

Notes & Group Questions for January 23-29 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)

GENESIS 46:1 - EXODUS 9:35

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?**

MATTHEW 15:1 - 19:30

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 - 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?**

1/23 - 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)**

1/24 - 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?**

PSALM 19:1 - 24:10

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

worshippers 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](#).

PROVERBS 4:14 - 6:5

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?**

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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