

Notes & Group Questions for August 1 - August 31 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)

2 CHRONICLES 30:1 - JOB 39:30

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!

8/8 - We have great readings in Ezra today! It is very encouraging that King Artaxerxes wrote such a strong letter of endorsement for Ezra, the priest and scribe. It made me think that government and religion can work together for good. I found chapter 7 verses 9 & 10 intriguing: *"He had left Babylon on April 8 and came to Jerusalem on August 4, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the law of the LORD and to teach those laws and regulations to the people of Israel."* What I noticed here is that it says about Ezra - "the gracious hand of his God was on him." And why was this? "Because Ezra had determined to study and obey the law of the Lord AND to teach those laws and regulations to the people of Israel." Ezra was living his life not just for himself. He was committed to studying God's law and teaching it to those around him. And thus, the gracious hand of God was on him. And this just makes me wonder about our lives today. **Q: Are we committed to studying God's Word, the Bible, and then teaching it to those around us? Are we like Ezra in any way? Should we be?**

8/9 - Today in Ezra chapter 8 we read about Ezra & crew's return from the exile in Babylon to Jerusalem. I loved Ezra chapter 9 verses 1 through 3: *"But then the Jewish leaders came to me and said, "Many of the people of Israel, and even some of the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the other peoples living in the land. They have taken up the detestable practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and*

Amorites. For the men of Israel have married women from these people and have taken them as wives for their sons... To make matters worse, the officials and leaders are some of the worst offenders." When I heard this, I tore my clothing, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down utterly shocked." And then a wonderful prayer of repentance from Ezra on behalf of the Israelites comes forth in the remainder of chapter 9 today. **Q: When is the last time you prayed a prayer of repentance? Should we pray prayers of repentance regularly?**

8/10 - Powerful readings in Ezra chapter 10 today, as we read about people publicly confessing their sin! Verses 10 through 12 - *"Then Ezra the priest stood and said to them: "You have sinned, for you have married pagan women. Now we are even more deeply under condemnation than we were before. Confess your sin to the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and do what he demands. Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from these pagan women." Then the whole assembly raised their voices and answered, "Yes, you are right; we must do as you say!"* **Q: Do you think there is value in corporate/church repentance of sin? Does your church pray for repentance of sins ever during your services? Think this is a good idea? Should we confess our sins corporately?**

8/11 - Today we begin the book of Nehemiah!

Author: Nehemiah

Date: Fifth century B.C.

Content: The book of Nehemiah continues the story begun by Ezra and deals with life in the restored community. The major point of Ezra is the rededication of the Temple. The major point of Nehemiah is the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem. The book begins by explaining the need Jerusalem had for protection that walls would give. This is followed by a discussion of how the walls were built in spite of numerous problems both in the community and outside of it. A national day of repentance was called for and the project was completed.

Theme: The main theme of this book is the sad fact that people are slow to learn the lessons God wants to teach them. The Israelites had been carried into captivity because of their sin, but now the very same problems rose again. The people were neglecting worship, prayer, and Bible study, not to mention the fact that they were treating each other unjustly. But God in his patience continued to send his messengers to them to offer salvation and pardon. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 8-9)*

8/11 - Today in Nehemiah chapter 2 verse 17 we read *"Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."* I am fascinated by the rebuilding of the Temple that we read about in Ezra and now the rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah. The thought of rebuilding is something that I think each of us needs to meditate upon at times. I believe that over time in our lives we unfortunately can tear things down. Things that need rebuilding. Perhaps we have torn down our faith in some way. Perhaps our love for God. Perhaps our connection to a church community. Perhaps our relationship with a family member. Perhaps our service to the poor. **Q: Is there an area of your life that is in need of rebuilding? Will you meditate upon your life and begin to rebuild in that area? Will you pray to God for strength in rebuilding in that area and will you allow his Spirit to lead you?** I pray you will be encouraged by our readings this week in Nehemiah as you read about the Israelites rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. And I pray you will begin rebuilding the things in your life that have perhaps tumbled down over time!

8/13 - It is great to see Nehemiah's strong character in today's readings! As governor, he could have taken full advantage of collecting food allotments from the people. But he didn't, as he knew these allotments would have been a burden on them. Then, Nehemiah sticks to leading the people in the goal of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem - which was an incredible feat that was pulled off in less than 2 months through God's grace. And this is a wall that was down for 150 years! **Q: Is there anything you can apply to your life through today's readings about Nehemiah? Are there areas of your life where perhaps you are taking advantage of a situation you shouldn't? Is there a goal in your life that you're not moving on that you should? Will you pray to God like Nehemiah did in 6:9 - "But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands.""**

8/14 - We have powerful readings in Nehemiah today! Just to frame up for us the date of these readings, in chapter 8 verse 2 we are reading about October 8, 444 B.C. Verses 2 & 3 today tell us: *"So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the scroll of the law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people paid close attention to the Book of the Law."* You'll note in verse 2 that we read about Ezra for the first time in the book of Nehemiah. And of course we just recently read the book of Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries. Ezra was a priest and scribe - a religious leader - whereas Nehemiah was the governor

- not a member of the religious establishment nor a prophet. However, it's important to note that Nehemiah was a layman who was very devoted to God! Nehemiah pursued God's will in a secular world. **Do you suppose that you and I could learn something for our lives today from Nehemiah's devotion to God as a layperson? As a layperson, are you living your life fully devoted to God and pursuing God's will?** Let us live like Nehemiah encourages us to live in chapter 8 verse 10 today! *"Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!"* **Q: What do you think Nehemiah meant here by saying the joy of the Lord is your strength? Today, in your life, is the joy of the Lord your strength? If not, will you pray to know the joy of the Lord as your strength?**

8/15 - Today in Nehemiah chapter 9 we wrap up the wonderful prayer of the Levites that began in yesterday's readings! This prayer is a fantastic overview of God's grace and discipline to the Israelites. Today in Nehemiah chapter 10 we read the vows of the people, including these in verses 30 & 31: *"We promise not to let our daughters marry the pagan people of the land, nor to let our sons marry their daughters. We further promise that if the people of the land should bring any merchandise or grain to be sold on the Sabbath or on any other holy day, we will refuse to buy it. And we promise not to do any work every seventh year and to cancel the debts owed to us by other Jews."* Related to the concept of the Sabbath in our modern world today, I recently came across a nice review of Bruce Ray's book titled "[Celebrating the Sabbath: Finding Rest in a Restless World](#)" at [this link](#). **Q: Has anyone read this book? Reviews? Anyone have any other good books about the Sabbath you can recommend? How are you doing on taking a Sabbath day of rest?**

8/16 - Today in Nehemiah chapter 11 we read about the people of Israel occupying Jerusalem - and not necessarily by their own choice! Lots had to be thrown to determine which 1 out of every 10 people in rural areas would move to Jerusalem. Verses 1 & 2 tell us: *"Now the leaders of the people were living in Jerusalem, the holy city, at this time. A tenth of the people from the other towns of Judah and Benjamin were chosen by sacred lots to live there, too, while the rest stayed where they were. And the people commended everyone who volunteered to resettle in Jerusalem."* I read an interesting commentary that speculated that some people did not want to move to Jerusalem from the countryside because it would mean they would have to more stringently follow God with their lives. This would be due to social pressures of living in Jerusalem and proximity to the Temple. **Q: And this made me wonder - are we like this in our lives today too? Maybe we go through periods of time where we don't go to church because it means we might have to actually start living our lives like Christians due to the community that church provides?** I am always worried when I get to points in my life where I don't feel like going to church. It is in those moments that I realize how desperately I need church - and yet how I'm trying to avoid going. I don't want to change some behavior. I don't want people to see me for who I really am. I don't want to be too close to the "Temple"... How about you. **If you're called to "move to Jerusalem" by God, will you move?** In the words of a famous Switchfoot song, "I dare you to move."

