesis chapter 24 is a just a wonderful narrative story about Abraham sending his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac! What I like a lot about this chapter was how God was honored by Abraham, and by the servant at the well, and by Laban and Bethuel at the end of today's readings. It was evident that everyone was making their plans and prayers based on God! And not based on their own ideas or will power. God was being consulted. Verse 15 stands out in this chapter: *"As he was still praying, a young woman named Rebekah arrived with a water jug on her shoulder. Her father was Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah."* As the servant was just finishing his prayer, God was answering it! **Q: Describe a time to the group when you had a similar experience of a prayer being answered? Under what circumstances do you pray to God for His involvement in your life? Do you think that prayer changes things?**

1/11 - Rebekah and Isaac meet and marry in today's readings! Before the meeting & marriage - I love the very opening verse 52 in Genesis chapter 24 today: *"At this reply, Abraham's servant bowed to the ground and worshiped the LORD."* This just made me think - when was the last time that I actually bowed to the ground and worshiped the Lord? I have to confess it was a long time ago. This may sound strange, but one time I was listening to the David Crowder song "Deliver Me" and for some reason I literally fell to the ground, bowed, and worshiped God. It was an experience that's hard to forget. But why is it so hard for me to get back down on the ground and worship God once again? **Q: Can you share with the group a time you bowed to the ground and worshiped the Lord? Do you think our body posture makes any sort of difference when worshipping or praying to God?**

1/11 - Genesis chapter 25 has a lot going on in it today! We read about Keturah, the death of Abraham and the descendants of Ishmael. In verse 19 we begin reading about Jacob and Esau. Jacob we will read about for a large portion of the remainder of Genesis - there is actually not that many chapters we will read about Isaac. In verse 34 we read this about Jacob & Esau: *"Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate and drank and went on about his business, indifferent to the fact that he had given up his birthright."* In Genesis chapter 26 we can see where the old adage, "like father, like son" could have come from. Isaac like his father Abraham told foreigners that his wife was his

sister. **Q: What are your thoughts when reading about Jacob and Esau's birth and lives? Do you see any parallels in their behaviors to our behaviors today?**

1/11-12 - Today's Genesis chapter 26 readings open up with Isaac digging wells - and then moving on when the Philistine's contest the wells. This shows an incredible amount of patience on Isaac's behalf. In this arid region of Gerar, water was like gold and people often battled over water. Filling in someone's well was akin to declaring war. Verse 22 stood out to me in these readings about the wells: *"Abandoning that one, he dug another well, and the local people finally left him alone. So Isaac called it "Room Enough," for he said, "At last the LORD has made room for us, and we will be able to thrive.""* For me this was reminiscent of Abraham giving Lot the choice of lands when there was disputes between their herdsmen. Abraham was confident that God would provide even with "2nd choice" of the lands - and Isaac here seems to be following in his father's footsteps of wisdom. I also like the naming of the well - "Room Enough." I think sometimes in our world today we can get so competitive with each other, thinking that there is a limited sized pie and we have to get our piece of it! "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" author Steven Covey calls this the "scarcity mentality" - and he encourages us to instead operate with an "abundance mentality" - that there is ultimately enough pie for everyone. That there is Room Enough. (perhaps we do need to do a better job sometimes of sharing our pieces of the pie however... see our Psalms & Proverbs today on this point) **Q: How do you find yourself operating in your own life - more often out of the scarcity mentality or the abundance mentality? Do you see the risk of the scarcity mentality? And the blessing of the abundance mentality? Do you believe that there is Room Enough?**

1/12 - Genesis chapter 27 today is a very interesting and challenging chapter... both Jacob and Rebekah are deceitful. And Isaac is suspicious of the whole charade. And yet, Jacob receives the verbal blessing from Isaac, which was binding back in those days. I think this chapter is challenging in that it can bring up the question of sin - and can sin be used to fulfill God's will? You know I'm going to defer to our resident-expert on Genesis - Bob Deffinbaugh from bible.org. :) Check out this quote from Bob in his summary of this chapter: "The purpose of God as expressed to Rebekah in [Genesis 25:23](#) was perfectly accomplished without one alteration. The sins of Isaac and Esau and Rebekah and Jacob did not in any way thwart God's will from being done. In fact, their sins were employed by God in such a way as to achieve the will of God. God's sovereignty is never thwarted by man's sin. To the contrary, God is able to achieve His purposes by employing man's sinful acts to further His plans." **Q: Do you believe God is able to achieve His purposes by employing our sinful acts to further his plans? Have you seen God work through sin or redeem a sinful situation in your life?**

1/13 - Today's Genesis chapter 28 readings begin Jacob's adventure as he leaves the land promised to Abraham and Isaac and heads for Paddan-aram to stay with his uncle. Jacob's dream at Bethel is awesome in this chapter! While this dream is often referred to as "Jacob's Ladder," many commentaries say it was probably stairs that Jacob dreamt of - similar to the stairs of a ziggurat (think tower of Babel) that winded around the outside of the tower on the way up. **Q: Have you ever had a dream anything like this one? :) Have dreams played a part in your spiritual journey at all? Can you share a dream with the group that was part of your spiritual journey?**

1/13 - I do have to admit - Jacob's story and the parallel stories of his uncle Laban, Jacob's wives, and his sons - culminating with Joseph in Egypt - is one of my favorite parts of the Old Testament. This is just good narrative! I think one thing that really opened my eyes to all of the small details of the story of Jacob is that I was in an amazing Bible study for about a year going through this part of Genesis. **I don't know if you've been in a group Bible study before?** If not, let me encourage you to join one! They are incredible. You get so many different perspectives from each person in the group - similar in some ways to what you are getting here on this blog - but more personal and I think far better. You get to go through the text with other people and really dive into things - and even have some fun joking around about things. **Q: If the church you attend has some sort of Bible study, will you consider checking it out this month of January?**

1/13 - I found verses 21 & 22 intriguing: *"Then Jacob made this vow: "If God will be with me and protect me on this journey and give me food and clothing, and if he will bring me back safely to my father, then I will make the LORD my God."* Do you notice the "if" / "then" statement in this vow from Jacob? Jacob is putting some conditions on what it will take for him to make God his God. **Q: Do we do this in our lives sometimes? Do we try to put "conditions" on God? Does this really make sense to do? What if our conditions are not met? What if things don't go as planned? Will we still love God as our God, even if the "conditions" in our life are not met or are not ideal?**

1/13 - In Genesis chapter 29 Jacob arrives at Paddan-Aram, which was close to Haran. See a map on the Bible blog for where Jacob will spend the next 20 years of his life. All 12 of his children besides Benjamin will be born in this land! In this chapter Jacob meets Rachel and Laban, and works for 7 years to marry Rachel - except for the fact that Jacob was deceived by Laban on the wedding night! Which is a bit ironic, as we have seen in recent chapters that Jacob did some deceiving himself... I read one commentary that said for most of his life Jacob was so focused on getting the rights of the first born from his father Isaac - and now he must accept the rights of the first born in this surprise marriage to Leah! At the end of today's readings we see that Leah is beginning to have sons - including Levi who will be the ancestor of the Aaronic priestly line of Israel, and Judah who will be the ancestor of King David and ultimately Jesus Christ.

1/14 - Today's Genesis chapter 30 readings bring us the account of several of Jacob's sons and a daughter being born to Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and Rachel. We also read about Jacob gaining wealth and wanting to leave his father-in-law Laban's house to go back home in Genesis chapter 30. In verse 37 we read: *"Now Jacob took fresh shoots from poplar, almond, and plane trees and peeled off strips of the bark to make white streaks on them."* It seems in this verse and the ones that follow that Jacob is getting a bit superstitious - and not really asking God for help. Later Jacob does admit that God did do the work of increasing his wealth, and that he didn't do it on his own with his superstitions, as we see in Chapter 31 verse 9 when Jacob is speaking to his wives Rachel & Leah: *"In this way, God has made me wealthy at your father's expense."* I think it's great to see that Jacob starts to realize more and more that God is in control. **Q: I wonder for us, today, do we sometimes act like Jacob with the sticks - and rely on superstition or our own power, when we should be relying solely on God? Are there maybe areas in our work life or personal life where we think we are running the show? Are we really? Or is God? Will we let our superstitions go, and embrace the reality that God is in control?** And - who better is there to be in control, really? :) Actually - I'll share with you a quote someone shared with me once when I was really trying to micromanage a situation - and was worrying and fretting way too much about the situation. The quote is simply this: "Let go and Let God." Let us let go of what we are hanging on so tightly to if it is not of God - and let us instead let God run the show. **Are there areas in your life where you need to "Let go and let God"?**

1/14-15 - Today's Genesis chapter 31 readings take us through Laban's pursuit of Jacob and his family and Laban & Jacob's treaty. In this chapter we read about Rachel taking Laban's "household gods", which were worthless idols - and yet both Laban and Rachel were very attached to idols, which was common in pagan religions of that time. Idols were often family heirlooms that were passed down from generation to generation and could sometimes signify that someone would receive their family's estate if they received the idols. People believed idols could bring blessings - and Laban obviously wanted them back. Though, I think he wanted more than just his idols back - I think he also wanted control over Jacob and his family back. In verses 33 & 34 we read: *"Finally, Laban went into Rachel's tent. Rachel had taken the household gods and had stuffed them into her camel saddle, and now she was sitting on them. So although Laban searched all the tents, he couldn't find them."* Rachel was cunning like her husband Jacob! Verse 42 stood out to me in today's readings as Jacob spoke to Laban: *"In fact, except for the grace of God--the God of my grandfather Abraham, the awe-inspiring God of my father, Isaac--you would have sent me off without a penny to my name."* I like seeing that Jacob is realizing that the grace of God has blessed him! **Q: Do you think that sometimes in our lives the grace of God is blessing us, and we don't realize it? Do you ever have those moments when you look back on a day, or a week, or even a year and realize that God's grace was so there - and yet... you didn't realize it at the time? How can you live more like Jacob in this verse - and recognize awe-inspiring God's grace more and more frequently in your life? And how will you give praise to God for this ever-present ever-dependable gift of grace that is available to you?**

1/15 - In Chapter 32 we see Jacob preparing to meet his brother Esau. And - we see Jacob praying to God an amazing prayer! Verse 10 is beautiful: *"I am not worthy of all the faithfulness and unfailing love you have shown to me, your servant. When I left home, I owned nothing except a walking stick, and now my household fills two camps!"* **Q: Do you believe that God has been showing faithfulness and unfailing love to Jacob in our readings? Do you believe that God is showing faithfulness and unfailing love to you today?**

1/16 - Genesis Chapter 32 closes out with Jacob in a wrestling match! With God? Or an angel? Or God in the form of an angel? Or Jesus preincarnate? Or Michael the archangel? Biblical commentaries offer a few different views on just who Jacob was wrestling with. Clearly, God ordained whomever was wrestling with Jacob and I do think it could have been God himself in an angelic form. It was obviously not God himself in all of his glory - because He would have whooped Jacob in a wrestling match! :) We do see the quick & fierce power of whom Jacob was wrestling in verse 25 when *"he struck Jacob's hip and knocked it out of joint at the socket."* **Q: What is your take on Jacob wrestling with the angel**

and then being blessed by the angel? Should Jacob have not wrestled / struggled with the angel / God? Should we in our lives today not wrestle / struggle with God? Or should we wrestle with matters of faith sometimes? As long as we know God will win the wrestling match - is it okay for us to enter into a wrestling match with God or no? Is there a faith-journey wrestling match in your past that you'd be willing to share with others?

1/16 - This is what I love about the chapters of Genesis that we are entering into with our readings now – we read about imperfect humans, not so unlike us, trying to make sense of their lives and their relationships with God. Sound like anyone you know? :) In this early part of the Bible we are shown a God who is willing to wrestle with us, if we need to wrestle. A God who gives us dreams that end up saving a family that will soon become a nation that will save the world. A God who moves us into places and lands and situations to where we need to be to fulfill His perfect will. And in the midst of all of this – we read about imperfect humans that make mistakes. And God still can work through those mistakes and redeem mankind. This is incredible narrative in our readings coming up this next week in Genesis! Chapter 32 verse 28 is an incredibly important verse: *"Your name will no longer be Jacob," the man told him. "It is now Israel, because you have struggled with both God and men and have won."* This is interesting to know! Israel means "God struggles" or "one who struggles with God." It is also interesting I think to see that God gives people new names at times in the Bible, and the names are reflective of their new lives with God. Abram becomes Abraham. Sarai becomes Sarah. Jacob becomes Israel. Simon becomes Peter. **Q: Have you ever "struggled" with God?**

1/16 - Today's Genesis chapter 32 starts off with Jacob preparing presents for Esau. Overall, I thought this was pretty smart. I suppose in some ways you could look at all this as bribery... :) But, I guess I thought Jacob was demonstrating some good business / political principles here. This is something that I do struggle with at times in my own life - a balance of utilizing good business principles versus relying completely on God. I suppose you could argue that Jacob should have simply relied on God to prepare the way for Jacob's meeting with Esau. And this would be a good argument - Esau had become wealthy over the years himself, and seemed to have forgiven Jacob before they met up here again. Though, if you were in Jacob's shoes, think about how you would have had no way of knowing this... and think about the last time you saw your brother 20 years earlier and how that ended... I do think that while clearly our reliance should be on God and His work and providence first and foremost, I believe God also wants us to be actively partnering with him. So, I think after we first pray to God about a situation, we should also do the work that we are called to do by God for the situation as well. This is where I think good business / political principles can come into play - as long as they are clearly aligned with the will of God. Again - a fine line to walk, and a line that can only be blessed by the Holy Spirit. We cannot walk this line on our own power or smarts. **Q: Do you pray to God to show you the work He wants you to do in your life? Do you also ask God to show you the work to be done in various situations that arise in your life? Do you enjoy working with God? How do you integrate faith into your work?**

1/16 - In Genesis chapter 34 Jacob and Esau meet again! I found verses 5 through 7 interesting. Jacob presents his concubines and sons first - then Leah and sons - and then Rachel and Joseph. I read a commentary that he was keeping his favorite wife and son back, as the last presentation to Esau - just in case anything should go wrong with Esau and the introductions of his family... Meaning, if any violence erupted - Rachel and Joseph would hopefully be removed from it. In verse 14 of this chapter we see Jacob likely being deceitful again: *"So go on ahead of us. We will follow at our own pace and meet you at Seir."* He did not follow Esau and meet him at Seir, as we will see in the next chapter. And commentaries suggest Jacob never intended to go to Seir. Genesis chapter 34 is a chapter where we see a lot of violence... It is interesting to note that the name of God ends chapter 33 and begins chapter 35, but is completely absent from this chapter! The NIV Study Bible has this note about this chapter: "Jacob is now confronted in the promised land with the danger of being absorbed by the native Canaanites (verses 9 & 16), and then with the threat of their hostility after his sons' vengeful act (verse 30). These were dangers Israel constantly faced from the peoples around them - either absorption or hostility, both of which are perpetual threats to God's people."

1/17 - Today is a big day for Jacob in that he finally returns to Bethel - the same place where his pilgrimage began with God in [Genesis 28:10-22](#)! Bethel is where Jacob had his dream of the angels ascending and descending the staircase, when he was leaving the promised land for 20 years in Haran. Bethel was the place where God first gave to Jacob His covenant promise that was also given to Abraham and Isaac - and the covenant promise is reconfirmed in today's readings in chapter 35 verses 11 and 12: *"Then God said, "I am God Almighty. Multiply and fill the earth! Become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants! And I will pass on to you the land I gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants."* These 2 verses are essentially thought to be the climax of the Isaac-Jacob portion of Genesis. In tomorrow's readings we begin the Jacob-Joseph portion of Genesis. (which is an

amazing narrative that begins tomorrow...) The covenant continues! **Q: How do the covenants to Abraham's family stand out to you? Do you believe God is a God of covenants? How do you see God in covenant with you today?**

1/17 - Today we read about the passing of Isaac. What was interesting to me today about the death of Isaac was that he passed away after Jacob and Esau reconciled. However, even with Jacob and Esau being reconciled at this point, going forward in the Old Testament we will see that this reconciliation didn't carry forward to their descendants. The nation of Israel (Jacob) and the kingdom of Edom (Esau) will have much strife in their coming generations toward each other, which we'll read about later this year. **Q: Do you see how the conflicts in the Middle East today tie back to Biblical times? How do you think these conflicts will ultimately be resolved? Or, Who will resolve them?**

1/17 - Today we read about genealogies! :) In chapter 36 we read about Esau's descendants. One interesting note on verse 11 per Zondervan's NIV Study Bible - "Eliphaz: Teman - One of Job's friends was named Eliphaz the Temanite ([Job 2:11](#)), and Job himself was from the land of Uz ([Job 1:1](#)). Thus Job probably lived in Edom (see verses 28 & 34 in Genesis readings today)." **Q: How does reading the genealogies stand out to you? How do genealogies or family tree's play a role in your family? Do you have any family historians? Why is this important?**

1/18 - Today in Genesis chapter 37 we begin the incredible last portion of the book of Genesis where we read about Joseph! This portion of the story that starts in today's readings will carry us through the rest of the book of Genesis and will set the stage for the exodus from Egypt. In chapter 37 today we read about Joseph's dreams and how these dreams make his brothers jealous. A couple of things came to mind to me today as reading through this. First is that it is clear that God does some communicating through dreams in the Old Testament. We've already seen this in our previous readings - via a dream Abimelech had or a dream Laban had. And here we see some powerful prophetic dreams that Joseph has. Actually, while I am on this topic of dreams, let me share this. I did used to have nightmares periodically. However, when I started reading the One Year Bible each night before going to bed a few years ago the nightmares basically went away. Seriously. I honestly believe because of the Light & life-giving power of the Word of God that the nightmares went away. Just a little testimony here for you on the power of reading the Bible each day. It is spiritual food and nourishment and protection for you in ways that you may not consciously realize. For me, there has been maybe a time or two in recent years where a nightmare has still come to fruition - and I don't remember the details of the nightmares, but somehow I know that in the midst of my dream I called out the name of Jesus and the nightmare stopped immediately! I am not kidding. I don't know how I got myself to call out Jesus' name in the nightmare, but I am so thankful that I did! Maybe this is something that prayer brings - or maybe this is something that happens when we really understand and believe in the all-powerful name of Jesus? If you suffer from nightmares, my two prescriptions are to 1. read the Bible before going to bed, 2. somehow somehow say the name of Jesus in your nightmare. Pray about this before you go to bed. Maybe this will help you do this in your dream. I hope so! **Q: My first question I had was whether Joseph should have shared these dreams with his family? And I asked this question because I wonder if sometimes we also maybe get an insight or what we believe to be a word from God - and if we should share these things with others? Or keep them between God and ourselves? The other thing that came to mind for me here is what role do dreams play for us today? Does God still communicate to people via dreams today?**

1/18 - Genesis chapter 38 brings us the story of Judah and Tamar. Keep in mind that Judah, Tamar, and Perez from this chapter are all part of the genealogy of King David and Jesus as we recently read in Matthew chapter 1 verse 3: "*Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron.*" Verse 24 stood out to me in this chapter as sad irony: "*About three months later, word reached Judah that Tamar, his daughter-in-law, was pregnant as a result of prostitution. "Bring her out and burn her!" Judah shouted.*" This verse reminded me quite a bit of a recent teaching we read about from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 7 verse 3: "*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"* **Q: How in our lives are we too are sometimes like Judah? Do we sometimes condemn others for sins that we ourselves commit too? Even if we don't commit the same sin as someone else, should we instead leave the judging and condemning to God?**

1/18 - Today in Genesis chapter 37 we read about Joseph in Potiphar's house! Verse 5 stood out to me in this chapter: "*From the day Joseph was put in charge, the LORD began to bless Potiphar for Joseph's sake. All his household affairs began to run smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished.*" I found it fascinating that God was blessing Potiphar for Joseph's sake. It reminded me of God blessing Laban for Jacob's sake earlier in Genesis. **Q: Today, how does God today continue to bless others around those who love God? Do you think God intervenes and blesses our work lives? Do you pray about your work life regularly? Do you think God blesses your work life? And like Joseph,**

does God maybe bless those around you, even if they aren't necessarily in relationship with God? And maybe does He do this for your sake?

