

Notes & Group Questions from August 1-8 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)

2 CHRONICLES 30:1 -EZRA 6:22

8/1 - We have great readings today in Second Chronicles chapter 30 about King Hezekiah inviting all of Israel and Judah to celebrate the Passover of the Lord! Yeah, sure, they ended up celebrating it a month later than normal because not enough priests had been purified, nor enough folks gathered in Jerusalem at the original time. But, in light of the Passover not being widely celebrated in many years, this was huge. I love Hezekiah's letter that he wrote - and verse 9 in particular: *"For if you return to the LORD, your relatives and your children will be treated mercifully by their captors, and they will be able to return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful. If you return to him, he will not continue to turn his face from you."* **Q: Think these words of Hezekiah's could apply to us in our lives today as well? Do you need to return to the Lord in any area of your life? Is there a sin that you are still indulging in that is hampering your relationship with God? Will you confess and repent of that sin? Will you return to the Lord?** For the Lord your God is indeed gracious and merciful...

8/2 - Well, it was bound to happen. Assyria conquered Israel. They were bound to go after Judah / Jerusalem soon enough. Tough to stop an ego / power like that. It's "never enough". So, we get the bold boasts before the walls of Jerusalem by King Sennacherib of Assyria's representatives in Second Chronicles 32. Verse 14 includes this boast, which probably didn't make God too happy: *"Name just one time when any god, anywhere, was able to rescue his people from me! What makes you think your God can do any better?"* It's great to see that Hezekiah took all of this to God in prayer in verse 20 - *"Then King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to God in heaven."* Good move! **How often in our lives today, when challenges come our way, do we take the challenges everywhere else BUT to God? Wouldn't it be easier to take them directly to God? Why do we turn to alcohol or drugs or food or worrying or whatever - can we simply take our challenges to the one true living God who can actually do something with them?**

8/2 - Hezekiah later in this chapter receives envoys from Babylon. You'll recall from our Second Kings readings (full details are in [Second Kings 20:12-20](#)) that unfortunately, Hezekiah is a bit too hospitable with these envoys. He believes showing off his wealth will prove that he has worldly power and that the Babylonians will respect him and Judah. Isaiah sees that Hezekiah is relying on worldly wealth and not God, and Isaiah delivers a word from God that Judah will be exiled to Babylon. Indeed, this comes true in 115 years from when Isaiah delivers this word. **Q: How about us, in our lives today – do we try to impress people with our worldly wealth or toys or stuff, like Hezekiah was trying to impress the Babylonians? And further, do we actually try to rely on this worldly stuff rather than rely on God?**

8/3 - Wow... I thought today's readings are some of the best we've had in a while! King Josiah cleaned up house for God! Unfortunately, the southern kingdom of Judah is about to meet a similar fate as the northern kingdom of Israel did. But King Josiah goes down with a fight for the Lord in today's readings! **I wonder about this in our lives today - are we willing to fight for the Lord and his values in the way that Josiah did today?** Or, perhaps "fight" isn't quite the right word, as Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek.... but, then, considering this, should we simply be meek and mild and not fight for things of the Lord? I don't think Jesus modeled this entirely either. Jesus turned over some tables in the Temple and turned over some ideas about God during His life... **Q: What can we learn about a zeal for God from Josiah and Jesus' lives?**

8/3 - Verse 15 reminds me of the old adage - "Dusty Bibles lead to dirty lives..." :) - *"Hilkiah said to Shaphan the court secretary, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the LORD's Temple!' Then Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan."* That is amazing to think about - that finding the Book of the Law in the Lord's Temple was a big find! Most commentaries suggest that the scroll was either the entire Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) or possibly just Deuteronomy. Imagine if you will that the Bible was "forgotten" about for generations and then finally discovered today! King Josiah's words in verse 21 are wonderful repentful words - *"Go to the Temple and speak to the Lord for me and for all the remnant of Israel and Judah. Inquire about the words written in the scroll that has been found. For the Lord's great anger has been poured out on us because our ancestors have not obeyed the word of the Lord. We have not been doing everything this scroll says we must do."* **Q: Have you ever had ah-ha experiences like this in your life? Where you realize finally what God wants you to do - and you realize that you have not been doing it?** Well, fortunately God is a God that Psalm 145 verse 8

tells us, *"is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love."* There is room for repentance with God! **When you have these ah-ha moments like King Josiah did, will you turn in repentance and humble yourself before God?**

8/5 - Today we begin the book of the priest & scribe Ezra!