8/17 - We finish up the book of Nehemiah today! Esther is up tomorrow! Today in Nehemiah chapter 12 we read about the dedication of Jerusalem's Wall, which is awesome to read about. Verses 27 & 28 tell us - *"During the dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem, the Levites throughout the land were asked to come to Jerusalem to assist in the ceremonies. They were to take part in the joyous occasion with their songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, lyres, and harps. The singers were brought together from Jerusalem and its surrounding villages and from the villages of the Netophathites."* **Q: How does music enhance your worship experience these days?**

8/18 - Today we begin reading about Queen Esther! Hold on tight because Esther is an amazing book - and next week we launch into Job, which is incredible in its spiritual depth. We're entering some amazing spiritual territory of the Old Testament. Don't miss it!

~ Esther ~

Author: Unknown

Date: Fifth century B.C.

Content: The book of Esther deals with a momentous event that took place after the Persians had destroyed Babylon and while many Jews were still living in the land of their captivity. The story concerns a Jewess named Ester who had become the wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I). An evil advisor to the king, named Haman, sought the destruction of the Jews in order to gain control of their wealth, but Esther tactfully intervened and saved her people from this fate. Haman was executed, and after some civil strife things quieted down once more. The remarkable deliverance of the Jews was celebrated by a feast named Purim and it remains to this day.

Theme: The providence and power of God are the central points of this book. God was protecting his people even in their captivity and was working all things together for their good. God's power is seen in the overthrow of Israel's enemies. It is important to note that God used human beings to accomplish his purpose here, rather than doing it directly himself. We must be ready at all times to do God's will when he so directs. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One*

Year Bible Companion" p. 9)

Q: How has the book of Esther stood out to you over time? Has this been a meaningful book to you over the years? How so?

8/19 - Today in Esther chapter 4 we read about Mordecai persuading Queen Esther to help save the Jews from Haman's evil plot. In verse 14 we read these amazing words of Mordecai's to Esther: "*And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*" For such a time as this. Powerful words to consider. You'll recall similar words were used in the narrative of Joseph in Genesis – Joseph was sent ahead to Egypt by God to save his family from famine "for such a time as this." Esther was married to the Persian King for such a time as this. And I believe that you and I have been placed on this earth this very day for such a time as this. **Q: Do you believe it is true that you really have been placed on this earth by God for such a time as this? Do you believe that there is a definite purpose for your life that God has called you to? Do you realize that you have the choice – as Esther had the choice – to move forward with God's vision and plan for your life or to say no to God?** Our time on this life is short. We can live our lives in accordance with God's will and purpose for us or we can waste away our life with useless distractions. Trust me - the devil wants nothing more than to distract you from what God has called you to for such a time as this. **So, what say you? Will you live your life wholly and purposefully for God for such a time as this? Will you leave the distractions behind?**

8/20 - We wrap up the book of Esther today! Job begins tomorrow! Okay, somehow I forgot that the book of Esther ended with the Jewish holiday of Purim being instituted. A good FAQ from a Jewish website about Purim is [at this link](#). In doing a google image search on Purim I quickly realized that folks dress up for this celebratory Jewish holiday! There is also a device called the Purim "gragger", which is a noisemaker. When the Purim story is read aloud from the book of Esther everyone boos and shakes their graggers whenever Haman's name is mentioned! (I'm not kidding - it sounds like fun to me! :) More on Purim graggers, including how you can make your own, is [online here](#). Below is a picture of a gragger, and below that is a picture of a woman shaking a gragger at the sound of Haman's name being read during Purim! **Q: Have you ever celebrated Purim or any other Jewish holidays?**

8/21- Yesterday we wrapped up Esther and today we begin Job! We are jumping back in time from 5th century B.C. (Esther) to 10th century B.C. (Job).

~ Job ~

Author: Unknown

Date: Tenth century B.C.

Content: This long narrative poem deals with one of the deepest problems of man: How do we explain sin and suffering, if there exists a God powerful enough to do something about them? The book begins with the suffering of Job being given three sets of speeches by some friends of his: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, each of whom tries to explain Job's misery in a different way. A fourth man, Elihu, tries to summarize the situation, offering yet another explanation of why Job was suffering. Finally, the Lord himself speaks to Job, and Job recognizes that we do not so much need "answers" to life's problems, as we need God himself. Job is then healed and given material and spiritual blessings far beyond his former state.

Theme: The mystery that surrounds human existence and the need to trust in God runs throughout the book. Mankind simply does not have enough knowledge to explain why things happen the way they do. It is possible to rise above our limitations by faith in God, however, because God does know why everything happens and will work good for those who love him. We may thus learn the profound truth that when we have nothing left but God, God is enough. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 9-10)

8/21 - Today Job has a very interesting chapter 1 discussion between God and Satan. **Do you believe in the existence of Satan? Demons? Evil?** In the introduction to the wonderful book, "[The Screwtape Letters](#)," C.S. Lewis writes: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which the human race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." I'll be honest – in my early Christian walk, I did not really believe in the existence of Satan, demons, evil. I believed in God and Christ and Love, and thought that was enough – evil didn't need to exist in my universe. :) Unfortunately, I've heard another quote that: "Satan's greatest trick is to convince a person that Satan does not exist." I now could not agree more. If you don't believe in Satan or evil's existence then you are left open to subtle attacks, without even realizing it. God is so much more powerful than anything Satan can throw at you. But, keep in mind, Satan is throwing temptations at you. **Q: How do you combat the devil's temptations? Read [Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10-18 at this link](#). Do you believe in the existence of Satan? Demons? Evil?**

8/22 - Today in Job chapter 4 we read about Eliphaz the Temanite's first response to Job, including these words in verses 3 through 6: *"In the past you have encouraged many a troubled soul to trust in God; you have supported those who were weak. Your words have strengthened the fallen; you steadied those who wavered. But now when trouble strikes, you faint and are broken. Does your reverence for God give you no confidence? Shouldn't you believe that God will care for those who are upright?"* **Q: How do these words of Eliphaz's speak to you? Are these fair words for him to be saying to Job? Are they fair words for us to consider in our own lives today as well?**

8/22 - Then in chapter 6 Job responds to Eliphaz as follows in verse 2 through 6: *"If my sadness could be weighed and my troubles be put on the scales, they would be heavier than all the sands of the sea. That is why I spoke so rashly. For the Almighty has struck me down with his arrows. He has sent his poisoned arrows deep within my spirit. All God's terrors are arrayed against me. Don't I have a right to complain? Wild donkeys bray when they find no green grass, and oxen low when they have no food. People complain when there is no salt in their food."* **Q: How do these words of Job's speak to you? Are these fair words for him to be saying in reply to Eliphaz? Are they fair words for us to consider in our own lives today as well?**

8/23 - Okay, so I am sure that most of us have heard the old adage "patience of Job." (As in, "she has the patience of Job." etc.) Well, today's chapters 9 & 10 are probably not where this adage came from! :) Job is not showing a lot of patience in these chapters. **Q: Can you blame him? Would you speak differently if you were in Job's situation? Or perhaps would your language be worse?** It is important to note that Job does not curse God directly, as Satan said Job would do in the beginning of the book. Job is certainly complaining about his situation - and, well, not to spoil the book of Job here for you... but Job will repent of what he says to God later in the book. In Job chapter 10 today we read Job's plea to God, including this in verses 18 through 22: *"Why, then, did you bring me out of my mother's womb? Why didn't you let me die at birth? Then I would have been spared this miserable existence. I would have gone directly from the womb to the grave. I have only a little time left, so leave me alone--that I may have a little moment of comfort before I leave for the land of darkness and utter gloom, never to return. It is a land as dark as midnight, a land of utter gloom where confusion reigns and the light is as dark as midnight."*

8/23 - The other adage, in addition to "patience of Job", that I was thinking about in today's readings is "with friends like these, who needs enemies??" :) Zophar in chapter 11 seems to really have compassion-deficiency! I do think that Zophar and Bildad in chapter 8 were trying to say the things they thought Job needed to hear. But they overstated the case I think in a few places. I don't agree w/ Zophar saying in chapter 11 verse 3 that Job mocked God: *"When you mock God, shouldn't someone make you ashamed?"* Here's my question for us today. **Q: Are we sometimes like Zophar and Bildad? Do we jump to conclusions about maybe why bad things are happening to our friends? Do we offer up our big advice and big words and big bluster before really listening to our friends and understanding their situation fully?** I am afraid that sometimes we jump to conclusions far too quickly. I always try to remember the old Stephen Covey adage (wow, 3 adages here in 1 post! :) from the "7 Habits of Highly Effective People": "Seek first to understand, and then to be understood." Let us seek first to really understand our friends or family members issues before we start offering our prescriptions for them. Let us first try walking a mile in their shoes!

