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Notes & Group Questions for June 1 - June 30 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)

2 SAMUEL 18:1 - 2 KINGS 18:12

6/1 - Wow. Intense readings today. As could be expected from Absalom's pursuit of his ego and pride the past few chapters, his sin catches up with him. One commentary had the interesting point that Absalom's "pretty head & long hair" (as you'll recall from [2 Samuel 14:25-26](#)) ironically ended up being his undoing as his long hair got caught up in a tree. This seems very symbolic of how pride and ego can be it's own undoing. While on one hand I do appreciate David's grace and love for his son Absalom, I have to say that I really do appreciate Joab's boldness & wisdom in rebuking David in verses 5 through 8: *"We saved your life today and the lives of your sons, your daughters, and your wives and concubines. Yet you act like this, making us feel ashamed, as though we had done something wrong. You seem to love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that we mean nothing to you. If Absalom had lived and all of us had died, you would be pleased. Now go out there and congratulate the troops, for I swear by the LORD that if you don't, not a single one of them will remain here tonight. Then you will be worse off than you have ever been."* That is quite a speech by Joab to David! And I believe he was right. David's love for his son was admirable in one sense - but it also could be seen as selfish in another sense. David seemed to care more for his son than for the nation of Israel, and Joab called him out on this. It is interesting how sometimes our love for one person can cloud everything else going on in our lives. Love for one person is a beautiful thing. But it seems that we should also be cognizant of others around us too - and love them. And sometimes, like David, we may need to realize that there is a greater good - a greater love - than the singular love we have been focusing on. This is not easy to discern of course... hopefully this makes some sort of sense or doesn't sound too harsh? **Q: What is your reaction to David's grief over his son Absalom today? Why do you think he grieved so much?**

6/2 - Today is a great day of readings in Second Samuel! David returns to Jerusalem! I love the entire flow of today's readings as David crosses the Jordan River toward Jerusalem and shows incredible kindness to Shimei, Mephibosheth, and Barzillai along the way. However, don't forget the name Shimei just yet - the "rock thrower & curser" when David fled Jerusalem a few chapters back... On David's deathbed, later in our readings in [First Kings 2:9](#), David will pass along to his son Solomon these instructions: *"Bring his (Shimei's) gray head down to the grave in blood..."* But, this day was not a day of bloodshed, but a day of amnesty, as David exclaimed in 2 Samuel 19:22 today: *"This is not a day for execution but for celebration! I am once again the king of Israel!"* In Second Samuel chapter 20 today we read about the revolt of Sheba from the tribe of Benjamin. Zondervan's commentary today points out that an important thing to keep in mind here is that tribal jealousy still was brewing over the transfer of the kingship from Benjamin (Saul's tribe) to Judah (David's tribe). Sheba appeals to the Israelite suspicion that David favored his own tribe over the other tribes. As this chapter progresses Joab again shows his true colors by murdering Amasa. I'm beginning to wonder about Joab... he's ruthless. I suppose as being the commander of the army for so long, this was his "job" to be ruthless? Let me know your thoughts on Joab in the Comments section below. R., thanks for the comment in yesterday's readings saying "Joab operated out of Justice with no Love." Great point! In Amasa's case, Amasa was part of the rebellion against David led by Absalom, so again here Joab is acting out "Justice"... (and certainly no Love...) **Q: I wonder if we ever fall into this trap in our lives today as well? Operate in an unbalanced way showing nothing but Justice, and yet no Love? Or, on the other hand do we sometimes operate with just Love, and no Justice? Should we be operating with a balance of Love and Justice? Or should one (Love or Justice) outweigh the other in our life?**

6/3 - Well... Sheba's grand rebellion against David doesn't last very long! And Sheba's own clan doesn't treat him well at all... Rebellion over. Second Samuel chapter 21 begins 4 chapters that are thought to essentially be an "appendix" to First and Second Samuel. These 4 chapters contain additional information about David's reign, without regard to chronology of events. The first event we read about

in today's readings about David handing over 7 of Saul's relatives to the Gibeonites is believed to have taken place after David extended his kindness initially to Mephibosheth in chapter 9 and before Absalom's rebellion. The triumphs over 4 Philistine giants is at unknown times / chronology, although verse 15 seems to indicate to me that these took place perhaps later in David's life when he was older: *"And when David and his men were in the thick of battle, David became weak and exhausted."* Somehow I can't imagine a young David becoming weak and exhausted in battle... These 4 episodes are thought to have been included to show the heroics of David's men.

6/4 - Today in Second Samuel chapter 22 we read David's Song of Praise to God! This is an incredible chapter and certainly reminds us why David composed so many powerful Psalms as well. In fact, you will notice that this song of praise from David today is, oh, the same as [Psalm 18](#)... :) It is thought that this Song was composed shortly after David's victory over an enemy, but before his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah. The Song starts off with David using the metaphor of a rock in verses 2 & 3: *"The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection."* The metaphor of a rock is very appropriate for David, as he often had taken refuge among the rocks of the desert (when fleeing from Saul, for example), but David realized that his true security was found only in God. In verses 31 through 33 of David's Song of Praise to God in today's readings we read these incredible words: *"As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect."* Can you imagine yourself saying these words to God in praise? Can you say these words now to God? It is interesting to think about the word "perfect" – used twice in these verses. I don't know about you, but sometimes I have been accused of being a "perfectionist." But, really, can you or I be perfect or create anything perfect? I don't think so. I do think we can live in a loving, growing relationship with God who will arm us with strength and make our way "perfect." But, it is not us making us perfect. It is God. God's way is perfect. His word – the Bible – is flawless. This is why we study the Bible. We are flawed people looking for flawlessness. God and the Bible deliver this to us. **Q: Is God a shield for you? When the storms of life come, do you take refuge in God? Do you believe there is any other God besides the Living God of the Bible? Is there anything else out there?** I don't think so. I've looked. I have never found anything else besides our Heavenly Father, Son & Holy Spirit. He is the Rock whose way is perfect. Who arms us with strength and makes our way perfect.

6/5 - We finish up the book of Second Samuel today and begin First Kings tomorrow! Are you ready to dive into our next Old Testament book?? Today in Second Samuel we continue to read about David's mighty men. It is sad to read the name of Uriah the Hittite in verse 39. Another reminder of David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah - one of David's own mighty men... And, yes, another reminder of God's forgiveness of David - and God's offer of forgiveness to you and me today. **Q: Have there been any "mighty men (or women!)" in your life that you have sinned against? Will you go to God for forgiveness for that sin today? And will you apologize and reconcile with the mighty man/ woman in your life that you need to apologize to / reconcile with?** Interestingly, I think this whole forgiveness/mercy talk ties in very nicely into Psalm 123 today. As Psalm 123 sings to us today: *"Have mercy on us Lord, have mercy."*

6/5 - Second Samuel 24 today finishes up with David taking a census, then judgment upon Israel for this sin, and then closing up the book with David building an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. A few things to point out here. First, you'll note verse 1 starts out with: *"Once again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel."* Commentaries suggest that God was likely upset with Israel because of their support of Absalom's & Sheba's rebellions. This is why it is thought the plague in this chapter affected Israel and not just David's house for the sin of the census. The census was a sin because it was not needed at this time in Israel's history. Censuses were taken in the past for military conscription & review of number of men before a war. But this was not a time of war. The census was a sin because David may have been taking this census just for his own glory & pride - to see how many people were under his reign. Even Joab asked David why he was doing this as we see in verse 3. The overall interesting thing to me about this chapter is that many commentaries suggest that it was placed at the end of the book of Second Samuel for the primary reason of setting the stage for the building of the Temple by Solomon in First Kings. The very interesting note about Araunah's threshing floor that

we read about today is that it is believed to have been located on Mount Moriah! Yes, the same Mt. Moriah where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac. And the same spot where the Temple was to be built by Solomon! So, this brings to light the importance of David actually buying the threshing floor from Araunah and not just taking it for free, as was offered. David not only bought the threshing floor to build the altar for the burnt & peace offerings, but he bought the land for the Temple of the Lord to soon be built on by his son Solomon! Pretty interesting to note as we close out this amazing book of Second Samuel. I am very excited to begin our readings about David's son Solomon in First Kings beginning tomorrow!

6/6 - Today we begin First Kings! First Kings is an amazing book of the Bible. We'll be diving into David's son Solomon's reign and the building of the First Temple in Jerusalem. You'll recall that Solomon wrote many of the Proverbs, and in chapter 3 of First Kings this week we will learn why Solomon had the wisdom to be able to write such amazing proverbs that have stood the test of time for some 3,000 years!

Book: First Kings

Author: Unknown

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Content: First and Second Kings form one book in the Hebrew Bible and are considered to be prophetic literature, probably because a prophet put the books together. The two books cover a period of approximately 350 years, when kings ruled the land, hence the name of the book. First Kings begins with the death of David, followed by a description of Solomon's reign, including the building of the first Temple in Jerusalem. The split of the kingdom into Israel (North) and Judah (South) is described, ending with the great conflict between Elijah the prophet, and Ahab, the king of Israel.

Theme: The fact that a history book is considered to be prophetic is important. It shows that God speaks to us from the past, as well as from the present experience of others. These events are recorded so that we will not make the same mistakes again. The conflict between Elijah and Ahab shows God's immediate involvement in human life and his concern for human affairs. First Kings particularly shows the disastrous effects of social evil upon the spiritual life of a nation. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 6)*

6/6 - First Kings chapter 1 is quite a chapter today! David is old! Adonijah claims the throne! David makes Solomon King! Quite a dramatic chapter, eh? Adonijah was David's 4th oldest son, and probably the eldest son living at this time. First son Amnon was killed by Absalom. Second son Daniel was probably not living at this time. Third son Absalom was killed in his rebellion. So, fourth son Adonijah thought now was his moment to shine. Well, as Paul Harvey would say, "now for the rest of the story..." The chapter tells us the story well. Solomon was clearly God and David's choice for the kingship. **Q: What is your reaction to reading about the struggle for the Kingship of Israel? Any similarities to our struggles for power today?**

6/7 - Dramatic readings in First Kings today! David's final instructions to Solomon include some strong words about how Joab & Shimei should die. And later in today's readings, these words come to fruition. Today we read about Adonijah's request to marry Abishag. You'll recall from yesterday's readings that Abishag took care of David in his old age. She was a virgin, but still considered part of David's harem. And, in those days, to inherit the harem was to inherit the kingdom. (I know, strange stuff to talk about harem's... it was the way it was back then - even though God's plan from Genesis with Adam & Eve was 1 man & 1 woman - not 1 man & many women... us humans - even David - do not always pay attention to God's plans...) So, Adonijah's request to marry Abishag was essentially his attempt to gain back the kingdom again. Hence, Solomon got upset... Joab proved the maxim of "those who live by the sword, die by the sword." David knew Joab had killed Abner and Amasa and passed on his disdain for Joab to Solomon. Solomon knew Joab was in cahoots w/ Adonijah. Joab was seeking sanctuary at the altar - and there was indeed sanctuary in the Law for those who accidentally killed someone else. There were sanctuary cities. However, Joab's killings of Abner and Amasa could in no way be viewed as accidental. His attempt at sanctuary at the altar did not stand up in Solomon's eyes. It is an interesting thing to read about the blood and deaths caused by some of our fathers of our faith - David & Solomon and the list will go on. I think the thing I take away from all of this is that in the B.C. age, "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" ruled the day. People "got what they deserved" so to speak... It essentially kept the peace in a barbaric age. But, we were fortunate to have Jesus Christ come into our world and be the final sacrifice and change the rules. Jesus died on a cross. Jesus got what WE deserved. He changed the whole

eye for an eye Law to a higher law of love & grace. We deserve condemnation. Thanks to Jesus, we are given eternal life through the free gift of faith in his life, death and resurrection. I think it is always important for us to remember that Jesus got what we deserved... this is why Jesus is called Savior! **Q: How are you seeing the need for Jesus in our Old Testament readings? Do you see that Jesus is needed to redeem us?**

6/8 - Today in 1 Kings chapter 3 we read about King Solomon asking for wisdom from God! It is of note that Solomon is estimated to be about 20 years old in this chapter - he was born about half way through David's 40 year reign. So, he is a very young king. In verse 5 we read these words from God to Solomon – *“Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”* In verses 7 through 9 we will read this amazing response from Solomon to God – *“O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”* Solomon could have asked God for anything – more wealth, more power, more strength, more whatever, but he simply asked for wisdom. Why? Because he wanted to govern God's people well and distinguish between right and wrong. Amazing. **Q: How would you or I answer this question today? What if God came to you today and said the same thing to you from verse 5 - “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” What would you ask for? Would you ask for Wisdom?** If so, God offers this to you and me now. Where? I believe wisdom is offered to us through study of the Bible and by living in a loving and right relationship with God. We can receive the gift of God's wisdom today! **If we would answer this question from God differently – maybe wanting more money, or power, or whatever – do you think we might forfeit gaining wisdom? So, again, what if God were to say to you right now this same statement he said to Solomon? “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” What do you ask for?**

6/8 - As we read 1 Kings 4 verses 29, 32 & 33 I am reminded that some say Solomon was the last person on earth (well besides Jesus of course) who knew everything there was to know about any and all subject's of the day - *“God gave Solomon great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge too vast to be measured. He composed some 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs. He could speak with authority about all kinds of plants, from the great cedar of Lebanon to the tiny hyssop that grows from cracks in a wall. He could also speak about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish.”* Solomon was obviously one wise person. **Q: What do you think the wisest thing about Solomon was?** I think it was this - he was in relationship with God. That was the #1 wisest decision Solomon ever made. And it's the #1 wisest decision you or I could ever make - to be in relationship with God through his son Jesus. From this wise decision flows all other wisdom in our lives. But this decision is of primary importance... **Are you as wise as Solomon in this regard? Does your heart belong to God?**

6/9 - Wow. Big readings today in First Kings. Solomon builds the Temple of the Lord! 1 Kings 6 verse 7 tells us - *“The stones used in the construction of the Temple were prefinished at the quarry, so the entire structure was built without the sound of hammer, ax, or any other iron tool at the building site.”* This shows how reverent the workers were in building the temple of the Lord. They felt it was honoring to build on the temple site without the sound of an iron tool. In 1 Kings 5 verses 13 & 14 I thought Solomon's wisdom was incredible - *“Then King Solomon enlisted 30,000 laborers from all Israel. He sent them to Lebanon in shifts, 10,000 every month, so that each man would be one month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of this labor force.”* He wisely cared for his workforce! **Q: What is your reaction to Solomon building the temple? Do you think we should appreciate grand building projects in our world today, like this grand building project of the temple?**

6/10 - Today we read about the building of King Solomon's Palace! Here is an interesting note in Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion on the Sea discussed in chapter 7 verse 23 - *“Then Hiram cast a large round tank, 15 feet across from rim to rim; it was called the Sea. It was 7 1/2 feet deep and about 45 feet in circumference.”* Apparently the sea was a huge tank that could hold approximately 12,000 gallons of water. It was used by the priests for their ceremonial washings. **Q: What is your reaction to reading about Solomon's palace?**