1/18 - Verses 8 & 9 also stood out to me in today's readings, demonstrating Joseph's strong moral integrity when being approached by Potiphar's wife: *"But Joseph refused. "Look," he told her, "my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. No one here has more authority than I do! He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I ever do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God."* I admire this so much. Joseph was gaining more and more favor with Potiphar and more and more "power" so to speak. And here we see a situation where Joseph could have abused his favor and power. But he did not. He stood strong with his moral convictions. And I wonder about this in our lives. **Q: As we maybe gain more and more favor in our work or personal or ministry lives, do we also gain more and more "power" so to speak? And when this happens, do the temptations maybe even somehow seem to get bigger and bigger and our opportunity to abuse our favor or power get easier and easier? And in light of all this, will we stand strong by our moral convictions? Will we realize, like Joseph, that our favor or power only comes from God - and it can be taken away in an instant if we sin against God?**

1/19 - In Genesis chapter 41 we read about Pharaoh's dreams and Joseph is called from prison to interpret them. The cup-bearer finally remembered Joseph 2 years later! :) Verse 16 is powerful for us to consider as Pharaoh calls for Joseph to interpret his dreams: *"It is beyond my power to do this," Joseph replied. "But God will tell you what it means and will set you at ease."* What I like about this reply from Joseph is that he is giving credit to God for his "gift" of being able to interpret dreams! And really, it is God interpreting the dreams, and letting Joseph know what to say. I wonder about this in our lives today. **Q: Do you have some unique gifts in your life? Things that you are really good at? How do you give credit to God for these gifts in your life? Have you ever claimed them as gifts we developed on your own? Do you believe that God is truly the Gift-Giver of all your skills and talents and wisdom in your life?**

1/20 - Today in Genesis chapter 41 we read about Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dreams - and not just interpreting them, but offering a solution! Joseph suggests finding a wise man to administer a program to collect crops during the 7 years of plenty to save up for the 7 years of lean. Verses 39 & 40 in this chapter tell us: *"Turning to Joseph, Pharaoh said, "Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, you are the wisest man in the land! I hereby appoint you to direct this project. You will manage my household and organize all my people. Only I will have a rank higher than yours."* Notice that Joseph did not ask for this position. He probably could have, in light of interpreting the dream and offering a solution. But he didn't. The position was simply thrust upon him. **Q: And I wonder in our lives - are we like Joseph - humbly offering our gifts and skills with no need of a payback? Or, do we expect something in return? Do we want to be put in charge? I do wonder this about myself - if I was put in charge of all of Egypt, would I still remember God? Or would the power go to my head and would I think it is all about me? And then I wonder if there are similar, smaller temptations like this in my life - in my work or ministries or in my social circles. Are there times where I offer my skills & gifts, and expect to be put in charge of something, forget about God, and think it's all about me? How about you? Do you give freely and humbly from your God-given gifts with no need of a payback?**

1/20 - In Genesis chapter 42 Jacob sends Joseph's brothers to Egypt for grain. Verse 4 stood out: *"Jacob wouldn't let Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, go with them, however, for fear some harm might come to him."* As you'll recall both Benjamin and Joseph were Rachel's only sons. And Jacob loved Rachel dearly. It seems that in light of Jacob already losing one of Rachel's sons, he didn't want to lose the other. **Or - I wonder - did Jacob maybe have some sort of mistrust in the back of his mind of the other 10 brothers?** (as obviously Joseph disappeared when going to find the 10 brothers many years back) This is outside of the text I realize. Just a thought.

1/20 - Genesis 42:6 stood out: *"Since Joseph was governor of all Egypt and in charge of the sale of the grain, it was to him that his brothers came. They bowed low before him, with their faces to the ground."* This fulfilled the dreams Joseph had in Genesis chapter 37 verse 6 & 7! *"He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."* And verse 6 was 21 years after Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers at the age of 17 - Joseph has spent 11 years as a slave, 2 years in prison, and 7 to 8 years in charge of Egypt (through the 7 fat years of the harvest, and now they are likely in the first year of the famine). And even after 21 years Joseph recognized his brothers immediately. I read a commentary that his brothers probably didn't recognize Joseph because he was decked out in Egyptian robes & garb, he may have been speaking through an interpreter, and he was likely clean shaven - Egyptians shaved, whereas Hebrews typically wore beards. **Q: How did it impact you, reading about Joseph and his brother**

reuniting and seeing Joseph's earlier dream fulfilled?

1/22 - In Genesis chapter 44 we read about Joseph instructing his servant to place his silver cup in Benjamin's sack. I guess what struck me about all this is that it seemed to me like Joseph was possibly playing mind games with his brothers. Not to say that they didn't deserve it... but, I wonder if in all of this Joseph had a master game-plan - or if it was simply games he was playing? The weeping we see from him kind of makes me think that he was not 100% sure of what he was doing, game-plan wise. The weeping seemed to indicate that he wanted to reconnect with his brothers and his family. It seems in all of this he has kept at least 1 family member around - or has not let them get very far away. **Q: This makes me wonder – how do we play mind games with others around us? Should we? Would it have been better if Joseph was honest with his brothers from the beginning on who he was? How would it be better for us if we are simply honest with others from the beginning? And don't play mind games?**

1/22 - Verses 18 through 34 in this chapter is Judah's amazing speech to Joseph! I don't know what it is about this speech. But I love it! It seems like Judah is finally owning up to being who he was born to be - the forefather of the line of King David and Jesus Christ. Verse 33 is the verse that really stood out to me: *"Please, my lord, let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers."* What struck me about this is that now Judah is willing to be the slave, in the place of his brother Benjamin - whereas 22 years prior he offered up the idea of selling his brother Joseph into slavery as we read in Genesis 37 verses 26 & 27: *"Judah said to the others, 'What can we gain by killing our brother? That would just give us a guilty conscience. Let's sell Joseph to those Ishmaelite traders.'" It seems like Judah in chapter 44 has finally grown up and is acting like a morally responsible adult. Judah with this speech today is finally beginning to look like he might indeed deserve to be referred to as the father of the tribe of the "Lion" of Judah! **Q: Have there been big moments like this in your faith walk, where it's clear you've moved forward in your faith?***

1/22 - Genesis chapter 45 begins with Joseph weeping again - and I think that it makes perfect sense that he does so, in light of Judah's impassioned speech! **Q: Do you think that Joseph in part weeps because Judah is offering to be the slave in the place of Benjamin? Either Joseph is weeping because his brothers did not show him this same mercy 22 years prior - or he is weeping because he is happy that Judah and his brothers seem to be very different people from 22 years prior - or he's weeping for other reasons. What are your thoughts on the reasons for these tears? When have you ever cried tears in your faith walk?**

1/22 - Verse 5 in this chapter is a powerfully mature statement from Joseph to his brothers: *"But don't be angry with yourselves that you did this to me, for God did it. He sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives."* I find this very powerful that Joseph discerned this. He had been sold into slavery for 11 years! He was in a prison for 2 years! And then, yes, things got better for him thereafter - but he was still apart from his family. And yet - Joseph saw God's hand and God's plan in all of this. There was a greater good happening - the preservation of Abraham & Isaac's descendents. The preservation of God's covenant people. I then wonder about this in our lives. **Q: Are there times where we go through some hard times - maybe for many years - and in the midst of that, could God be working? Could God's hand and God's plan be moving in the midst of challenging times in our lives?** I think it's possible that if I was Joseph that maybe I would have become a bitter man toward my brothers - and maybe done worse than just mind games. But, Joseph was compassionate - he wept - he gave grain in abundance to his family - he forgave his brothers. And more than anything, he saw that God was in control. **Q: How do you believe that God is in control of your life? Right now? All the time? No matter how good or how bad circumstances seem? Is God in control?**

1/23 - Today in Genesis Chapter 46 we read about Jacob and his family's journey to Egypt! I really like that God speaks to Jacob in a vision at Beersheba - the same place where both Abraham and Isaac had worshiped God earlier in Genesis. As Jacob was about to leave Canaan, God reaffirms his covenant promises. Very reassuring for Jacob I am sure! **Q: I wonder - sometimes in our lives - as you are about to embark on something big: Maybe a new ministry. Maybe a mission trip. Maybe a new job. Maybe a new marriage. Maybe a new child. Does God speak to you? Does God reaffirm his love to you? Does God tell you that he will be with you on this new thing - as he did to Jacob in this chapter?** I can't say that I've verbally heard God speak to me during times of big change in my life. But, I have most definitely sensed amazing peace many times during big changes in my life. I do try to pray more than ever during times of change. I try to stay as absolutely close to God as I possibly can. Maybe I'm kind of like a scared child trying to huddle up to my heavenly Father during times of change. Which I am okay with. :) And - it seems almost without fail, God does "speak" to me with a peace that surpasses all understanding. If the peace is not there... then I do begin to worry if what I am doing is really God's will for my life. If the peace is there - I know without a shadow of a doubt that what I am embarking upon is God's will for my life. I will say this - that even if I cannot discern or sense the peace

during a time of change, I still do not doubt that God will be with me. That he will not leave me. That he will be there. **Q: How do you believe that God is with you always? That he will go with you wherever you go?**

1/23 - Chapter 46 verses 33 & 34 stood out to me in today's readings, as Joseph gives his brothers this instruction: "*So when Pharaoh calls for you and asks you about your occupation, tell him, 'We have been livestock breeders from our youth, as our ancestors have been for many generations.' When you tell him this, he will let you live here in the land of Goshen, for shepherds are despised in the land of Egypt.*" I like Joseph's wisdom here. I guess you could look at this as Joseph being manipulative of Pharaoh. But I don't really see this. I see that Joseph is telling his brothers what to say - which is true - and that this will allow the nation of Israel to begin to grow and flourish in the land of Goshen, removed from the cities of Egypt. It seems like Joseph is definitely catering to Pharaoh's generosity - "*let your family come to Egypt!*" - and Pharaoh / Egyptians prejudices - "*shepherds are despised in the land of Egypt.*" For a win / win. It's a Stephen Covey win / win business principle here! :) In Genesis chapter 47 I find it very interesting that Jacob blesses Pharaoh twice. I haven't studied why this happens. My thought is that Jacob is indeed very appreciative of this current Pharaoh - for literally saving the Israelites by allowing God to move mightily through Joseph. We will see soon that there are future Pharaoh's who are not so kind to the Israelites... So, perhaps Jacob realized that this Pharaoh was deserving of two blessings.

1/23 - In Genesis 47 we read about Joseph's leadership and business skills during the famine - as things get really bad with the famine and people are on the brink of starving. Overall, I initially thought that Joseph was making wise decisions that ultimately ended up saving lives - and in verse 25 the people said the same thing. However, I have one good friend who was in a Bible study with me who felt that Joseph was being way too harsh. I can see both sides... :) Did Joseph have other options / ways to do this? We actually got into quite a heated discussion on this point in our Bible study on this topic a couple of years ago. **Q: What do you think? During this time of extreme famine, was Joseph being too harsh or being wise and even being compassionate?**

1/24 - Today in Genesis Chapter 48 we read about Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh! One thing I thought about when reading this chapter and the next chapter was how interesting it is that blessings had so much importance and significance back in the days of the patriarchs. **Q: And I wonder - do we have blessings today that are as significant? Do fathers bless kids or grandkids these days?** Maybe so... I guess I just haven't noticed it in my family... :) I do think there are still some "blessings" today that hold some incredible significance today. Wedding vows come to mind and the blessings that come from the pastor/priest/minister during this time. Church ceremonies or rituals come to mind - Communion, Baptism, Funerals, etc. And then certainly above all else, there is the amazing and eternal blessing we receive from Jesus himself - the free blessing and free gift of salvation. **Q: What other blessings are there today that I'm missing? How have you been "blessed" by others in some way, like we read about in today's 2 chapters? How have you "blessed" others?**

1/24 - In Genesis chapter 49 we read about Jacob blessing his sons - and these are some very accurate blessings he gives as we will see as we continue through the Bible this year. Perhaps Predictions or Prophecies might be the better term for Jacob's blessings in this chapter. Verse 10 is awesome: "*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will obey.*" This verse can apply to 2 descendants of Judah - King David and then ultimately and eternally to Jesus. In verse 22 we read this about Joseph: "*Joseph is a fruitful tree,*" And this is certainly true, as his descendants will include Joshua, Deborah & Gideon & Jephthah (3 judges of Israel), and Samuel the prophet.

1/25 - Genesis chapter 50 verses 19 & 20 stood out to me as Joseph spoke to his brothers: "*Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you? As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people.*" Again, I am impressed with Joseph's character here. His brothers seemed to think that Joseph hadn't really forgiven them, and that he was waiting to get back at them after their father had passed away. But, I think we see here that Joseph had truly forgiven his brothers! It was water under the bridge. And not only had Joseph forgiven them, but he saw the power of how God turned something bad into something incredibly good. I wonder about this in our lives today - **Q: How do you truly forgive other people like Joseph forgave his brothers? Have you ever held some piece of unforgiveness within you? How did you move forward to forgiveness? Is there anyone you need to forgive in your life right now?**

1/25 - One interesting side note in chapter 50 was the embalming of Jacob & Joseph. Embalming was an Egyptian custom - not a Hebrew custom. Some commentaries suggest that Jacob & Joseph were likely being respectful of the

Egyptian customs of the day. The Egyptians believed in an afterlife - and believed that the embalming allowed the deceased to utilize their body in the afterlife.

1/25 - Today we wrap up Genesis and begin the book of Exodus!

~Exodus~

Author: Moses

Date: 1420 or 1220 B.C.

Content: The book of Exodus deals with the significant facts surrounding Israel's emergence as a nation. Moses' great leadership is described as he accepted God's call to return to Egypt in order to lead God's people to freedom. God sent the ten devastating plagues upon Egypt because the Pharaoh refused to obey his command. The ceremony of Passover was established during the last plague and became a memorial of God's deliverance for all time to Israel. The Israelites crossed the sea and arrived at Mt. Sinai where God gave the Ten Commandments and the plan for the tabernacle, and the covenant was renewed the nation.