8/24 - I forgot how much trash-talking goes on here in the book of Job! It occurred to me that all of this bickering back and forth between Job and his friends keeps transpiring without Satan coming up in their comments at all. Meaning, no one seems to realize that Satan is the one who has afflicted Job! **Q: And I'm wondering if this happens in our lives today as well? Do we sometimes miss it when Satan is literally attacking us? Do we blame others? Blame ourselves? Maybe even blame God? When the blame should be directed at the Deceiver?**

8/25 - "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives!" Whoo-hoo! Awesome words from Job today in chapter 19 verse 25! Job chapter 19 verses 23 through 27 are some of the best known and well loved verses of the book of Job. These verses seem to be where Job hits his high point in his understanding of his relationship with God: *"Oh, that my words could be written. Oh, that they could be inscribed on a monument, carved with an iron chisel and filled with lead, engraved forever in the rock. But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the thought!"* **Q: How powerful are these verses for you??** Great stuff. Job starts off saying that he hopes his words could be written and engraved forever - and indeed they were as we are reading them in the Bible! Then Job makes the incredible statement that even in the midst of all of his suffering and perceived distance from God, he knows that God lives! The closing two verses are powerful in that they actually indicated a belief in the resurrection by

Job. He says that even after his body has decayed - after his death here on this earth - he will see God with his own eyes in his own body! How could this possibly be? Well, only if he believed in a resurrected body after death - as we've been reading about in First Corinthians chapter 15 the past couple of days! I've read some various commentaries on who is the "Redeemer" that Job is referring to in verse 25. Jesus? Could be. But it seems like most commentaries seem to suggest Job is referring to God himself, rather than Jesus. Though, of course Jesus is God so maybe this is a moot point! :) Job does talk about his desire for a mediator in other parts of this book, which could be references to Jesus as well.

8/26 - Today in Job chapter 21 verses 7 through 13 we read these words of Job: *"The truth is that the wicked live to a good old age. They grow old and wealthy. They live to see their children grow to maturity, and they enjoy their grandchildren. Their homes are safe from every fear, and God does not punish them. Their bulls never fail to breed. Their cows bear calves without miscarriage. Their children skip about like lambs in a flock of sheep. They sing with tambourine and harp. They make merry to the sound of the flute. They spend their days in prosperity; then they go down to the grave in peace."* **Q: How do these words of Job speak to you? Is there truth in these words? If the wicked go to the grave in peace, what happens to them after the grave?** Honestly, I'm not so sure about the wicked living to a good old age and going to the grave in peace... I personally would not take this chance. I think living a wicked life leads to inner conflict and an unhealthy life and potentially an early grave. I understand why Job said these words in his circumstances (he was experiencing suffering without committing the great sins his friends accused him of), but I personally would not bet on a wicked life delivering a long lifetime of wealth or peace...

8/27 - In chapter 23 verse 12 today Job makes such a powerful statement about his relationship with God! *"I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread."* (NIV) The first statement is of course powerful - Job has not departed from the commands of God's. But the second statement is the one that really stood out to me today - Job has treasured God's words more than food! This may sound like nice high holy talk from the Old Testament... but I think each of us should stop and meditate on this one in our lives today. Do we treasure God's Word, The Bible, more or do we treasure the food we eat each day more? I'm sure most of us would say the Bible... But let me put this another way for us to really think about this. **Q: How many minutes a day do you spend eating? And how many minutes a day do you spend reading the Bible? What might make this whole equation even a little bit more interesting to consider is how many minutes a day do you think about food? Prepare food? Talk about food? And then how many minutes a day do you think about the Bible? Prepare for reading the Bible? Talk about the Bible?** I am afraid that we may be a people today who (when the rubber meets the road and we look at actual time spent in each activity) treasure our food more than we treasure God's Word. However, the first step in realizing we have a problem is admitting we have a problem! :) **When it comes to amount of time you spend with food when compared to the amount of time you spend with God's Word, do you have a problem?** Can you learn something from Job's words today in verse 12: *"I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food."* (ESV)

8/28 - Job chapter 28 is incredible! It could be my favorite chapter of Job so far this year. I kind of forgot about this chapter from my previous readings of this book. It seems to me to a large degree this chapter builds up and gets at one of the most important points in the Old Testament Wisdom / Poetry Books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) in the closing verse 28 of this chapter: *"And this is what God says to all humanity: 'The fear of the Lord is true wisdom; to forsake evil is real understanding.'" Beautiful! We do hear this theme over and over again in the other Wisdom / Poetry books of the Old Testament. It is a powerful and true point. I love the way Job builds up to this point early on in this chapter 28. Verses 12 through 14 I found to be particularly great: *"But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding? No one knows where to find it, for it is not found among the living. 'It is not here,' says the ocean. 'Nor is it here,' says the sea."* **Q: So, how about for you? Where do you find wisdom? Where do you find understanding? What does it mean to you that the fear of the Lord is true wisdom? Do you believe this is true? Do you believe that forsaking evil is real understanding?***

8/29 - Great readings in Job today! In chapter 31 Job basically "rests his case." He gives his final plea. This chapter is the last time we'll read this many words from Job. Late in the book we'll get some brief words of repentance from Job after God speaks. In chapter 31 I like how Job lays out his case - and lets everyone know what his retribution should be. He basically gives a series of if / then statements. If I did this, then that should happen to me. This is similar to the book of Exodus' concept of the "law of retaliation", from Exodus chapter 21 verses 23-25: *"But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."* **Q: Do you see how Job's logic in chapter 31 is similar to this law of retaliation?** You'll recall in our readings from Matthew chapter 5 that Jesus calls us beyond the law of retaliation (which was really a law of "limited-

retribution" in its day, limiting people to retaliate only based on actual harm done - meaning, eye for an eye. Not a life for an eye, etc.). Jesus called us beyond this law of retaliation and beyond limited retribution to the highest law of love. Bible.org has an in depth look at Jesus' taking on the law of retaliation in Matthew 5:38-42 [at this link](#). **What is your take on the law of retaliation in your life today? Should or shouldn't we take eye for an eye as Christians?**

8/29 - Before we move onto Elihu - today in Job chapter 31 we read what I think is one of Job's most profound pleadings. It is a 10th century B.C. pleading that is ultimately fulfilled by a little baby born in a manger in Bethlehem who is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Here is Job's prophetic plea in verse 35: *"If only I had someone who would listen to me and try to see my side!"* You and I are so very fortunate that we do not need to make such a plea as this. Jesus is in heaven seated on his throne and will receive our prayers! Jesus listens to us! Jesus sees our side! It is humbling to look back toward the time of Job, and realize that Jesus had not yet walked the earth as a man and taken on the sins of the world on the cross. Jesus had not yet risen from the grave and ascended into heaven. Job was looking for someone to listen to him and to see his side. You and I are blessed immensely in this regard. We do not need to look anywhere else other than to the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. **Q: How is Jesus on your side these days? Do you believe Jesus listens to you and sees your side of things?**

8/29 - In Job chapters 32 and 33, Elihu becomes angry at Job and his friends and presents his case! Elihu was sitting on the sidelines up until this point and obviously was ready to say a few words! It was amazing to read his words in chapter 32 - it was apparent to me that he was young and energetic and felt he had some very important things to say - and we will hear all that Elihu has to say between now and chapter 37! :) Interestingly, as we get to God speaking to Job and his friends in chapter 38, you'll note God does not condemn Elihu along w/ Job's 3 other friends. **Q: How does Elihu stand out to you? Do you like his style? His passion? His message?**