6/11 - Today we read about the Ark of the Covenant being brought into the Temple! In verses 10 & 11 we read: *"As the priests came out of the inner sanctuary, a cloud filled the Temple of the LORD. The priests could not continue their work because the glorious presence of the LORD filled the Temple."* It is thought that the cloud of the presence of God here in the Temple was the same cloud of the presence of God that guided the Israelites by day through the desert as they left Egypt for the Promised Land. Solomon's prayer in today's readings is awesome! Verses 12 & 13 at the start of the prayer are interesting to contrast with a later verse: *"Then Solomon prayed, 'O LORD, you have said that you would live in thick darkness. But I have built a glorious Temple for you, where you can live forever!'"* These verses seem quite bold and confident... and maybe even seem to our modern ears that Solomon is trying to put God "in a box." But, then I was very pleased to read Solomon say this in verse 27 - *"But will God really live on earth? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built!"* Clearly, Solomon gets it that God is bigger than the Temple and that God does not "need" the Temple for a home. But, as we read about the cloud of God's presence coming into the Temple, it is apparent that God is certainly pleased with the Temple. I think God was pleased that the Israelites were building a Temple to honor God and his name & fame. It was a Temple for God. And though God did not "need" it, I think he appreciated it. I think God appreciated "King" Solomon and the Israelites praying to and honoring God as the true King of Israel. **Q: What was your reaction to reading about the Ark being brought into the Temple and then Solomon's prayer? Have you ever prayed a pray like Solomon prayed that day? In what way is your body today a temple?**

6/12 - Well, we can gather from today's First Kings readings that Solomon was clearly wise and rich! I have to confess... when I was reading today's readings I briefly thought to myself, "well, it was just inherited wealth from his father David..." :) How wrong was this thinking! Yes, David was certainly wealthy and Solomon inherited the throne if you will. But Solomon had to administer the Kingdom, including the building of the Temple and the Palace, which were no small tasks! He was able to do this successfully I think because he asked God for wisdom - rather than riches or wealth - earlier in First Kings. Solomon sought God first and asked for wisdom, and I do think God blessed him with riches too. You'll recall that Jesus referred to "Solomon's splendor" in the Sermon on the Mount when he talked about the lilies of the field and his teachings on not worrying, from Matthew 6:29: *"Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."* **Q: What was your reaction today to reading about "Solomon's splendor" in First Kings? Did you view this wealth of Solomon's as a blessing from God or perhaps as excess? What's your reaction to seeing this level of wealth of Solomon's versus Jesus' lack of wealth while walking the earth? What about in today's world - is there such a thing as too much wealth? Should we seek material wealth for our lives? Or should we be seeking other things? Should we seek to be like Solomon? Or like Jesus? Or perhaps like both?**

6/12 - These are very interesting readings today. The thing that I'm thinking about now, after reading about Solomon's wealth and wisdom - and also thinking back to David's warrior skills - is that it is not surprising to me that many people in Jesus' day were expecting a differing kind of Messiah. When Jesus came on the scene, people were reading these sacred texts of King David and King Solomon. They were reading about how wise and wealthy and what great warriors these Kings were. And these Kings were shown great favor by God. So - surely the coming Messiah would be all of this and more! Right?? Well... no. As we know Jesus was not a Warrior-Messiah. He did not come to set free the Jews from the Roman rule by the sword. Jesus did not come into the world with wealth - he came into the world in a stable with animals nearby. Now - in terms of wisdom, yes, obviously Jesus was wiser than David or Solomon of course. But in terms of being wealthy and being a warrior - Jesus was neither - on this earth. However - in the heavenly realm Jesus is obviously wealthy beyond all comprehension. And he is a warrior for you and for me. He is battling for the souls of men and women. He leads a legion of angels against a legion of darkness. Jesus is not meek. Nor is he eternally poor. But... what an interesting contrast of how Jesus was not a warrior nor wealthy during his time here on earth - and he warned us against both of these trappings. What to make of all of this? I'm not sure. I'm full-on going stream of consciousness writing here. :) I think the take-away for me is this - Solomon rightly sought after wisdom above all else. (He wrote many of the Proverbs!) And Jesus was of course wise beyond all measure. So, I think for you and I the key to life is first and foremost to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior - this is the wisest decision we will ever make. And after we have accepted Jesus, then we need to actually

follow him. Follow his teachings. Follow his wisdom. And as we follow Jesus, we really should not be concerned about being wealthy or being a warrior. Perhaps these things will be part of our Walk in some regard. But they should not be the focus. Jesus should be the focus. Godly wisdom should be the focus. **Q: What is the focus in your life? Is it Jesus? Is it godly wisdom? Are you following Jesus with all that you are? Are taking up your cross daily? Are you following Jesus all the way up that hill?**

6/13 - Wow... things go south in today's readings big time for Solomon! Why? Simple. 1 Kings 11 verses 5 & 6 tell us: *"Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. Thus, Solomon did what was evil in the LORD's sight; he refused to follow the LORD completely, as his father, David, had done."* This is sad stuff to read. Solomon had a great life, great relationship with God and he plain and simple fumbled the ball. He knew God and knew he was not to worship other gods. And he did so anyway? Why? Well, yeah, maybe having 1,000 wives & concubines was a bit of a distraction - but I don't blame them per se. It was Solomon that decided to marry outside of Israel and it was Solomon that decided to have all those wives and concubines (and polygamy is not God's plan - God's plan since Adam & Eve was one man, one woman - not one man, many women). And it was Solomon that decided to worship other gods. He was running a strong race early on - but stumbled. Fumbled. This all reminds me of Paul's wisdom in 1 Corinthians 9 verses 25 through 27: *"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."* Paul wisely realized that even with all of his preaching to others, he still had to be diligent to make sure that he himself would not be disqualified! Incredible wisdom... **Q: Think Solomon could have learned from these words of Paul? Think you and I can learn from these words of Paul? And can we learn not to repeat Solomon's mistakes? How are you running the race? Are you running in such a way as to get the prize?**

6/14 - Well, Jeroboam didn't last very long before worshipping other gods as we read in 1 Kings 12! Keep in mind Jeroboam's name as we continue to read through the book of Kings - you will continue to hear about "Jeroboam's sin" and "the sin Jeroboam caused Israel to commit" many times in our upcoming readings - even long after he is dead. Not a legacy one would want to leave behind... Interesting story about the man of God from Judah prophesying against the altar at Bethel. The man of God delivers his prophecy and then shuns Jeroboam's invite to go to his palace for food and a gift. The man of God appears very strong. And then later... he lets down his guard. And he falls prey to the lie of the old prophet. Now why on earth the old prophet decided to pursue the man of God and tell this lie is beyond me. If anyone has insights on this, please post up in the Comments below. I think the lesson here for us today is this - we cannot let down our guard when it comes to spiritual matters. I think sometimes we think we can - but we simply cannot! If we do let down our guard, then we often stumble. And thanks to God's grace we can recover from that stumble. But, there is always the dangerous risk that our stumble could be very severe, as it certainly was for the man of God in today's readings... **Q: Have you ever let your guard down and stumbled? How do you keep your guard up from the tricks and attacks of the flesh, the world or the Enemy?**

6/15 - Allright, now we are getting into the story of the Kings! I really like this portion of the Bible. I am fascinated by the back-and-forth stories and timelines of the Kings of Israel and the Kings of Judah. The one very unfortunate thing you will notice over and over are verses like 1 Kings 14 verse 22: *"During Rehoboam's reign, the people of Judah did what was evil in the LORD's sight, arousing his anger with their sin, for it was even worse than that of their ancestors."* Or verses like 1 Kings 15 verse 3: *"Abijam committed the same sins as his father before him, and his heart was not right with the LORD his God, as the heart of his ancestor David had been."* And we will read far too few verses like verse 11 as we read about the Kings of Judah and Israel: *"Asa did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight, as his ancestor David had done."* I think what is interesting to note in all of these verses - and in the verses to come about future Kings we will read about - is that it really didn't much matter what the Kings "did" in their reigns. Their wars or their building of cities or whatever really didn't matter compared to did they sin against God or not? Did they lead Israel or Judah into sin or not? Did they love God or not? And I think this is the same for our lives today. God does not so much care what our careers are or what our

social status is or how many friends or how much money we have. God cares whether we love Him with all of heart, mind, soul and strength. God cares whether we are sinning against Him or not. As Jesus tells us: *"seek first the kingdom of heaven, and all of these things will be yours as well."* So, yes, God ultimately does care about our lives and careers and friends and such too - but he first wants us to seek a right relationship with Him - and then everything else will flow from our relationship with God. Someone should have let some of these Kings of Israel and Judah know this! **Q: What can you and I learn from the story of the Kings of Judah & Israel? How are you leading others and yourself toward God or toward sin in your life today?**

6/16 - 1 Kings 15 verse 26 stood out to me right away today: *"But he did what was evil in the LORD's sight and followed the example of his father, continuing the sins of idolatry that Jeroboam had led Israel to commit."* The key word that stood out to me in this verse is "example." I think sometimes we can forget that every action we take is an example to others. We are either exemplifying godly behavior or ungodly behavior. Obviously Jeroboam exemplified ungodly behavior - and unfortunately, since he was king of Israel, his bad example had far reaching effects. Even though you or me aren't king of any land, I do believe that the examples we set have bigger impacts than we realize. Our kids, our parents, our siblings, our neighbors, our co-workers, the stranger on the street, the person at the coffee shop, are all watching what we do. How we behave. Who we are. Our very lives are examples to so many people each and every day. **Q: What type of example are you setting with your life? Do you realize that people are literally following your example each and every day?**

6/16 - 1 Kings 16 is quite the chapter full of drama! It's like a soap-opera. As I was reading this chapter, and in particular when Zimri was plotting to kill Elah, I was reminded of Macbeth's old quote - "Heavy is the head that wears the crown." Indeed very true in this chapter! Great readings in 1 Kings 17 today! We are introduced to the prophet Elijah! And what an introduction. I love the visual of Elijah being fed by ravens. Elijah was completely dependent on God for his food delivery via birds. **Q: How are you dependent on God for you food? For your life?**

6/17 - Wow! Great readings today in 1 Kings 18. This is an amazing chapter of the Bible, and one that I heard a wonderful sermon on a couple of years ago. This is strong stuff. One thing that kind of got me chuckling was the subtitle the New Living Translation puts at the top of this chapter - "The Contest on Mount Carmel!" For some reason this got my mind thinking of WWF Championship Wrestling... yes... strange place for my mind to wander I realize. :) But then, this imagery kind of stuck with me throughout the readings and I definitely think Elijah threw down a WWF level taunt in verse 27 when the prophets of Baal were not having any luck getting their fire started: *"About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or he is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or he is asleep and needs to be wakened!"* Perhaps he is relieving himself?? The prophet Elijah puts even Hulk Hogan's WWF taunt's to shame! :) Okay... in all seriousness... 1 Kings 18 is an amazing chapter. There were several verses that stood out to me. First was verses 17 and 18 when Ahab meets Elijah - *"So it's you, is it--Israel's troublemaker?" Ahab asked when he saw him. "I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead."* I love Elijah's directness and boldness to Ahab. Ahab tries to go after Elijah and maybe intimidate him, since Ahab is King. And Elijah does not back down one iota - he tells Ahab exactly why Ahab is the troublemaker. I love that. **Q: I wonder about our lives today. If someone comes after us and maybe attacks our faith or integrity falsely in some way, will we immediately stand up for our faith like Elijah did to King Ahab?**

6/17 - Verses 20 & 21 are powerful - *"So Ahab summoned all the people and the prophets to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent."* **Q: What a great question - and one that we may need to ask ourselves - "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him!" Are we wavering at all in our commitment to God? Are we being silent like the people were when Elijah asked this question? Let us not waver between two opinions... If the Lord is God, are you following him? Wholeheartedly?**

6/18 - Great chapter 19 today! We are introduced to Elisha, who will be mentored by Elijah to succeed him as a prophet at the end of First Kings 19 today. However, before we get to Elisha, we read about Elijah being very "dejected" in the desert to say the least. Some commentaries on this early portion of chapter 19 are not super-kind to Elijah for heading to the desert. Commentaries I think wisely suggest that verses 9 & 13 demonstrate God trying to gently let Elijah know he's off course and feeling too sorry for himself, when asked twice in these verses: *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* This kind of reminded me of Jonah fleeing from God's will on the boat. (which we'll read about later this year). And this kind of reminded me of me - and maybe you too. :) **Q: Have you ever had that nagging question enter your heart or mind when you suddenly realize that you are off course from God's will in your life? That question of: "What are you doing here??"** I know I have... Praise God when we are actually able to hear and understand that question and get out of the desert and back to life and back to loving this hurting world!

6/18 - Today in 1 Kings 19 verses 11 through 14 we read about how God appears to Elijah in a way that he was not expecting – *"Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"* The interesting thing to note about these verses is that Elijah was expecting or hoping God would appear in judgment to the Israelites in a windstorm, earthquake or fire. But God did not appear in any of these forms. Instead, God comes to Elijah in a simple gentle whisper. A gentle whisper. **Q: And I wonder about us in our lives today as well – do we often expect God to move mountains or to really show himself to us in big bold ways? When, perhaps, God may be speaking to you or me right now, but we're missing it? Why?** Well, is it possible that God is speaking to you right now with a simple gentle whisper? Is it possible that you have built up so many distractions or duties or activities or worries in your life that you cannot hear God's gentle whisper? I know that I have been in this place too many times – I've gotten myself so busy looking for God in all the wrong places. And then finally I will slow myself down for just long enough to hear God speaking to my heart in a gentle whisper! A gentle whisper that I am sure was there all along. . . but I was looking for God in the windstorm and earthquake and fires of life. When instead I should have simply slowed down and listened for God's gentle whisper. **Will you slow down long enough to listen for God's gentle whisper for you? Do you believe that God can speak to you in a simple gentle whisper this very moment?**

6/19 - In 1 Kings 20 today we read about King Ahab's battles with King Ben-hadad of Aram. Verse 11 today was sharp! *"The king of Israel sent back this answer: "A warrior still dressing for battle should not boast like a warrior who has already won.""* Not a bad little saying from Ahab to Ben-hadad! Sounds sort of like a Proverb. Actually, this really sounds like our modern day saying of: "Don't count your chickens before they hatch!" :) Alas, even though King Ahab was given victories by God's grace in today's readings, he goofs things up by letting King Ben-hadad of Aram go free. Then, as we get into First Kings chapter 21 today, things go from bad to worse for Ahab in terms of his relationship with God. Chapter 21 is a sad story of Naboth and his vineyard... **Q: Would it be safe to say that King Ahab was coveting Naboth's vineyard? Would Ahab be breaking a commandment in the Mosaic Law here...? Have you ever struggled with coveting?**

6/19 - I couldn't quite remember why Jezebel was cast in such a bad light in our readings a few days ago. Today I remember why... It is great to see Elijah show up on the scene and say to Ahab in 1 Kings 20 verse 20 - *"I have come because you have sold yourself to what is evil in the LORD's sight."* How sad. **Do you see people today still selling themselves to what is evil in God's sight?**

6/20 - Today we finish the book of First Kings! Second Kings begins tomorrow! Ahab is not happy about the Arameans occupying Ramoth-gilead at the beginning of today's readings. King Jehoshaphat of Judah wisely suggests that they should consult God before going into battle against the Arameans. At which time King Ahab of Israel trots out his 400 yes-men "prophets" who say they should definitely go to war and that they will be victorious. I love Jehoshaphat's reaction to these 400 yes-men in verse 7: *"But*

Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the LORD around, too? I would like to ask him the same question." Ahab's reaction in verse 8 is quite telling... "There is still one prophet of the LORD, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but bad news for me! His name is Micaiah son of Imlah." This verse really stands out for me in a big way in our world today. I wonder if sometimes we - you and me - look for supposed "prophets" of the Lord that are yes-people to our particular likings - instead of looking for Truth. Meaning... and I'm just putting this out there, so bear with me. **Q: Do we sometimes maybe even decide to attend a particular church because it tells us basically what we want to hear?** It keeps us in our comfortable place... we get yes-messages... When, instead, should we be okay with attending a church that will give us some challenging and convicting messages on occasion? Biblical messages mind you - which surely can be challenging to our modern ears at times. I heard somewhere once before that church should be a place that "comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." I like that... Now, don't get me wrong. I am not saying we need to be in super-strict churches per se. I just think we should really watch for churches that are giving a yes-message all the time to our particular likings verses churches that teach the Truth. I don't think church is the only area of where we might default to looking for yes-messages. I think this can happen in books we read, TV we watch, or even with friends or with work. **Are we listening to 400 yes-people in our lives or are we okay with 1 Micaiah coming in and sharing a perceived "bad-news" message?** (which may ultimately be very good news if we'll just listen to it... if Ahab had really listened to Micaiah's message in today's readings, think he still would have rushed out to battle?)