Author: Ezra

Date: Fifth century B.C.

Content: The book of Ezra deals with the return of the Israelites to the land of Palestine after their captivity in Babylon. After describing first the return and how the work on the Temple was begun, the author tells us the problems that arose. After a great deal of trouble and early failure, the Temple was finally finished and rededicated to the glory of God. The ministry of Ezra is described in some detail, stressing the intercession that he made to God for the wayward people of the restored community.

Theme: When the people of Israel returned home they saw this as the fulfillment of the promise of God. God had said he would never abandon his people, and although they were judged for their sin, God never stopped loving them. That God should care for the world to this degree is the deepest of mysteries. God desires our worship in return for his love, however. This may be seen in that he sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to speed the rebuilding of the Temple after the people, in discouragement, had ceased to work upon it. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 8)*

8/6 - Today in Ezra chapter 3 we read about the Israelites rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. We read in verse 10 – *"When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel."* There are some powerful chapters in Ezra as we read about the start of the rebuilding of the Temple, the opposition to it, and then its final completion. I like that verse 10 above tells us that the priests and the Levites praised God after the foundation to the Temple was laid. And I wonder about this in our lives today. **Q: Is there perhaps a "Temple" of some sort in your life that needs rebuilding? Is there a good habit that you have lost? A bad habit that you have picked up? Have you lost some of your zeal for God that you had earlier in your life? Do you want things to change? Do you want to rebuild a "Temple" in your life? How will you do so? Will you perhaps follow the example of the Israelites in Ezra and begin with the Foundation? Will you take the very first, maybe seemingly small steps to begin to rebuild your Temple? And – when you get to even just the foundation of your Temple being rebuilt, will you praise God as the priests and Levites did in Ezra?** Many blessings to you as you begin your journey with God of rebuilding a Temple in your life!

8/7 - We have great readings today in Ezra about the completion of the second Temple! Note that this second Temple, which was completed on March 12, 516 B.C., is the same Temple that existed during Jesus' ministry. This second Temple was then destroyed by Roman armies in 70 A.D. This second Temple was a lot smaller than the first Temple built by Solomon. And less ornate. And the big thing of course was that this second Temple did not have the Ark of the Covenant nor the tablets of the Law, as these were believed to have been destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar burned Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Nonetheless, the completion of the second Temple was a great cause of celebration for the Israelites who had returned from exile!

ROMANS 15:1-1 CORINTHIANS 3:23

8/1 - Romans 15 verses 2 and 3 definitely give us much to think about: *"We should please others. If we do what helps them, we will build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn't please himself."* That's a bit of a counter-intuitive statement compared to what our culture preaches. We should please others? I think our culture would say instead, "We should please ourselves! It's all about you! You are #1!" and so on. This is the beauty of the Gospel. It is counter-cultural in so many beautiful ways. It's the great revolution. It turns the world upside down. The last shall be first. Blessed are the peacemakers. Rejoice when you are persecuted. We should please others. **Q: So, are you living your life to please others? Are you doing what helps them? Are you building them up in the Lord?**

8/2 - Paul's words in Romans 15 verse 30 stood out to me today - *"Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Do this because of your love for me, given to you by the Holy Spirit."* The thing that stood out to me in these verses is Paul's encouragement to his brothers and sisters in Christ in Rome to pray for him. Not only to pray for him - but to "join me in my struggle." That is pretty powerful to consider. That we can actually join someone in their struggle - in their work for the Kingdom of God - by praying for them! And I'll be honest - I do not do this enough. I rarely join my pastors and family and friends and spiritual mentors in their

struggle by praying to God for them. I rarely join my missionary friends in their struggle by praying for them. I rarely join my brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted in other countries for being Christian by praying for them. I simply do not pray for others enough. And in not doing so, I honestly think I am missing out on something powerful. I am missing out on joining them in their struggle for the Kingdom of God! My selfishness in not praying for others doing Kingdom work in this world is my loss. But - this actually sounds selfish - "my missing out - my loss." Sometimes I guess I try to trick myself into doing something good (praying for others) by attaching a selfish reason (so I won't miss out). The truth here is that our pastors and priests and missionaries and spiritual mentors need us to take up the struggle with them by praying to God for them. Even Paul needed this prayer coverage - and he asked for it! I am afraid that too often our pastors and priests and missionaries and others doing God's work may not ask us for our prayers. But they need them!