8/30 - Elihu continues his strong discourse from yesterday! There is a lot of good stuff in his words today. Chapter 34 verse 12 is awesome - *"There is no truer statement than this: God will not do wrong. The Almighty cannot twist justice."* I pray you believe this verse to be very true...? In chapter 35 the beginning of verse 26 really stood out to me - *"Look, God is exalted beyond what we can understand."* This is a powerful verse to meditate upon. It is so true! Certainly in this life we can know many things about God. We can read God's Words in the Bible. We can surrender our lives to God's perfect Son, Jesus. We can allow God's Holy Spirit to live in our hearts. And yet, even after all of this, isn't God still exalted beyond what we can understand? This is beautiful to think about. Beautiful to know. We will not fully understand God this side of heaven. But I do think we can certainly begin to know more and more about God and His holy love and righteousness and grace as we go through our lives. God's glory is so immense that we have a lifetime of adventure before us as we learn and experience more and more of God's glory. And then, as we pass on to the other side of this life, there is an eternity with God! The God of all glory. Who is exalted beyond what we can fully understand this side of heaven. Preach it Elihu! **Q: Do you agree that God will not do wrong? How has this been the case in your life?**

8/31 - Today we begin reading four amazing chapters in the book of Job when God speaks to Job! We've been reading a lot so far about what Job would like to say to God. Well, stay tuned for chapters 38 through 41 in Job starting today... it appears God was indeed listening to Job and has some things to say to him! (and to us!) I love the opening words of chapter 38 verses 1 through 3 - *"Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind: 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.'"* **Q: How did these verses of God speaking to Job stand out to you? What can you learn from them for your life today?**

ROMANS 15:1 - 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

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."*

8/8 - Allright... so Paul has a little bit of scolding for the church in Corinth in our readings today! Perhaps we would do well to listen to some of this scolding today too? Verse 5 is powerful for us to consider: *"So be careful not to jump to conclusions before the Lord returns as to whether or not someone is faithful. When the Lord comes, he will bring our deepest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. And then God will give to everyone whatever praise is due."* I think far too often we ourselves try to judge others - saying that someone is wholly righteous or that someone is a doomed sinner. Neither this excessive praise nor condemnation is ours to give. It is only for God. God is the judge. We are not. So be careful not to jump to conclusions about someone else... If you blinked, you just might have missed verse 20 today - *"For the Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk; it is living by God's power."* Great stuff! I am afraid that sometimes we do indeed reduce the Kingdom of God and living out our faith to just fancy talk. We sometimes talk a lot, but we do not practice what we preach. **Q: Rather than focusing on our fancy talk, how about if we simply live by God's power? Have you ever struggled with fancy talk - either speaking it yourself or hearing it from others? Should actions speak louder than words?**

8/9 - Wow... there is a lot going on in Paul's words in First Corinthians chapter 5 today. The first half of verse 6 stands out: *"How terrible that you should boast about your spirituality, and yet you let this sort of thing go on."* This is such a trap I think for many of us - boasting about our spirituality. It is a very dangerous trap too. **Q: Why do you suppose Paul would say this is a terrible thing to boast about your spirituality?** I think it is because when you boast about your spirituality, you have lost humility and you have in a sense put yourself in the place of God. You've elevated yourself too high. And Jesus says we are to be humble. Here comes a tangent - :) - I was listening to talk radio recently and I heard some guy talking about Kabala - the Jewish mysticism religion that is very popular these days - particularly with some Hollywood celebrities. Well, I won't say that this guy was boasting about his spirituality... but maybe he was. :) The great thing I thought was then a guy studying to be a rabbi called in and basically went off on this guy. The caller said that this guy was far too confident and boastful in his discussions of who God is and how God works. And the caller said that he had studied the Torah for all of his life and he still considered himself only a student. I wish I could remember his exact words - but he said something along the lines that "one will always be a student of the Torah. Never its master." Something like that. I loved it! It was so humble and true. And I think you and I would do well to realize that we will always be students of the Bible - never its master. And we need to realize how terrible it truly is for us to boast about our spirituality in any way - either publicly or in our own minds.

8/9 - The second half of verse 6 is powerful for us to consider as well - *"Don't you realize that if even one person is allowed to go on sinning, soon all will be affected?"* This is so true. Sin is an infection that will infect others. Or, another way to look at this - when we sin we are affecting / infecting others. Nobody sins in a vacuum. It affects the whole community. It affects everyone you know in some way. Paul goes on later in this chapter to say in verse 12 - *"It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your job to judge those inside the church who are sinning in these ways."* Paul really has what will appear to our modern ears to be some strong / harsh words for Christians who sin in the ways listed in verse 11 - *"What I meant was that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a Christian yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler."* I think there is truth in his words - but we need to walk a fine line. There are people who are Christian who do struggle with sin - sin that indeed will infect / affect others. And I think we are absolutely called to speak the truth in love into those Christians lives to point out their sin and encourage them to repentance. But... I think there does come a point where we may have to realize that someone simply will not or does not want to repent of their sin. And then it may be time to prayerfully follow Paul's words about avoiding and removing that type of person from your church. **Q: How / when do we draw the line of speaking the truth in love to a Christian stuck in sin? And when do we avoid and/or remove them from our churches? Is this too harsh? Are Paul's words too harsh? Even if they are harsh, are they true? That might be the big question to ask - do you think there is Truth in Paul's words today in First Corinthians chapter 5?**

8/10 - Today in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 we will read: *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside their body, but you who sins sexually sins against your own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."* These are powerful verses. And verses that seem to fly in the face of much of what we are sold in today's culture. Reflect on these verses. **Q: Do you believe that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Do you believe that you are not your own? Do you realize that you were bought at a price by Jesus on the cross? If you see sexual immorality heading your way, do you flee from it? Will you flee from it? What are the consequences if you do not flee from sexual immorality? Do you believe that sexual immorality is a sin you commit against your very own body? (self-abuse, if you will – though, I strongly believe others around you suffer from this sin against your own body as well. Nobody sins in a vacuum. It affects everyone we interact with. It affects everyone in our community. Think that sin is a selfish act?) Do you realize that when you sin sexually, you are sinning against a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells? Will you flee from sexual immorality? Please - literally - flee from it.**

8/11 - Today we read 1 Corinthians Chapter 7. This has been a very powerful chapter of the Bible for much of my spiritual journey. For a period of about 7 years I felt the call to "singleness" through this chapter through much prayer and reflection. I think the call to singleness for some of us may be just for a season, or it could be for many seasons. At the same time, just as valuable is the call to marriage and family life for many of us in this chapter as well. These are some powerful verses. Some say it is best just to consider these verses in "context" of the Corinthian church two thousand years ago. However, I do believe there is value in this chapter's verses for our lives as well. **How does First Corinthians chapter 7 speak to you and your life today? Have you ever felt the call to singleness for a season?**

8/12 - First Corinthians chapter 7 verses 32 through 34 are intriguing words from Paul: *"An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him. But a married man can't do that so well. He has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided."* I see his logic of these words - and these words have often rung so very true in my own life. But, I also see the blessing of the family. Of marriage. Of being part of a Holy Family. Obviously each of us came into this world because of the union of a woman and man. There are a billion reasons of why marriage is important - why the family is important. It produces people like us! :) Unfortunately in our world today I am afraid the concept of the "Holy Family" is not so strong. Family can turn into a negative word for many people, instead of the holy word it should be. All this to say - I believe many of us are called to family life - to marriage and to kids. But I also believe that some of us are called to singleness. I really do. And I do believe being called to singleness is truly a blessing - just as being called to marriage is a blessing as well. **Have you spent much time in your life discerning whether God has called you to singleness or to marriage?** I think it's worth reflecting upon periodically - but not to stress out about. It's better to ultimately remember Paul's words in verses 29 through 33: *"The time that remains is very short, so husbands should not let marriage be their major concern. Happiness or sadness or wealth should not keep anyone from doing God's work. Those in frequent contact with the things of the world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them, for this world and all it contains will pass away. In everything you do, I want you to be free from the concerns of this life."* **Q: Whether you are single or married, do you believe these preceding verses are true for you? What does it mean to you that "the time that remains is very short"? How might this affect how you live your life?**