6/21 - Today we begin the book of Second Kings!

Author: Unknown

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Content: Second Kings covers a period of approximately 250 years during which time two national tragedies occurred. In 722 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians, and in 586 B.C. the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians. The reigns of the various kings are described in some detail with care being taken to show the spiritual significance of what they were doing. Throughout this whole time of good and bad kings, war and peace, prosperity and ruin, God is seen to be at work, in particular sending prophets to preach his word and warn of judgment to come.

Theme: God's control over the affairs of men and nations is constantly seen throughout this book. The rulers of men may think they are in control, but even the enemies of God's people fit into God's plan by executing judgment upon the wayward nations of Israel and Judah. It must be stressed that sin invariably brings judgment upon the people and righteousness brings God's blessing. Second Kings also shows that God never sends his judgment without a warning first; in this instance, the warning came through the prophets who were sent. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 6-7)

6/21 - 2 Kings 1 today... wow... Elijah is not to be messed with when he is sitting on top of that hill! Elijah asks a very poignant question twice in this chapter - "Is there no God in Israel?" **Q: This is a question each of us will need to ask in our lives at some point - "Is there or is there no God in my life?"** Hopefully we've already answered this question affirmatively. It's a sad state of affairs to imagine a country without God. It is a sad state of affairs to imagine our own lives without God. Today in 2 Kings 2 we read about Elijah going up to heaven in the whirlwind! Elijah was taken to heaven without dying. He is the 2nd person in scripture to do so - Enoch was the first (see [Genesis 5:21-24](#)). Jesus of course was also taken to heaven in bodily form after His resurrection from the dead (see [Acts 1:9](#)). **Q: How did the life of the prophet Elijah stand out to you? What can we learn from Elijah?**

6/21 - Okay, so 2 Kings 2 verses 23 & 24 are some of the most unique verses in the Bible no doubt... "Elisha left Jericho and went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, a group of boys from the town began mocking and making fun of him. "Go away, you baldhead!" they chanted. "Go away, you baldhead!" Elisha turned around and looked at them, and he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of them." Zondervan's NIV Study Bible has some good commentary on these verses as follows: "The youths from Bethel no doubt assumed that Elisha was going up to Samaria to continue Elijah's struggle against royal apostasy. Some believe that the youths, in their mocking, were telling Elisha to ascend to heaven as Elijah had done. By calling Elisha "baldhead" the youths from Bethel expressed that city's utter disdain for the Lord's representative, who, they felt, had

no power. Elisha pronounced a curse that gave warning of the judgment that would come on the entire nation of Israel should it persist in disobedience and apostasy." **Q: Have you ever been mocked? How might Jesus suggest we react to mocking? Curses or turning the other cheek? Might there be an appropriate time for curses and a time for turning the other cheek?**

6/22 - In 2 Kings 3 verse 3 today we are reminded that King Jeroboam's legacy is held out as a unfavorable legacy... *"Nevertheless he (Joram) continued in the sins of idolatry that Jeroboam son of Nebat had led the people of Israel to commit."* That is an interesting thing to think about - a legacy. Jeroboam's legacy was obviously not one we'd like to have. **Q: So, what type of legacy would you like to have? And what type of legacy are you in fact leaving these days?** The more I think about my legacy, the more I simply hope and pray that my legacy is something along the lines of "one who loved God and loved people." Pretty simple really. But also really tough in our modern world full of so many distractions! And I am not so sure that I am really leaving this legacy some days. I don't want to pursue this type of legacy for the wrong reasons - for any sort of appearing "righteous" or prideful reasons. But I in fact I really do want to spend the rest of my days simply loving God and loving people. Whatever else I do - career, ministry, whatever - pales in comparison to loving God and loving people. I even hesitate to write this hope for a legacy on this blog - I feel like I should go back and delete everything I just wrote. Except - I think this might be the type of legacy we are called to as Christians. Remember the two great commands Jesus gave us in Matthew 22:37 & 39 - *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself."* Love God and love people. **So - whaddya think? Is this a good legacy for us to aim for? Should we be aiming for a legacy at all? What will your legacy be?**

6/23 - Interesting readings in 2 Kings 4 about the Shumanite woman, her son and the prophet Elisha today! You'll note that in verse 20 her son dies, and in verse 21 she places her son on Elisha's bed - in part so that no one will know that her son died. As she gets to verse 22-24 she is saddling up on a donkey to go straight to Elisha without anyone in her family knowing her son had died. As the Shumanite woman nears Mount Carmel Gehazi, Elisha's servant, comes out to greet her and still she won't even tell him that her son has died! She says everything is fine. She wants to deliver the news first and directly to Elisha! I like this woman's focused faith. She knew that Elisha delivered the Word that she would have a son in previous day's readings, and now that her son had died, I think she had faith that Elisha, being a prophet in relationship with God, would be able to revive her son. **Q: Do you have a focused faith like this when it comes to your relationship with God and Jesus? Do you always take your problems directly to the One who can truly revive you?** In chapter 5 we get to the story of the healing of Naaman. I found it very interesting that Naaman needed to humble himself and wash up in the waters of the lowly river Jordan! Know anyone else that did some "washing up" in the river Jordan?? :) **Maybe all of us somehow need to humble ourselves and symbolically be washed up in the river Jordan to receive true healing?**

6/24 - 2 Kings 6 today opens up with a very interesting little story about the floating ax head! :) Apparently in those days the iron in an ax head was very costly - far too costly for prophets to have been able to afford. Hence, they had to borrow it. If the prophet who lost the ax head had not been able to recover it, he would have then had to have become an indentured servant for a period of time to the person he borrowed it from to pay back the cost. So, Elisha's recovery of the ax head I think demonstrates a simple moral of this opening story in today's readings: God cares for the welfare of those who love God. **Q: Whaddya think on this moral of the floating ax head story? Have you had experiences in your life where God has done some small things - or maybe even big things - that don't seem super spiritual at first glance, but simply saved you a lot of heartache/costs/time? I know I have...** Praise God that He floats ax heads and even "floats" you and me too!

6/24 - Today in 2 Kings 6 verse 27 we will read this verse that King Joram says to an Israelite during a time of a severe famine - *"If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you?"* I think the thing to note in this verse is that the King realized he could not end the famine on his own, but that only God could end the famine. (I think the King may have actually been trying to blame God for the famine - and certainly Elisha he blames later in the chapter). **Q: I wonder about this in our lives today - do we try to help others and even try to help ourselves using our own power and without relying on God at**

all? And maybe sometimes even blame God for problems we see, like this King? Do we think we can end a "famine" or whatever problems we see at work, in our community, in our family, or in our world all on our own? Or should we be asking for God's help in these areas of our lives? I've been thinking about this more and more lately – about how little I truly pray for others. I see areas of my life, my family, my community, my work, my church, my favorite charities, our world, that need some help. Need some changing. Need some love. And sometimes I think that I can institute these changes all on my own! Which is foolish. Instead, I should be praying for God's providence and work in these areas of my life where I see a "famine." Yes, I do think that God will oftentimes answer our prayers by encouraging us to "do something" to work on a change. But, we'd be wise to prayerfully approach all areas of our life and to pay attention to where God is asking us to "do something" – and to pay attention to where God is flat-out doing the work! **Q: Are there any "famine" areas in your life? In your personal relationship with God or others? In your work, church, community? Are there "famine" areas you see in our world? Will you today begin praying to God about these "famines" in the knowledge that famines can truly only end if God is involved in the work? Will you allow God to get involved in the famine areas of your life? Will you pray more consistently than ever before for the famine areas you see in your life?**

6/25 - Second Kings 8 begins with a wonderful example of God's "perfect timing." It was no coincidence that the king was talking with Gehazi about the time Elisha brought a boy back to life when the woman from Shunem walked in with her son! God knew that the Shumanite woman was faithful and obedient to Him, so He orchestrated the timing so that she would get her house and land back - after God perfectly timed her to be out of the country for 7 years to avoid the famine! **Have you ever had the experience of God's "perfect timing" in your life?** My hunch is that you have - even if you haven't realized it. I have had some experiences where I have consciously realized that God's perfect timing was at work - and sometimes I've quickly said the prayer under my breath of "thank you God!" But, I also now can look back on my life and now see so many instances of God's perfect timing. Hindsight is 20/20. **Q: When is the last time you experienced God's perfect timing? Think it could have been today - even if you don't realize it right now?** Elisha's interaction with Hazael demonstrates Elisha was certainly a prophet of God's! Elisha was not condoning what Hazael is going to violently do, but he was just stating the facts of what was going to happen. Verses 11 & 12 are sad to read - *"Elisha stared at Hazael with a fixed gaze until Hazael became uneasy. Then the man of God started weeping. "What's the matter, my lord?" Hazael asked him. Elisha replied, "I know the terrible things you will do to the people of Israel. You will burn their fortified cities, kill their young men, dash their children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women!"* Verse 13 is also sad because you will notice that Hazael doesn't get upset by the violent predictions in Elisha's proclamation, but only wonders how someone like him would pull off something like this... *"Then Hazael replied, "How could a nobody like me ever accomplish such a great feat?"* I love Elisha's final instructions to the young prophet concerning his anointing of Jehu as King of Israel in 2 Kings 9 verse 3 - *"Then open the door and run for your life!"* Not your typical instructions from a prophet, you wouldn't think - but if a prophet gives you instructions like these, you better follow them! :)

6/26- Well... Jehu kills a lot of people in today's readings. I realize that the violence in the Old Testament can often bring up a lot of questions. Rather than me diving into why there is violence in the Bible - I'll defer to a couple of theologians [at this link](#) and [at this link](#) - and I'll give you 3 images below from a very young theologian. :) Unfortunately, our human history is full of violence - from Cain and Abel until this very day. The Bible does record human history. There will come a day where there is a new heaven and a new earth, free from violence. That day has not come yet - but will with Jesus' Second Coming. Most Biblical commentaries agree that Jehu was carrying out justice for the sins of the Kings of Israel and the worship of Baal. Jezebel's death was predicted by the prophet Elijah because of her sins. A brutal death that it was. I think one thing for us to keep in mind is that sin does bring death. As Paul teaches in Romans 6:23 - "The wages of sin is death." Jesus saves us from this deserved death when we come to him in faith and surrender our lives to him. But, let us not forget the severity and risk of sin and the risk of not being in relationship with Jesus. Without Jesus saving us, the wages of sin truly is eternal death. 2 Kings 10 verses 25-27 seem to demonstrate Jehu's initial apparent zeal for God - *"Then Jehu's men went into the fortress of the temple of Baal. They dragged out the sacred pillar used in the worship of Baal and destroyed it. They broke down the sacred pillar of Baal and wrecked the temple of Baal, converting it into a public toilet. That is what it is used for to this day."* But we soon learn in verse 31 - *"But Jehu did not*

obey the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He refused to turn from the sins of idolatry that Jeroboam had led Israel to commit." It is thus thought that Jehu's action of destroying the idols of Baal was more political than spiritual - as Baal worship was associated with the dynasty of Ahab, whereas the golden calves had a longer history in the northern kingdom of Israel and were valued by most people. And keeping the golden calves would keep people from Israel traveling to the southern kingdom of Judah to worship God in Jerusalem. **Q: What is your reaction to reading about violence in the Old Testament? Are there any parallels to violence in our world today?**

6/27 - Eventful readings today in 2 Kings 11 for the coming of a 7 year old king of Judah, Joash! It is great to see that in 2 Kings 12 Joash is passionate for the repair of the Temple in Jerusalem. 2 Kings 12 verse today 9 tells us: *"Then Jehoiada the priest bored a hole in the lid of a large chest and set it on the right-hand side of the altar at the entrance of the Temple of the LORD. The priests guarding the entrance put all of the people's contributions into the chest."* **Q: If God can work all things together for the good of the nation of Israel through a 7 year old boy turned King (Joash), do you trust God can work all things together for good in your life? (Roman 8:28) What is something recently in your life that seemed unlikely or small (like a 7 year old king) that God turned into a good in your life?**

6/28 - Today we read about the passing of the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 13! I am sad that our readings of Elijah and Elisha are now behind us. I don't know what it was about these 2 prophets, but I loved them. Sure, they were a bit rough and gruff at times, but also very tender. They'd send fire down from heaven to kill the prophets of Baal and bears from the trees to kill mockers, but then they'd care for widows. **Q: I'm wondering if in our lives today we should be a mix of rough & gruff at times, but also very tender? Should we be rough and gruff toward those that are modern day "prophets of Baal" and tender toward those who need God? I have to confess, I'm rarely rough and gruff toward anyone - well, okay, maybe myself! :) Do you think rough and gruff should be in our personality mix at all today?**

6/28 - Even once Elisha passes on, his bones still give life! I think this is simply because of the life-giving power of God whom Elisha represented during his life. It wasn't the bones themselves that gave life. It was God. 2 Kings 13 Verses 20 & 21 tell us: *"Then Elisha died and was buried. Groups of Moabite raiders used to invade the land each spring. Once when some Israelites were burying a man, they spied a band of these raiders. So they hastily threw the body they were burying into the tomb of Elisha. But as soon as the body touched Elisha's bones, the dead man revived and jumped to his feet!"* In 2 Kings 14 today we read about King Amaziah of Judah. I'm not sure if you caught this - I barely did - but we read about the ancient city of Petra, which is located in modern day Jordan, in verse 7: *"It was Amaziah who killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He also conquered Sela and changed its name to Joktheel, as it is called to this day."* Sela/Joktheel is the same city as Petra. **Q: I'm curious of anyone reading this has visited the ruins of Petra in Jordan? Can you post up reviews in the Comments? Are they worth visiting? How about visiting the Holy Land? Have you been? Did it change your perspective on the Bible or grow your faith?** I have heard they are incredible! In fact, [Bruce Feiler's book, Walking the Bible](#), has a wonderful chapter on Petra - I highly recommend this book! I hope to visit Petra someday.