Q: So - are you regularly praying for others in your life who are in ministry? Are you joining them in their struggle? Will you begin today / tonight by praying for someone in your life that you know who is in ministry? Will you take up the struggle with them?

8/3 - We finish up Romans today! Tomorrow we embark on First Corinthians! Romans has been a powerful book for me to read and study this year. I hope it has been for you as well? I love the closing words in this book today from Paul in Romans 16 verses 25 through 27: *"God is able to make you strong, just as the Good News says. It is the message about Jesus Christ and his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they might believe and obey Christ. To God, who alone is wise, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen."* **Q: Do you believe that God is able to make you strong? Are there areas of your life currently where you feel weak? Will you turn these areas over to God completely, so that he can strengthen you?** To God, who indeed alone is wise, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

8/4 - Today we begin Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth!

First Corinthians

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Ephesus

Date: A.D. 55

Content: Paul had established a church in the Greek city of Corinth on his second missionary journey (see Acts 18:1-8), but things had gone very badly after his departure. He felt it necessary to write them concerning the many problems that had arisen. They were challenging his apostleship, abusing the Lord's Supper, wondering about eating meat sacrificed to idols, going to court against one another, condoning immorality, denying the resurrection, arguing about marriage - to name a few of the problems. Paul felt that he had to deal with the situation, lest everything in Corinth fall to pieces. As Paul more or less systematically goes through these problems, he touches upon many of the fundamental teachings of the faith.

Theme: Paul's major purpose in writing this letter was to correct some glaring abuses in the church at Corinth, showing the importance of how we live. It is not enough to say that we are Christians; we must also act like Christians. Not to do so is to bring dishonor upon the name of Christ. Paul also stresses the all-sufficiency of Christ for the believer. In Christ we are made pure, holy, and acceptable to God. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 24-25*)

8/5 - Today in First Corinthians 1 verse 18 we read - *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* What does this verse say to you? Does it speak to you in any way? What is the message of the cross? What does the message of the cross mean to you personally? Is it foolishness? Or, is it the power of God? I don't know what it is about this verse, but it really is so powerful for me. I think that it brings the Gospel message back to the central point in time in history - Jesus on the cross. And what Jesus did on the cross changed everything. Jesus changed history. The power of the cross is such that Jesus continues to change things this very moment. He is changing you. He is changing me. **Q: To us who are being saved, is the message of the cross literally the power of God? Do you meditate upon the cross regularly and meditate upon what the message of the cross truly is? Are you sharing the message of the cross with others in your life?**

8/7 - This may be a somewhat of a controversial reflection here, but I'd like to put it out for discussion. Please feel free to let me know your thoughts in the Comments section of the blog below. Today's readings in First Corinthians made me think about all of our various Christian church denominations that we have in our world today. In our readings today, some followed Paul. Some followed Apollos. Some followed Peter. And in our churches today, some follow Calvin. Some follow Wesley. Some follow Knox. And so on. **Q" And I guess I just wonder would the church today look any**

differently today if we simply all followed Jesus? I don't mean to knock denominations here per se. I myself go to a church affiliated with a denomination. I just pray that each of us could look beyond our denominations and look fully toward Jesus. And that we come to realize that no matter what our denominations, we are brothers and sisters through faith in our Lord Jesus. We inherit eternal life through God's grace and our faith in Jesus. We all - no matter our denomination - are "the church" through our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. As Paul teaches us in First Corinthians 3:21-23 - *"So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."*

PSALM 25:1-29:11

8/1 - Psalm 25 has some amazing verses today! I think I could write some reflections and questions on each of the verses today... Maybe a good thing for each of us to do is to re-read this Psalm today and really reflect on what the verses are saying to our hearts. David wrote this Psalm as a prayer for God's mercies when he was suffering affliction for his sins and when enemies were seizing this occasion to attack him. It's a very penitential Psalm. One that we might need to pray to God from time to time as David did. I do like verse 5 a lot and I believe it will speak to each of you going through the One Year Bible this year - *"Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you."* **Do you believe that reading God's Word each day is allowing you to be led by God's truth? Are you being taught each day?** Then - that last sentence in verse 5 is amazing. I cannot honestly say that all day long I put my hope in God. I pray that I do... but I think sometimes I drift away from putting my hope in God and I put my hope in myself - or maybe even sometimes I lose hope! I get discouraged about a situation. I get stressed. I worry. **Q: If we put our hope all day long in God, do you think we would get discouraged, stressed, or worried?** I don't think we would... **Have you ever struggled with worry or anxiety? How have/will you overcome it?**