Theme: The power of God over evil is clearly shown when God defeats the enemy of his people by delivering them from bondage, but God expects that we trust and obey him in return. Worship in the Tabernacle and adherence to the law were two aspects of Israel's obedience. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pages 1-2)*

1/25 - In Exodus chapter 1 verse 12 is awesome: *"But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more quickly the Israelites multiplied!"* It's amazing how when God wants people to flourish, they flourish! Even in the midst of oppression. This verse kind of reminds me of the flourishing of churches over the centuries and even today where the body of Christ is still often oppressed. It flourishes! Praise God for flourishing his people then - and now! **Q: How do you see God flourishing people in the midst of oppression in our world today?**

1/26 - Moses kills the Egyptian in Exodus chapter 2 today. We cannot hide from some of the things in the Bible that are not squeaky clean & perfect. The Bible is not always squeaky clean & perfect in terms of the behaviors of people in the Bible. Life is not always squeaky clean & perfect. However God will ultimately make us squeaky clean & perfect - forever. And in this life God can even redeem Moses after this act. Please do read up more on this act of Moses' in chapter 2 at bible.org [at this link](#). At this link you'll see this line: "We dare not seek to defend Moses in the murder of the Egyptian, no matter how cruel he may have been. Moses' act was in defiance of the authority of Egypt, and it was premeditated murder ("he looked this way and that," v. 12). While Moses' method of dealing with this problem was wrong, we can see that his motivation was commendable. Moses sought to defend the oppressed. When he sought to rebuke his Hebrew brother for wrongly mistreating another Hebrew (v. 13), Moses revealed, once again, the disposition of a deliverer." Moses was 40 years old when he killed the Egyptian. Moses then escapes to Midian - an area on the eastern side of the Red Sea that was very dry and desolate. Moses ends up living in Midian for 40 years. **Q: Do you believe God can redeem murderers? Do you think God redeems murders in our world today?**

1/26 - In Chapter 3 today God speaks to Moses through the burning bush! What I love about this is in verse 4: *"When the LORD saw that he had caught Moses' attention..."* It seems like Moses probably could have seen this burning bush - and kept going. He could have somehow walked on by - maybe because he had to get the flocks back home or he was late for dinner or who knows what. He could have missed the adventure and the calling of his life. But he doesn't. He stops. He investigates. He has a conversation with God. God caught his attention. **Q: Do you think God is trying to catch your attention today in any ways? How has God caught your attention in the past and revealed to you something important? Have you ever passed God by when he was trying to catch your attention?**

1/26 - Exodus 3:14 is a biggie in today's readings as Moses asks God who he should tell the Hebrews who sent him: *"God replied, 'I AM WHO I AM. Just tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* I AM WHO I AM translates into Yahweh in Hebrew. I read a great little commentary that said when God speaks of himself, he says "I AM". When we speak of God we should say "He is." I like that. He is. I actually heard a sermon recently about the unchanging nature of God. He is omniscient. Omni-present. Eternal. He is wisdom. He cannot learn anything, because He knows everything. He is. The Hebrew letters yud, hey, vav, hey (below) -- often depicted in English as YHWH or Yahweh -- spell the ineffable name of God. Another powerful thing to note is that Jesus uses this same phrase of I AM and nearly gets stoned to death for sharing this truth in the Gospel of John chapter 8 verses 58 & 59: *"'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'"* At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds." **Q: Do you believe that Jesus IS? What IS Jesus to you in your life today? How IS Jesus your very life?**

1/27 - Today in Exodus chapter 4 we read about God discussing with Moses from the burning bush how Moses will lead the Israelites out of Egypt! Moses has a classic line to God in Chapter 4 verse 10: *"Moses said to the LORD, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.'*" I think what is classic about this line is that probably many of us have some sort of line similar to this one that we say to God when God is calling us to do something big for His Kingdom. Or maybe even if it is something medium-sized or small God is calling us to, we probably have some pretty good excuses. "Why me God?" "I'm too young." "I'm too old." "I'm too busy." "I'm not that smart." "I'm not that talented". And I'm sure our list of excuses could go on. BUT – check out what God says to Moses in verse 12: *"Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."* Wow. **Q: What is an area of your life that God is calling you to move forward? Maybe calling you to some Kingdom work? And what are your excuses? Will you leave those excuses behind? Do you realize that God will help you do whatever you need to do? Do you realize that God will teach you what to do as you go? You may not know exactly what to do right now – but if you move forward, do you believe God will show up and help you accomplish the task? Will you go?**

1/27 - Verses 24 through 26 probably raised some questions for you today... :) *"On the journey, when Moses and his family had stopped for the night, the LORD confronted Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah, his wife, took a flint knife and circumcised her son....After that, the LORD left him alone."* The obvious question being, why was God about to kill Moses? Didn't God just call Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt? Well, yes he did. Commentaries I read suggest that the primary issue here was an issue of obedience. Moses had not circumcised his son, which was a requirement of God's covenant with Israel from Genesis chapter 17 - you'll recall Abraham and his household all getting circumcised in that 1 day. So, Moses - and actually Zipporah his wife performed the task of the covenant - had to circumcise his son before God would let Moses go forward to deliver God's people out of Egypt. Don't you like it when the Bible throws in some quick curveballs like this? :)

1/27 - I like Exodus chapter 5 verse 1, which builds upon some of our readings in chapter 4: *"After this presentation to Israel's leaders, Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh."* What I like about this is that there was Moses & Aaron going to see Pharaoh - the 2 of them. This reminds me of Jesus sending out the disciples in pairs. Sometimes in life it seems like we can accomplish more, or stay on task better, if we are partnered with someone else. It's sometimes tough to do things on our own. I think sometimes we want to make ourselves out to be Lone Rangers - thinking that we can shoulder the weight of the world on our own. But... we can't. First and foremost we need to be in relationship with God through Jesus. Secondly, in relationship with our family. Thirdly, relationship with our community - as we saw Moses and Aaron spoke with the Hebrew leaders at the end of chapter 4. And then... we are ready to take on Pharaoh! Then, we are ready to take on the world! Yeah, sure, on rare occasions God will call us to pull off Kingdom tasks on our own - but... 9 times out of 10, I think you are going to need brothers and sisters in Christ to help you make it. **Q: What type of Kingdom work do you do with other people? Who would you say is your "Aaron" in your life?**

1/28 - Exodus Chapter 5 verse 22 starts off our readings today with what seems to be an awfully bold question & complaint from Moses to God: *"So Moses went back to the LORD and protested, 'Why have you mistreated your own people like this, Lord? Why did you send me? Since I gave Pharaoh your message, he has been even more brutal to your people. You have not even begun to rescue them!'"* That first question initially made me wince - obviously God was not mistreating his own people - Pharaoh and the foremen were. I don't fault Moses for this question, since he saw the Israelites suffering so much - and God didn't seem to fault Moses either as we see in the beginning of chapter 6 he tells Moses what he is going to do to Pharaoh - and he doesn't address Moses question & complaint. I think Moses was probably really instead trying to ask God what he gets at in the last sentence - why haven't you started your rescue of your people? Then, the second question in verse 22 above takes us back to Moses' words to God at the burning bush near Midian when God first called Moses to this task - "why me??" This second question kind of made me smile... I guess because I've probably asked this question of God a lot of times in my life in various forms - why are you asking me to do this? Why not pick someone else? Don't I have enough going on? How am I going to pull this off? Etc. Etc.... Etc.... any of these questions sound familiar to you? :) And yet, even in the midst of this protesting, God is still going to use Moses in a big way for his Kingdom purposes. I pray he will still use me in the midst of my protesting. **Q: How have you ever protested against God? Why do you think we protest against God? Do you think God can still use us despite our protesting?**

1/28 - In Exodus chapter 7 we read about Aaron's staff becoming a snake and the plague of blood. It is interesting that Pharaoh's wise men & magicians did the same thing as these miracles with their "secret arts." However, it's obvious that what the magicians did was not as powerful as what God did - because God's snake wins! :) And, it is indeed ironic that

the magicians turning water to blood would really only make matters worse for the Egyptians. I read commentaries that suggested the magicians were either coming up with illusions or potentially tapping into dark / demonic forces to make their tricks come to fruition. Check out tons more great info on the nature of the plagues, the magicians tricks, the pattern of the plagues and the point of the plagues in Bob Deffinbaugh's essay titled "**The Finger of God**" at bible.org [at this link](#). This is worth the read before we dive into all the plagues over the next few days!

1/29 - Today in Exodus chapters 8 & 9 we read about many of the plagues! I've got to say, for some reason the plague of frogs really resonated with me in today's reading. I'm not sure why - but for some reason I could really envision frogs being everywhere... and how disgusting this would truly be... An interesting thing I read in a commentary today is that the plagues in some ways were direct attacks on the Egyptian "gods". For example, the Egyptians had a god named Hopi, who was god of the Nile river. Hopi couldn't stop the river from turning to blood. They had a cow-goddess named Hathor, who couldn't stop the livestock from dying. They had a sun-god named Amon-Re who couldn't stop darkness from coming over the land. (in tomorrow's readings). God's plagues were going after these false gods - and showing to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and the Hebrews too I think, who the one true living God is, was, and forever shall be. Chapter 8 verses 18 & 19 stand out: *"Pharaoh's magicians tried to do the same thing with their secret arts, but this time they failed. And the gnats covered all the people and animals. "This is the finger of God!" the magicians exclaimed to Pharaoh.*" The magicians tricks were beginning to fail! They realized that God was creating the plagues with their exclamation, "This is the finger of God!" God's name & fame was becoming known. **Q: When is a time in your life when you saw or experienced the finger of God?**

1/29 - Chapter 9 verse 16 is powerful: *"But I have let you live for this reason--that you might see my power and that my fame might spread throughout the earth."* In the New Testament, Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:17, which we'll view in context here from Romans 9:14-18 - *"What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."* Wow... great stuff in this Roman's verse... it does not depend on our desire or effort, but on God's mercy. **Q: How have you seen God's mercy in your life? Have you ever seen God's mercy show up in spite of your own efforts?**

1/29 - Exodus chapter 9 verse 20 is also powerful, as we read about some Egyptians beginning to believe in God: *"Some of Pharaoh's officials believed what the LORD said. They immediately brought their livestock and servants in from the fields."* How about us today? Do we believe what the Lord says? Like these Egyptians in this instance, do we then also immediately do what the Lord says? In verse 27 Pharaoh finally confesses his sin: *"Then Pharaoh urgently sent for Moses and Aaron. "I finally admit my fault," he confessed. "The LORD is right, and my people and I are wrong."* Though he doesn't stay repentant for long. **Q: Have you ever confessed your sin to God and then not stayed repentant? Why do you think this happened? How do you confess your sins and then make a complete U-turn - go completely in the other direction and not look back?**

1/30 - In Exodus chapter 10 today we read about the Plague of Locusts! In ancient times locust plagues were greatly feared and were often considered to be a sign of divine judgment. Next up is the plague of darkness. Some Biblical commentaries have found Pharaoh's statement to Moses to be quite appropriate and ironic that he said this during the plague of darkness in 10:28: *"The day you see my face you will die."* Apparently Moses couldn't quite fully see Pharaoh's face during the plague of darkness? Makes sense to me. Commentaries have also suggested that this verse was a death threat to Moses, and that this death threat was responded to with the coming plague on the firstborns of Egypt, including Pharaoh's son.

1/30 - Today we read in Exodus chapter 12 about God giving Moses and Aaron instructions on the First Passover. Verse 2 stands out: *"From now on, this month will be the first month of the year for you."* Here we see that God is actually instituting a new religious calendar for the Hebrews with the month that Passover is in being the first month of the calendar year. This month is in the March-April spring timeframe and is called Abib or Nisan in Hebrew. The feasts that were and are celebrated in this 1st month were - Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. Here is a very interesting note on the Jewish calendar from the NIV Study Bible - "In the ancient Near East, new year festivals normally coincided with the new season of life in nature. The designation of this month as Israel's religious New Year reminded Israel that its life as the people of God was grounded in God's redemptive act in the Exodus... Israel's agricultural calendar began in the fall, and during the monarchy it dominated the nation's civil calendar. Both calendars (civil and religious) existed side by

side until after the exile. Judaism today uses only the calendar that begins in the fall."

1/30 - The significance of Passover was that God was introducing the concept of a sacrifice or a substitute for a life. The lamb was sacrificed as a substitute for the Hebrews first-born sons. The blood of the lamb was placed on the doorposts as a sign that the household had sacrificed an innocent life - the lamb. By the blood of the unblemished/perfect lamb, the household was protected from death. This is a foreshadowing of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb for us. He was a substitute for us and our sins. He was an innocent unblemished/perfect lamb - sinless. By Jesus' blood, we are protected from eternal death. **Q: What are some parallels you see between Passover and Jesus' death on the cross?**

1/30 - Exodus chapter 12 verse 11 is of note: *"Wear your traveling clothes as you eat this meal, as though prepared for a long journey. Wear your sandals, and carry your walking sticks in your hands. Eat the food quickly, for this is the LORD's Passover."* By wearing their traveling clothes, the Hebrews were faithfully acknowledging God's Word that they would very soon be freed from slavery and bondage in Egypt. The Exodus would soon begin! And the traveling clothes signified that the Hebrews were ready for the journey! **Q: How about you? Do you think that God may still call you on journeys today? What journey might God be calling you on in 2010? Are you be ready for the call? What are your "traveling clothes" that you're wearing, so that when the "Exodus" comes, you are ready for it?**

1/31 - This is a big day in our readings today - The Israelites officially begin their exodus from Egypt! Today in Exodus chapter 12 we read about God instituting the Festival of Unleavened Bread along with Passover. These both are still observed today by practicing Jews. Verse 14 states the importance of these festivals to the Israelites: *"You must remember this day forever. Each year you will celebrate it as a special festival to the LORD."* Verses 37 & 38 are amazing: *"That night the people of Israel left Rameses and started for Succoth. There were about 600,000 men, plus all the women and children. And they were all traveling on foot. Many people who were not Israelites went with them, along with the many flocks and herds."* 600,000 men equals probably at least 1.2 million people all together - and probably close to 2 million. This is a massive Exodus! Verse 38 is very interesting in that some Egyptians were joining the Israelites in this Exodus! **Q: Why do you think some Egyptians joined the Israelites in the Exodus? Do you think these Egyptians believed in God? When have you ever experienced a Passover meal in your life? What was it like? How does the Passover foreshadow Jesus' life?**

1/31- In Exodus chapter 13 we read about God's instructions for the dedication of the firstborn. Note that based on this law that Jesus, the firstborn of Mary & Joseph, was dedicated to God in the Temple in Jerusalem as we read in Luke chapter 2 verses 21 through 24: *"On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons.""* I think it's also interesting to note that Mary & Joseph did not present a lamb, but a pair of doves or two young pigeons. This portion of the law came from Leviticus chapter 12 verse 8: *"If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.""* **Q: How have you dedicated your children to God? Or how have you seen family members or your church dedicate children to God? Why do you think we still dedicate children to God today?**

NEW TESTAMENT

1/1 - **Overview of the book of Matthew:**

Author: Matthew

Place: Perhaps Antioch Date: A.D. 60-70

Content: Matthew was a tax collector, called by Jesus to follow him early in his public ministry; hence, he was an eyewitness of most of the events he describes. He begins with a detailed account of Jesus' birth of the virgin Mary, his baptism, and temptation in the wilderness. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God, entrance into which meant eternal life. One entered by repentance and faith. Matthew blocks the teaching of Jesus together into five discourses in which may be seen the ethics, the proclamation, the parables, the fellowship, and the consummation of the kingdom. Jesus' death and resurrection end the Gospel with the command to go into all the world with the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ.

Theme: Matthew's main purpose in writing his Gospel is to show that Jesus fulfills the promise of God in the Old Testament. For this reason Jesus is introduced as a "descendant of King David and of Abraham," and Matthew makes use of numerous Old Testament prophecies and quotations to explain Jesus' life. Jesus came to be the Savior of the

Jews, the Gentiles, and ultimately the world. The ethics required by members of God's kingdom are found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) where the world's values are rejected and the Kingdom of God and his righteousness become supreme. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 21*)

1/1 - In today's Matthew readings, we read the genealogy of Jesus. I know that genealogy's can sometimes seem a bit boring to read, but this one in Matthew is phenomenal! If you just finished reading the One Year Bible this past year, you will recognize many of these names. Or - let me encourage you to come back and read this genealogy again on January 1st of next year, if you are going through the entire Bible for your first time this year. This genealogy will amaze you. One of the interesting things to note in this genealogy is the mention of 5 women - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. It was not the norm in the 1st century to list women in genealogies - only men were typically listed. At least 3 of these women were Gentiles (not Jewish) - Tamara, Rahab, and Ruth. Matthew was potentially trying to indicate to his Jewish readers that God's work in this world is not limited to the people of Israel - nor was God's work limited to men. The genealogy in Matthew is sometimes illustrated by a "Jesse Tree" showing the lineage of Jesus from Jesse, father of King David.

1/1 - Chapter 1 verse 23 is certainly a huge prophecy from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah being fulfilled through the birth of Jesus: *"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (meaning, God is with us)."* Jesus is God and came to literally be with us. To experience our human sufferings and temptations - and joys and triumphs. The importance of this birth of Immanuel cannot be overstated. God came to be with us in flesh and blood.

1/1 - Chapter 2 verse 6 is very powerful in that this past year's One Year Bible crew recently read about the prophet Micah's prophesying of Jesus being born in Bethlehem: *"O Bethlehem of Judah, you are not just a lowly village in Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel."* Here again you can see Matthew writing for his Jewish audience - quoting an Old Testament prophet and also focusing in on the town of "Bethlehem of Judah" - the City of David. This was to demonstrate again that Jesus was from the lineage of King David.

1/1 - Verse 10 is a brief verse showing us the reaction of the magi in being led to Jesus: *"When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!"* The magi were also Gentiles and likely astrologers - following a star might lead one to think this... :) But no matter where they were from and what they believed prior, they were filled with joy at being led to the Messiah, Jesus. And they gave him gifts and worshipped him. And for us today - are we filled with joy in reading about the birth of Jesus? Do we realize what this meant back then - and still means today? That Immanuel was born - that God came to be with us. (Note that some Biblical scholars say that contrary to popular tradition, it is believed that the magi did not visit Jesus at the manger on the night of his birth, as did the shepherds, but that the magi came months later and visited him as "child" in his "house" - see verse 11.)

1/2 - In Matthew today we read about The Escape to Egypt. Two things stood out to me in Joseph's behavior in today's readings. In Matthew chapter 2 verse 13 an angel tells Joseph to *"get up and flee to Egypt"* - and Joseph responds by leaving THAT NIGHT with the family, as we see in verse 14. That's beautiful obedience. Then, in verse 21 we see Joseph respond similarly when he is told by an angel to return to Israel - he leaves with the family "immediately." I like this - Joseph is acting obediently to God's will in his life - and he is acting pronto! He's not sitting around worrying or fretting or thinking that he'll get to it tomorrow. He goes that night! He returns immediately! **Q: Can we learn from Joseph's amazing obedience in these readings? Is God calling you to do something in your life that you are hemming and hawing about? Is God calling you to forgive someone? To love someone? To serve someone? To encourage someone? Will you be like Joseph and obey God's call for your life immediately?**

1/2 - Today in Matthew chapter 3 we are introduced to John the Baptist! I don't know exactly what it is about John the Baptist - but I love reading about him and his life. He is just on fire for God and Jesus and he is encouraging others to get on fire too! I guess I like that in a person. :-) Another thing about John is that he is so focused on his mission to call others to repentance and to baptize them, that he really does not care about worldly things - like how he looks or what he wears or what he eats. None of that really matters to him. It is the message of the coming of Jesus that matters to him. Maybe it is verse 4 that really stands out to me about John: *"John's clothes were woven from camel hair, and he wore a leather belt; his food was locusts and wild honey."* I think this is really saying that John lived a simple life. He did not "major in minor things" - he "majored in the major thing" - Jesus! **Q: Is there something we can learn from John the Baptist in our lives today? Are you perhaps focusing too much on things of this world and not enough on God and Jesus? Are you truly loving God and loving people like John did? Or are you spending your life "majoring in minor**

things"? Will you instead "major on the major thing" that John is calling you to even today - complete passion and love for God: the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit; and other people?