6/29 - In 2 Kings 15 today we read about several kings in very short order! The thing that amazed me was that things were obviously going from bad to worse in the northern kingdom of Israel with the kings, whereas things appeared a bit more stable in Judah (for this chapter...). 2 Kings 15 opens up with Uzziah reigning in Judah for 52 years - whereas Israel I think has 6 or so kings during Uzziah's reign, most of whom are assassinated! We will see how this all plays out over the next couple of days in our 2 Kings readings. There are definitely some ramifications coming for Israel based on how things are going down in these days. Verses 13 & 14 today really showed how tough it was to be king in Israel in these days - *"Shallum reigned in Samaria only one month. Then Menahem son of Gadi went to Samaria from Tirzah and assassinated him, and he became the next king."* Reading about Shallum only reigning one month reminds me of how the hearts of men and women are sometimes - that very thing in our world which we seek so strongly, sometimes can be our very downfall. I have no doubt that Shallum wanted to be king very badly - he assassinated King Zechariah in public in verse 10! And yet, becoming king for Shallum did not give him control over all things - he himself was killed just 1 month into his reign. **Q: This all**

makes me think about us today - is there anything in this world that we are striving after that may not be all that it's cracked up to be? Might we risk "gaining the whole world, but losing our soul" in some of our pursuits? Is there anything in this world today that you are pursuing that you are putting above your relationship with God? If so, will you let it go? Will you focus primarily on your relationship with God first and foremost? Will you follow the truths of Matthew 6:33 - "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Let us not be greedy in this short and precious life!

6/29 - In 2 Kings 16 today King Ahaz of Judah messes up big time... Whaddya think about his idea to remove the bronze altar from the Temple and install an altar that was designed in Damascus? Think God will be happy about this? Essentially King Ahaz swapped his security in God to placing his security in King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria and his pagan gods. Stay tuned to upcoming readings... Again - I come back to our lives today. **Q: Are we ever similar to King Ahaz in doing something in our lives that we know is not pleasing to God? Do we know what is right and what is wrong and sometimes choose what is wrong? Why do we do this? Can we stop doing this? If so, how? Might it help us to stop doing wrong things if the #1 priority in our lives today were God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit? What is the #1 priority in your life today?**

6/30 - Big news! We cross the halfway threshold in our One Year Bible readings today! Whoo-hoo! Yep, June 30th marks the end of our first 6 months of readings and July 1st marks the beginning of our final 6 months of readings. Congratulations! 2 Kings 17 is a HUGE and very sad chapter today! This is a huge chapter because it is the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel is invaded by Assyria and its people are exiled. It is so sad because the Israelites could have avoided this strife - but they chose to follow in the sins of Jeroboam and worship other gods. After much patience and many second chances by the True and Living God, Israel was allowed to be invaded & exiled for their disobedience. Sad stuff. You can learn more of the history of how this all transpired [at this link](#). In 2 Kings 17 verse 41 we will read this about the foreigners in Israel: "Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols." **Q: If the foreigners both worshiped God AND served idols at the same time back then, do you suppose that we can fall into this same trap today? What would some examples be today of both worshiping God and serving idols at the same time? Are there any areas of your life where you might be serving idols? Will you allow those idols to be turned over to God for his healing and transformation of you? Will you worship God only? Will you leave the idols behind?**

6/30 - Verse 15 stands out and relates to the paragraph above: "They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless themselves." How true is that? Maybe another way to look at it - you are what you worship! (like you are what you eat...) If we worship worthless idols, we become worthless ourselves. If we worship the true living God, we become more like his son Jesus. **Q: Would you rather be worthless or becoming like Jesus in this lifetime? And how about after this lifetime? So, who or what are you worshiping these days?**

JOHN 20:1 - ACTS 20:38

6/1 - Today we read about Jesus' glorious resurrection! Verse 18 is awesome - "Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!"" Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion gives a great list today of the order of Jesus' 11 appearances after his resurrection:

1. Mary Magdalene and the other women
2. the disciples on the road to Emmaus
3. Peter
4. the ten disciples in the upper room
5. the eleven in the upper room with Thomas present (Below is an oil painting by Carravaggio from the year 1601 titled "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas")
6. the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius
7. the eleven on a mountain in Galilee
8. five hundred of the brethren
9. James
10. all of the apostles
11. those present when he ascended into heaven

Q: What does Jesus' resurrection mean to you, personally? How has Jesus' resurrection changed your life?

6/2 - John 21 is one of my favorite chapters of the Bible in so many ways! In some ways it is because of a beautiful modern day book written by the late Henri Nouwen titled "[In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership](#)", which is based on this chapter and Jesus asking Peter 3 times if he loves him. Has anyone else read this book by Nouwen? If so, please post up reviews in the Comments section below. I know I make a lot of book recommendations on this blog over the course of a year, but if there is just 1 book you read based on my recommendations (other than the One Year Bible of course :), "In the Name of Jesus" by Henri Nouwen would be the book. In this book Henri writes about the end of his life ministry where he is a spiritual director at a L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto, working amongst mentally handicapped. It is so incredible to read about how Henri learns from what the world would see as "the least of these" and how Henri realizes in his Christian ministry throughout his life he's been fighting 3 temptations:

1. the temptation to be relevant.
2. the temptation to be spectacular.
3. the temptation to be powerful.

I could go on and on about this book, but the last thing I will say is that it is so beautiful how Henri ties his learnings in this book to Jesus and Peter's Q & A here in John 21. If you serve in any way, shape, or form in Christian ministry (or even if you don't :), please pick this book up. You will be blessed by it immensely!

6/2 - One of my absolute favorite red letter quotes from Jesus in the Gospels arrives today in John 21. Verse 12: *"Now come and have some breakfast!" Jesus said.* There is something about the simplicity and beauty and every-day-ness of this command from Jesus to the 7 disciples that I just absolutely love!

Q: Can you image Jesus saying this to you? Can you imagine Jesus making breakfast for you on the beach?

6/2 - Okay, now onto the big question probably for many of us from today's readings is why did Jesus ask Peter 3 times if he loved him? Many commentaries call these passages "the reinstatement of Peter" - meaning that he was reinstated as the rock / confessor of the foundation of Jesus' church based on [Matthew 16:16](#). And that he needed this reinstatement after denying knowing the Lord 3 times before his crucifixion (and the then rooster crowing, as we know...). Interestingly, Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion has the following suggestions on the original Greek used when John wrote about this Q & A exchange between Jesus and Peter: "Two different Greek words are used for "love." The first two times the word *agapo*, which means devoted love, is used. When Peter refuses to use the same word, Jesus turns to the word *phileo*, which indicates the love of friendship. Peter accepts this word and admits that he loves Jesus in this way. Peter was humbler now than earlier in his life, and was making no claim to superior love (see [John 13:36-37](#))." In verse 18 Jesus says to Peter: *"The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go."* The early church understood this as a prophecy of crucifixion. Peter would be a martyr and tradition suggests that he was crucified upside down. **Q: What are your thoughts on our readings in John today with Jesus asking Peter 3 times if he loved him? Why do you think this was asked of Peter 3 times? Was this a "reinstatement" of Peter? What are your thoughts overall on this closing chapter of John today? (Acts begins tomorrow!! :)**

6/2 - Okay, I realize this has been a long post today... but the last thing I want to point out is that I love Jesus' response to Peter when Peter asks about what will happen to John and Jesus says this is verse 22: *"Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me."* I think this is a great word from Jesus to both you and me today as well! **Q: How often do we worry about others and their relationship with the Lord? How often do we perhaps think that we are so saved, and "they" are so not...? Or how often do we wonder why someone seems like they are so blessed, and perhaps we think that we are not? Well, what does Jesus say to all of this to you and me today?** I believe he would say the same words from verse 22: "What is that to you? You follow me." Indeed, let us not worry so very much about others. But let us worry instead about ourselves simply following Jesus!

6/3 - Today we begin the book of Acts! I am sad to be leaving the Gospels behind, but am definitely looking forward to reading Luke's writings in Acts. (And there is always early next year to read the Gospels again! Hint... hint... :) We'll soon be introduced to Paul in Acts, and his Epistles will be coming up in the months ahead. It is always so exciting to read about the early church and its genesis. I hope you are ready for Acts! Let's go!

Author: Luke

Date: A.D. 65-70

Content: The book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke where Luke intends to show that what Jesus began on earth, he continues to do in the life of the church. The book begins with the apostles being filled with the power of God and preaching to great effect, three thousand being saved in one day (Acts 2:41). The life of the church in Jerusalem, the spread of the gospel to Samaria, the activities of the apostle Peter, and the persecution of the early Christians are then described. The focus then shifts to the apostle Paul and his missionary activity in Gentile territory. His three missionary journeys are treated in some detail, ending with Paul's trip to Rome where the book ends. Some scholars suggest that Luke intended to write a third volume that would have described Paul's release, further travels, arrest, and death.

Theme: Acts was written to show the spread of the gospel from Jewish to Gentile territory (Acts 1:8). The good news that Jesus dies and rose again could not be confined to one corner of the world, but was intended by God for all. To that end God empowered his people so that they could accomplish their task. The Holy Spirit is that empowering agent. The sovereign control of God over all things is seen in the triumph of the gospel over paganism and persecution; and although it may cost many their very lives (even Peter and Paul, whose lives are described in Acts), ultimate victory is assured through Jesus our Lord. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 23)

6/3 - It's intriguing to note that Luke begins Acts 1:1 with "Dear Theophilus." You will recall from Luke's Gospel in chapter 1 verses 3 & 4 Luke addresses the Gospel to Theophilus as well: "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." So, just who is Theophilus? There is a lot of speculation on this question, and not a lot of certainty. Theophilus' name means "one who loves God." Not a bad name, eh? Some speculate that Theophilus was someone of high position and wealth, and perhaps even a Roman official. Some speculate Theophilus was actually Luke's publisher, funding his writings distribution! In whatever case, it appears that both Acts and Luke were written for Theophilus' own instruction, as well as the instruction of those whom these writings would be distributed, which includes you and me! Let us simply thank God for the unknown man Theophilus to whom Luke felt compelled to write the books of instructions for us in Acts & Luke! Verse 8 from Jesus is basically a Cliff Notes version of the book of Acts: "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In chapters 1 through 7 the apostles will be witnesses in Jerusalem. Judea & Samarian in chapters 8 & 9. And then to the ends of the earth in chapters 10 through 28. Well, ends of the earth in terms of Caesarea, Rome, Greece, Antioch and Asia Minor. But, they wouldn't begin this witnessing until they are equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2. **Q: How are you living out Act 1:8 in your life? Have you received the Holy Spirit's power? How are you telling people about Jesus everywhere?**

6/4 - Today we read the incredible Acts chapter 2 where the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost! We also read in Acts 2 today about how the early church flourishes. You may hear some churches today say that they are "Acts 2:42" churches. Today we read these incredible words about the early church in verses 42 through 47 – "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." **Q: How do these verses speak to you? Do you think this is how church today should be as well? Do you see aspects of these verses in your church today? Do you see aspects of these**

verses in your life today? Is your church an “Acts 2:42” church? Do you think it should be? How will you yourself help it to be an Acts 2:42 church?

6/5 - Acts chapter 3 is a wonderful look at the power of Jesus' name and faith in Jesus as Peter heals a lame man. **Q: I am curious about how you might say or pray the name of Jesus in your life today? Do you close out your prayers in the name of Jesus? Do you do other things in your life in the name of Jesus? Do you have any stories or examples of the power of the name of Jesus that you have experienced in your life?**

6/5 - I love verse 6: *"But Peter said, "I don't have any money for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"* It is awesome to see how Peter follows up this healing with preaching at Solomon's Porch! He sees an opportunity to let others know about Jesus and he does not let this opportunity pass him by. **Q: How often in your life do you come across opportunities to let others know about Jesus? How often do you move forward with that opportunity? Or how often do you let that opportunity pass you by?**

6/6 - In our Acts readings today, I found it very interesting that Peter and John found themselves before the same 70 member Sanhedrin that Jesus found himself before when he was sentenced to death. Peter and John avoided death in this case, and Jesus' name and power was proclaimed before the high council in a powerful way. Caiaphas you'll recall from John 18:14: *"Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people."* Well, the Spirit of Jesus was once again before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin through the boldness of Peter and John! **Q: We read about the boldness of Peter and John in Acts chapter 4 today. Do you think we are called to be bold in our faith? Why? What are some ways that we should be bold in our faith? What are some ways in which you are bold in your faith today? What are some ways you want to become bolder in your faith?**

6/6 - I love reading about the early church praying and sharing their possessions after Peter and John were released! Have you ever prayed a prayer that was anything like verses 29 & 30? Wow... *"And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give your servants great boldness in their preaching. Send your healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* **Q: Think we could learn something about prayer from this early church community in Acts 4? How often do you pray with a group of people outside of a regular church service?**

6/7 - Today in Acts 5 we continue to read about the early church. It's important for us to note that Ananias and Sapphira's sin was that they acted as if they were giving 100% of the proceeds from the sale of their land to the church - when in fact they weren't - so that they would be glorified for this very generous act. The sin wasn't what percentage they were or weren't giving - but that they were acting as if they were giving 100%, which was a lie. In verse 3 we read – *"Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"* One thing of note from this verse is that Satan was active in the hearts of men and women in the early church. After Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, Satan was still on the loose. **Q: Do you believe Satan is still on the loose today tempting the hearts of men and women? Do you pray daily for God to “lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil?” Do you think this should be a daily prayer?** (maybe not in these words exactly, but they are from the Lord's Prayer, so not a bad choice of words to pray...)

6/7 - I love verse 29 in today's readings, when the apostles are yet again before the Sanhedrin: *"But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than human authority."* How powerful of a statement is this! And how often in our lives do we truly practice this? Do you obey God rather than human authority? Consistently? Verse 41 brought tears to my eyes: *"The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus."* This is an incredible thing to consider! The apostles rejoiced that they were given 39 lashes - this is no joke as we all know - because they were proclaiming Jesus. They rejoiced that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus! This is something that should definitely bring tears to all of our eyes. Let us pray that God also counts us worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus! **Q: Have you**

ever suffered dishonor for the name of Jesus in your life? Will you rejoice if indeed someday you do suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus? Is it proper for a Christian to want to actually suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus? Should we want this? Expect this? Seek this? Rejoice in this?