8/13 - Paul's teachings today about food sacrificed to idols in First Corinthians chapter 8 should be considered along with chapter 10 verses 14 through 22. In particular check out 10:19-21 - *"Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons."* Food sacrificed to idols was a major issue for Christians in Corinth to consider, so they wrote Paul asking about this issue. Paul in chapter 8 hones in on the point that even though it may mean nothing to eat meat sacrificed to idols - which are nothing - it may mean a lot to some and cause some to stumble. Then in chapter 10 Paul hones in on the point that sacrifices to idols are really sacrifices to demons. This all makes me think about are world today. As Christians, in our freedom in Christ many things are permissible. But not all things are beneficial - to ourselves or to others that see us participating in some activities. **Q: So, are there any areas of your life where perhaps you are participating in worldly activities that really don't mean anything - they're okay in our freedom - but that perhaps could cause others to stumble in some way? Or, perhaps those activities could even cause you to stumble if you're not careful? Will you leave these activities by the wayside? Related to that activity, would you be willing to say as Paul did in First Corinthians chapter 8 verse 13: "So if what I eat causes**

another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble."

8/14 - First Corinthians chapter 9 is an amazing look at Paul's passion for the Gospel! I think in this chapter Paul makes a very strong case for why we should support our local church. Verse 10 says - *"Just as farm workers who plow fields and thresh the grain expect a share of the harvest, Christian workers should be paid by those they serve."* Our pastors, priests, ministers deserve our support. Our local church deserves our support through our tithes. It is interesting in today's readings that Paul first lays out the case for "sharing our harvest" with Christian workers. But - Paul refuses this payment because he says in verse 12 - *"Yet we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than put an obstacle in the way of the Good News about Christ."* That is powerful! Paul is not asking for nor expecting nor demanding payment or anything from those he serves, simply because he does not want to put up any obstacle in the way of the Gospel. Incredible. But again, remember this is the apostle Paul we are reading about here - your local church needs your tithe. **Q: How is your tithing to your church going these days? Are you consistently tithing to your church? Will you pray about what God would have you tithe to your church and other ministries and nonprofits?**

8/15 - These are some of my favorite teachings of Paul's today in First Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 through 27! *"Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."* The amazing thing about these words is that they are timeless. Paul wrote these words nearly 2,000 years ago and they still ring so true today. We still run races today. We still have athletes. We still win prizes. We still have boxers. I think so often in our world today we hear people in business or other fields use sports analogies. Well, here is Paul using a sports analogy for faith! :) I love it. Please take a moment to re-read these verses above again. Meditate for a few moments on the words. **Q: What do they say to you? Do you believe you are in a race for an eternal prize? Do you want the eternal prize? Are you disciplining your very life with purpose in your every step? How are you running the race today? Are you running to win?**

8/15 - First Corinthians 10 today ends in verses 12 and 13 with some powerful words of warning and encouragement that each of us should always remember - particularly in our darkest hours - *"If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin. But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it."* **Q: Do you believe that you should always be careful to not fall into sin? Particularly if you feel you are "standing strong?" Do you realize that temptations will come into your life? But, most importantly, do you realize that God will show you a way out of the temptations, so you will not give into them? Will you pray fervently to God and Jesus to show you the way out when temptation comes your way?**

8/16 - Great great unselfish words from Paul today in First Corinthians 10 verses 31 through 33! *"Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, you must do all for the glory of God. Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. That is the plan I follow, too. I try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what I like or what is best for me, but what is best for them so they may be saved."* How powerful is that? Paul states that he doesn't just do what is best for him - what is most comfortable for him - but he does what is best for others so that they may be saved! Beautiful. I am afraid that all too often we get "comfortably numb" in our lives and basically end up looking out for our own needs and desires and wants - even if we love Jesus. We become a bit lazy in our Christianity. We need to remember that there is a world out there that is dying. Literally. Dying. They need the love, healing, grace, peace, and salvation of Jesus in their lives! We must accept some level of discomfort in our own lives so that others may be saved. **Q: How about you today? Are you allowing there to be some discomfort in your life so that others may be saved? Are you being discomfited by sacrificially giving to your church and to ministries that serve the poor? Are you being discomfited by volunteering on a very regular basis? Are you being discomfited by supporting a missionary? Are you comfortable with being discomfited so that others may be saved? Will you bend over backwards for others so that they may be saved?**

8/17 - Okay, so I suppose today's readings might get some folks a bit upset with Paul... I think it is important to keep in mind that these writings in First Corinthians 11 were directed to the church in Corinth. And Paul is basically saying in this

chapter that we need to be sensitive to the culture we are in. Meaning, in 1st century Corinth men with long hair typically were prostitutes in pagan temples, so Paul says in this chapter it's a disgrace for a man to have long hair. Which it was in the culture and time of Corinth when this was written. Same thing with women with short hair at this culture and time in Corinth - it was a sign of prostitution. So, Paul says keep it long. I know it can seem a bit tricky to figure out when the Bible should be taken literally word for word and when we need to consider context. I would say that generally speaking, we need to consider context - context of one verse to the verse before and after. Context to the chapter. Context to the book. Context to the Bible. And context to the time and place that a particular book was written. However, don't let context mislead you into thinking that the Bible is not God's Holy Word - that the Bible is not Truth. For it is both. The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is Truth. And Paul's words in today's chapter essentially get at the Truth that believers should look and behave in ways that are honorable within their own culture - so that they (and we) will be believable witnesses for Jesus Christ. I love verses 11 & 12 in today's readings - *"But in relationships among the Lord's people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. For although the first woman came from man, all men have been born from women ever since, and everything comes from God."* It's pretty hard to argue with this. We are all dependent upon each other. The Body of Christ is a community of believers. Men and women are not independent. We are dependent and interdependent on each other. And things do not come from men or women - everything comes from God. Great stuff. **Q: How does First Corinthians 11 stand out to you? What can we learn from this chapter?**

8/18 - Wow.. great verses from Paul today! I think most of us will recognize these words, or slight variations, as to how the Lord's Supper happens at many churches today. It is beautiful to come across these words in verses 23 through 26 in the context of Paul's overall letter to the Corinthians. It reminds me of how the Lord's Supper comes upon us at church in the midst of our often busy / distracted lives. We so need to hear these words and so need to receive the Lord's Supper: *"For this is what the Lord himself said, and I pass it on to you just as I received it. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and you, sealed by the shedding of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again."* **Q: How is the Lord's Supper experience for you these days? Do you consciously take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Jesus? Do you consciously realize when you participate in the Lord's Supper you are announcing Jesus' death until he comes again?**

8/18 - Paul's teachings in verses in 27 through 29 are something for us to take note of: *"So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup unworthily, not honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself."* **Q: How do these verses speak to you? Do you examine yourself before participating in the Lord's Supper?**

8/19 - First Corinthians 12 is once again another amazing chapter in this book! Spiritual Gifts and the Body of Christ... it gets no better! I love verses 4 through 7: *"Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church."* **Q: If you are a believer in Jesus as your Lord, do you believe that a spiritual gift has been given to you? Do you know what your spiritual gift is? Are you using your spiritual gift as a means of helping the entire church?** (I think my spiritual gift is a gift that Paul did not write about in this chapter - the gift of blogging! :)

8/19 - I love Paul's discourse on the Body of Christ. Verse 26 stands out: *"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad."* This makes me wonder about the Body of Christ in our world today. **Q: Do you think that there are Christians in our world today who are suffering? Who are starving? Who are being persecuted? Who are dying of AIDS? And... if there are Christians - part of the Body of Christ just as we are part of the Body of Christ - who are suffering, are we sharing in the suffering with them in any way, shape, or form? If we are not, are we ignoring part of our Body? As Casting Crowns put it in their big hit Christian song - "If we are the Body, why aren't His hands healing? Why is His love not showing them there is a Way?" Why?**

8/20 - Today in First Corinthians chapter 13 we will read verses that you have likely heard many times at many weddings. It is the "Love" chapter of the Bible. This chapter goes way beyond just romantic or marital love - it gets at how we live our

very lives each and every moment in relationship to all of creation. In verses 1 through 3 we read: *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."* **Q: How do these verses speak to you? Do you notice the juxtaposition of the concept of love and the concept of nothingness? Do you see that without love there is nothing? Do you believe that if we live our lives without love, we are nothing? Even if we have amazing spiritual gifts. Even if we have faith that can move mountains. Even if we give away all of our possessions to the poor. If we do not have love, we are nothing. We gain nothing. We give nothing. Do you see how important love is in our lives? Do you see that we must live each and every day from a starting point of love? Why do you suppose Paul spends this entire chapter telling us about the importance of love? Do you think that God is love and wants us to be love as well?** I love (pun intended :) how this chapter ends: *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."* Amen and amen.