1/3 - Today's Matthew readings are incredible on so many levels. We begin by reading about John the Baptist going off on the Pharisees and Sadducees! John is not joking around here... :) I think one verse that really stood out to me was verse 8: *"Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God."* and verse 10: *"Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."* I think what I hear John saying here is that we are called to truly repent and change our ways. Not just to say some nice words or just show up to church on Sundays - but to be transformed. Our lives should be visibly different from our past if we have really turned from our sins and turned to God. And this change will be evident by our lives producing "good fruit" - examples of which can certainly be seen in any of the Ten Commandments or loving our neighbor as ourselves and above all loving God with all our hearts, minds, soul and strength. Our lives should look very different from our past. **Q: Do they? Does yours?**

1/3 - Verses 16 & 17 are phenomenal as we see the three persons of the Trinity interacting with each other! God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: *"After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him.""* Jesus' baptism is very significant because it is the act that opens up the public ministry phase of Jesus' life. Now - I think what happens just after Jesus' baptism is something each of us should take heed of - the devil comes in full force after Jesus. I heard someone tell me just before I was baptized about 6 years ago that whenever we make a public declaration that we love God: the Father, Jesus the Son, & the Holy Spirit and that we want to follow Him, the devil and temptation very likely will appear. The devil isn't happy when we are moving forward in our love of Jesus and loving others - and he wants to derail it. And that's what we see here in chapter 4 - God: the Father, Jesus the Son, & the Holy Spirit have just declared "Game On!" with Jesus' public ministry via the baptism - and then who should show up coming after Jesus? **Q: If the devil showed up to tempt Jesus, don't you think he might try to show up in our lives when we are starting something big in our faith walk?** Fortunately, Jesus gives us all the answers we need in chapter 4 to thwart the devil's attacks.

1/3 - Chapter 4 verse 4 I believe is one of the most important verses for us to commit to memory in all of the Bible: *"But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.'" (NLT).* Or, you might recognize this verse a bit better in NIV format: *"Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* This is such a powerful spiritual truth that Jesus is conveying - we will not live full and true lives if we live simply on bread alone. We need spiritual nourishment - food - from every Word of God. Where do we get this Word of God? You got it - the Bible. And note that Jesus says "every" word of God. This means the whole Bible is spiritual food for us. All of it. Not just the parts we like the best. :) We can learn something and be nourished by even the long genealogies! Seriously. So - I want to applaud you for going through the One Year Bible - you will be getting nourishment from "every" Word of God this year!

1/3 - One other important point to make in Matthew 4:4 and the 2 other temptations in this chapter. We see the devil tempting Jesus with things that may look enticing to Jesus or to us. But they are lies. And note - this is important - how Jesus fends off the devil's temptations and lies - by quoting Scripture! Jesus knew Scripture (well, yes, technically He is Scripture...:) The point is this. I do believe that we need to do more than just read the Bible. We need to memorize many portions of the Bible to protect us when the devil is attacking. If we have Scripture memorized, when we are tempted, we can quickly call to mind a verse or two that will bring us back into right state of mind - focusing back on God: the Father, Jesus the Son, & the Holy Spirit and their love and strength available through the Holy Spirit. If we don't have Scripture memorized, as Jesus clearly did in this chapter, we are at risk of falling prey to the deception and lies of the temptation. So - I am mostly preaching this to myself! :) But, I really want to do more memorization of Scripture this year. I have several verses down - but not enough. [Proverbs 3:5-6](#) certainly comes to mind for me often when I am worried or stressed and it transforms my state of mind immediately! **Q: What can you apply in your life today based on how Jesus rebuked the devil's temptations?** Very important to note is what happened when Jesus rebuked the devil's temptations with Scripture, the Word of God, in verse 11: *"Then the Devil went away."* Amen to that! :) **Are you memorizing Scripture on a regular basis? Are you bringing Scripture to mind when faced with temptation or sadness or whatever ails you? I would love to know which verses you have found useful in your life? Do you have advice on how to best go about memorizing Scripture? Will you join me in my plan to memorize more Scripture verses this year?**

1/4 - Matthew chapter 4:12 begins Jesus' public ministry. Verse 17 is of note: *"From then on, Jesus began to preach, 'Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near.'"* You'll note that Jesus is echoing earlier words of John the Baptist - turn from your sins - repent. The message is obviously of utmost importance - then and now. And then you'll see several times in the gospel of Matthew the term "the Kingdom of Heaven." You'll later see in Mark and Luke's gospel's a similar term, "the Kingdom of God." They basically mean the same thing - but Matthew was using the term "Heaven" instead of "God" because he was writing for a Jewish audience, which did not like to verbalize God's name (out of respect). Per Zondervan's NIV Study Bible, the Kingdom of Heaven is essentially brought about through the ministry of Jesus and those that have faith in Him - the establishment of God's rule in the hearts of people, the overcoming of evil, the removal of the consequences of sin, and a new order of peace. The idea of God's kingdom is mentioned nearly 50 times in the gospel of Matthew. **Q: How have you seen God's Kingdom manifested in your life? How have you seen that the Kingdom of heaven is near? What does repent meant to you? Is repentance a one time thing or an ongoing thing our lives?**

1/4 - Matthew 4 verses 18 through 20 is something that I think all of us should reflect upon in our own lives: *"One day as Jesus was walking along the shore beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers--Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew--fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. Jesus called out to them, 'Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!' And they left their nets at once and went with him."* What would you do if you were at work today or tomorrow and Jesus came to you and said - "Come, be my disciple, and I will show you how to fish for people!" Like Peter and Andrew, would you go at once with Jesus? This is not an easy question for us to answer. But I think it is worth asking. I have a great friend who indeed felt the call of Jesus to leave his very nicely paid architect job in the U.S. and to become a missionary architect in Asia - building primarily hospitals for communities that need them. The point of this passage I think is this - Jesus is indeed calling each one of us to follow Him. We may not need to leave our jobs. (But some of us may...) The call may entail leaving some of our luxurious ways or lazy behaviors behind to truly follow Him. The call to follow Jesus certainly entails leaving our sinful ways behind. **Q: Do you think Jesus still calls people today? Can you share with everyone a time in your life when felt that you were called by Jesus? Maybe it was a time when you were called to follow Jesus for the first time or maybe it was a call to love or serve others in a new way for you? Do you think that Jesus is calling you to something new in your life now in 2010? What do you think Jesus is calling you to do?**

1/4 - Matthew 4:23 nicely encapsulates Jesus' 3 main ministries that we will see over and over again in the gospels - 1. teaching, 2. preaching, and 3. healing. *"Jesus traveled throughout Galilee teaching in the synagogues, preaching everywhere the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed people who had every kind of sickness and disease."* **Q: How will you allow Jesus to teach you this year? How will you even allow Jesus to preach to you this year? And, this may be the toughest to surrender answer – how will you allow Jesus to heal you this year?**

1/5 - Okay... today is a big day my friends! We are starting the Sermon on the Mount! Whoo-hoo! (are you cheering here with me?? :) And as we do, let me encourage you in a few ways on what we'll be reading here. First of all, personally, these 3 chapters of Matthew (5, 6, 7) have been transformative for me over the years. Before I had faith in Jesus, I would continually read these chapters and I kept thinking to myself - "This guy has got some wisdom! I like what he's saying!" And I do believe that the Spirit was no doubt working on me as I read these chapters. So, I do ask that you would be sensitive to the Spirit as you read The Sermon on the Mount. **What is the Spirit speaking to you as you read?** Which verses are really jumping out at you - maybe making you think about some areas of your life that might need some tidying up... I know that this happens to me every time I read the Sermon on the Mount. Here's my other big request for you as you read through the Sermon on the Mount - and really all of the gospels. Try to experience what you are reading as something more than just "historical" teachings or "historical" readings. Try to envision yourself maybe down at your local park and maybe imagine that Jesus was actually at that park surrounded by a bunch of your neighbors and imagine that you heard Jesus actually saying these words to you and your neighbors - today. **Would this change your perception of what you are reading?** Or, maybe imagine that indeed Jesus is not just at your local park - but in your very home saying these words to you. And truly - He is - as you are reading the Bible you are hearing directly from Jesus. I just want to encourage you that the words you read here in the Sermon on the Mount are incredible spiritual food. And I don't think we can come back to these 3 chapters of Matthew often enough. I pray that you will let the Spirit of Jesus speak directly into your mind and your heart as you read and meditate on the meanings of these 3 chapters of the gospel of Matthew...

1/5 - Matthew 5: 17-18 are interpreted in different ways - but a friend of mine has encouraged me when in doubt, just stick to the text, which is wise. So, let's look at the Jesus' words here in this text - *"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them. I assure you, until heaven*

and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God's law will remain until its purpose is achieved." **Q: What does the reading of this text say to you?** Related to these verses above, quoting this from Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion book - which I have found to be a very helpful commentary to our daily readings: "In the Old Testament, there were 3 categories of law: ceremonial, civil, and moral. 1. The **ceremonial law** was related specifically to Israel's worship. Its primary purpose was to point forward to Jesus Christ; these laws are therefore no longer necessary after Jesus' death and resurrection. However, the principles behind these laws - to worship and love a holy God - still apply. 2. The **civil law** applied to daily living in Israel and these laws cannot be followed specifically today in our modern society and culture. But the principles behind these laws are timeless and should guide our conduct. 3. The **moral law** (such as the Ten Commandments) is the direct command of God, and requires obedience. The moral law reveals the nature and will of God, and it still applies today." So, there you have it from one evangelical commentary. I know probably different people reading this blog are going to interpret these verses a bit differently. This framework of these 3 categories of laws above and their fulfillment in Jesus I personally have found helpful and agree with. One other commentary I found related to these verses says this: "Christ does not terminate the law. *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; we establish the law. (Romans 3:31)* The law will always be there to point out what sin is, but the law is not the focus, Christ is the focus. Only He can cleanse, and sanctify and change the heart and mind." **Q: How do you look at the Old Testament law in your life? How do you integrate the Ten Commandments, for example, into your daily life? Or do you?**

1/6 - Matthew 5:27-30 are Jesus' teachings about adultery. And really I think these teachings, along with many others in the Sermon on the Mount, are even more so about what is going on inside our hearts. Jesus discusses how the law says clearly how we are "not to do" something - it's very apparent and very "exterior" if we commit a sin like adultery. Jesus says that the exterior/apparent/obvious sin is wrong for sure - but Jesus is equally as concerned with what's going on in the "interior" - inside our hearts. Jesus proposes that if we have looked at someone lustfully with our "interior", we have committed the same sin as if we had actually committed adultery on the "exterior." **Q: Do you see how Jesus' teachings in today's readings are really focusing on the condition of our hearts? How is the condition of your heart today when it comes to these teachings?**

1/6 - Matthew 5:27-28 reads: "*You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" **Q: Are there any good books or websites you can recommend to the group related to achieving victory in this area of our lives? Or any habits or practices of yours that you are comfortable sharing about how you avoid the sin of lust in your life?**

1/7 - What a blessing to read the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6! I have to confess, I don't say this prayer very often... and Jesus seems to indicate pretty clearly that this is a good way to pray. :) I do pray often throughout the day - but usually it's pretty immediate stuff - bless this meal, thank you for this day, bless my time at work, etc. etc. What a great thing it would be if I could remember to actually pray the Lord's Prayer a bit more... **Q: How do you pray? Or, in how many different ways do you pray? Do you pray specific prayers regularly, like the Lord's Prayer? Do you keep a list of people by your bedside to pray for regularly? Do you pray by writing in a journal?**

1/7 - Matthew 6:24 has always always been a verse that's convicted me and still does today: "*No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*" There is so much truth here in these 3 little sentences... Who are we serving in our lives today? I once read that one good indicator is to take a look at your monthly budget. Where does the money go each month? Interesting way to look at this. Maybe another way to look at this is how you spend your time each week. How much time is spent at work, volunteering, being with God, being with family/friends, taking a Sabbath, etc. Maybe looking at how we spend our time and money is a good way to see who or what we are worshipping? **Q: Do you believe that it is true that we cannot serve two masters? What are some ways that help you make sure that you're not serving money in your life?**

1/8 - Today in Matthew we continue the Sermon on the Mount! Chapter 6 verse 27 is solid science from Jesus: "*Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not.*" **Wouldn't you agree that scientific studies show that severe worrying (anxiety) can actually decrease the longevity of your life?** Jesus knew his science! :) Truly... I do think you'll continue to be amazed by the scientific validity and Truth that is exhibited in the Bible over and over and over again as we read it this year!

1/8 - Chapter 6 verse 34 has always been one of my favorites to remember: *"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."* Great great truth here. **I'm not sure if anyone has ever read a Dale Carnegie book about worrying?** It's called "[How to Stop Worrying and Start Living](#)." It's been probably 10 years ago since I read this book. But, I remember Dale writing about how he lived his life in what he called "day-tight compartments". He used a cargo ship analogy, which I won't be able to explain here well. But, basically, Dale got to the point where he mentally segmented his time off into morning prep time, time with family over breakfast, morning work time, lunch time, afternoon work time, dinner time, family time, time to read, sleeping time. And while he was in the present time of each of these "compartments" of his day he would not worry at all about the other compartments even in that very same day! It's pretty interesting to think about... when you are at work, you focus on work and you don't daydream or worry about your personal life - but, once you are off work, you then don't worry about work at all. I don't know... maybe this Dale Carnegie "day-tight compartments" is only helpful to me... I recommend you listen to Jesus' advice on worrying before you listen to Dale or mine! :) But, if you do worry a lot, this Dale Carnegie book may very helpful for you as well.

1/8 - In Matthew chapter 7 verse 6 we read: *"Don't give what is holy to unholy people. Don't give pearls to swine! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you."* I understand what is being said here - and I can think of specific instances in my life where this type of thing has happened. My question though for each of us is this - how do we show our friends, family, neighbors the love of God? Honestly, I have an evangelistic heart - but I don't think I really openly evangelize much. I love God so much - and it tears me up when I see my friends struggling with addictions - particularly when it seems like they are seeking God but settle for an addiction. So - I don't think this verse 6 is referring to these types of situations - people seeking God in all the wrong places. I think we are called to share the love of God with our hurting friends - with a hurting world. **Q: How do you do this? Do you pray for others? Do you give others books or Bibles? Do you send them spiritual emails? Do you invite them to church? Do you "preach the gospel at all times, and use words when only necessary?"**

1/9 - Matthew 7:20 was insightful for me: *"Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced."* I think this verse goes back to my post yesterday about how we are still to identify or perceive the types of people we come in contact with - without judging them or condemning them. And one good way to identify someone is by the type of fruit they produce - actions they demonstrate or lives they lead. And while it may sometimes be easier to identify other people's fruit... maybe we ought to look at our own lives too. What type of fruit is your life producing? And let us not forget Jesus' warning in verse 15 today about how we are to identify false teachers. *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."* **Q: Do you believe there are false teachers in our world today? What are their fruits that you will know them by?**

1/9 - Verse 24 is strong: *"Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock."* **Q: Have you really listened to Jesus' teaching these past few days as you read through the Sermon on the Mount? And - will you now obey Jesus' teaching? Would this be wise? Would this be like building a house on solid rock? Will you stay out of the sands of sin?**

1/9 - Matthew 7:25 I think is an important verse for us to meditate upon in our own lives: *"Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock."* I never paid too much attention to this verse - I always focused on verse 24 and building a strong foundation on solid rock. But, I had lunch with a friend recently and he shared with me that this verse 25 - and verse 27 too - should be a reminder to each of us that storms will come in our lives. And I think this is so true. Sometimes we go through wonderful seasons of blessing, and we may think that storms will never come our way - but guess what, they will. If we are followers of Jesus - Jesus who endured an unimaginable storm during his passion and crucifixion - storms will come our way too. So, then, the key becomes if we know storms will come, we really should pay attention to verse 24 and build up a strong foundation of faith during the times of calm. It's kind of like the idea of saving for a rainy day - the day will come when it rains. So let us build up our faith and love in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit today! So that when the storms of life come our way, we will not collapse, but will remain faithful to the beautiful end. My friends, the storms will come. But with Jesus, we do not need to fear them or collapse under them when they come! **Q: Based on the knowledge that storms will come into our life, what are you doing in your life to build a firm foundation of faith? Reading the Bible regularly? Going to church regularly? Being part of a small group or community group or Bible study with other Christians regularly? Praying regularly? What else? Do you think that storms will come to your life? Have you experienced storms in your life in the past where your faith has been your firm foundation and has gotten you through the storm?**

1/10 - Today we read Matthew chapter 8, which is an amazing look at Jesus' healing ministry. While we do read about someone with leprosy, and a paralyzed man, and others with sicknesses and demons - don't we all need some sort of healing in our lives today? Maybe we can learn something from the man with leprosy in verse 2: *"Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached Jesus. He knelt before him, worshiping. "Lord," the man said, "if you want to, you can make me well again."* I will give a caveat here - I do know people that have prayed for healing from various sicknesses and diseases - and it has not always been healed. Please don't see this as any shortcoming in your faith - or in Jesus' power. Oftentimes God's ways are much more of a mystery than we can comprehend on this side of heaven. "For now, we see in part. But, then - in heaven - we will see in full." (my paraphrase of Paul's words in [1 Corinthians 13:12](#)) Please don't give up on God or Jesus if the healing is not coming as you'd prayed for it to. Ultimately, all who have faith in the born, crucified, and risen Jesus will have perfected bodies in heaven. Please stay focused on this "hope of glory", as Paul also wrote about. **Q: Do you believe that Jesus still heals people today? What does he heal people of today? Does he heal sickness? Addictions? Laziness? Pride? All manner of sins? Has Jesus healed you of anything? Do you believe He can?**