6/8 - Acts 6 verse 2 is of interest to me today - *"We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program."* When I first read this, I thought, "Wait a second! What's wrong with administering a food program??" Then, upon further reflection I realized the apostles were not saying anything was wrong with administering a food program - just that they were not called to it. They were called to spend their time preaching and teaching the Word of God. Which of course is true Food in the spiritual sense. So - I think this is important for us to realize today as well. I think sometimes we might get a bit grouchy if we don't see our pastors or ministers at every single church function or event - but we have to realize they are not called to do every single thing that we, the body of the church, are called to. One of their primary roles is to preach and teach the word of God. So, they may need us to volunteer at or administer a food program while they are doing what they are called to. Each of us are important parts of the body of Christ. And each part of the body has different functions. We shouldn't get upset if one part of the body is not doing exactly what we are doing. And yes, there are times when community & fellowship will bring us all together - which typically is worship on Sundays. Let us come together as many members but one body without complaint toward others who are called to other holy tasks! **Q: How are you serving the Body of Christ today? Are you willing to serve in ways that may be more "behind the scenes"? Are you willing to administer a food program, if that's what God calls you to do?**

6/9 - Today we read the beginning of Stephen's amazing sermon to the Sanhedrin in the Temple. You'll recall from yesterday's readings in Acts 6 verses 8 through 10 - *"Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. None of them was able to stand against the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen spoke."* So, men began to lie about Stephen, and then we get into the sermon Stephen gives to the council today. It is clearly a great sermon today from Stephen! Today he is beginning to set the stage for his zinger closing statements. He's like a lawyer today laying out his opening arguments for the case. Unfortunately, things will not proceed well in the coming days readings for Stephen. After he concludes this speech, Stephen will soon be the first Christian martyr... **Q: What in Stephen's sermon stood out to you?**

6/10 - Stephen's great sermon to the temple council continues today! Great timing on his sermonizing in verses 46 through 50 related to the Temple Solomon built - *"David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who actually built it. However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple as good as that?' asks the Lord. 'Could you build a dwelling place for me? Didn't I make everything in heaven and earth?'"* The last 2 verses came from Isaiah chapter 66 verses 1 & 2 (as the prophet says..) Indeed it is true! We do not need a temple for God today. God does not live in a temple built by human hands. I have heard it said before - "If you are in relationship with God through his son Jesus, you are God's temple." **Q: Do you believe this is true? Do you believe that your body is a temple that God can live in?**

6/11 - Today is a sad day of readings as we read about the stoning of Stephen - the first Christian martyr. Verses 59 & 60 are incredible and reminiscent of Jesus on the cross: *"And as they stoned him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And he fell to his knees, shouting, 'Lord, don't charge them with this sin!' And with that, he died."* In verse 58 we are ominously introduced to who we now know as Paul, the author of many of the epistles in the Bible: *"The official witnesses took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul."* This laying of coats at Saul's feet may be signifying that Saul was the highest official at the stoning of Stephen and may be signifying that Saul gave permission for this stoning of Stephen to occur. Saul is Paul's Hebrew name. Paul is his Greek name. (which is a significant distinction, as Paul's ministry reaches out to the Gentiles, including the Greeks - hence going from the Hebrew name Saul to the Greek name Paul is significant) In a few chapters ahead we will learn about Saul's encounter with Jesus and how his persecution of Christians will soon take a dramatic

U-turn... Take a look at the cloaked figure in the image below to the left - this looks to me to be Saul watching over the stoning of Stephen with coats laid at his feet. God has an amazing conversion for Saul coming up... **Q: What was your reaction to reading about the stoning of Stephen? Do you think you could be a Christian martyr, if called to it?**

6/12 - Wow. Acts chapter 8 verses 18 & 19 should be a warning to each of us to not lose sight of where spiritual power truly comes from - *"When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given when the apostles placed their hands upon people's heads, he offered money to buy this power. "Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!"* Scary stuff... but I have a hunch this type of thing still happens today. People want to "buy" faith or buy spiritual power. God ain't selling it. It's a free gift. Salvation is free. It ain't for sale. I pray that each of us realizes that our faith in Jesus is a free gift. We didn't buy it. We didn't earn it. And we most definitely should not exploit our free gift of faith in any way for \$. That is scary to consider. And if we are blessed with what appears to be spiritual power in any way, I pray we realize that this power comes only from God, and not from ourselves. And if we ever happen to think that spiritual power comes from ourselves, then I am sure we will quickly learn the maxim - "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." Spiritual power goes bankrupt quick if we ever try to claim it as our own...

6/12 - Today in Acts chapter 8 we read about Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch. In verses 34 and 35, just after the eunuch has finished reading verses in Isaiah 53 about Jesus, we will read - *"The eunuch asked Phillip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else? Then Phillip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."* I wonder about this in our lives today - do you think there are people that you know who are trying to understand who God is and what God is saying, just like this eunuch was trying to understand? Are there people in your life who may be seeking God and Jesus? If so, will you be like Phillip was for this eunuch for these people in your life? Will you begin with wherever these people are ("that very passage"), even if they are very far from God, and begin to share with them the good news about Jesus? Yes, this story about the Ethiopian eunuch is a very quick conversion story. Not all of our stories of having conversations with others seeking God will turn out like this. In fact, I'd venture to say that many will take many months and maybe even several years. **Q: But, even if it takes a lifetime of conversations with someone about the good news of Jesus, isn't it worth it? Who in your life is God calling you to share the good news about Jesus with? Will you begin those conversations now? And, perhaps most importantly, will you begin praying for those that God has placed in your life - praying that they will come to understand who God truly is?**

6/13 - Big readings today! Saul is converted to Christianity by Jesus himself! I think this is the most powerful conversion story in all of the Bible! **Q: In your life, what was your conversion story? Do you mind sharing your testimony here with others? Perhaps it may not be as dramatic as Saul/Paul's story, but do you think it is just as special in God's eyes?**

6/13 - As I was reading Acts chapter 9 today, I thought more about Ananias than I have before. Can you imagine being Ananias and being asked to go find Saul of Tarsus? Ananias demonstrated amazing faith in today's readings. God's words to Ananias about Saul in verses 15 & 16 are powerful - and as we now know, so very true: *"But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say. For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for me."* Great stuff... **Q: In your life, who might God be calling you to go visit - like he called Ananias to visit? Is there someone who is waiting for you to visit them, lay hands on them, and open up their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit?**

6/14 - Wow. Something about Acts chapter 9 verse 31 really stood out to me as we read about the early church today: *"The believers were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit."* Read this verse again. Whaddya think? The believers of the early church were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. I don't know about you, but I want to walk like that! I love that dichotomy - that balance - of walking in fear and comfort. No - don't get me wrong - I'm not talking about a fraidy-cat type of fear. But I am talking about a healthy / respectful fear - I mean, just look at the image

above again of the lion and the man of God. I don't mean to bag on the man of God by any means, but I think it is safe to say that he was walking in the "fear of the Lord" when he shunned Jeroboam's invite, but then he may have not been walking in the "fear of the Lord" when accepted the old prophet's lie. **Q: And, like the old prophet in today's Kings readings, do you think that people will lie to you and me today? Will the Enemy, the Destroyer, seek to lie to us? If so, do you think there is value in walking in the "fear of the Lord" today?** While - at the same time walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. There is something about the wisdom of this verse in Acts today that I really really like. This may be one of those verses to really meditate upon. I think there is so much value in this verse for our lives... **Today - are you walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit?**

6/15 - I love it! Almost every time we see an angel visit someone the visited person is panic stricken by the angel! :) Acts 10 Verse 4 today - *"Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel."* Seriously, it's pretty consistent that people in the Bible get freaked out by angelic visitors. Probably because it's a pretty rare thing. **Q: Don't you think you'd get freaked out / scared if an angel visited you?** I am pretty sure I would. Maybe that's why angels only show up in our human world visuals when something big needs to happen. Something big happens in today's (and tomorrow's) readings with Cornelius and Peter. **Have you ever had any spiritual experiences that have freaked you out? (positive or negative)**

6/15 - Before we get to the big thing that happens today with Peter, check the remainder of verse 4: *"And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have not gone unnoticed by God!"* Hmm... **Q: Think God pays attention when we give gifts to the poor? Have you found a consistent way to give gifts to the poor?** (If not, might I suggest one avenue? World Vision. I know they do amazing work caring for and creating self-sufficiency for the poorest of the poor worldwide. I've been sponsoring children with them for the past 7 years and volunteering with them the past three years. One very powerful thing you can do with World Vision - in addition to sponsoring a child, which I think is the most impactful - is that you can literally buy things like a goat or a cow or fruit trees for the poorest of the poor worldwide. And you can buy these things for someone you know, in their honor, as a gift. Really. So, next time you are struggling with what to buy the person who has plenty of stuff a wedding gift or a birthday gift or whatever, buy a goat in their honor at World Vision! It's a beautiful thing. All you'd ever want to know about the life-changing opportunity of sponsoring a child through World Vision is at this link - www.WorldVision.org - and click on [Gift Catalog link](#) for all the details on buying goats and cow and fruit trees. Thanks for considering.)

6/15 - Okay, back to today's readings and the big happenings. I think Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion answers the question well of "What was the meaning of the vision Peter saw?" as follows: "According to Jewish law, certain foods were forbidden to be eaten ([see Leviticus 11](#)). The food laws made it difficult for Jews to eat with Gentiles without risking defilement. In fact, the Gentiles themselves were often seen as 'unclean.' Peter's vision meant that he should not look upon the Gentiles as inferior people whom God would not redeem. Before having the vision, Peter would have thought that a Roman officer could not accept Christ. Afterward, he understood that it was his responsibility to go with the messengers into a Gentile home and tell Cornelius the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ."

6/16 - Acts 10 verses 25 & 26 stood out to me today - *"As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell to the floor before him in worship. But Peter pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm a human being like you!"* This reminds me that this type of stuff can still happen today. I am afraid that sometimes we can end up worshipping people today, instead of worshipping God. And I'm afraid that this can oftentimes happen in the context of our churches. I have to say that I have seen what almost looks like worship of Pastors at churches. And that ain't a good thing... Pastors are human beings just like us! Yes, they are called to a very high standard in Paul's letter to Timothy, which we'll read later this year. But Pastors are not God. They are not divine. They should not be worshiped. Yes, they can help lead us in worship of God in great ways and with great messages. But let us make sure we are directing our worship at the true Rock and Light and Author of All who will never fail us and never let us down - God. So, stand up before your pastor. Pastors are humans just like us... **Q: Why do you think we sometimes place our pastors on pedestals? Have you ever made this mistake?**

6/16 - Peter's words in verses 34 - 36 are so powerful and are a huge turning point in the Gospel beginning to be preached to the Gentiles (non-Jews) - *"I see very clearly that God doesn't show partiality. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. I'm sure you have heard about the Good News for the people of Israel--that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."* **Q: Do you believe that God does not show partiality? Do you believe that in every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right? Do you believe there is peace with God through Jesus? Do you know this peace?**

6/17 - I love how Peter answers his "critics" in Acts chapter 11 today. He simply tells them the story of what happened. And through this plain and simple act of telling his story truthfully we get to verse 18 - *"When the others heard this, all their objections were answered and they began praising God. They said, "God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of turning from sin and receiving eternal life.""* **Q: And this makes me wonder about our lives today. How do we answer our "critics" when it comes to our faith? Is it possible that we can answer our critics simply by telling our story? Just like Peter simply answered his critics with his story? Is it possible that our story of how God reached out and changed our lives could be very effective in winning hearts and minds for Jesus? I think sometimes we underestimate the power of simply telling our story. It is our story - and after we tell it, how can anyone really criticize it? Or argue with it? It is our story. Let us tell it. And let us tell our story often and with great love. I believe God can work wonders when we simply tell our stories...**

6/18 - There is a lot going on in today's Acts readings as Peter is freed from jail by an angel! I love Acts 12 verse 5 in this chapter as Peter was put in jail - *"But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him."* **Q: Who are you praying for very earnestly these days? Do you think that prayer changes things? How is your prayer life this very day?**

6/19 - Wow. It is fun to read about Paul's first missionary journey! A very cool thing to note about today's readings is that Paul started his missionary journey not after an extensive planning session / retreat / etc. (all our modern day stuff of what we have to do before embarking on something...) No! Paul started his missionary journey after a time of worship & fasting and being filled with the Holy Spirit! The Spirit moved and thus Paul moved! It was that simple. **Q: Think we can learn something from this in our lives today? Are you listening to the Spirit's prompting in your life today? What is the Spirit prompting you to do? Will you do it?** Check out Acts 13 verses 2 and 3 that show all it took for Paul to begin his missionary journey: *"One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work I have for them." So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way."*

6/20 - Acts 13 is a great sermon from Paul today! Really... this is about as good as it gets for a solid Gospel presentation. Go Paul. I love how he starts off in verse 16: *"So Paul stood, lifted his hand to quiet them, and started speaking. "People of Israel," he said, "and you devout Gentiles who fear the God of Israel, listen to me."* You'll note that Paul delivers this message to both Jews and Gentiles - he is preaching the Gospel for the world! **Q: Are you really listening to Paul's message to you in today's readings in Acts? What are you learning from the book of Acts?**

6/21 - Great readings today about how Paul and Barnabas' ministry to the Gentiles was growing! Verse 52 is awesome: *"And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."* **Q: Are you filled with joy? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? How does this joy & the Spirit manifest itself in your life?**

6/22 - Do you see the depth and strength and love of Paul's faith in Acts 14 verses 19 & 20 - *"Now some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and turned the crowds into a murderous mob. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, apparently dead. But as the believers stood around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe."* Paul is stoned and then gets back up and keeps going forward in his ministry for God! Next thing you know he is praying and fasting for elders in churches - after nearly getting stoned to death! I want a faith like that... Also, it is wonderful to read in today's readings how Paul and Barnabas tear their garments because they are so distressed that people were worshiping them as if they were gods! **Would we react so quickly to stop people from worshipping us today I wonder... ?**

6/23 - Peter's teaching at The Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 verse 11 is one of the most important verses that all of us should really meditate upon and know and believe: *"We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the special favor of the Lord Jesus."* **Q: Do you believe Peter here? Do you believe this to be true? Does this simple message of this little button below ring true to you?**

6/24- In Acts 15 today we read about Paul not wanting to bring along John Mark on the next missionary journey. Good news is that Paul and Mark were eventually reunited in missionary efforts. Some speculate that it was because Barnabas went with Mark at this juncture, Barnabas' patient encouragement helped Mark's eventual effective ministry. In fact, John Mark is the very same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark! **Q: How's that for encouragement changing the world?? Is there anyone in your life today who you think could be a great worker for God's kingdom with some encouragement? Will you be like Barnabas was for John Mark and work with and encourage that person?**

6/24 - Today in Acts 16 we read about Paul's 2nd missionary journey, which took place around AD 49-52. Great readings about the conversion of Lydia of Philippi today! She was a business woman and a Gentile (like Cornelius) who loved God. And the Lord opened her heart and she believed! Praise God for his continual ministry of opening people's hearts to the Gospel. **Q: Has your heart been opened like Lydia's was opened?**

6/25 - Today in Acts 16 we will read about the earthquake that comes while Paul and Silas are imprisoned! As a trembling jailer comes to Paul and Silas we will read this in verses 30 through 34 – *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family."* This is a wonderful look at how many of us become and grow as Christians! We first hear the Good News of how Jesus came to this earth fully human and fully God – how he lived a sinless life and died on the cross for our sins – and how he rose from the dead and will come again. Then, through God's grace, we believe! We simply believe. From there we learn more about God from others and through studying his Word, the Bible – we can call this discipleship. Then comes a decision to be baptized – to publicly profess our faith in Jesus as our Savior. Then comes living a joyful life of community with others. Now – yes – this is a very abbreviated example of how one becomes and grows as a Christian. :) And our various denominations will probably put the order of how all this happens in various ways. **Q: But, can you see similarities in your own faith journey with the jailer's conversion, baptism, and growth as a Christian? Do you remember first hearing the Good News of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? Do you remember the day you first Believed? Do you remember learning more about the Word, the Bible? (hopefully you'll remember this year's One Year Bible journey! :) Do you remember being baptized (or maybe you'll have photos or stories from your younger years)? Do you now joyfully live life in community with other Christians through your local church? If you haven't yet experienced all of these things, will you pray to God asking him for the experiences He has planned for you? And, when others in your life come to you like the jailer, asking "What must I do to be saved?" are you prepared to give them the joyful answer?**