8/21 - First Corinthians chapter 14 is an interesting chapter. I personally have not spoken in tongues - nor heard it as far as I know. But, I do know many people that have both spoken in tongues and heard it and have heard interpretations. I do think Paul makes it clear in this chapter that both speaking in tongues and prophecy are gifts. I do think we do well to pay attention to Paul's conclusion to today's readings in verses 15 through 17: *"Well then, what shall I do? I will do both. I will pray in the spirit, and I will pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will sing in words I understand. For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don't understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don't understand what you are saying? You will be giving thanks very nicely, no doubt, but it doesn't help the other people present."* Bible.org's commentary on speaking in tongues is [at this link](#). **Q: What are your thoughts on speaking in tongues and prophecy in the church these days?**

8/22 - The One Year Bible Companion book dives into the question "Does 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 mean that women should not speak in church services today?" I encourage you to pick up this book, as it is invaluable in going through the One Year Bible and covers great questions like this. I will share with you a little bit of their answer on this today - "Women have much to contribute and can participate in worship services. In the Corinthian culture, women were not allowed to confront men in public. Apparently some of the women who had become Christians thought that their Christian freedom gave them the right to question men in public worship. This was causing division in the church. Paul was asking the women not to flaunt their Christian freedom during worship. The purpose of Paul's words was to promote unity, not to teach about women's role in the church." Thank you Tyndale for this Q & A. **Q: What are your thoughts/experiences with women's roles in church services today?**

8/23 - We read beautifully true words from Paul today in First Corinthians chapter 15 verses 3 & 4: *"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me--that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said."* And then there are some interesting words from Paul in verses 17 through 19: *"And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ have perished! And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world."* He immediately follows up these verses with this statement in verse 20: *"But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again."* This is quite a chapter from Paul about the Resurrection of Jesus and the Resurrection of the dead! **Q: I think the key question we each need to ask ourselves is: do you believe that Jesus was born on this earth 2,000 years ago, is the Son of God, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for your sins, and on the third day rose from the dead? This is the question on which all of Christianity - and your personal faith in Jesus - hinges. So, what say you?**

8/23 - In verses 5 through 8 today six resurrection appearances of Jesus' are mentioned. Below is a full list of Jesus' resurrection appearances from Zondervan's NIV Study Bible:

1. The empty tomb (not an appearance per se - but no body was in the tomb - the first indication of the resurrection)
2. To Mary Magdalene in the garden
3. To the other women
4. To two people going to Emmaus
5. To Peter
6. To the ten disciples in the upper room
7. To the 11 disciples in the upper room (including Thomas this time - see painting below)
8. To seven disciples fishing on the Sea of Galilee

9. To the 11 disciples on a mountain
10. To more than 500
11. To James
12. To the disciples at His ascension
13. To Paul on the road to Damascus

Q: What does the Resurrection mean to you personally?

8/24 - Today in First Corinthians chapter 15 verses 42 through 44 and 49 we read: *"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. . . And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."* **Q: Have you thought much about heaven? Have you considered life after death? Do you believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead? Do you believe that your body will be raised imperishable? That your body will be raised in glory? In power? Do you believe that there is a spiritual body, just like we now know our earthly body? Are you looking forward to bearing the likeness of Jesus in heaven?**

8/25 - We wrap up Paul's first letter to the Corinthians today! What an amazing book! I have been blessed immensely by it this year. I hope you have too? I like Paul's instructions to the church in Corinth in chapter 16 verses 1 through 3 today: *"Now about the money being collected for the Christians in Jerusalem: You should follow the same procedures I gave to the churches in Galatia. On every Lord's Day, each of you should put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned and save it for this offering. Don't wait until I get there and then try to collect it all at once."* I love this last sentence! It made me smile. Paul knows how us humans are - back then and now - we like to procrastinate! We like to do things at the last minute if we can. Well, I concur with Paul that our giving to our churches should be a regular thing. With each pay check we should "put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned." Really, as I think about it, giving of money to our churches with each paycheck is an act of worship. We are worshiping God with our finances. Let us not wait to give to our churches. Let us give faithfully and regularly with each paycheck God blesses us with! **Q: How is your giving going these days? Do you joyfully give?**

8/26 - Today we begin Paul's Second Letter to the church in Corinth! Corinth was a city known in the 1st century for its wealth and lust. It was a trade center with thousands of sailors who disembarked there. Its pagan temples encouraged the practice of sexual immorality along with idol worship. Thus, this was not an easy place for the early church! But clearly a place where the church was so needed! Below is a map of where Corinth is in Greece - it is about 48 miles west of Athens.

~ Second Corinthians ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Ephesus

Date: A.D. 57

Content: Paul's earlier letter to the Corinthians had not settled all of the problems. It had some good effect upon them but much more remained to be done. In particular, Paul had to settle the problem concerning his own authority. Deep suspicions had been aroused concerning him, for what reasons we do not fully understand. But in great anguish Paul writes to reestablish his own apostolic authority. He also attempts to deal with some more practical matters, like supporting the poor believers elsewhere.

Theme: Triumph over adversity is seen throughout this letter. It is a very personal one, written by one who loved his people but had been deeply wronged by them. As Paul catalogs the experiences of his life and the nature of the Christian ministry, it is possible to see the grace of God at work bringing good from evil. Satan is active, seeking to destroy God's work, but God is greater still, establishing those who trust in him. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 25)*

8/27 - I love that Paul calls Jesus the "Divine Yes" in today's readings in Second Corinthians chapter 1 verse 19 in the NLT! Here are verses 18 through 20 in the NIV - *"But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ."* Amen! **Q: Do you realize that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises in the Old Testament? The Law pointed to Jesus in the OT and the Law is fulfilled in Jesus. The sacrificial system pointed to Jesus in the OT and the sacrificial is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is indeed the Divine Yes! In your life each and every day, is Jesus your Divine Yes?**

8/28 - I absolutely love and appreciate Paul's words today in Second Corinthians chapter 2 verses 14 through 16: *"But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those being saved and by those perishing. To those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume."* What great imagery! Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God! I love it. It does get sad - but true - in verse 16 when Paul says that to those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. **Why do you suppose this is?** I think it because when someone is living their life completely enslaved to sin and they encounter the light - the fragrance - of the Gospel, they either will embrace it or push it away. Unfortunately I am afraid some folks - perhaps even us in our past - are so enslaved to sin that the sin literally makes us fear / flee from the light and fragrance of the Gospel. Unfortunately sin can ensnare someone such that the Gospel is the fragrance of death and gloom because that is where the sin is leading someone who is enslaved to it - to death and gloom. Sad... and this reminds us of how urgent it is for us to pray for others who are enslaved to sin. Let us pray the fragrance of the Gospel and the grace of God will turn them back toward the Savior of the World who can free them forever - Jesus Christ. **Q: Jesus - is there a name more fragrant to you?**