1/11 - Matthew's readings in chapter 8:18-34 today are powerful in so many ways. The first section of our readings focuses on the costs of following Jesus. And I do think that we all probably realize that there are some costs associated with faith. However, there is also eternal reward, which outweighs all the temporary costs we might have to pay in this life. In some ways, I do ask myself this - are we really participating in a true faith if there are no costs associated with it? I have heard and read books and listened to speakers about how faith can bring us health & wealth & happiness. And I know there are many times when this is true (see our Proverbs reading today for a good truth to this) - but I do think these would be dangerous goals of faith in and of themselves - we could end up serving health, wealth and happiness as mini-gods of our own design if we're not careful. **Q: Do you believe there is a cost to following Jesus? Is it worth the cost? What are the costs in your life of following Jesus? Do you believe that suffering might be part of the package in this life of following Jesus? Are there any limits to the cost of following Jesus that you couldn't agree to? Would your life be too much?**

1/12 - In Matthew chapter 9 we read about Jesus not only healing - but also forgiving sins. This is a power and an authority - forgiving sins - that only God could truly have. It is true that Jesus would be blaspheming, per the teachers of religious law in this passage, if Jesus was not God. **Q: So, this might be a good point for you to ask yourself: do you believe that Jesus is God? If this is your first go through the Bible or the gospel of Mathew, you may not feel ready to answer this question yet. But ask it of yourself now - and again as you continue to read this gospel: do you believe that Jesus is God? Do you believe that Jesus, as God, could not only heal the paralytic but forgive his sins as well?**

1/12 - In chapter 9, Jesus calls Matthew (or "Levi"), the author of this Gospel, and a Jewish tax collector at the time of his call. Note that while Jerusalem was under the authority of Rome at this time, Rome would hire Jews to collect taxes from other Jews that would be paid to Rome. The Jewish tax collectors were allowed to keep a commission or percentage of the taxes they collected - however, they were notorious for overcharging and making more than they should have in their collections. As such, Jewish tax collectors were typically not allowed to be in the temple - nor were they even trusted as witnesses in trials. And this is our Gospel writer! :) (yes, I still trust Matthews writings - he, like us, was forgiven & changed after meeting Jesus) In this chapter Jesus has a meal with "tax collectors and other notorious sinners." And the religious leaders ask Jesus why he eats with such "scum." I do hope that you see that this is such an amazing thing about Jesus - he will have a meal with anyone - the "scum of the earth" as one translation calls sinners who believe in Jesus in one of Paul's letters. Jesus loves the "scum". And he gets frustrated with the religious leaders who are righteous in their own eyes. Why the difference? I think verses 12 & 13 answer this well: *"When he heard this, Jesus replied, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do... For I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."* **Q: So, this leads to some questions we may want to ask ourselves today. Are we spiritually healthy or are we sick? Do we need a spiritual doctor? Do we need Jesus? Are we sinners? Or, do we think we are already "good enough" on our own? Like Jesus, will we talk and dine with "sinners" in our lives today? Or, do we consider ourselves somehow "above" talking and dining with sinners?** One thing that I have to be careful of - and maybe all of us do - is not getting myself stuck in the "Christian bubble" or the "Christian ghetto." Meaning, I think we can sometimes find ourselves just spending time, just talking with, just dining with our Christian friends. And then after a while find ourselves completely removed from the world that needs to experience Jesus' love and light and truth through us. I think we are called to minister in the world. Yes, there is a time and place for sure to fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters. But, I think we do well to find some occasion to talk and dine with

"sinners" (not so unlike ourselves, also sinners...) like Jesus did. **So, how and when do you find time to talk and dine with folks who perhaps do not yet know God or Jesus?**

1/13 – Matthew 9 Verses 37 & 38 are so powerful in today's readings: *"He said to his disciples, "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields."* I think each of us can reflect on this teaching from Jesus. **Q: you agree with Jesus that the harvest is so great? And the workers are few? Do you pray to God for more workers for his kingdom work? How are you one of God's workers in his kingdom work? What are some ways in 2010 you could become more of worker in God's kingdom?**

1/14 - Matthew 10 verse 16 stands out: *"Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. Be as wary as snakes and harmless as doves."* This is good advice for us today as well. Jesus is still sending us out today as his followers. And I do think this teaching is wise - for us to be wary and harmless at the same time. It's an interesting line to walk, but I believe a very wise one. I believe the only way to really walk this line well is through the blessing of the Holy Spirit. I don't think we can do it on our own... **Q: How in your life do you balance being wary and harmless? Do you have an example of where this balance really paid off in your life?**

1/15 – Matthew 10 Verse 38 is the first mention of the word cross in the gospel of Matthew: *"If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine."* What strikes me about this verse is that Jesus is teaching that we do have a cross to bear. And we have a choice to make of whether we will take up the cross and follow Jesus. **Q: What is your cross in your life? Do you think you know what it is? How do you bear your cross daily? How do you choose to follow Jesus daily?**

1/15 - Matthew 11 starts off with an interesting question from John the Baptist to Jesus in verse 3: *"Are you really the Messiah we've been waiting for, or should we keep looking for someone else?"* I read an interesting commentary that said this is the beginnings of where we see that people are starting to wonder if Jesus is really the Messiah, because he hadn't overthrown the Roman government. Many in Jerusalem were expecting a Warrior-King Messiah that would free the Jewish people from the oppression of Rome. And Jesus' ministry of "only" preaching, teaching, and healing was bringing up the questions of, "are you really the Messiah?" People were starting to wonder... Instead of the Warrior-King, they are seeing a Suffering-Servant, which was not what was expected. **Q: What do you personally believe the answer to John's question was and is? Is Jesus the Messiah?**

1/16 - Matthew chapter 11 opens up with Jesus teaching about the importance of John the Baptist's ministry and the transitioning from the old covenant to the new covenant, which can be seen in verse 13: *"For before John came, all the teachings of the Scriptures looked forward to this present time."* Basically, this could be rephrased that all of the Old Testament was prophesying about the coming of Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. **Q: Do you believe this to be true about the Old Testament?**

1/16 - Verse 20 is a convicting one! *"Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where he had done most of his miracles, because they hadn't turned from their sins and turned to God."* This is something for each of us to really examine ourselves on. **Q: Have we heard Jesus' teachings? Do we believe in his miracles? And in light of these things - have we turned from our sins? And have we turned to God?**

1/16 - Today we read Matthew chapter 11 verses 28 through 30, which are amazing verses for each of us to consider, particularly if we are struggling with the burden of sin or the burden of worry or the burden of regrets (and the list could go on - you can fill in the blank for your life): *"Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."* **Q: Have you ever experienced the power of these verses? Have you ever come to Jesus weary and carrying heavy burdens and found rest? Is there anything in your life today that is heavy that you can give to Jesus?**

1/17 - Today in Matthew chapter 12 we read about Jesus' teachings surrounding his healing on the Sabbath. Note that in verse 14 the plots to kill Jesus begin: *"Then the Pharisees called a meeting and discussed plans for killing Jesus."* **Q: Why do you suppose these plots started at this point?** I don't know that it was this one incident per se that began the plots in and of itself - but it was probably a culmination of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing ministries up to this point that started murmurs and discussions and finally led to plots. I think Jesus' wisdom and power and popularity with

the people were seen as a threat. **Q: Do you think that Jesus' wisdom and power and popularity with the people are seen as a threat by some in our world today? What are some examples of people threatened by Jesus in our world today?**

1/17 - I read an interesting commentary on verses 11 & 12 today: *"And he (Jesus) answered, 'If you had one sheep, and it fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you get to work and pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep!'"* The commentary said that in this verse Jesus contrasts the worth of an animal with that of a human being. I think for most of us, we would agree that a human life is more valuable than an animal life. However - interestingly, not everyone in our world today feels that way. I recently heard a radio talk show host ask a woman if she saw both her beloved dog and a stranger drowning in a lake and she could only save one of the two, who would she save. And the woman basically said her dog - she hemmed and hawed about saying that straightforwardly, but basically she said her dog was her family... And so the stranger - the human - would lose out in that situation. **Q: If you could only save your beloved pet or a stranger (human) from drowning, who would you save? Who would God save? Do you think God places a higher value on human life than animal life? Do you think some people in our world place higher value on animals than human life? What are some examples of this?**

1/17 - I love the Isaiah prophecy in today's readings, summarizing the quiet aspects of the ministry of Jesus! Verse 21 makes me tear up to really meditate upon: *"And his name will be the hope of all the world."* **Q: How does this verse strike you? Do you believe that Jesus' name is the hope of the world? Is Jesus' church a part of the hope of the world?**

1/18 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew Chapter 12 verse 30 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Anyone who isn't helping me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me."* This is a really really powerful verse if you think about it. **Q: And I think we then need to ask ourselves - are we really helping Jesus? How are we really working with Jesus? How are we really being obedient to Jesus' teachings for our life? Are there times in our lives when we are actually working against Him?**

1/18 - Jesus' teaching on the sign of Jonah in this chapter is awesome! In verse 40 Jesus prophesies His death, burial and resurrection: *"For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights."* And then the following verse is just so powerful and convicting: *"The people of Nineveh will rise up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And now someone greater than Jonah is here--and you refuse to repent."* **Q: In what ways is Jesus greater than Jonah? And greater than Solomon? (as we read in verse 42) How has understanding Jesus' teachings led you to repent in your life?**

1/19 - Matthew 12 verses 48 through 50 are powerful: *"Jesus asked, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' Then he pointed to his disciples and said, 'These are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!'"* I read an interesting commentary that said that these words from Jesus were stating that spiritual bonds are as strong as physical bonds. And that in this teaching Jesus was paving the way for a new community of believers - the church! Very cool... **Q: How are you a brother and sister and mother of Jesus?**

1/19 - Matthew 13 verse 22 in this chapter is convicting for me, as I have experienced this in my life in the past.... *"The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the Good News, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life and the lure of wealth, so no crop is produced."* and I still struggle with the "cares of this life" crowding out the Good News in my life today! I think in some ways this might be a life long struggle. **Q: How are you doing on this verse? Where is God's seed of the Good News being sown in your life? In the good soil of your heart?**

1/20 - In today's Matthew readings we go through 5 parables that begin "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." Great way to start these parables! They do indeed give us a glimpse of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Do these parables speak to you as you read through them? I know they do for me. Sometimes in encouraging ways. Sometimes in convicting ways. I love verses 31 & 32: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants and grows into a tree where birds can come and find shelter in its branches."* I think if we cultivate the seed that Jesus plants in our hearts - the Gospel - we will see an amazing plant grow that will ultimately bless others. From the tiniest beginnings, with patience and faith, can come the largest of plants. **Q: How have you let Jesus plant a mustard seed in your heart? How have you been patient and allowed the seed**

time & space to grow? How have you watered and cared for the seed of the Gospel planted in your heart so that one day it will be a beautiful tree of life for yourself and others you come in contact with? In 2010, how will you allow Jesus to grow a new mustard seed tree with your life?

1/20 - I love the last 2 parables in today's readings! The treasure buried in a field and the pearl of great price. And the thought of being willing to give up absolutely everything to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. How about for you? Are you willing to give up absolutely everything to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven? Is there a price too high that you would not be willing to pay? I will share with you this somewhat related tangent. I had this really interesting jog several years ago. And it was before I was a Christian, so I didn't equate my thinking with the "Kingdom of Heaven" at this time. But, here were my thoughts that night on the jog. As I was jogging I thought to myself - I am a "billionaire"! Why? Because I am blessed with this opportunity to jog, and to check out the beautiful night air around me, and more than anything because of this wonderfully complex thing in my skull called the brain. :) The brain that allows me to do all these things and to simply think and enjoy life. And I thought to myself - at what price would I give up the ability to use my brain? Would I sell my brain for 1 billion dollars? And the answer is obviously no - because there would then be no point to living in this life without the brain. So - I reasoned with myself, well - "Then I am a billionaire!" I have a billion dollar asset in my skull! :) I hope this isn't too random of a tangent. Maybe you'll realize that you are a billionaire today too though? :) To tie this back to the Kingdom of Heaven. Would I sell of my rights to the Kingdom of Heaven for 1 billion dollars. No. So - I guess then technically, I am a multi-billionaire now! 1 billion asset value for the brain + 1 billion asset value for the Kingdom of Heaven! The point being... or maybe the question to you. **Q: Which would you prefer - 1 billion in cash, or the Kingdom of Heaven? Is there any price you would place on giving up the Kingdom of Heaven? If not – how will you pursue the Kingdom of Heaven with all of your worth? And how will you then share this amazing "pearl of great price" with others around you?**

1/21 - Today in Matthew chapter 13 verse 54 we read about Jesus going to his hometown of Nazareth where he was raised as a child. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as we know, but raised in Nazareth, where Mary & Joseph met and married and returned after their flight to Egypt after Jesus' birth. In verse 57 we read this when Jesus was in Nazareth: *"Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.""* This verse remind me that sometimes when we really move forward in our faith, our friends ("hometown" from the verse above) and our relatives can sometimes not understand what is going on with us. I think there are phases of our walk with God where really it becomes very personal – between us and God – and through that process God will transform us. And our friends and relatives sometimes may not appreciate our change for various reasons – just as Jesus' friends and relatives did not appreciate his ministry in this verse. I hope that this verse can be of comfort to you if by chance you are having challenges reconciling your faith and your changed heart with your friends & relatives expectations of who you were in the past. Know that you are on the right path. As long as you are staying focused on God and his will for your life, you may have to accept some loss of "honor" (per the verse above) in your status with your friends and relatives. You may not seem to be as "cool" or "fun" or whatever as you once were in your friends' eyes. But – if in God's eyes you are loving Him with all of your heart and you are loving your neighbors as yourself, then you are eternally cool and fun in the Kingdom of Heaven. And that's where it really counts. **Q: Where are you seeking "honor" in your life today? In the eyes of your friends and relatives – or in God's eyes? How do you seek honor with God? How does the world tempt you with its honor? Have you ever lost some "honor" with your friends or family as you've moved forward in your faith? If you did lose honor with your friends did you gain honor with God? Do you think you sometimes base your decisions more on what other people will think? Or do you base your decisions on what God will think? At times in your faith walk have you had to distance yourself from some old friends so that you can move forward in your faith walk? How has this been hard? How has it been worth it?**

1/22 - In Matthew chapter 14 today we read about two miracles - Jesus feeding the 5,000 (or really 10,000 to 15,000 counting men, women & children - Matthew just counted men, as his Gospel was written to a Jewish audience, which had men eat separately from women and children at that time/place) and Jesus walking on water. While these 2 miracles are amazing and again confirming that Jesus is God - a couple of other things stood out me. First was verse 23: *"Afterward he went up into the hills by himself to pray."* **Q: If Jesus did this - do you think we should do the same? How often do we get away from the "crowds" or even the "disciples" or loved ones in our life to be by ourselves and pray? Do you do this at least for a few minutes each day? Do you do this for longer periods of time too? How do you model this behavior of Jesus' in your life and slip away from the crowds to pray by yourself? How often? Where and How? Also, do you take spiritual retreats? Do you take the retreats alone or with others? Is prayer a central part of the retreats?**

1/22 - Verses 29 & 30 also stood out to me today: *"All right, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.*" These verses made me wonder in our own lives – **Q: Are there times or areas in your life where Jesus has said, "Come", and you've moved forward in faith? But then - the waves came... the challenges came... the doubts came... the insults came.... and you started to waver in your faith? Maybe you got scared - and started to sink? Well - I do admire that Peter did cry out to Jesus to save him in this situation - and we then get the reassuring verse 31: "Instantly Jesus reached out his hand and grabbed him."** If you feel like there are some areas in your life where you are sinking - will you cry out to Jesus to save you? Do you believe he will instantly reach out his hand and grab you?