6/26- Great reading about Paul's travels and preaching in Acts 17 today! I absolutely love the quote in verse 6 where the Jewish leaders of Thessalonica say: *"Paul and Silas have turned the rest of the world upside down, and now they are here disturbing our city," they shouted.* **Q: Have you ever heard that the Kingdom of God is an "upside down" kingdom? That the values of the Kingdom of God are upside down compared to worldly values? Paul and Silas turned the world upside down. How are you turning the world upside down in your life today?**

6/26 - Today in Acts 17 verses 22 & 23 we read - *"Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."* Paul then went on

to introduce to the Greeks our personal Creator, in contrast with their views of pantheistic Stoicism. **Q: Are there people in your life today that are perhaps like the Greeks Paul was speaking to? People who are religious but do not yet know our personal Creator? Are there people in your life who are seeking the Unknown God? Will you begin conversations with these people that God has placed in your life and let them know about the living God that you know and love? Will you let them know, as Paul let the Greeks know in verse 28 – “For in him we live and move and have our being.” As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.”?”**

6/27 - Today's readings in Acts 18 are important in that Paul is beginning his work of building the church in Corinth through his ministry! We of course are very familiar now with Paul's letters of 1st and 2nd Corinthians - today we get a glimpse of how Paul's relationship with the city of Corinth began. Verses 9 through 11 let us clearly know that the Lord was very involved in Paul's ministry in Corinth: *"One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will harm you because many people here in this city belong to me." So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God."* Per Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion today: "Corinth was the political and commercial center of Greece, surpassing Athens in importance. It had a reputation for great wickedness and immorality. A temple to Aphrodite - goddess of love and war - had been built on the large hill behind the city." **Q: How are you involved in helping to build or support the church today? What are some ways that God has called you to love and serve your local church? How about the global church?**

6/28 - Today in our readings in Acts, we are introduced to Apollos! Apollos loved God, but initially he didn't fully understand that Jesus gave believers the gift of the Holy Spirit. Apollos understood repentance of sins very well - that was the "baptism of John (The Baptist)" that he preached. Repent from sins and be baptized was Apollos' message, without a strong teaching of the gift of the Holy Spirit after belief in Christ. Well, Priscilla and Aquila more fully explained the Gospel and then Paul introduced the Holy Spirit to believers who were initially taught by Apollos before he learned the full Gospel. A good overview of "Who was Apollos?" is at biblequestions.org [at this link](#). I love that they say at this link, "Apollos was teachable." Inferring that you and I should be teachable too when it comes to our faith! **Q: Are you teachable? Or do you know it all? :)**

6/29 - Wow - strong readings today in Acts 19 verses 13 to 16 about the power of Jesus' name - and how to incorrectly try to "use" his name too - *"A team of Jews who were traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus. The incantation they used was this: "I command you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. But when they tried it on a man possessed by an evil spirit, the spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul. But who are you?" And he leaped on them and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and badly injured."* Jesus' name is the name above all other names - but we should never try to "use" Jesus' name as an incantation or spell. We can call upon Jesus believing that he and his power will be there with us. But we should not call upon Jesus' name as if His name was "magic" in some way. It is holy. It is not magic. **Q: When is the last time you called on Jesus' name? How has calling on the holy name of Jesus ever changed a situation in your life?**

6/29 - Sad stuff that Demetrius stirs up the Ephesians against Paul for one primary reason - his pocketbook. Paul's preaching of the one true living God was cutting into D's profits of handmade gods. And so D called on patriotism and loyalty to Artemis to go against Paul's truthful teaching. **Q: I wonder if we in our lives today ever choose our finances over God? Have you ever chosen finances over God? How does this play into your giving/tithing?** An interesting note from today's readings is that the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World". Jesus obviously is the One wonder of the entire world - ever ancient, ever new.

6/30 - Acts 20 verse 7 is a great look at an early church service! *"On the first day of the week, we gathered to observe the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching; and since he was leaving the next day, he talked until midnight."* Paul preached until midnight? That had to have been one great sermon I am sure! Well, and yes, Paul raised to life a young man named Eutychus who fell from the window sill during his sermon if you didn't notice! Wow... that's amazing. I honestly think I've kind of flown by this little tidbit

before. Paul raised Eutychus from the dead! **Q: Have you ever heard a sermon that went long and yet was so powerful the time flew by and you didn't notice the length? Do you enjoy hearing a good sermon preached? Are you okay if it goes long?**

PSALM 119:153 - 148:14

6/1 - We finish Psalm 119 today... :(I am sad. I loved reading through this Psalm again! For some reason it meant so much to me these past few days. I pray this Psalm has been good for you as well this go round. I think the last 3 verses of this Psalm are worth us camping out on here for a moment. In verses 174, 175 & 176 the author of Psalm 119 closes out the Psalm with what I think is a prayer and a confession all in one - *"O LORD, I have longed for your salvation, and your law is my delight. Let me live so I can praise you, and may your laws sustain me. I have wandered away like a lost sheep; come and find me, for I have not forgotten your commands."* Wow... not a bad prayer and confession, eh? **Q: Is God's Word your delight? Do you wish to live so you can praise God? Does His Word sustain you?**

6/2 - Psalm 120 is the beginning of 15 Psalms known as "songs of ascent!" This could mean the ascent of the stairs to the Temple in Jerusalem - or more likely the annual religious pilgrimages and the ascent to Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Are you ready for the next 15 Psalms of Ascent? Verse 1 in this Psalm should be encouraging to each of us: *"I took my troubles to the LORD; I cried out to him, and he answered my prayer."* **Q: Do you have troubles in your life? Have you brought them to God in prayer? Will you? Will you allow him to answer your prayer?**

6/3 - Psalm 121 is the second in this series of 15 Psalms of ascent that were likely written for religious festivals when people were making their pilgrimages to Israel. I love verses 3 & 4 today - *"He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep. Indeed, he who watches over Israel never tires and never sleeps."* How about that! God does not sleep! This reminds me of other parts of the Bible where it talks about God being pure light and having no shadows. God is also so perfect that he does not sleep! I like that... Allows me to sleep better at night. I'll no longer need to count sheep now! :) And the closing verse 8... wow... *"The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever."* **Q: Do you believe this is true? Do you believe that God watches over you - always?**

6/4 - Psalm 122 is the third in this series of Psalms of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This is a joyful Psalm today! Today in Psalm 122 verse 1 we read - *"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'"* **Q: Have you ever had this experience? Have you ever rejoiced when someone invited you to attend church? Have you ever given this experience to others? Have you said to others in your life, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"? Do you make it a regular habit to invite people to church? Does church bring joy to you? Do you think it might then also bring joy to others? Others who are waiting for you to simply invite them? Will you? Will you rejoice with those around you through the simple & graceful act of an invitation? Are you yourself part of a church community? Are you attending church on a regular basis? Do you believe that being in community with other Christians each week will help grow your relationship with God? If you are not part of a church community, will you seek one out this upcoming week?**

6/4 - And verse 6 is so true then - and still true now - *"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."* **Q: Will you join me in praying for the peace of Jerusalem? How often do you pray for the peace of Jerusalem?**

6/5 - Psalm 123 continues the songs of Ascent. Psalm 123 is a short one, but a great one. I love these portions of verses 2 and 3 - *"We look to the LORD our God for his mercy....Have mercy on us, LORD, have mercy..."* **Q: Do you look to the Lord for his mercy? What does God's mercy to you look like? Why would you need God's mercy? Do you pray to the Lord this simple prayer - "Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy"?**

6/6 - I read in a commentary that Psalm 124 was likely a call and response from a Levitical priest and worshipers. Verses 1 through 5 were likely spoken by the priest and verses 6 through 8 were the response of the people. Great way to read this Psalm! Even though this Psalm title says it is a "Psalm of David", some commentaries believe this Psalm is post-exile from Babylon based on verse 8: *"We*

escaped like a bird from a hunter's trap. The trap is broken, and we are free!" Though, I could see that verse apply to Davidic times too. Verse 8 is a joyful response that hopefully each one of us can sing confidently: *"Our help is from the LORD, who made the heavens and the earth."* Amen and Amen! **Q: How is God your help today?**

6/7 - Psalm 125 has great verses in 4 & 5: *"O LORD, do good to those who are good, whose hearts are in tune with you. But banish those who turn to crooked ways, O LORD. Take them away with those who do evil. And let Israel have quietness and peace."* I love that closing line - let us have quietness and peace! What a great prayer. Don't we all wish for quietness and peace in our lives? One thing I'll recommend - which I am trying so hard to learn myself - is to take a Sabbath day of rest each week. Just rest. Just be peaceful. Just be with God. One day a week. It will dramatically change the other 6 days of your week without a doubt. Will you join me on this quest for quietness and peace in our lives by taking a Sabbath day of rest once each week?

6/8 - Psalm 126 has a great verse today. I always love the verses in Psalms that speak about water! I don't know what it is about these verses, but here's verse 4: *"Restore our fortunes, LORD, as streams renew the desert."* **Q: Do you believe that God can restore your life like water restores the desert? Will you allow God's water into all the nooks & crannies in your life that are in need of renewal? Do you believe that God is living water? Are you thirsty for that living water in your life? Will you drink the Water?**

6/9 - It is interesting to note that Psalm 127 today is written by Solomon. Think he might have written this around the time of building the temple? It would be very fitting! Psalm 127 verse 1 I think I heard for the first time verbally a couple of years ago on a Habitat for Humanity job site. Each morning the volunteers would take turns leading devotions before the day's build. One morning a volunteer read Psalm 127 verse 1 to all of us, which was absolutely fitting for working on a Habitat house - *"Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good."* Great stuff and I believe this verse is not only applicable to working on Habitat houses, but is very applicable in our own lives as well. **Q: Are there things we are building or creating in our life that might be outside of God's will for our life? Are we building these things on our own? If so, should we be building these things? Will we take to prayer all that we build in our lives and seek God's guidance and blessing upon our work? Is God building our life or are we attempting to build with our own power? Is God protecting our life or are we attempting to protect ourselves with our own power?**

6/9 - Speaking of work, I also love verse 2 in this Psalm: *"It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones."* Great verse to combat our workaholic tendencies, no? :) **Q: Do you overwork yourself these days? What for? Is this pleasing to God? Are you taking a Sabbath day of rest once a week to simply be in relationship with God? To enjoy God's rest?**

6/10 - Psalm 128 verse 1 stands out today: *"How happy are those who fear the LORD-- all who follow his ways!"* **Q: Do you think it is possible to be happy and to fear God at the same time? Do you believe a healthy fear of God is, well, healthy? Why would we fear God - God who loves us immensely? What is this Psalmist saying to us today in our lives? What are some ways that you are literally "fearing the Lord" in your life today? Do you agree with the Psalmist that those who fear the Lord are happy? Why or why not? Have you gone through periods of your life where you did not fear the Lord? Were you happy then?**

6/11 - Psalm 129 is a prayer for the continuing withering of Israel's enemies and verse 4 likely represents a celebration from Babylonian captivity - *"But the LORD is good; he has cut the cords used by the ungodly to bind me."* **Q: How about in our lives today? Has Jesus cut any cords used by the ungodly to bind you? Are there still some cords being used by the ungodly to bind you? Will you let Jesus cut those cords? Will you let Jesus free you from that captivity? Do you believe that Jesus is good and that he wants to cut the cords that bind you? Do you believe that Jesus cares for you?**

6/12- Psalm 130 is amazing today! Each verse is jam packed with good stuff to think about.... Actually - if you get a chance - please read through each of these verses again, and meditate for a moment on each one and what each verse might be speaking into your life and your heart. I think you will find tons of relevant meditations in this Psalm for your life. Today in Psalm 130 verse 5 we read - *"I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word."* **Q: Are you counting on God in your life? Really counting on him? Have you put your hope in his Word, the Bible? Do you believe that reading and meditating and reflecting on the Bible can transform your life and your relationship with God? What is your plan to stay in God's Word each and every day for the rest of your life? (I hope it is the One Year Bible! :) Should you have a plan to be in God's Word each and every day?**

6/13 - Psalm 131 verse 2 is a beautiful reflection! *"But I have stilled and quieted myself, just as a small child is quiet with its mother. Yes, like a small child is my soul within me."* What a great reflection and reminder to take 1 day a week as a Sabbath day of rest. A day to still and quiet yourself. Just like a small child is with its mother. **Q: Have you been still and quieted yourself recently? Why would David, the Psalmist, write about this? Why would this be a good thing to do?**

6/14 - Psalm 132 is a fantastic psalm of the King David era! It is thought that this Psalm may have been written for the dedication of the temple or it may have been used in a coronation ceremony. Verses 4 & 5 stood out to me today as demonstrating David's dedication to God - *"I will not let my eyes sleep nor close my eyelids in slumber until I find a place to build a house for the LORD, a sanctuary for the Mighty One of Israel."* **Q: What in your life is keeping you awake at night? Is it something of God's will? Or perhaps something worldly (not of God's will)? Will you pursue God's will in your life, and leave worldly things behind you? Will you pursue building "a sanctuary for God" in your life above all else?**

6/15 - Psalm 133 is a great short Davidic Psalm about harmony! Verse 1 sets the pace of this psalm nicely: *"How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when brothers live together in harmony!"* **Q: Do you consistently seek harmony in your interactions with others? Do you pray for peace?**

6/16 - Psalm 134 is a great little Psalm! This Psalm is basically taking place as worshippers are leaving the Temple in Jerusalem for the night - and in the first two verses the Worshippers are speaking to the Levites (priests) in the temple - giving blessings to the Levites and asking them to bless God overnight. Then, in the third verse the Levites give a departing blessing to the worshippers as they leave the temple: *"May the LORD, who made heaven and earth, bless you from Jerusalem."* And that is certainly my prayer for each of you reading this - May God bless you! **Q: Does your church have closing benedictions or blessings, at the end of services? How does this impact you?**

6/17 - Today in Psalm 135 verse 3 we will read this very simple, yet profound verse – *"Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant."* The words I want to focus in on here are "the Lord is good." **Q: Do you believe this to be true? Do you really – in your heart – believe that God is good?** I think this is important for us to really meditate upon. I'm afraid sometimes we get into our minds that maybe God is not always good. Maybe we start to think that God is out to get us. Or out to trick us. Really isn't looking out for us. Doesn't really like us. Doesn't really love us. These are all of course lies that come into our mind from the Enemy, the Destroyer. God is obviously good. So good. All of the time. And maybe sometimes we really need to remind ourselves of this. Even in the midst of challenges and struggles and addictions and hardships – God is good. God is there with us. God is leading us – and maybe even taking us through a hardship to bring us to the Promised Land on the other side. Our human minds will often not understand God's ways. But, I think for us to always remember that God is good is so important for our continuing growth in our relationship with God. **So, again, do you believe the words of this Psalmist? Do you believe that God is good?**

6/18 - Psalm 136 is a liturgy of Praise to God as Creator and Redeemer. A Levitical priest singer likely led the recital, while either worshippers or a Levitical choir responded with the refrain. Fun Bible factoid here - the response "His love endures forever" is repeated 26 times in this Psalm, which is the numerical

value of God's name "Yahweh" - back when Hebrew letters were also used as numbers. A lot of intricacies went into the Psalms... some of which do get lost in translation from Hebrew to English. Below is an image of the Hebrew letters yud, hey, vav, hey -- often depicted in English as YHWH or Yahweh -- spelling the name of God.