8/1 - Psalm 25 verse 15 really stood out to me today - *"My eyes are always looking to the LORD for help, for he alone can rescue me from the traps of my enemies."* I have come to realize more and more lately that the Enemy is indeed constantly setting traps for us. I don't mean to scare anyone here - but I think this is something very important for us to realize. It has been said that the greatest trick the Devil can play on us is to make us think that he does not exist. If we don't think the Devil exists, then we logically won't think that he's setting any traps for us. Let me assure you - this is clearly Biblical - the Devil exists. Evil exists in this world. Temptation exists. And evil does not rest. However - the good news - God is so much bigger and stronger and brighter (and this list can go on) than the Devil - the Enemy. David says in this Psalm that his eyes are ALWAYS looking to the Lord for help. Why? Because God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit alone can rescue us from the traps of the Enemy. Again, the traps are out there for us in this modern world. The temptations and dark alleys and wrong turns call to us unceasingly. But - again, great news here - we can be saved from all of that nonsense; all of that darkness; indeed all of that death, through a relationship with Jesus. Jesus saves. Jesus saves us from ourselves. From our sin. And from the Enemy that sets traps for us. **Like David in this Psalm, are your eyes always looking to the Lord for help?** Please don't ever take your eyes off God and His mercies, power, and strength.

8/3 - Today in Psalm 26 verse 2 we read: *"Put me on trial, LORD, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and affections."* What a powerful reflection from David - God, test my motives and affections. **What are your motives? Why do you do what you do in life? Whom are you doing it all for? What are your affections? Who do you pledge your loyalties to? Who do you give your heart to? Where are you investing your time, treasure and talents? Have you ever asked God to test your motives and affections?**

8/4 - Psalm 27 verse 13 is so beautiful - *"Yet I am confident that I will see the LORD's goodness while I am here in the land of the living."* **Q: Do you have this same confidence? What are some examples of how you have seen God's goodness here in the land of the living? What are some examples of how you are sharing God's goodness with others here in the land of the living?**

8/5 - I love verse 11 today - *"Teach me how to live, O LORD. Lead me along the path of honesty."* Teach me how to live... what a beautiful prayer! God - Teach us how to live! Lead us along the path of honesty! Teach us how to live... And Psalm 27 verse 14 today is wonderful for us to meditate upon: *"Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD."* **Is there an area of your life where you feel like you are waiting for the Lord to show up? Do you believe that the Lord will show up?** I pray that this Psalm will encourage within you the virtue of patience. The Lord will show up. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

8/6 - Psalm 28 verse 2 stood out to me today - *"Listen to my prayer for mercy as I cry out to you for help, as I lift my hands toward your holy sanctuary."* The thing that stood out to me is the image of the Psalmist "lifting his hands" in prayer. **I'm curious about this - do you periodically lift your hands in prayer? Do you kneel when you pray? Close your eyes? Bow your head? What do you do to really signify your worship and praise of God? Do you think lifting our hands or doing other body movements can change the way we pray to God - rather than doing nothing unique with our body?** My quick thoughts are that we can absolutely pray at any time in any place without lifting our hands or closing our eyes or bowing, etc. I think this gets toward the idea of "praying unceasingly." However - I do think there is something special about the times in our day when we can really spend some quality quiet time with God in prayer. And the best way for me to personally do this is by really changing my body language first - by kneeling down, closing my eyes, bowing my head, maybe lifting my hands, etc. This somehow I think brings me closer to God - it doesn't bring God closer to me - he's always close. But, somehow, what I do with my body before & during prayer can definitely make a difference in how long I will actually pray to God and how deep into prayer & listening I will go. **How about for you?**

8/7 - Psalm 29 today is a beautiful hymn of praise to God the Creator! Verses 3 and 4 are awesome - *"The voice of the LORD echoes above the sea. The God of glory thunders. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty."* And verse 2 is something for each of us to joyfully obey - *"Give honor to the LORD for the glory of his name. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness."* Amen! **Q: How are you giving honor to God for His holy name these days? How are you worshiping the Lord today?**