1/23 - In Matthew chapter 15 today we read about Jesus confronting the Pharisees on their "age-old traditions." I read in Zondervan's & Tyndale's commentaries that after the Babylonian exile (we'll read about the exile late this year in the One Year Bible), Jewish rabbis began to make meticulous rules and regulations governing the daily life of people. And that these rules were added to God's law and were essentially elevated to the same sacred status by the Pharisees. In 200 A.D. these traditions of the elders were put into writing in the [Mishnah](#). I think what Jesus gets at here in this chapter is that the Pharisees were allowing the "rules & regulations" to overshadow the spirit of God's law. They were not honoring their parents because of the practice of [Corban](#) - giving \$ to the temple. Which, giving \$ to the temple is a good thing... but at the expense of the great thing of caring for your parents? I know we all could probably go round and round on what is the greatest good - how should we spend our time and our money and our lives. I like that Jesus basically takes it to the heart. What is the heart of the matter? No matter what the matter is - taking care of your parents, giving to your church, obediently following God's will, receiving God's grace - what is the heart of the matter? One thing that I have been so blessed to learn over the past few years is that the condition of our hearts matters. Immensely. The motives of why we do something - anything - matters. Immensely. We are called in Proverbs to *"guard our hearts, for it is the wellspring of life."* If we do not care for the state of our hearts, we can become very regimented or insensitive in our thinking and doing. We might even get to the point in verse 8 of this chapter where Jesus quotes from Isaiah: *"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away."* **Q: How is the state of your heart today? How is it close to God? How does your heart yearn for Jesus?**

1/23 - In Matthew 15 verses 10 & 11 today we read: "Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "Listen," he said, "and try to understand. It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth.""**Q: Do you agree with these words of Jesus'? Are you cognizant of the words that come out of your mouth on a moment by moment basis? Have you ever had to conscientiously change the words that come out of your mouth because they were not blessing others? Do you use profanity? (or am I being a Pharisee by even asking this question... :) I think it's a fair question - does profanity come out of your mouth? Do you think this is pleasing in God's sight? (Psalm 19:14)**

1/23 - Jesus continues to speak about the importance of what is in our hearts in verses 18-20 today: *"But evil words come from an evil heart and defile the person who says them. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all other sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you."* I think this takes us back again to the Sermon on the Mount - where Jesus teaches us in one example that yes, it is wrong to commit adultery. But, if you commit adultery in your heart, it is just as wrong. Because if you commit adultery in the heart, you have defiled your own heart. And from the heart could come the actual act of committing adultery - which would then shatter several lives. But it all starts in the heart.... So - the good news? Jesus can heal our hearts! Jesus is in the business of heart-healing! **Q: In your life, are there any areas where you might need to refocus from some external actions and start focusing on the state of your heart? Maybe by focusing on what's going on inside your heart, the external actions will ultimately change? Maybe allow Jesus to heal your heart - and then your external life will be healed as well? I'm not sure you can go about this the other way - trying to work from the outside back in... I think you need to start on the inside first and work your way out. But don't do this alone - let Jesus walk this healing path with you. Let Jesus tattoo your heart with his healing love! Why do you think our hearts are so important to Jesus?**

1/24 - In Matthew chapter 16 verses 11 & 12 stood out to me: *"So again I say, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' " Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about yeast or bread but about the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."* And I wonder today - are there false teachings that we should beware of today? I believe there are... and there have been times in my life where I have bought into false teaching's. How can we know if a teacher is false? That is a great question. I would say that each of you are doing an amazing thing to help discern whether a teacher is false by reading the entire Bible. I believe the Bible to be the ultimate Truthful teaching that we can

read - and thus, if you come across teachers that differ radically or go against the teachings of the Bible, you need to be wary. Don't get me wrong - every pastor / minister / priest is going to have some different takes or views or interpretations of the Bible. By slight degrees... If there are major differences, then you should be worried. In addition to knowing the Bible relatively well, the key to discerning false teachers will be the Holy Spirit. If you are getting bad "gut feelings" (hopefully coming from the Holy Spirit) over and over again about a teacher, there might be an issue. Pray to God about this and ask for his guidance. I realize this can be a sensitive issue! I'd say don't freak out about this and start wondering if your pastor is a false teacher.... :) But, be aware. I do believe there are still false teachers out and about today unfortunately. **Q: How do you discern false teaching from true teaching? Is there a time you can share with the group you were deceived by false teaching for a time?**

1/25 - Today we read about Peter's confession of Christ in Matthew chapter 16. In verse 15 we hear Jesus ask: *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" And then in verse 16 Peter replies – "Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* I believe this is a question that is asked of each of us today as well. **Q: Who do you say that Jesus is? What does Jesus being the Christ mean in your life today?**

1/25 - In verse 18 we read - *"Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."* Praise God for Jesus instituting the body of Christ, Jesus' church! And all of the powers of hell will not conquer the body of Christ! Do you praise Jesus regularly for the church you attend? Do you pray for the ministry of your church regularly? Do you pray often for your pastors / ministers / priests? Do you pray for others that attend your church? Do you pray for those that will soon be coming to attend your church? I have to say - I absolutely love my church. I honestly cannot imagine what my life would be like without the church. I met first met Jesus thanks to the church about 6 and a half years ago. And Jesus changed my life forever. Thank God for the church! I realize that some of you may feel that some churches have some issues and so you don't go to church at all at this time. However, I honestly do believe that we are called to be in community with others in a church – be it a big church, small church, house church, etc. - and that you really can find a great church if you search prayerfully. Trust me, they are out there! If you are not currently attending church - maybe because of bad experiences you had at another church in the past, will you pray about this with Jesus? Will you attend a different church again soon? I honestly believe it will bless you immensely to attend church again on a regular basis. Also, I am reminded of a classic line from Billy Graham – "If you ever find the perfect church, please do not join it. You'll mess it up!" :) Indeed, there are no perfect people out there, and hence no perfect churches. But let us be the church anyway! The church may be a majestic mess, but it is Majestic indeed! And I do honestly believe that the body of Christ is the "hope of the world". Please be an active participant in this Hope. **Q: I'm curious what your thoughts are on the church today? And I'm not talking about any one denomination - I mean church as the overall "body of Christ" Christian churches worldwide. Big churches, small churches, house churches, cathedral churches. Do you personally go to church regularly? Why or why not? Have there been periods of your life where you have not gone to church regularly? Have these been good or not so good periods of your life? What would you say to someone now who does not go to church about church? How might you encourage someone to go to church? Why does it matter if they go to church or not?**

1/25 - Verses 24 - 26 are so powerful today: *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?"* Wow... there is so much going on in these verses... I pray they speak to you powerfully as well? **Q: How do you follow Jesus? How do you put aside your selfish ambition? How do you shoulder your cross? Do you know what your cross is? Are you trying to "keep your life" in any area of your life? Or, will you give up all of your life - every area - to Jesus so that you will find true life? Is there anything that this world has to offer that is worth more than your soul?**

1/26 - Today in Matthew chapter 17 verse 20 stood out to me: *"You didn't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I assure you, even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."* **Q: As you think about this verse, how about your own faith. How much faith do you really have? Do you have enough faith in Jesus? And in all of God's promises? Or – do you ever hedge your bets? Do you also place a lot of faith in your own power? Your own skills? Your own "smarts"? Do you truly have complete faith in Jesus and Jesus alone? If so, and if it was Jesus' will, do you believe that you could move mountains?** I don't think that this idea of not having enough faith means that we need to "try harder" in any way. I think it means we simply need to depend more - rest more - relax more - give more - to Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Trust that his grace is enough... As a great Chris Tomlin song goes - "All of you is more than Enough, for

all of me." **Is Jesus more than enough for you?**

1/27 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 18 verses 3 & 4 are something for each of us to consider: *"I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."* I find it interesting the order of the words - first, turn from your sin. THEN - after turning from your sins - become as little children. It seems that we cannot become humble as children without first turning from our sins. This makes sense if you think about it. If you are still living in sin, how can you become humble like a child? You must first repent of the sin before moving toward humility. I think this teaching is a tough one in our modern age. It doesn't sound quite right... become humble like a child? Why?? But, there is so much wisdom in it. **Q: In what areas of your life do you want to become humble like a child? What are some steps you can take to become humble like a child?**

1/27 - Verses 19 & 20 are awesome: *"I also tell you this: If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them."* Again, these verses remind me of the importance of being in community with other believers regularly. The importance of church. And not just showing up to church on Sundays, but really investing in your church. Serving. Giving financially. Being part of a small group. Doing life together with others. Being the body of Christ. I will admit that there have been periods of my life where I really felt like I did not need the church. That I did not need to be in community. These have turned out to be lonely or hurried or stressful seasons when I look back on them! I realize now more than ever that I need the church. I love my church. I love everyone in my church - warts and faults and all - and I believe they love me in return, warts and faults and all. **Q: How has Christian community been important for you in your life? Have you had seasons in your life when you didn't have Christian community? What is an area of your life today that God might be calling you into Christian community?**

1/28 - Today in Matthew chapter 18 we read about Jesus' strong teaching on the need for us to forgive others in our life. And not just to forgive someone once... but many many many times. Why? Because God has been so gracious to us - he has forgiven us for our many many many sins through our faith in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. If God has forgiven us many times over - who are we to not forgive others many times over as well? Are we better than God? :) We all know the answer to this one. No. But, we are all called to forgive as gracefully as God has forgiven us. We are to forgive, just as we have been forgiven. **Q: Who is someone in your life today that you need to forgive? When and how will you forgive this person?**

1/28 - In Matthew 19 we read a discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees on divorce. The context of this discussion basically revolved around 2 Jewish schools - Shammai and Hillel - and their differing viewpoints in Jesus' day on Deuteronomy 24 verses 1-4: *"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."* From the NIV Study Bible commentary - The Shammai school held that "something indecent" from verse 1 above meant "marital unfaithfulness" - the only allowable cause for divorce. Hillel emphasized to the preceding clause, "who becomes displeasing to him" in verse 1 above - they would allow for a man to divorce his wife for anything she did that he disliked. Jesus in the midst of these 2 viewpoints seems to take to the side of Shammai - but, only after first pointing back to God's original ideal for marriage. So... there you have the context. What does that mean for us today? I honestly will say that I don't know. I do know that many folks are divorced. And many are married. And many are single. So... I guess I'd encourage you to read more or study more about the topic of divorce if you feel God is calling you to this. I do believe in God's grace in each of our lives and I believe in Jesus... Bible.org does have a pretty long overview of **Marriage, Abortion and Divorce** [at this link](#) - I haven't read it all, so I can't say that I agree with everything at this link... but, if you're interested in diving more into this topic you may want to read. Also, Bible.org's commentary on today's readings in Matthew chapter 19 titled **"Questions About Marriage and Divorce"** are [at this link](#). **Q: Please do share your wisdom / thoughts / books / websites / other resources on this topic? Please be graceful in your remarks as many of our participants have gone through a divorce. If you yourself have been through a divorce, and are willing to share your learnings / experiences from it, this could be beneficial perhaps to some others.**

1/29 - Today in Matthew 19 we read some challenging verses about the Rich Young Man. I have read some

commentaries say that we don't need to take Jesus' words literally that each of us must sell all of our goods and give to the poor. However, these words in context to this rich young man were indeed to be taken literally by him - and he knew it. He wouldn't do it. Jesus called him to do this, I think, because the young man's "stuff" was an impediment to his relationship with God. Perhaps the young man literally valued his stuff more than God. So - while the commentaries say that we don't have to take Jesus' teaching to this young man literally, I do think we should keep in mind that Jesus may ask of us something along these lines. Jesus may ask us to pack up and become a missionary. Or maybe he'll ask us to leave a high powered, high paying job, to go serve the poor in our town. Or he may ask us to not spend our money on luxury items, but to invest in micro credit loan programs in third world countries. So - while this may seem like Jesus was asking a lot of this rich young man, keep in mind that Jesus asks much of each of us. And really, Jesus simply asks us to follow him. **Q: How did you decide to follow Jesus? Have you always followed Jesus, no matter the cost? What are some things you've had to "give up" to follow Jesus?**

1/30 - Matthew chapter 20's parable of the vineyard workers is one that I have at times had challenges with. I, like the workers who labored all day, would think - "that's not fair!" Well... but then I came to realize that I believe this story is a parable of **Grace**. God's grace. And you know what - God's grace is not "fair." And thank God for this being so! God's grace is so powerful and all-encompassing and life-giving and healing and saving. And God's grace is offered to me. And to you. And to our neighbors. And to everyone. God's grace is offered to people that have sinned against God. Me. You. Our Neighbors. Everyone. God's grace is offered to people who become Christians early in their lives and live wonderfully giving lives. And God's grace is offered to people who become Christians on their deathbed after living destructive lives, but who finally repent and surrender to God. God's grace is given freely. Like these workers in this story, we may accept God's grace at different points in the "day" of our life. Though, of course, some never do ultimately accept God's grace and there is grave risk as the day grows longer... **Q: How about you? What part of the "day" are you in? When did you accept God's gift of grace? Please feel free to share your testimony.**

1/30 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew 20 verse 16 has always been convicting to me: *"And so it is, that many who are first now will be last then; and those who are last now will be first then."* I see the wisdom in this verse... but yet, I still think that I try to be "first" in many ways in my life. I don't like being "last". I like being honored. I like being the star. I don't like being the servant. I don't like to be the guy supporting the star. And yet, Jesus is calling us to be last. To serve others. To let others go first. **Q: How about you? In what areas are you trying to be "first" in your life? How do you see the eternal wisdom in being "last"?**

1/30 - As this chapter proceeds we read about Jesus prophesying his own death and resurrection. And then, we see Jesus prophesy about the end of James & John's life when their mother and they ask to sit at Jesus' right & left in heaven. Check out verses 22 & 23: *"You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of sorrow I am about to drink?" "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" "You will indeed drink from it," he told them.* You will indeed drink from it... James ended his life being martyred for his faith in Jesus. And John ended his life in exile on the island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. And I wonder again about us today... sometimes we hear about the "health, wealth and prosperity gospel", and think that's what we've signed up for as Christians. **Q: But... do you think that it might be possible that at some point in your life that you might be called to drink from the bitter cup of sorrow that Jesus drank from? If you are called to drink from that bitter cup, will you indeed drink from it?**

1/31- Today in Matthew chapter 21 verse 22 we read these words from Jesus: *"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."* This is a powerful verse if you really stop and think about it... **Q: Do you believe Jesus' teaching here? Do you believe that if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer?** I do believe this... but then there is always in the back of my mind - "but what about so-and-so who was ill and was praying in belief that they would be healed. But then they weren't..." I don't have any easy answer on this one. I have to believe there are probably some good resources out there for this tough question? **If you know of any resources / books on this subject of prayer - or, more specifically, unanswered prayers - please share with your group?**

PSALMS

1/1 - **Overview of the Psalms:**

Author: Principally David; also many others

Date: Tenth century B.C. and later

Content: This favorite book of today was also a favorite in antiquity. In it may be seen the many different ways in which believers over several centuries related to God. Every human mood and feeling may be brought to God for him to bless. There are sorrow and joy, anger and calm, doubt and faith, repentance and praise. There are recollections of the past, the

struggles of present existence, and visions of a glorious future. In numerous places, God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, is portrayed in his suffering and in his glory. The book of Psalms was used in much the same way as a hymnbook is used today, for public and private worship.

Theme: The book of Psalms teaches principally that God has a personal concern for his people and that he wants us to come to him just as we are. We need not solve our problems before we go to him; we go to him for the solutions. Wherever we are, however we feel, whatever we have done – if we offer ourselves to God, he is willing to help and give us the strength to live again. God's power and control of all things is also seen. Because God is in control of everything, he can help us when we turn to him for deliverance. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 10*)

1/1 - Martin Luther said this about the book of Psalms: *"The Psalter is the favorite book of all the saints. Each person, whatever his circumstances may be, finds in the psalms words which are appropriate to the circumstances in which he finds himself and meet his needs as adequately as if they were composed exclusively for his sake, and in such a way that he himself could not improve on them nor find or desire any better psalms or words."*

1/1 - Psalm 1 verse 2 reads: *"But they delight in doing everything the LORD wants; day and night they think about his law."* **Q: How well does this verse ring true with your life today? Do you delight in being obedient to God? Do you think about God's Word, the Bible, day and night? Do you memorize Scripture on a regular basis?**

1/2 - Psalm 2 is a prophetic and Messianic Psalm. This Psalm is frequently quoted in the New Testament in reference to Jesus as God's Anointed and the great son of King David. The word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew word for "anointed one." And the word "Christ" comes from the Greek word for "anointed one." (as we read Anointed One in verse 2) Verses 11 & 12 in this Psalm are encouraging and also a strong warning for us at the same time: *"Serve the LORD with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling. Submit to God's royal son, or he will become angry, and you will be destroyed in the midst of your pursuits--for his anger can flare up in an instant. But what joy for all who find protection in him!"* I think the closing sentence should be a huge encouragement to us. If we are seeking to love God and Jesus and other people with all of our hearts, mind, strength and souls - God knows it. And he will provide eternal protection for us. Yes, there will be suffering in this life - but joy can be found in knowing that we will have an eternity to spend with God and his royal son!

1/3 - Psalm 3 is a wonderful Psalm of David's, when he was fleeing his own son Absalom - details of which we will read about later this year. Verse 5 stood out to me today: *"I lay down and slept. I woke up in safety, for the LORD was watching over me."* God watches over us as we sleep! I like that a lot! I hope this verse comforts you as you sleep tonight!

1/4 - Psalm 4 is a wonderful Davidic Psalm. Verse 7 stands out: *"You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and wine."* **Q: How has God's Spirit given you greater joy than any amount of money or material goods or even human love can give? How are you experiencing God's holy joy in your life currently?**

1/5 - Psalm 5 verse 3 reads: *"Listen to my voice in the morning, LORD. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly."* This is a great reminder to pray in the mornings - before we start the hustle and bustle of the day. I know that many of you are reading the One Year Bible readings in the morning, which I think is a great way to start your day! I do see a huge positive difference in my day if I do pray to God in the morning and pray specifically about the upcoming day - and pray for others that I will interact with that day as well. Praise God for the morning! **Q: what do you do in the morning to set your mind and heart on God? Is it prayer, reading the Bible, reading other devotions?**

1/6 - As I read Psalm 6, it seems very penitential to me - like David was making a confession of sins and praying for forgiveness from God. **As you read through these verses, have you ever felt like this?** I have. And it ain't fun. But, it's part of the healing process. I do think we need to allow ourselves to get fully broken before God before we get fully healed. We can't mask over or hide from God what's really going on - we have got to put it all out there on the table before God, for him to be able to truly fix it. However - there is great encouragement and confidence from David in this Psalm in verse 9: *"The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD will answer my prayer."* The Lord will hear your plea! The Lord will answer your prayer! Please plea and pray to him if you need to. He will listen and answer.