6/19 - Psalm 137 is a Psalm reflecting upon the Israelites exile in Babylon and about how much Jerusalem was missed. We also read about a call to punish Edom for their rejoicing in the fall of Jerusalem. Later this year we will read prophesies against Edom in the book of the prophet Obadiah. Verses 8 & 9 read: *"O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."* I realize that verses 8 & 9 in this Psalm may be troubling. I found a couple of links with essays / thoughts on this verse. I'll need to reflect on these - and study further - to see if I agree or disagree w/ what these are saying:

http://www.learnthebible.org/q_a_dashing_little_ones_against_stones.htm

<http://www.jimmcguiggan.com/nonbelievers2.asp?id=6>

<http://www.brfwitness.org/Articles/1986v21n4.htm>

6/20 - Psalm 138 is an awesome Psalm of thanksgiving and praise to God from David! You'll note that the word Temple is used in verse 2 - and of course the Temple was built by David's son Solomon. It is thought that David used the word Temple in reference to the tent holding the Ark of the Covenant. Some have also thought that this Psalm possibly was written after David's time, in the post-exile period. Either way, it is a beautiful Psalm of praise. Psalm 138 begins a final collection of eight "Davidic" Psalms, which are framed by songs of Praise in Psalm 138 & Psalm 145 - and Psalms 139 through 144 are six prayers. In Psalm 138 today, verse 3 stood out to me - *"When I pray, you answer me; you encourage me by giving me the strength I need."* **Q: Do you believe that God answers your prayers? Maybe not exactly in the way you'd expect, but that they are answered? Do you believe that God answers your prayers through encouragement and by giving you strength?** Verse 7 stood out to me as well - *"Though I am surrounded by troubles, you will preserve me against the anger of my enemies. You will clench your fist against my angry enemies! Your power will save me."* **Do you believe that Jesus' power will save you in times of trouble? Or do you rely on your own power and maybe forget about Jesus during times of trouble? Will you rely on Jesus, realizing that only His power will ultimately save you?**

6/21 - Today we read Psalm 139! I LOVE this Psalm... and had somehow forgotten about it. Is this Psalm anyone's favorite Psalm out there? I would not doubt it if was. This is just an incredibly beautiful Psalm about how much God loves and cares for us. And just how well God knows us. Please read and re-read this Psalm this week if you can. And rejoice in how much God loves you and how much he knows you. Each of the verses in this Psalm are incredible. I'll highlight a few. Verse 3 - *"You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am."* **Q: Do you believe that God charts out your path for you? Do you believe that God gives you true rest? Do you believe God knows where you are every single moment of your life?** Verses 13 & 14 - *"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous--and how well I know it."* **Do you believe that God was loving and caring and creating you in your mother's womb? Are you amazed by the complexity and wonder of the human body? Could it be anything other than the marvelous workmanship of a loving and creative and living God?** And verses 23 & 24 to close out the Psalm: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life."* **Do you consistently ask God to search your heart and mind? Do you confess to God what is not right in your heart and mind? What needs healing? Do you ask God to even point out to you things that you may not realize are destructive to you and others in your heart and mind? Do you believe that this process of confessing your sins to God and asking for forgiveness and healing will lead you along the path of everlasting life?**

6/22 - Psalm 140 is a prayer for deliverance from evil. And this Psalm certainly should be a good reminder of the Lord's Prayer, where we pray - "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." **Q: What is the one thing that can truly deliver us from evil? Can we deliver ourselves from evil on**

our own? Or do we need something beyond ourselves for this deliverance? Verse 7 in this Psalm gives each of us something to consider and should be an encouragement: "O Sovereign LORD, my strong savior, you protected me on the day of battle." **Do you believe God is your strong savior who will protect you from evil on the day of battle? Do you believe that perhaps every day is a day of battle? Do you believe that Satan or evil ever rests in attempting to tempt people? Should we pray for protection from evil on a very regular basis? The Lord's Prayer / Our Father is one great way to do this each day...**

6/23 - Psalm 141 is a beautiful prayer of David's - praying for deliverance from the wicked and their ways. Verse 4 is powerful - "Don't let me lust for evil things; don't let me participate in acts of wickedness. Don't let me share in the delicacies of those who do evil." **Q: Is this a prayer you could incorporate into your prayer life? What might be some examples of "delicacies of those who do evil"? Will you pray to God to avoid these "delicacies" and "treasures" that will ultimately fail you?**

6/24 - Psalm 142 is a prayer of David's when he was fleeing Saul and was hiding in a cave. David is praying for deliverance to God from his enemies. I thought verse 3 was powerful - "For I am overwhelmed, and you alone know the way I should turn. Wherever I go, my enemies have set traps for me." **Q: Have you ever felt this way? Overwhelmed? And traps every which way you look? And you have no idea which way to go? At a time like this, will you cry out to God as David did in this Psalm? Will you "pour out your complaints before him and tell him all your troubles"? (v. 2) Do you believe that God knows which way you should turn? Will you allow God to ""be your place of refuge"? In times like these, will you allow God to be "all you really want in life"? (v. 5)**

6/25 - Psalm 143 verse 8 stood out to me today - "Let me hear of your unfailing love to me in the morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I have come to you in prayer." I read somewhere before - I think it was [Bruce Wilkinson's book "Secrets of the Vine"](#) - that many great men and women of our Christian faith connect with God in the morning through prayer, reading the Bible, and other quiet time activities. Bruce even suggested that this is the preferential way to go - to start your day by spending time with God in the morning, rather than at night. Because he said this would then transform the rest of your day - in terms of being more conscientious of our relationship with God. This does make sense to me - and in fact, I have started reading the One Year Bible now in the mornings, and it is a beautiful way to start the day! I like what this Psalmist says - "Let me hear of your unfailing love to me in the morning." And it reminds me that somehow, someway, it almost seems easier to me to connect with God in the morning. Actually - one other thing I used to do in the morning is read a page or two from [Oswald Chambers "My Utmost For His Highest."](#) And I am thankful that I did this in the morning for a season. **Q: How about you? Do you have some way that you connect with God in the morning? Are you able in some way to hear of God's unfailing love for you in the morning?**

6/26 - Psalm 144 verses 3 & 4 are well known! "O LORD, what are mortals that you should notice us, mere humans that you should care for us? For we are like a breath of air; our days are like a passing shadow." **Q: If our days are like a passing shadow, how then should we be spending our days? What types of things should we be investing our time & money into? What should we be investing our very hearts and minds into? Are you wisely spending your passing days in godly ways?**

6/27 - Today's readings in Acts 18 are important in that Paul is beginning his work of building the church in Corinth through his ministry! We of course are very familiar now with Paul's letters of 1st and 2nd Corinthians - today we get a glimpse of how Paul's relationship with the city of Corinth began. Verses 9 through 11 let us clearly know that the Lord was very involved in Paul's ministry in Corinth: "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will harm you because many people here in this city belong to me." So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God." Per Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion today: "Corinth was the political and commercial center of Greece, surpassing Athens in importance. It had a reputation for great wickedness and immorality. A temple to Aphrodite - goddess of love and war - had been built on the large hill behind the city." **Q: How are you involved in helping to build or support the church today? What are some ways that God has called you to love and serve your**

local church? How about the global church?

6/28 - Today in our readings in Acts, we are introduced to Apollos! Apollos loved God, but initially he didn't fully understand that Jesus gave believers the gift of the Holy Spirit. Apollos understood repentance of sins very well - that was the "baptism of John (The Baptist)" that he preached. Repent from sins and be baptized was Apollos' message, without a strong teaching of the gift of the Holy Spirit after belief in Christ. Well, Priscilla and Aquila more fully explained the Gospel and then Paul introduced the Holy Spirit to believers who were initially taught by Apollos before he learned the full Gospel. A good overview of "Who was Apollos?" is at biblequestions.org [at this link](#). I love that they say at this link, "Apollos was teachable." Inferring that you and I should be teachable too when it comes to our faith! **Q: Are you teachable? Or do you know it all? :)**

6/29 - Wow - strong readings today in Acts 19 verses 13 to 16 about the power of Jesus' name - and how to incorrectly try to "use" his name too - *"A team of Jews who were traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus. The incantation they used was this: "I command you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. But when they tried it on a man possessed by an evil spirit, the spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul. But who are you?" And he leaped on them and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and badly injured."* Jesus' name is the name above all other names - but we should never try to "use" Jesus' name as an incantation or spell. We can call upon Jesus believing that he and his power will be there with us. But we should not call upon Jesus' name as if His name was "magic" in some way. It is holy. It is not magic. **Q: When is the last time you called on Jesus' name? How has calling on the holy name of Jesus ever changed a situation in your life?**

6/29 - Sad stuff that Demetrius stirs up the Ephesians against Paul for one primary reason - his pocketbook. Paul's preaching of the one true living God was cutting into D's profits of handmade gods. And so D called on patriotism and loyalty to Artemis to go against Paul's truthful teaching. **Q: I wonder if we in our lives today ever choose our finances over God? Have you ever chosen finances over God? How does this play into your giving/tithing?** An interesting note from today's readings is that the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World". Jesus obviously is the One wonder of the entire world - ever ancient, ever new.

6/30 - Acts 20 verse 7 is a great look at an early church service! *"On the first day of the week, we gathered to observe the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching; and since he was leaving the next day, he talked until midnight."* Paul preached until midnight? That had to have been one great sermon I am sure! Well, and yes, Paul raised to life a young man named Eutychus who fell from the window sill during his sermon if you didn't notice! Wow... that's amazing. I honestly think I've kind of flown by this little tidbit before. Paul raised Eutychus from the dead! **Q: Have you ever heard a sermon that went long and yet was so powerful the time flew by and you didn't notice the length? Do you enjoy hearing a good sermon preached? Are you okay if it goes long?**

6/27 - I love the imagery today in Psalm 145 verse 9! *"The LORD is good to everyone. He shows compassion on all his creation."* **Q: Do you believe that God is good to everyone? Do you feel God's compassion being showered upon you right this very moment?**

6/28 - I love Psalm 146 verse 9 today: *"The LORD protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows."* **Q: If God protects foreigners, orphans and widows, should we protect these folks in our communities as well? How in your life today are you caring for orphans and widows and foreigners?**

6/29 - Psalm 147 was thought to have been written for Levitical singers on the happy occasion of the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem - see [Nehemiah 12:27-43](#). Psalm 147 was divided into two Psalms - verses 1 through 11 and 12 through 20 - in the Septuagint, the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament. However, the Hebrew text has the Psalm as one whole Psalm. Verses 10 and 11 are an incredible middle point of this Psalm that stood out to me today: *"The strength of a horse does not impress him; how puny in his sight is the strength of a man. Rather, the LORD's delight is in those who*

honor him, those who put their hope in his unfailing love." These verses remind me that God really is not impressed with our shows of "strength" or "independence." God is much more impressed when we are dependent on Him. **Q: How are you honoring the Lord with your life today? Do you put his hope in his unfailing love? Or do you rely on your own strength?**

6/30 - Psalm 148 is a call for all creation to praise God! I love it. As I was reading this Psalm I was reminded of the Matt Redman song that we sometimes sing in church that goes something like - "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" I love how the Psalms can stir up worship songs in our minds! We read this in verse 5 - "*Let every created thing give praise to the LORD, for he issued his command, and they came into being.*" **Q: Do you agree with this verse? That you came into being because the Lord commanded it? Do you give thanks to God frequently? And joyfully? Even in the midst of maybe some challenging times in your life, can you still give praise to your Creator?**

PROVERBS 16:14 - 18:7

6/1 - Proverbs 16:15 today is nice: "*When the king smiles, there is life; his favor refreshes like a gentle rain.*" **Q: What else in our life today refreshes like a gentle rain? When a baby smiles at you? When you smile at someone else? When someone else smiles at you when you're having a rough day?** Let us be like gentle rain for each other!

6/2 - Proverbs 16:16 today teaches us: "*How much better to get wisdom than gold, and understanding than silver!*" **Q: Do you believe this Proverb to be true? How do you spend the majority of your time in your life - pursuing wisdom & understanding or pursuing money? What are some ways in your life you can spend more time pursuing wisdom & understanding and less time pursuing money?**

6/3 - Today in Proverbs chapter 16 verse 18 we read this convicting proverb: "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*" I don't know about you, but I struggle with pride. Honestly, I have a hunch that most of us do to some degree. It is part of our human condition I'm afraid. I do believe that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God can save us of our pride. But, we have to really be willing to give it up to them - to let it go. I honestly do not think I have let go of my pride. The thing I've noticed that I've been doing lately - which I think is a symptom of pride - is judging others. I really have been judging others harshly. And it's a horrible thing to do. I caught myself saying something horrible to a friend recently about another group of acquaintances. And I felt so horrible after saying it - but I realized that indeed what I said is exactly what I had been thinking. I had been judging others! I had been prideful! And that is a scary thing. . . if this proverb is true. And I know that it is true. Pride goes before destruction. A haughty spirit before a fall. I realize I'm on a bad course right now of judging others and being prideful. I am thankful that God has shown to me this is a sin I need to repent of. I am praying constantly now for healing and redemption from it. I am confident it will come. But, I am also wise enough to realize that I will need to be diligent and continually pray for healing in this area in my life - judging others and pride. I am afraid that I will struggle with this my whole life. But, that's okay. It makes me realize I cannot do this life on my own. I need God. I need Jesus. I need the Holy Spirit. Otherwise - without them - I would be a prideful & judgmental person. And I would surely fall. . . How about you? Do you struggle with pride? Do you judge others? (really, think about this one. . . it was scary for me to realize that not only do I judge others - but I do it constantly. . .) If so, will you join me in repentance and prayer in these areas? Will you give these sins over to Jesus and pray constantly for redemption and healing in these areas? He will heal you. Surely he will. No one else can. We cannot heal ourselves of pride & judging others on our own. **Q: What are some ways you have dealt with pride in your life in the past? Have you been able to overcome issues of judging others? Have you been able to overcome thinking you are "all that"? How did you overcome these pride issues?**

6/4 - Proverbs 16 verse 20 closes with an amazing little teaching that really stood out to me today: "*Those who listen to instruction will prosper; those who trust the LORD will be happy.*" The first half of this Proverb is great / makes sense. Listen to instruction. Allow some discipline in your life - wait, I mean, *embrace* godly discipline in your life... :) Really. And then you'll prosper. If we ignore instruction. Ignore discipline. No prosperity - financially, emotionally, etc. Fine. Makes sense. But check out that second

half of the Proverb - *"Those who trust the Lord will be happy."* How amazingly simple & true is that?? And how often is this Truth completely missed in our culture today? We look for happiness everywhere else *besides* God!! Yes, we want happiness. But trusting in the Lord for happiness? Forget about it. That seems too easy / boring / etc.. I'd prefer to pursue this addiction, or that greed, or that idol... and our list of looking for happiness from everything besides God can go on and on and on. I am sure you know what I mean. But let's look at this teaching one more time and perhaps we'll really start to let this sink in today: *"Those who trust the Lord will be happy."* **Q: Do you believe this to be true? Do you trust the Lord? I mean, really. Do you really trust the Lord? With everything? With all that you are? In every moment?** Let us seek true happiness where only true happiness can be found! Let us live every moment of our lives trusting in the Lord. **How do you trust in the Lord each day in your life? Meaning, how do you make sure you stay focused on God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in your life every day? Is it through prayer, fasting, community, Bible study, etc.? Do you ever find yourself having some days where you have lost sight of trusting in the Lord? Where you are looking elsewhere for happiness? How do you bring yourself back to trusting in God on those days instead of trusting in worldly things?**