8/29 - I love Paul's words in Second Corinthians verse: *"Clearly, you are a letter from Christ prepared by us. It is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on stone, but on human hearts."* That is a great concept! **We are living letters from Jesus sent out to the world! Have you ever thought of yourself as a letter from Jesus?** I have not, but I like it! It's also interesting to realize that the Spirit living within us as Christians professes and gives witness to the glory of God oftentimes without us even realizing it. I heard a quote once that said something like, "Who you are is so strong that I cannot hear a word you are saying." Basically this quote means that the inherent nature of who we are overshadows our very words. It's more important than our words - people notice our inherent nature! Be it good or be it not so good... So, if the Spirit of Jesus is within us I do believe that the Holy Spirit gives witness and gives glory to God to others that we come in contact with - even if we don't say a word! This is the letter that we are from Christ to the world. The letter that is written on our hearts. And of course there is St. Francis of Assisi who said: "Preach the Gospel at all times - use words only when necessary." Again, the Spirit of Jesus within us preaches the Gospel to the world even without us consciously saying words. Don't get me wrong - sometimes words are exactly what are needed. But oftentimes our very presence through the Spirit of Jesus living within us is more than enough. So, let us go forth into our world this week as living letters from Jesus to a hurting and dying world that so needs the Good News of the Gospel! **How are you like a letter from Jesus to others in your life today?**

8/30 - I love Second Corinthians chapter 4 verse 1 today. In fact, if there is nothing else you remember from today's readings I hope you will remember the last 4 words of this verse always - *"And so, since God in his mercy has given us this wonderful ministry, we never give up."* We never give up. That is powerful for each of us to remember. Why? Because we will have good and bad days. Days when we are happy. Days when we might be feeling sad. And there will be days when we make mistakes. When we will stumble. When we will fall. But you know what has often gotten me through days like those? This simple prayer or statement or something that fortunately comes into my mind - "I'm not giving up!" We shouldn't say this as justification for our falling short of God's plan for our life. But, when we do fall short, I have found it helpful. Or, if I haven't fallen short, but bad stuff is happening to me, I say it. And I don't say it just to myself - as if my own will power will get me through the tough times. I say it to God. I say it really as a prayer. I say it almost as a statement against the devil, who would love nothing more than for us to give up. The devil would love it if we stumbled and stayed on the ground. If we decided this Christianity thing was just not for us. But you know what - don't give up! When times are tough. When you stumble, pray it to God - "I'm not giving up." Tell it to yourself. We're not giving up! We're never giving up.... **Q: How have you learned to persevere in your life and never give up? Do you still need to learn to never give up in some areas of your life?**

8/30 - Verse 7 today is indeed a wonderful reminder that we humans are but jars of clay - *"But this precious treasure--this light and power that now shine within us--is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own."* We really do have very fragile bodies. They are wonderful! But they are fragile. They break. They will die. As one writer puts it, "our condition is terminal." And it's true. This side of heaven, our bodies will eventually wear out. But - as Paul tells us in this verse - there is light and power that shines within us when we are in relationship with Jesus! The Holy Spirit indwells our earthen vessels. Our jars of clay. And hopefully we and others recognize that the glory within us is not our own. It is of God. And it is a glory that is available to anyone. Free of charge. It is grace and it beckons us to receive God's glory in our jars of clay so that we will live eternally

in heavenly bodies. But for now, we are simply in the hands of the Potter... **Q: How do you see God's light and power shining within you? Especially in your "jar of clay" body, how do you see God's power shine?**

8/31 - Paul's words in Second Corinthians chapter 4 verses 16 through 18 are incredible for each of us to take to heart: *"That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever."* I don't know about you, but I confess that I all too often get caught up in the troubles we can see right now. I forget about the joys to come that will last forever. It's sad when I forget about the joys to come. There is so much hurt and disaster in our world that I am afraid all too often I focus only on these negative things and forget that this is a world where bad things happen. Through our faith and relationship with Jesus we will one day be in heaven where there will be no more tears. No more crying. No more suffering. But, this side of heaven, we will suffer. Each of our bodies will deteriorate and these earthly bodies will die. But, as Paul says in these verses above, though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day! I pray this is the case for you. I pray this is the case for me. **Q: Are you experiencing renewal in your spirit every day? How? Why?** Let us pray for renewal!

PSALM 25:1 - 44:26

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?**

8/8 - Today in Psalm 30 verses 4 through 5 we read: *"Sing to the Lord; you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."* **Q: How does this verse speak to you? Do you believe that God's anger can last only a moment, but his favor last a lifetime? If you are weeping now in some area of your life, do you believe that God can bring rejoicing to you? Will you pray to God to grant you favor in this life and in life everlasting? Will you pray to God to heal any situation that you are weeping over today, and to bring you rejoicing tomorrow? Do you look forward to this rejoicing that will allow you to sing to the Lord as a saint and to praise his holy name?**

8/9 - Psalm 31 verse 1 is such a powerful start to this powerful Psalm of David's - *"O LORD, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be put to shame. Rescue me, for you always do what is right."* **Q: In your life today, do you need protection from something? If so, will you run to God for your protection? Do you believe that God can rescue you? Do you believe that God can save you from shame? Do you believe that God always does what is right?** Did you catch that verse 5 from this Psalm were Jesus' last words on the cross.... *"Into your hands I commit my spirit."* (NIV) Here it is from Luke 23:46 - *"Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last."*

8/10 - Have you ever felt like Psalm 31 verse 10.... *"I am dying from grief; my years are shortened by sadness. Misery has drained my strength; I am wasting away from within."* Do you believe that God can rescue you from this? Will you pray to God to save you from this? Earlier this year I read [C.S. Lewis' book A Grief Observed](#). Has anyone read this? It is a very short book. But, wow, it is a powerful short book! It is a memoir C.S. Lewis wrote after the death of his wife and it is so incredibly thoughtful and moving as C.S. Lewis works through his grief and his questions for and about God. This verse kind of reminds me of this book.... though not really... it seems like C.S. Lewis didn't quite get as down as the level of this verse. Anyhow - great book I think for any Christian who has lost a loved one. **Q: Let me know reviews if you've read A Grief Observed, or know others who have? Has it been consoling for you during a time of loss? Are there any other books on grief you can recommend?** Barb Roberts' new book [Helping Those Who Hurt: A Handbook for Caring and Crisis](#) I know has been very beneficial to my wife and several others who are in a counseling or Stephen's Ministry role.

8/11 - This is a wonderful look at God's goodness in Psalm 31 verse 19: *"Your goodness is so great! You have stored up great blessings for those who honor you. You have done so much for those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world."* **Q: Do you believe that God's goodness is indeed great? Are you honoring God with your life and your actions and your thoughts each day? Do you believe that God is storing up blessings for you? Do you believe that God will bless you if you go to him for protection?**

8/12 - Today we read Psalm 32, which is a wonderful testimony of joy about God's gift of forgiveness to us when we confess our sins to God! In Psalm 32 verses 1 & 2 we read: *"Oh, what joy for those whose rebellion is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!"* **Q: Do you agree with this Psalmist that there is joy in forgiveness? Have you confessed your sins to God? Do you make a regular habit of examining your conscience and confessing your sins to God? After confessing your sins, do you continuously pray to God to heal you of sins that may be gripping you? Will you then move forward on the actions or corrective measures that God leads you to - to truly be healed of addictive sins? Will you seek the joy of God's forgiveness? Will you seek to live your life in complete honesty to God?**

8/13 - Psalm 33 verse 11 is powerful: *"But the LORD's plans stand firm forever; his intentions can never be shaken."* I think the thing that stands out to me about this verse is that it is God's plans - not our plans - that stand firm forever. Therefore, it's only logical in my mind that we should align our lives such that they are part of God's plan - God's Kingdom. I think reading the Bible each day is one excellent way to discern what God's plans are. **Q: And then - once we know what God's plans are, will we then align our lives with his plans? Knowing that his intentions can never be shaken? Or will we keep trying to forge out on our own... Do you know what God's plans are? How do you know?**