1/7 - Today in Psalm 7 verse 10 we read: *"God is my shield, saving those whose hearts are true and right."* What stood out to me here is that it does not say that God saves those who "do" what is true and right. It says that God saves those

whose "hearts are" true and right. As discussed in yesterday's Matthew 5 post, below, this is getting toward our interior motives and thoughts and hearts - the important thing is not what we do on the "exterior", but who we are on the "interior". And then certainly if our hearts are true and right, a natural outflow of this is doing good things on the exterior. But, it's the interior - our hearts - that matter most. **Q: How is your heart these days? Is it true and right? And do you believe that God is indeed your shield?**

1/8 - Psalm 8, verses 3 & 4 I love: *"When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers-- the moon and the stars you have set in place-- what are mortals that you should think of us, mere humans that you should care for us?"* What I love about this verse is that before I had faith in Jesus, and even God, I used to always look toward the night sky and just be amazed by the stars! I would always think to myself - there is no way that this all just happened by chance. There's gotta be something bigger going on making all of this happen. The night sky was evangelizing me!! :) What a beautiful thing. **Q: How have you ever had the experience of nature, God's creation, evangelizing you? When you are out in nature, how do you offer up praise and thanks to God for His amazingly beautiful creation?**

1/9 - Psalm 9 verse 9 stood out at me today and reminded me of Matthew 7:25 above too: *"The LORD is a shelter for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble."* **Q: When we are in trouble, do we run to God for shelter? Or do we look elsewhere? Where will we ultimately find true peace and rest from the storms of life? Do you believe that the Bible is a haven for you in the midst of the storms of life?**

1/10 - Psalm 9 verse 18 is so true and powerful: *"For the needy will not be forgotten forever; the hopes of the poor will not always be crushed."* This is a great reminder that God's heart is for the poor in this world! **Q: If God's heart is for the poor - should our heart be for the poor too? How is your heart for the poor these days? How do you remember the poor and their hopes? TOPICAL: How do you see God's heart for the poor in Haiti today?**

1/11 - Psalm 10 is a prayer for rescue from attacks from the proud and wicked. Wisely, you'll note that this Psalmist is not taking punishment into his own hands - but asking God for punishment. We would do well to remember that punishment is the Lord's... For some reason much of this Psalm reminded me way too much of our world today - and I realized that not much has changed over 3,000 years! Verse 4 in particular rang true to me about much of our world today: *"These wicked people are too proud to seek God. They seem to think that God is dead."* Only about 100 years ago the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche uttered those exact words - "God is dead." And I know that this viewpoint of many expressed in this Psalm 3,000 years ago, and 100 years ago by Nietzsche, is still a viewpoint of many in our world today. What a sad thing. **Q: What can we do in our lives today to show the world that God is not dead? How can we live our lives to demonstrate that God is alive? Let us share with this hurting and dying world with all that we are that God is not dead. What are you doing with your life today to show others that He Lives?**

1/11 Psalm 10 verse 1 also stood out to me today: *"O LORD, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I need you the most?"* Have you ever felt like this? I know I have. However, I also have realized later on that just when I thought God was no where near me, he was actually as close as could be taking care of me. Even though it may have seemed that God was "hiding" from me, he was actually right there with me all along! **Q: When have you ever felt that God was hiding from you? Did you later see he was with you all along? What helps you see God in your life when he feels distant?**

1/12 - I love Psalm 10 verses 17 & 18 today: *"LORD, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will listen to their cries and comfort them. You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so people can no longer terrify them."* The Psalmist here tells us that God knows the hopes of the helpless. **Q: How do you know the hopes of the helpless? How are you listening to their cries and comforting them? Are there any ministries or organizations you support that do this type of ministry that you'd be willing to share with the group? Why do you support this ministry?**

1/13 - Today we read Psalm 11, which is one that you might miss the full meaning of if you didn't know some of the commentary behind this Psalm. Basically in this Psalm King David is expressing his unshakable trust in God to other people around him who are very scared of enemy attacks. Knowing this - check out verse 1: *"I trust in the LORD for protection. So why do you say to me, 'Fly to the mountains for safety!'"* **Q: Like David, do we really trust in God for our protection? Or do we sometimes rely on others or our own cunning - or, our own fear - for protection? Are there times when we are faced with a challenging situation that we feel like running away from it? "Fleeing to the mountains" for safety? When, instead, should we simply trust in God for our protection and move forward in spite of the fear within us? Is there an area of your life where you need to turn over more trust in God for**

ultimate protection?

1/14 - Psalm 12 verses 1 & 2 are intriguing verses for me - *"Help, O LORD, for the godly are fast disappearing! The faithful have vanished from the earth! Neighbors lie to each other, speaking with flattering lips and insincere hearts."* **Q: Are there days when you feel like this?** I think there are some days when I do... but not too many. I guess I sometimes wonder about the state of my heart - or if I've gotten enough sleep the night before :) - when I feel like this Psalmist does. It is interesting how this verse goes into people talking with "flattering lips and insincere hearts". I do notice right away when that's happening... particularly the insincerity. **Q: Maybe this is something we should ask of ourselves - do we talk at times with flattering lips or insincere hearts? Or are we sincere people?** I like that thought... being a sincere person. I pray that we all are and can become more and more "sincere" in our dealings with each other and that we would just simply be sincere people. **Q: Are you a sincere person? Do you want to be sincere? Was Jesus a sincere person?**

1/15 - Psalm 13 is thought to be a prayer by David for recovery from a grave illness, based on verse 3: *"Restore the light to my eyes, or I will die."* Yet, even in the midst of this serious illness, David amazingly proclaims in verse 5: *"But I trust in your unfailing love."* **Q: How about you? When you are sick or in the midst of a very challenging or sad situation, do you trust in God's unfailing love? Always? No matter what is going on around you? Do you trust that God will ultimately restore the light to your eyes?**

1/16 - Psalm 14 could be seen at first glance as a discouraging Psalm...Particularly as we look at verse 3: *"But no, all have turned away from God; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one!"* I think it is important to keep in mind that there is truth in this verse (particularly if we ever start thinking we're "good" and others around us are not...). But also I think it's good to keep in mind that this verse was written before Jesus came to the earth. Jesus was perfect. And through His resurrection we are called toward greater holiness and ultimately perfect goodness once we meet Jesus face to face in heaven. Jesus gives us the hope spoken of in the closing of this Psalm in verse 7: *"Oh, that salvation would come from Mount Zion to rescue Israel! For when the LORD restores his people, Jacob will shout with joy, and Israel will rejoice."* **Q: Do you recognize the salvation that has come to us? Are you shouting for joy for this salvation? Are you rejoicing!?**

1/17 - Psalm 15 verses 1 & 2 today are awesome: *"Who may worship in your sanctuary, LORD? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts."* Psalm 15 was written for those that wished to have access to God in his Temple in Jerusalem. However, I do believe that today, through Jesus, anyone can worship God anywhere - in a church or in our homes or wherever we find ourselves. However, I do think there is truth in these Psalm verses in that we can worship God beautifully by living a blameless life (not perfect life - only Jesus was perfect this side of heaven - we will need to confess sins & repent), doing what is right, and speaking the truth from sincere hearts. I do believe these are acts of worship that demonstrate our friendship with God and our growth in becoming more like his son Jesus in our lifetimes. **Q: How do you seek to lead a blameless life? How do you seek to do what is right? How do you speak the truth from a sincere heart? How do you seek to worship God in some way each and every day?**

1/18 - Today we read Psalm 16, which I absolutely love! I could probably share with you some thoughts on just about every verse in this Psalm. Verse 1 tells us: *"Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge."* **Q: When has God kept you safe when you've come to Him for refuge?** And verse 2 is so true: *"I said to the LORD, 'You are my Master! All the good things I have are from you.'"* Everything good thing in our life - absolutely everything good thing in our life - comes from God. **Q: How have you experienced this?** Verse 3 reminds me to rejoice for and pray for our pastors and spiritual mentors: *"The godly people in the land are my true heroes! I take pleasure in them!"* **Q: How do you appreciate your pastors / ministers / priests and spiritual mentors? How do you appreciate other godly people you know too? Are they true heroes? Do you pray for these folks regularly?**

1/19 - In Psalm 17 David appeals to God as Judge when he is being attacked by foes. Verse 7 is a great prayer and comfort! *"Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways. You save with your strength those who seek refuge from their enemies."* **Q: How do you seek refuge with God from whatever might attacking you? How do you believe that God will show you his unfailing love in wonderful ways? How have you been saved by God's strength? How have you sought refuge with God from your "enemies"?**

1/20 - Psalm 18 is an amazing one! We'll get it for the next 3 days of readings, which is great. And then comes Psalm 19 which is off the charts awesome! Verse 1 today is so beautiful: *"I love you, LORD; you are my strength."* **Q: How often do you tell God that you love him?** One thing that one of my former pastors does when he prays publicly, which absolutely moves me, is that he closes out just about every prayer with "God we love you. And we pray all of this in the name of your son Jesus." The last line of course is the powerful line! But, that second to last line... is just beautiful. Just telling God that we love him. I'm not sure I tell God that I love him often enough. God may not "need" to hear it. But I think that I need to say it more often. **I love you God! Q: Why do you think it might be important for us to say "I love you God?"**

1/21 - There are so many great verses today for us to meditate upon in Psalm 18! I love verses 25 through 27: *"To the faithful you show yourself faithful; to those with integrity you show integrity. To the pure you show yourself pure, but to the wicked you show yourself hostile. You rescue those who are humble, but you humiliate the proud."* **Q: How are you showing yourself to be faithful to God? How are you living with integrity? How you showing yourself to be pure? How is God showing you these things as well?**

1/21 - I really love verse 28: *"LORD, you have brought light to my life; my God, you light up my darkness."* **Q: How has Jesus brought light into your life? How does God light up your darkness?**

1/22 - Today we finish up Psalm 18. (Psalm 19 tomorrow! So excited! :) The closing verse 50 of Psalm 18 today is powerful - and I believe can apply to both David and Jesus: *"You give great victories to your king; you show unfailing love to your anointed, to David and all his descendants forever."* **Q: How are you a spiritual descendent of David? How do you believe that God shows you unfailing love? How do you think that God's Word, the Bible, shows His unfailing love for you?**

1/23- Psalm 19 – I do encourage everyone to really read through and meditate on every verse in this Psalm of David and how this Psalm might be speaking to you this week. Please do take a few minutes to go through the Psalm twice if possible and really reflect upon it. You may even want to journal to God some thoughts or ideas or prayers that come to you through reading this Psalm. I find verse 14 in this Psalm to be so powerful – again in large part because one of my former pastors often sang a worship song that simply repeats this verse over and over again – and what a beautiful prayer it is for each of us to repeat over and over again as well: *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."* **Q: How are the words of your mouth and the meditation of your heart pleasing in God's sight? How is God your Rock? How is God your Redeemer?**

1/24 - Psalm 20 is a prayer for a king as he goes out into battle - check out verses 1 through 5 again and you can imagine a group of people saying these words to the king. Maybe another way to read this Psalm, personally, is as a prayer for yourself as you go out into battle against a sin or a struggle in your life. And this verse 5 then is for you as you go into this battle: *"May we shout for joy when we hear of your victory, flying banners to honor our God. May the LORD answer all your prayers."* Amen! Let the banners fly soon in your life! **Q: How do you invite God into the "battles" in your life? Is there a battle in your life right now that you can share with the group? How can they pray for you in this battle?**

1/25 - Psalm 21 today follows up Psalm 20 from yesterday - yesterday's being a prayer for victory for the king as he goes out to battle - and today's being a psalm of praise for victories granted to the king. I like the credit given to God in verse 1: *"How the king rejoices in your strength, O LORD! He shouts with joy because of your victory."* The king is not rejoicing in his own strength. He is not claiming victory as his. He is giving credit to God! How about you in your life today? **Q: How do you give credit to God for the blessings and gifts he has given you? What is a time in your life when you shouted for joy and rejoiced because of God?**

1/26 - Psalm 22 is an amazing Psalm! This Psalm is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. Re-read this Psalm again and see if you see parallels to Jesus' crucifixion? There are a lot in this Psalm. I realize that reading Psalm 22 and seeing some of the images I posted up can evoke a lot of emotions. **Q: I am wondering, how often do you meditate upon Jesus' passion and death? Do you do this just around Good Friday / Resurrection Sunday each year? Or more often? How do you meditate upon the Lord's passion and death? Are passion plays, movies, or books helpful for you to do this? Or are their other things you read or watch or do? Do you think we should or should not meditate upon Jesus' passion and death more often than once a year? Why or why not?**

1/27 - What's one good reason to go to church at all? Check out Psalm 22 verse 22: "*Then I will declare the wonder of your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among all your people.*" Praising God with other brothers and sisters through worship, tithing, learning, serving and being in community in church is a great reason to go to church! To declare the wonder of God's name! To praise God among all his people. Wow... yes... this is church! **Q: How important is your church in your life today? How has church grown (or not grown) in importance in your life over time?**

1/28 - Psalm 23! What a Psalm!! This is the first Psalm for sure that I ever really read and was comforted by without a doubt. Psalm 23 is a profession of joyful trust in God as the good Shepherd-King by David. **Q: How has Psalm 23 ever comforted you in your life? What has this Psalm meant to you?**

1/29 - Psalm 24 is a beautiful Psalm! Check out this brief snippet of commentary on this Psalm from bible.org: "The Israelites have returned from a battle with the Canaanites. They are proceeding up to the sanctuary on the holy mount to give praise to Yahweh for the great and mighty victory in battle, carrying with them the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of Yahweh's presence with them. As they approach the gate, they are met by the Levites who function as gatekeepers. It is their part to ask who may enter the sanctuary of the Lord; and it is the priests' part to answer with the stipulations from the Law. Whoever meets these qualifications may enter and fellowship with Yahweh... The psalm then concludes with the worshipers calling to the gates to make way for Yahweh to come in to His sanctuary, for why should the King of Glory stoop to go under a doorway?" This quote is from, and there is much more commentary on Psalm 24, at bible.org [at this link](#).

1/30 - Psalm 25 has some amazing verses today! I think I could write some reflections and questions on each of the verses today... Maybe a good thing for each of us to do is to re-read this Psalm today and really reflect on what the verses are saying to our hearts. David wrote this Psalm as a prayer for God's mercies when he was suffering affliction for his sins and when enemies were seizing this occasion to attack him. It's a very penitential Psalm. One that we might need to pray to God from time to time as David did. I do like verse 5 a lot and I believe it will speak to each of you going through the One Year Bible this year - "*Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.*" **Do you believe that reading God's Word each day is allowing you to be led by God's truth? Are you being taught each day?** Then - that last sentence in verse 5 is amazing. I cannot honestly say that all day long I put my hope in God. I pray that I do... but I think sometimes I drift away from putting my hope in God and I put my hope in myself - or maybe even sometimes I lose hope! I get discouraged about a situation. I get stressed. I worry. **Q: If we put our hope all day long in God, do you think we would get discouraged, stressed, or worried?** I don't think we would...

1/30 - Psalm 25 verse 15 really stood out to me today - "*My eyes are always looking to the LORD for help, for he alone can rescue me from the traps of my enemies.*" I have come to realize more and more lately that the Enemy is indeed constantly setting traps for us. I don't mean to scare anyone here - but I think this is something very important for us to realize. It has been said that the greatest trick the Devil can play on us is to make us think that he does not exist. If we don't think the Devil exists, then we logically won't think that he's setting any traps for us. Let me assure you - this is clearly Biblical - the Devil exists. Evil exists in this world. Temptation exists. And evil does not rest. However - the good news - God is so much bigger and stronger and brighter (and this list can go on) than the Devil - the Enemy. David says in this Psalm that his eyes are ALWAYS looking to the Lord for help. Why? Because God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit alone can rescue us from the traps of the Enemy. Again, the traps are out there for us in this modern world. The temptations and dark alleys and wrong turns call to us unceasingly. But - again, great news here - we can be saved from all of that nonsense; all of that darkness; indeed all of that death, through a relationship with Jesus. Jesus saves. Jesus saves us from ourselves. From our sin. And from the Enemy that sets traps for us. **Q: Like David in this Psalm, are your eyes always looking to the Lord for help?** Please don't ever take your eyes off God and His mercies, power, and strength.

PROVERBS

1/1 - Overview of Proverbs:

Author: Principally Solomon; also many others Date: Tenth century B.C. and later

Content: The book of Proverbs contains practical instructions for successful living, given by God to supplement the teaching of the prophets, which was to call men to repentance, and the work of the priests, which was to direct the worship of the people. The book of Proverbs teaches that there is a divine wisdom given to man by God, but there is also

a divinely given human wisdom, or common sense, and both must play a part in daily life. Practical sayings from many centuries are collected together in this book; it deals with such diverse matters as the discipline of children, social justice, foolish talk, and money. It ends significantly with a description of a truly good wife.

Theme: The theme of Proverbs is stated in 1:7 – The first step to wisdom is to trust and revere the Lord. This is to say that only when a man trusts in God will he be truly wise. Human wisdom is fine and necessary but no matter how skilled we might be, without humility in the presence of God and a willingness to learn from him, we will inevitably go astray. The book also teaches the sanctity of human life. Everything that pertains to successful living is a concern to God and he has made provision for it. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 10-11)*

1/1 - Bob Deffinbaugh, Th.M., with <http://www.bible.org> (please bookmark & visit this website often this year!), has a wonderful Introduction to Proverbs found on this link - <http://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-proverbs> I'll quote from Bob's article's 8 points on how we can benefit from a study of the Proverbs – but you'll need to go to the link above for further details on each of these following points:

1. Proverbs is a book that is concerned with the development of godly character.
2. Proverbs does away with the distinction between the sacred and the secular.
3. Proverbs offers to teach us to be wise.
4. Proverbs teaches us that what is good is also what is right.
5. Proverbs helps us to look at life realistically.
6. Proverbs is as concerned with the process of right thinking as with the product of it.
7. The method of teaching employed in Proverbs is most like the instructional method of Jesus.
8. Proverbs is a key book for obtaining divine guidance.

1/1 - Today we read in Proverbs chapter 1 verses 2 through 4 a great overview of why we should read and study the Proverbs: *"The purpose of these proverbs is to teach people wisdom and discipline, and to help them understand wise sayings. Through these proverbs, people will receive instruction in discipline, good conduct, and doing what is right, just, and fair. These proverbs will make the simpleminded clever. They will give knowledge and purpose to young people."* **Q: Do you want wisdom? Do you want discipline in your life? Do you want to do what is right, just and fair? Do you want purpose for your life? Do you believe this journey through the Bible this year will move you forward in these areas? Will you cling to the wisdom of the Proverbs this year?**

1/2 - Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7 is basically the mission statement for the entire book of Proverbs! *"Fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Only fools despise wisdom and discipline."* **Q: What does this proverb say to you? Do you believe we should fear God?** Bible commentaries define this fear of God as "a loving reverence for God that includes submission to his Lordship and to the commands of his words." **Do you believe that fear of God is the beginning of knowledge in our lives? Will you embrace wisdom and discipline in your life? Will you make wisdom and discipline top priorities in your life in this new year?**

1/3 - Proverbs chapter 1 verses 17 and 18 teach us this today: *"When a bird sees a trap being set, it stays away. But not these people! They set an ambush for themselves; they booby-trap their own lives!"* I think these verses basically say that birds are smarter than those who conspire to do harm to others - Are you with me on this thought?? :)

1/4 - Proverbs 1:23 is beautiful to think about: *"Come here and listen to me! I'll pour out the spirit of wisdom upon you and make you wise."* **Q: How do you plan to grow in a spirit of wisdom this year? Do you believe studying the Bible can give you the spirit of wisdom?**

1/5 - Our readings in Proverbs 1:24-28 today is a great reminder to not ignore an opportunity to gain wisdom when the opportunity comes, or we may regret it later. **Q: Is wisdom knocking on your door today? Will you let Wisdom enter in?**

1/6 - Proverbs 1 verse 31 is a strong teaching to consider: *"That is why they must eat the bitter fruit of living their own way. They must experience the full terror of the path they have chosen."* I guess what jumped out at me is the simple word "path." Such a simple word... but a profound one. Every single day there seem to be various paths in front of us. Various options. Choices we can make. Paths we can take. Paths that can lead to light and life. Paths that can lead to full terror. **Q: What type of path are you on now? Are you on the right path? Who is leading you down this path? Is it God?** I'll close with one of my favorite Proverbs, that I have memorized and repeat to myself often, which also

discusses paths - Proverbs 3:5-6: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."* Let us pray for straight paths today!