6/5 - Proverbs 16:23 today is fantastic: *"From a wise mind comes wise speech; the words of the wise are persuasive."* **Q: Do you want a wise mind? Do you want wise speech to come forth from your mouth? Where in this world do you think you can find wisdom? Wisdom that will transform your mind? Wisdom that will transform your speech? And then, with that wisdom, how will you persuade others? What would you even want to persuade others toward? Below are a couple of images of Jesus. First image is of Jesus studying as a boy. What can we learn from this image of Jesus and apply to our lives today? Next image is an overview of Jesus' wisdom. Would you agree that Jesus fulfilled this Proverb perfectly? *"From a wise mind comes wise speech; the words of the wise are persuasive."***

6/6 - Today in Proverbs chapter 16 verse 24 we read: *"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."* **Q: How does this verse speak to you? Do you believe that words have power? Do you speak to others with pleasant words? Do you realize that your words literally can be sweet to the soul of others and healing to their bones? Knowing this, would this maybe change how you speak to others? Do you also believe that there is a time and place to speak to someone with words that may not be pleasant, but that are needed discipline?** I do think there is a time and place for disciplinary words to be spoken directly to someone – with love. And though these words may seem harsh at first, over time they may be seen as very pleasant words that someone needed to hear. Generally speaking I do think we can probably do the most good and encourage others to change through pleasant words. **Is there someone in your life today who might be going through a hard time that you can bless with pleasant words? Will you encourage that person today with words that are sweet to the soul and healing to the bones?**

6/7 - Proverbs 16 verse 25 today teaches us: *"There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death."* This is a great reminder that it is so important for us to pay attention to what path we are on! **Q: Really, examine the path you are on this very day... where is it ultimately leading you? To Life or death?**

6/8 - I like Proverbs 16 verse 26 today! *"It is good for workers to have an appetite; an empty stomach drives them on."* This wisdom reminds me of the old adage - "Lord, don't make me too rich that I forget you or too poor that I curse you." **It's better to be a bit "hungry" I think... What are you hungry or thirsty for in your life right now? Are you hungry for wisdom like young Solomon was hungry for wisdom? Are you thirsty to know God more? Are you hungry to love Jesus more? Are you thirsty to read the Bible every day? Are there people around you in your life who may also be hungry? What are they hungry for? Will you help feed them? Spiritually, mentally, physically? Like the food program we read about in Acts today, when was the last time you volunteered at your local food bank or soup kitchen or homeless shelter? If you are called to it, will you sign up to volunteer out there again in this next month? Will you get in the monthly habit of volunteering to feed someone in some way?**

6/9 - Proverbs 16:28 today teaches us: *"A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends."* I do have to admit here that I have been guilty of gossip all too frequently. I think it's one of the easiest sins for many of us to fall into. Everyone else is doing it, we might think, so why shouldn't we? Well, we know why we shouldn't. It's a sin. And it's a sin that I'm afraid sometimes can be found all too often in churches. I would take this Proverb a step further and say that gossip separates not only the best of friends, but separates the best of churches. Let us stop the gossip in our lives and realize it is a sin! **Q: Like me, have you ever struggled with gossip? How have you been able to stop yourself from gossiping about others? Have you ever stopped gossip from happening within a church? Or have you ever just let it happen and fester? Should we be more vigilant about stopping gossip within our churches and within our hearts and minds and on our own tongues?**

6/10 - I love Proverbs 16 verse 31 today! *"Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life."* Let us pray that we all get gray hair - and be thankful for it! Don't dye it away. It is a crown of glory! **Q: How are you appreciating people in your life that are older than you? How are you learning from them? Serving them?**

6/11 - Proverbs 17 verse 1 is so very wise... *"A dry crust eaten in peace is better than a great feast with strife."* I don't know about you, but this Proverb hits home. I have eaten very simple meals in peace that have been so beautiful. And I have also eaten at great feasts filled with drama and angst and strife. The world may preach to us that the latter is better - the feast with all its drama. But, I think the still small quiet voice of God through the Bible indicates the former is better. **Q: Which do you think is better? The peaceful crust or the strifeful feast?**

6/12 - I love Proverbs chapter 17 verse 3 today - *"Fire tests the purity of silver and gold, but the LORD tests the heart."* I think sometimes in our lives we tend to forget to live from our hearts. We live from our minds I think so often - and we can tend to silence our hearts. But God wants our hearts. He wants our hearts to be fully his. God oftentimes will speak to us through our hearts - sometimes I find that God's "still small voice" or God's whisper can only be discerned through my heart. So, let us live from our hearts. And let us realize that God is very interested in our hearts - and will test the purity of our hearts. The heart is so critically important for our spiritual life... **Q: How is the landscape of your heart today? What would God find inside your heart right now? Is your heart pure? Is your heart for God?**

6/13 - Proverbs 17 verse 5 is quite convicting for us to consider: *"Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who rejoice at the misfortune of others will be punished."* That is a powerful realization - if you mock the poor, you mock God. If you care for the poor, you care for God. I have a friend who met Mother Teresa many years back at her home for the sick & dying in Calcutta. And my friend when he met her was trying to tell her all the great stuff he was doing in his life and in his ministry. But, Mother Teresa really didn't care to hear about all his ministry stuff. All she said to him was "Do you want to meet Jesus? Do you want to meet Jesus?" And of course he said "Yes! Of course I do Mother Teresa." So, she led him by the hand down a hall and into a room where a man was on his deathbed. She sat my friend down at a chair by this man's bed. And she placed my friend's hands on this dying man's hands. And she said, "Now you will meet Jesus." And she left the room... and left him in the room with the dying man for about 30 minutes. And you know what - my friend met Jesus that day in a way he had never done so before. **Q: So, how about you. Do you want to meet Jesus? If you've already met Jesus, when and where did you first meet Him?**

6/14 - Proverbs 17 verse 6 is an amazing Proverb today: *"Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children."* The obvious slam-dunk commentary is the grandchildren portion - and I've got an image below for you on that one. But I really want to camp out on "parents are the pride of their children." This is beautiful! You'd think it would go the other way around - and certainly it works the other way around nicely: Kids are the pride of their parents. But parents being the pride of their children - this is great! (and very reminiscent of the Commandment to honor your father and mother) And something each of us should really meditate upon and remember as our parents get older. They are going to need us to care for them. And they should be our pride! **Q: How are your grandchildren or parents your glory or pride? Why do you think the Bible places so much emphasis on the importance of family in our lives? Do you agree with the Bible?**

6/15 - Proverbs 17 verse 7 teaches us today: *"Eloquent words are not fitting for a fool; even less are lies fitting for a ruler."* This is a great reminder, once again, to not lie. One thing I've noticed that people do a lot these days is exaggerate... and I gotta say it makes me uncomfortable. Exaggerating feels like a lie to me. Why exaggerate? Why not just tell it like it is. I mean, I think it's okay to encourage or market or get excited about things truthfully. But, why exaggerate? Particularly when it comes to factual numbers... why exaggerate those? **Q: How about you - do you exaggerate? Think this might be a very close cousin to a lie? If so, can you focus on just telling things straight, like they are?**

6/16 - Wow. Proverbs 17 verse 9 is a challenging one for me today - *"Disregarding another person's faults preserves love; telling about them separates close friends."* I get the wisdom of it initially. Makes sense. Makes me think about a marriage relationship really... :) **Q: But, what about speaking the truth in love? Isn't there is a time and place to let folks know about something that is maybe a major issue that needs some attention?** If someone is doing something wrong that is harming them or others around them, shouldn't we speak up? I know there is a fine line here... I need to meditate on this Proverb a bit more... (This is the beauty of the Bible! We will not understand every single verse every single time. Could take years! The Bible's got depth, that is for sure. I am glad you are on this journey into the depths of the Bible with me this year.) **What are your thoughts on this Proverb? When do we close our mouth to preserve love and when do we not close it?**

6/17 - Yikes... Proverbs 17 verse 13 is no joke - *"If you repay evil for good, evil will never leave your house."* Let us be diligent and prayerful to make sure we never repay evil for good... **Q: Have you ever seen this wisdom of this Proverb in your life or lives around you?**

6/18 - Proverbs chapter 17 verse 14 today is a great reminder that the best way to end a quarrel is to stop it before it starts! *"Beginning a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."* Once the quarrel starts, the waters can quickly flow out of control like a flood. **Q: Is there a simmering matter in your life that you need to address quickly and head-on before it breaks out into a quarrel? Before the floodgate opens?**

6/19 - Proverb 17 verse 16 is interesting to consider: *"It is senseless to pay tuition to educate a fool who has no heart for wisdom."* This is a great question for each of us to ask ourselves. **Q: Today in your life - do you have a heart for wisdom? What type of "tuition" are you paying to gain wisdom / to be educated? Are you paying the "tuition" of time invested in studying the Bible each day?**

6/20 - Proverbs 17 verse 17 is fantastic: *"A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need."* The thing I think about here is that Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John that we are his friends. That is an amazing thing to think about. **Q: As a friend, do you believe Jesus is always loyal to us? Conversely, are we as Jesus' friends, always loyal to Him?** Then, in the second half of the Proverb, as brothers and sisters in Christ, I do believe that we are to help each other in a time of need - much like a family brother or sister would help us. Through Jesus, we become a spiritual family. A family of brothers and sisters that is born to help each other in a time of need. **Are you available to help your brothers and sisters - both in your birth and spiritual family - during their time of need?**

6/21 - Proverbs 17 verse 20 stood out to me today - *"The crooked heart will not prosper."* **Q: Do you believe this is true? What would make a heart crooked? Whom can heal a crooked heart? Jesus? Has Jesus healed your heart yet? Will you let Him do so?**

6/22 - Proverbs 17 verse 22 for some reason reminds me of Paul again from today's Acts readings: *"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person's strength."* Think back again to Paul being nearly stoned to death in today's readings. Think he would have a good "reason" to have a broken spirit after something like that happened to him? But... we see what he goes and does for the Kingdom just after that tragic incident! My hunch is that Paul had a very cheerful heart - because he was in such close relationship with Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit. And his cheerful heart was certainly good medicine for him. He did not allow himself to have a broken spirit - even after nearly being stoned to death! Seriously, Paul is amazing - but don't worry, I'm not worshiping him... :) I am just amazed at

how in love he was with Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit - and how he let that love guide him and propel him forward no matter what. **Q: So, back to this Proverb - do you think it is possible for us at times to "decide" whether to have a cheerful heart or a broken spirit? All of us have something bad happen at some time or another. Is it possible that we can "decide" to be cheerful or broken after something bad happens to us? If it is possible to be cheerful after something bad happens to us, why? I think we could learn from Paul's example. If we are so close in relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, I pray we can weather any storm that life might bring. Any storm. Do you believe this is true?**

6/23 - Proverbs 17:23 today teaches us: *"The wicked accept secret bribes to pervert justice."* This should be a reminder to each of us to never accept bribes! Bribes always pervert justice... **Q: Have you ever seen bribes pervert justice? What are some other actions we might take that are similar to bribes that might unfairly influence a situation?**

6/24 - Today in Proverbs chapter 17 verse 24 we will read – *"A discerning person keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth."* This is a powerful little Proverb. I have been thinking about this quite a bit in recent weeks. I have found that sometimes the world can be so tempting – or maybe distracting is another way to say it. I have found that I have lately had a lot of opportunities to go out and do "fun stuff." Perhaps you could say I've been offered opportunities to "wander to the ends of the earth." And it's been tempting. But, I have realized that if I schedule myself 24 x 7, I don't spend much time thinking about God at all. Reading the Bible? Maybe I can skip it for today. . . And praying for others?? Forget about it. I'm just afraid that we can spend our lives being so distracted that we will lose sight of wisdom. We absolutely need to keep wisdom in view each and every day. That is why I love the One Year Bible format in so many ways – it provides each of us with at least 15 minutes of wisdom in our lives each day! **Q: How about you? How are your days being spent currently? Are you feeling distracted? Are you keeping wisdom in view each and every day? Do you see the wisdom in spending quality time with God each and every day? Do you see the wisdom in not taking any "spiritual vacations"?** (Spiritual vacations are a very bad idea. . . even when you go on a regular vacation, please bring God with you!) Like this Proverb teaches us today, let us keep wisdom in view and not let our eyes foolishly wander to the ends of the earth!

6/25 - Proverbs 17:26 today is an interesting teaching: *"It is wrong to fine the godly for being good or to punish nobles for being honest!"* **Q: Why do you suppose this teaching is in the Bible?** I'm thinking it is because unfortunately all too often the godly are fined or blamed or punished or ridiculed or this list could go on and on... Good becomes bad. And bad becomes good. **Sound like any cultural times that you might know of? :) Let us pray these days that the godly are not punished for being good or being honest. Let us pray the godly are not punished for simply telling the Truth! And let each of us also always remember that when we undergo any sufferings for Jesus, there is Ultimate comfort & encouragement that does come our way...**

6/26 - Proverbs 17:27 is so true - *"A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even-tempered."* And with this I will quietly close out today's posting with few words. :) **Q: Are you someone that typically talks more than you listen, or do you listen more than you talk? Do you think there is wisdom in using few words?**

6/27 - Proverbs 18 verse 1 is a great reminder that God created us to be in community with others! *"A recluse is self-indulgent, snarling at every sound principle of conduct."* **Q: Are you in community with others? In what ways? Are there some ways that God might be calling you to go deeper into community with others? Are you part of a church community? Think God would want you to be part of a church community? Why or why not?**

6/28 - Proverbs 18 verse 2 remind you of anyone you know? :) *"Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions."* I am sure each of us is probably thinking of someone else... but I think maybe each of us needs to reflect on this Proverb and ourselves as well... **Q: Do you literally listen twice as much as you talk? (hence two ears, once mouth) Do you truly listen to others to gain understanding of their point of view? Or are you quick to rush to air your own opinions? I**

know that personally I need to reflect on this one... Let us pray each of us has interest in understanding and not just in hearing ourselves talk talk talk! Let us listen!

6/29 - I love Proverbs 18 verse 4 - *"A person's words can be life-giving water; words of true wisdom are as refreshing as a bubbling brook."* **Q: Have you ever received words of life-giving water from someone? Have you ever given words of life-giving water to someone?** I love the analogy of true words of wisdom being as refreshing as a bubbling brook! So true!

6/30 - Proverbs 18:7 today teaches: *"The mouths of fools are their ruin; their lips get them into trouble."* As I mentioned in yesterday's post, I'm sure all of us probably can think of someone else we think this Proverb really applies to... :) **Q: And yet, again, perhaps should we think about ourselves when it comes to this Proverb? How is the condition of your mouth these days? Is it bringing peace, joy, love, teaching, truth, encouragement to others? Or is it bringing talk about you, yourself, and you all of the time... and worse, bringing talk of hate, judgment and ultimately ruin?** Let us examine the words that come out of our mouths each and every day! Let our mouth be a fountain of life and love for those around us!

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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