PROVERBS 20:13-27

8/1 - Proverbs 20 verse 15 is so true for our modern world: *"Wise speech is rarer and more valuable than gold and rubies."* I hope I don't come off sounding too critical or judgmental here, but I seem to notice that people today talk more and more about "nothing." I mean, I guess it just seems to me that so many of us - myself included - major in minor things. Meaning, we will know every single statistic about our local sports team and talk about these stats all the time. Which then makes me wonder - do we invest as much time into know God's Word, knowing God's Will, as we do in knowing stats? Or knowing gossip on celebrities? Or knowing what's going on with the latest TV reality show? I guess this Proverb today just rings so true for me - Wise speech is rarer and more valuable than gold and rubies. It is rare. And it is valuable. **Q: What type of words are coming out of your mouth these days? Is it wise speech? Or is it perhaps on occasion a whole lot of nothing?** Let us invest our words thoughtfully each day in wise speech. Let us share with others that which is more valuable than gold and rubies.

8/2 - I love Proverbs 20 verse 17! What a great analogy - *"Stolen bread tastes sweet, but it turns to gravel in the mouth."* Stealing is obviously a sin. And the spoils of this sin may taste sweet at first - but quickly turn to inedible gravel in our mouths. Well, I think this analogy works really with any sin we might commit. For one brief moment it seems sweet. But it quickly rots! Why do we sin in the first place? I think we're obviously looking for something. We're thinking the sin is going to deliver us something we're missing. But, of course, it doesn't deliver. It's empty. And sin can only pay the wage of decay and death. Only God can deliver what we mistakenly look to sin to deliver. **Q: Will you repent of sins you are committing? Will you instead turn to God to deliver what you are looking for? He will deliver. Will you stop building upon any mountains of sin in your life that turn quickly to nothing but mountains of gravel?**

8/3 - Proverbs 20 verse 19 is quite a Proverb! Perhaps convicting for some of us - *"A gossip tells secrets, so don't hang around with someone who talks too much."* This Proverb reminds me of something I posted up recently - I find all too often that we all too often talk about "nothing." Or, even worse than talking about nothing is that we talk about others. We gossip. We tell secrets. There is so much wisdom in "if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Keep our mouths shut. You'll be appearing wise this way! :) **Q: Do you gossip? Do you hang around someone that talks too much? Think this is good for your relationship with God? Think this is good for your relationship with others?**

8/4 - Proverbs 20 verse 20 today teaches us: *"If you curse your father or mother, the lamp of your life will be snuffed out."* This is a great reminder to honor your father & mother! **Q: How have you learned to honor your father & mother in your life? Have there been blessings because you have honored them?**

8/5 - Proverbs 20 verse 22 today teaches us: *"Don't say, 'I will get even for this wrong.' Wait for the Lord to handle the matter."* This is a great reminder that Justice is not for us to carry out. Justice is the Lord's! **Q: How have you learned**

the wisdom of this Proverb? Have you waited on the Lord to handle matters in your life? Has this worked out better than taking things into your own hands?

8/6 - Today in Proverbs 20 verse 24 we will read – *“A person's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?”* This is a powerful Proverb for us to consider. Do you believe that your steps are directed by God? I think so often we want to be in control of our own steps. And when we really try to take control of our own steps is when we so often stumble. . . It is so powerful for us to realize that the best thing we can possibly do in our lives is let God direct our steps! Let God lead us. And then let us pray we will follow. The question posed by at the end of this Proverb above is probably frustrating to our modern minds – “Whaddya mean I can’t understand my own way! That ain’t right. I am in charge around here!” Are we really? I mean, really? The question posed by this Proverb reminds me of another wise and famous Proverb in chapter 3, verses 5 through 6 – *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”* We should not ever try to make our own paths straight! Let God do it. He knows where we should be going. All we need to do is trust God. Simply trust.
Q: Do you trust God to direct your steps and make your paths straight?

8/7 - Proverbs 20:27 today is a powerful teaching: *“The Lord's light penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive.”* I love this thought! God's Light penetrates our human spirits, exposing our hidden motives. And this is a very good thing! I believe that most all of us have some "blind spots" in our lives. Blind spots meaning we have sins or issues or motives or bad habits that we don't even know we have! We're blind to them. And God's light - His Light of the world, Jesus - can expose these hidden things to us! I think sometimes this can happen via solitary prayer or worship. However, I think this can also often happen through brothers and sisters in Christ who we ask to point out any blind spots to us. **Q: Have you ever asked anyone in your life to point out a blind spot? Was this painful? Was it ultimately helpful to you? Do you think you have any blind spots in your life today? Will you ask someone who knows you well if you have any blind spots?**

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:

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