1/7 - Proverbs 2 verse 2 today is a fantastic teaching: *"Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding."* There is so much noise and static and distractions in our modern world today that I think it is often hard for us to "tune our ears to wisdom & understanding." With our 24 X 7 society, we can go 100mph and just kind of feel like we're doing fine... **but are we really doing fine when we are going that fast and moving all the time? Can you find ways in your life to slow down and "tune in" to God? I think reading the Bible each day is one amazingly great way to do this! What are some areas of your life that you can "tune out" this new year so that you can spend more time "tuning in" to God and His wisdom?**

1/8 - Proverbs chapter 2 verse 10 is amazing: *"For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy."* I like that thought that wisdom will enter your heart and then knowledge will fill you with joy! What a great proverb! **Q: Do you believe that knowledge can fill you with joy? What type of knowledge? What type of wisdom should enter your heart? Today - are you filled with joy?**

1/9 - Proverbs 2:16-19 I believe can be viewed as woman or man. There are both immoral men and women out there today who will talk flatteringly - which will lead down an incredibly dark path if we entertain the lust. Verse 20 reminds us there is another path to take: *"Follow the steps of good men instead, and stay on the paths of the righteous."* **Will you evaluate all of all the paths that present themselves to you in your life - and stay on the paths that are taken by good men and women? Will you stay only on paths full of light, and avoid at all costs paths that lead quickly to darkness?**

1/10 - Proverbs 3:1-6 today mentions the "heart" 3 times. I think this is significant! Our hearts - and the state of our hearts are of utmost importance. Proverbs 3:5-6 is a verse I have committed to memory and repeat to myself often. It is a beautiful verse to meditate upon. I'll share it with you in the NIV version that I have it memorized in: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."* Will you join me in memorizing these 2 verses? I do believe they will bless you immensely whenever you are feeling worried or anxious about anything in life. **Q: How has Proverbs 3:5-6 made a difference in your life? When do you call these verses to mind in your life?**

1/11 - Today we read this in Proverbs 3:8 (just after the verse on fearing the Lord and turning away from sin): *"Then you will gain renewed health and vitality."* I think this is so true. I have been a much healthier person - mentally, physically, spiritually, etc. - since I came to faith in Jesus. Through God's wisdom and grace, I have been able to discern what is healthy for me and what is not. I have let many bad habits go. **Q: How about for you? How has your faith brought you renewed health and vitality? What are there some areas in your life where you still have room to turn some bad habits over to God, and to let them go? How will you do so this year in 2010?**

1/12 - Proverbs 3:9-10 teaches us today: *"Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land produces. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with the finest wine."* This is a wonderful reminder to bring our tithes and offerings to God, and he will bless us immensely. We are not called to bring our leftovers - but our first fruits. **Q: Are the first checks you write each month tithes and offerings? How do you write these checks with a joyful and thankful heart to God for this opportunity to give back to Him?**

1/13 - Wow! Proverbs chapter 3 verses 11 & 12 today are so amazing and true... Please meditate on these verses and what they mean to you and your life: *"My child, don't ignore it when the LORD disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you. For the LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights."* I have come to realize in recent years that correction and discipline from God is such a blessing! No, it is not fun at the time that you are going through it. But, it is so necessary for us to move forward in our relationship and walk with God this side of heaven. We need God's holy and divine discipline! I think oftentimes we avoid it. Or run away from it. Or refuse to go through it. Can you see why this Proverb starts off with "My child," :) Please let me encourage you to joyfully accept and go through God's discipline in your life. In some areas of your life it may be the only thing that will break you through to victory. **Q: Do you believe there is such a thing as godly discipline? Do you believe that God corrects those that he loves? Can you think of any areas of your life or times where God has corrected you? Is there perhaps an area of your life today where God is correcting you?**

1/14 - Proverbs 3:13-15 are amazing truths for each of us to learn! I think these Proverbs are so different from what our world often preaches... *"Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. For the profit of wisdom is better than silver, and her wages are better than gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her."* **Q: Where are your true wages coming from in our life? Wisdom or money? Are you investing in things eternal - or things material? Which will give you ultimately a better return on investment? Do you believe that wisdom = happiness? Are you happy?**

1/15 - I love Proverbs chapter 3 verse 17! *"She (wisdom) will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying."* Amen! What a great choice of words - delightful paths and satisfying ways. Do you believe that wisdom will lead you down delightful paths and that wisdom proves to be always satisfying to you? What if we do not pursue wisdom in our lives - might our paths be miserable and might we be always hungry and never satisfied? Let us ever pursue the wise path of true Delight in our lives! **Q: What are some ways that you pursue Wisdom in your life these days? Do you believe reading the Bible for 15 to 20 minutes a day is one way to pursue Wisdom? What are some "delightful paths" (per our Proverb above) that Wisdom has led you down in your life?**

1/16 - Proverbs chapter 3 verses 19 & 20 are so truthful. If you look at the amazing way in which nature works, I don't see how you cannot believe in God. **Q: Could all of this majesty around us be just random chance? Do you believe as verse 19 teaches us: "By wisdom the LORD founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens"? Do you believe in intelligent design?**

1/17 - I love Proverbs 3 verses 21-23 today: *"My child, don't lose sight of good planning and insight. Hang on to them, for they fill you with life and bring you honor and respect. They keep you safe on your way and keep your feet from stumbling."* These verses remind me of a couple of things. First is the old adage of "Trust in God. And tie up your camels." Meaning, tying up your camels to a pole so they don't wander away is good planning and good insight. It's common sense. Obviously you don't want to live your life on solely your own smarts and your own planning and your own insight. We need God to be our foundation. But, at the same time I think God wants us to be smart about how we live our lives. Yes, trust in God, but wear your seatbelt. Trust in God, but save some money for a rainy day. See where I am going with this? The other thing that these Proverbs verses remind me of is one of my favorite three word quotes: "Habits determine success." I've spoken about this in some of my weekly emails in regards to reading the One Year Bible each day. It takes some planning and insight for us to figure out when we will realistically read the Bible for 15 minutes every day. After this planning and insight and after a week or two we've suddenly built up a great habit! A habit that will determine our success in reading the Bible in a year. **Q: How do you go about planning things in your life? In what ways do you invite God into the process of planning your life? And in what ways, or at what times, do you simply make decisions based on your own knowledge or common sense? What is the foundation of your own knowledge or common sense? Is it the Bible? Is it God? Do you suppose with the foundation of God and the Bible in our lives, that we may not need to take every single decision throughout our day to God in prayer because we are operating (generally speaking) from a biblical godly worldview? How do you balance taking things to God for guidance and making decisions on your own?**

1/18 - Today we read Proverbs chapter 3 verses 27 and 28: *"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it's in your power to help them. If you can help your neighbor now, don't say, "Come back tomorrow, and then I'll help you.""* **Q: How often do we say to ourselves when we think about serving the poor – "oh, I'll maybe do that in the future." Is this similar to saying "come back tomorrow, and then I'll help you" as this Proverb tells us? Can you help your neighbor now? Do you regularly volunteer with ministries or nonprofits that serve the poor? Do you consistently give offerings of your finances to ministries and/or nonprofits that serve the poor? Are the poor your neighbor? Should you be helping them today? Is it in your power to do so?**

1/19 - I love Proverbs 4:7 today! *"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."* How simple and yet profound is that first sentence? The beginning of wisdom = get wisdom. Can't argue with that! :) The question then becomes how do we get wisdom? Or, where do we get wisdom. I will say simply, The Bible is the best fount of Wisdom I know of. So, reading and studying the Bible on a daily basis = wisdom. Then the second sentence in the verse above is great too - though it cost all you have, get understanding. Where does understanding come from? Again, I'd say the Bible. But I'll also say that I think understanding comes from investing in a community of people and being invested in by other people. We can't really get understanding on our own, being a "lone ranger." We need others in our life so that iron sharpens iron. **Q: Where do you "get wisdom" in your life? Are there**

places outside of the Bible and the church that you get wisdom from?

1/21 - I love Proverbs 4:7 today! *"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."* How simple and yet profound is that first sentence? The beginning of wisdom = get wisdom. Can't argue with that! :) The question then becomes how do we get wisdom? Or, where do we get wisdom. I will say simply, The Bible is the best fount of Wisdom I know of. So, reading and studying the Bible on a daily basis = wisdom. Then the second sentence in the verse above is great too - though it cost all you have, get understanding. Where does understanding come from? Again, I'd say the Bible. But I'll also say that I think understanding comes from investing in a community of people and being invested in by other people. We can't really get understanding on our own, being a "lone ranger." We need others in our life so that iron sharpens iron. **Q: I hope and pray you are in a local church community? And I hope and pray you are in a small group of some sort? We need others to do life with and to gain understanding. Will you find a church or a small group in this next month if you're not part of a church or small group yet?**

1/22 - Proverbs chapter 4 verse 13 was impactful for me today: *"Carry out my instructions; don't forsake them. Guard them, for they will lead you to a fulfilled life."* I like that last thought - guard God's instructions. Don't forsake them. For they will lead you to a fulfilled life. I think sometimes people think that loving God and following his ways will be BORING. :) This is so not true! It is absolutely the best adventure we could ever imagine. And truly, following God and his instructions is the only way I personally believe that any of us can have a fulfilled life. I do not think there is another way to lead a fulfilled life. **Q: Can you imagine a life apart from God being fulfilling? Is this remotely possible?? Today, let us leap into the adventurous life of faith that God is truly calling us to live! How have you found your faith journey to be fulfilling recently?**

1/23- Proverbs 4 verse 18 reminds me of Psalm 19! *"The way of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, which shines ever brighter until the full light of day."* See the parallel? **Q: How is your life shining ever brighter as you go forward in life? How are you shining ever brighter for those around you? How are you loving and blessing those around you more and more each day? How are you moving forward toward the full light of day?**

1/24- Proverbs chapter 4 verse 23 holds so much truth: *"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."* Check out yesterday's posting below for tons more reflections on why it is so critical for us to guard our hearts. **Q: How do you guard your heart these days? What things in our world assault our hearts today?**

1/24 - We would do well to obey the teaching of verse 24: *"Avoid all perverse talk; stay far from corrupt speech."* I have found it sometimes far too easy to be pulled into perverse talk - even if I didn't start it. (look at me - blaming others here! :) I do think we really need to be aware of situations where talk amongst our peers or friends is going in the wrong direction and to realize that we need to get ourselves out of these situations as quickly as possible. Sure, try to do it gracefully. Try to change the subject if you can. But if not, just excuse yourself and get out of Dodge... **Q: How do you avoid perverse talk in your life today? Even deeper, how do you avoid perverse thoughts in your mind?**

1/24- Proverbs verses 25 & 26 are powerful and bring up a question I'd love feedback on: *"Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. Mark out a straight path for your feet; then stick to the path and stay safe."* One thing that stood out to me in these verses is the ideas of setting goals. Are you a goal setter? I honestly am not really. I mean, I kind of set short-term goals - work projects, ministry projects, etc. But I don't really sit down and write down any big lifetime type goals. Part of my thinking on this is that I want to be as flexible as possible - if Jesus calls me to do something, I don't want to be hung up on some other goal... :) But, I'm not sure if this is the best thinking. **Q: This Proverb verse kind of makes me wonder if setting goals helps us keep looking straight ahead? If goals help us mark out a straight path for our feet? And to stay on it? Are you a goal-setter? How do you set goals? How often? In writing? How often do you check back in on your goals? How do goals make a difference in your life and in your spiritual life?**

1/25- Today we read in Proverbs chapter 5 verse 6: *"For she does not care about the path to life. She staggers down a crooked trail and doesn't even realize where it leads."* For some reason this year, as we've been going through the One Year Bible, the idea of "paths" keeps jumping out at me over and over again. Every time we read about paths now in the Bible, it stands out to me. And here it does again. The idea of paths in the Bible seems to clearly indicate that there are good paths - straight paths - paths through the narrow gate - paths of life - that we can choose to take. Or, unfortunately, there are also crooked trails and we don't realize where they lead. Or we can take our eyes off the path. Or we can

stumble on the path. How about for you? **Q: How do you keep on a straight path? How do you keep your eyes straight ahead on the path and focused on the prize? Have you ever veered off onto a crooked trail when taking your eyes off of God?**

1/26 - Proverbs chapter 5 verses 12-14 are some sad verses to imagine saying in our lives: *"How I hated discipline! If only I had not demanded my own way! Oh, why didn't I listen to my teachers? Why didn't I pay attention to those who gave me instruction? I have come to the brink of utter ruin, and now I must face public disgrace."* **Q: Are there times in your life where you loved or hated discipline? Have you ever demand your own way? How are you listening to your teachers today? Who are your teachers today? Who is disciplining you?**

1/27 - Proverbs 5 verses 16 & 17 are powerful true Sex Education verses: *"Why spill the water of your springs in public, having sex with just anyone? You should reserve it for yourselves. Don't share it with strangers."* I like this a lot. Is this something we can teach young adults today? Is this something we can teach ourselves? Don't have sex with just anyone - it is degrading to you. Don't share something so holy as sex with just anyone. Save this holy bond for your spouse. I once heard a powerful sermon by John Ortberg at Willow Creek Community Church outside of Chicago. And John was preaching on "Don't Quench the Spirit". And it was a powerful sermon on how we are so blessed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives as followers of Jesus. And yet, we can quench, temporarily, the power of the Spirit in our life when we sin. It is basically like turning our back on God when we sin. And then we need to turn our faces forward again toward God in repentance. And while we are sinning and turning our back on God, we have effectively quenched the Spirit. And as I heard this sermon, I realized that sexual sin is one sure-fire quick way to quench the spirit. We degrade ourselves through sexual sin and I believe we quench the spirit. I don't know if this line of thinking will help you at all if you are struggling with sexual sin. But, it helps me. It helps me to realize that the quick little temporary highs we think we might get off sexual sin are so not worth it. **Q: What is worth quenching the Spirit in our life? Is sexual sin? Nope... you know it's not. Living fully in communion with God and with the Holy Spirit is one of the most amazing things we can possibly experience this side of heaven. If you struggle with sexual sin, wil you please, please, no longer quench the Spirit for the cheap lies sexual sins sells? Does anyone have any resources, books, websites, that you can recommend to folks that are struggling with sexual temptation or sin? Have you seen people in your life be enslaved to sexual sin? Hopefully you have also seen people also be freed from that enslavement through Jesus? Do you think that sexual sin - lust, pornography, adultery, etc. - is a rampant issue in our society today? Do you think it's worse now than the past? Or do you think sexual sin has always been an issue in the past and will be until Jesus returns again?**

1/28 - Proverbs chapter 5 verses 22 & 23 are just amazing wisdom for each of us of why we should FLEE from sin... don't entertain it at all! *"An evil man is held captive by his own sins; they are ropes that catch and hold him. He will die for lack of self-control; he will be lost because of his incredible folly."* Please know that if for some reason you are caught in the ropes of sin, please know that Jesus can truly set you free. Please pray for this freedom in Christ. Only in Christ are we truly set free! Please seek this freedom in Christ with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Don't die for lack of self-control. Don't be lost because of the folly of sin. **Q: What is a time in your life that you literally fled from sin?**

1/29 - Proverbs chapter 6 verses 1 through 5 were intriguing to me. I guess my first thought was that getting our own selves in debt is bad enough - but then to be a guarantor for our friends debt? Well, these verses certainly warn against doing this. Let us avoid debt! **Q: Does anyone have debt-relief resources, websites or books you could share with everyone? I've heard Financial Peace University is good and I hear there are some other good Christian financial management / debt relief books & seminars out there. It's amazing how wise it is to get out of debt and to save \$. I've often heard that it is wise to give 10% of your income and save 10% of your income with each check that comes in. What's your reaction to this type of formula?**

1/30 - Okay, Proverbs chapter 6 verses 9 through 11 make me smile. I do absolutely see the wisdom in these verses... but reading the word lazybones makes me smile. Is this a New Living Translation thing?? I honestly wondered for a split second if I was getting The Message translation on this Proverb somehow today! :) These are powerful words of wisdom I think for each of us to consider: *"But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up? I want you to learn this lesson: A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber."* It is pretty amazing to consider that this Proverb also tells us to take a lesson from the ant! The seemingly lowly ant! We're told to emulate. I love that... and it's so true. The ant works hard for its keep! **Q: What lesson can you learn from the ant today? How do you balance working hard in your life with getting proper rest and relaxation? How do you find the balance?**

1/31 - Proverbs chapter 6 verse 14 today tells us: *"Their perverted hearts plot evil. They stir up trouble constantly."* This is a powerful reminder of the utmost importance for us to guard the condition of our hearts continually! **Q: Do you think it is important to guard our hearts in our world today? How do you guard your heart?**

Group discussions:

- Introductions.
- What were some of your favorite verses or passages from the past week's readings?
- What are some questions that were generated for you based on the past week's readings?
- What is something new you learned about God or the Bible from the past week's readings?
- How did God speak to you through the past week's readings?
- What is something you want to change or grow in your life based on the past week's readings?
- **Discuss the bold Questions in the Study Notes**
- Any prayer requests for the group for the coming week?

Each group is encouraged to close in prayer.

Daily questions for this next week's readings you may want to journal or pray through and discuss with your group next Sunday:

- My favorite verses or passages:
- What I learned from the readings:
- My questions for further study:
- How God spoke to me through the Word:
- Something I want to change or grow in my life based on the Word:
- My prayer points based on the Word:

Visit www.OneYearBibleBlog.com this next week for daily commentary and questions for reflection.

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