8/14 - Psalm 33 verse 12 today is awesome: *"In him our hearts rejoice, for we are trusting in his holy name."* **Q: Does your heart literally rejoice when you think about God? Do you trust in God's holy name?**

8/15 - Psalm 34 verse 9 in the NIV reads: *"Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing."* **Q: What does fearing God mean to you? Do you think that fearing God is a good or bad thing? Why? Do you think it is possible to both love God and fear God at the same time? What do you think of when you hear the word "saints"? Do you believe that you are a saint? Do you want to be a saint? Are you acting like a saint? Do you believe that those who fear God lack nothing? Why would this be?**

8/16 - I love Psalm 34 verses 17 & 18 today: *"The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit."* I am sure all of us have moments of needing help. Moments of trouble. Moments of being brokenhearted. Moments of being crushed in spirit. **Q: The big question is what do we do in those moments? Or, who do we turn to? Do you call to God in those moments? Do you know that he will help you? Do you know that he will rescue you? Do you know that he is close to you? Do you know that He is near?**

8/17 - Per Zondervan's NIV Study Bible, Psalm 35 today is an appeal to the heavenly King, as divine Warrior and Judge, to come to the defense of his servant David who is being maliciously slandered by those toward whom he had shown only the most tender friendship. I like verse 10 a lot: *"I will praise him from the bottom of my heart: "LORD, who can compare with you? Who else rescues the weak and helpless from the strong? Who else protects the poor and needy from those who want to rob them?""* **Q: Have you recently praised God from the bottom of your heart? Do you think that anyone/anything compares with God? Do you believe that God has rescued you and protected you? Perhaps many times when you have not even realized it?** I think about this on occasion. It is my hunch that God literally rescues us and protects us dozens if not hundreds if not thousands of times each and every day. And I think we typically miss it.... If we knew it, I am sure we would be praising Him from the bottom of our heart very frequently!

8/18 - Psalm 35 verses 22 & 23 are two very impassioned verses that I think we should take note of: *"O LORD, you know all about this. Do not stay silent. Don't abandon me now, O Lord. Wake up! Rise to my defense! Take up my case, my God and my Lord."* I think what these verses do is remind me that we don't have to always speak to God in "hushed" tones or in our "church voices". We can interact with God at any moment as we really are. I don't think we should try to hide our emotions from God. We should come before God at any time - as we are - and let Him take us from there... and heal us from there... **Q: When is the last time you literally cried out to God?**

8/19 - Verses 5 & 6 reminded me immediately of the Third Day song "Your Love Oh Lord", which borrows nicely from these verses (and is our YouTube for the day, below): *"Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths."* 8/19 - I love Psalm 36 today! There are some powerful verses in this Psalm... Starting off with verse 1 being a scary & true verse... *"Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God to restrain them."* Wow. I'll admit - I've been there. I know what it is like to have sin whispering deep within my heart. Thank God for the gift of Jesus - the savior of my world... Thank God for the gift of the fear of God. And thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit who directs us along the narrow path - the path of life and light. I pray that verse 1 does not ring too true for you today - but if it does, please pray to Jesus to instead fill your heart with Jesus' Spirit, which is the only power that can truly dispel the whisper of sin within. Verses 5 & 6 reminded me immediately of the Third Day song "Your Love Oh Lord", which borrows nicely from these verses (and is our YouTube for the day, below): *"Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths."* Verse 9 just has so much simplicity in it's truth... I love it... I hope you believe this too - *"For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see."* **Q: Are there really any other lights by which we may see? Are there really any other fountains of life?**

8/20 - Today we read Psalm 37, which is most definitely a Wisdom Psalm! It's like we are reading Proverbs! I love verse 5: *"Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you."* **Q: Do you commit everything you do to God? EVERYTHING? Your waking life? Your sleeping life? Your job? Your relationships? Your family? Your finances? Your time? If so, do you trust that God will help you in everything you do in your life? Do you believe what verse 4 teaches? "Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires." I love that thought - take delight in God. **Do you take delight in God each and every day? Do you believe that he will give you your heart's desires?****

8/21 - Psalm 37 verse 16 is powerful today - *"It is better to be godly and have little than to be evil and possess much."* I don't know what I can add to this.... I think you probably get it. :) **Q: Do you live it?** Verse 23 is so amazing... *"The steps of the godly are directed by the LORD. He delights in every detail of their lives."* I don't mean to infer that I am godly here... but, I will admit that there are times in my life where I really sense that God is directing my steps - and taking care of every detail. And basically, it feels like I am sort of just going with God's flow. Things are just happening beautifully. And I do sense the Spirit often during these times. My sadness in this area is that I don't realize that God is directing my steps all of the time. And that he is delighting in every detail of my life - most of the time... :) I pray you and I will come to a greater awareness of this in our lives each and every moment: *"The steps of the godly are directed by the LORD. He delights in every detail of their lives."*

8/22 - Psalm 37 verses 30 & 31 read like amazing Proverbs: *"The godly offer good counsel; they know what is right from wrong. They fill their hearts with God's law, so they will never slip from his path."* **Q: Are you filling your heart with God's teachings? Are you doing this so that you will never slip from His path? Are you offering good counsel to those around you? When others around you see you, do they see someone that clearly knows what is right from wrong?**

8/23 - Psalm 38 is powerful! Verses 4 & 5 speak so much to our human condition - *"My guilt overwhelms me--it is a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and stink because of my foolish sins."* Does this verse speak to you in any way, shape or form? If so, please consider then verse 18 - *"But I confess my sins; I am deeply sorry for what I have done."* **Q: Will you confess your sins to God today? Will you admit that you are truly sorry for your sins? Will you pray for healing from your sins? Will you make confession of your sins to God a regular practice?**

8/24 - Today in Psalm 39 verse 5 we read - *"My life is no longer than the width of my hand. An entire lifetime is just a moment to you; human existence is but a breath."* This is a powerful verse for each of us to meditate upon. **Q: How does this verse speak to you? Do you feel like life moves fast sometimes? If so, how are you spending your time? Are you being intentional about how you invest your time? Are you being intentional about your work? Your friends? Your finances? Volunteering? Serving others? Loving others? Watching TV - or better yet, not watching TV? :) If life really is "but a breath" - are you spending your breath wisely? With your breath are you constantly loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbor as yourself?**

8/26 - Today Psalm 40 verse 16 stood out to me for it's pure joy and praise: *"But may all who search for you be filled with joy and gladness. May those who love your salvation repeatedly shout, "The LORD is great!"*" **Q: Does this verse**

resonate with you today? Have you searched for God in your life? Are you filled with joy and gladness because of that search? Do you love God's salvation? Do you shout praises to God for all he has done for you? Maybe if verse 16 does not resonate for you today, hopefully verse 17 can encourage you: *"As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord is thinking about me right now. You are my helper and my savior. Do not delay, O my God."* **Do you believe that Jesus is thinking about you right now? Do you believe that Jesus is your helper and your savior?**

8/27 - Today we read in Psalm 41 verse 1 – *"Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble."* For some reason this verse really opens up my heart. Something about the word "weak." Maybe this verse really speaks to me because I myself feel weak at times. And yet, I am so blessed in so many ways. And I realize that there are so many others out there in this world who may not have the blessings that I have, and who are struggling through an extremely tough cycle of weakness. And I wonder – **Q: what am I doing to help those who are weak? Do I really have regard for the weak? Do you? What in our life really demonstrates that we have regard for the weak? Are we investing time or finances into the weak? Are we praying for the weak? Are we loving the weak?**

8/28 - Today we read Psalm 42 verse 1, which is one of my favorite verses in the Bible! *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God."* That is so right on. Lately these days I have been longing for God more than ever - and I love that. I am thankful for that. There have been seasons in my life - which can certainly be called "dry" seasons - where I have not longed for God. Where I have not longed for the true Living Water. I just love the picture this Psalm verse paints in my mind - a deer in the wilderness is fleeing from hunters. It is literally dying of thirst as it runs. It is tired. It is weary. It is running from death. And it needs water. It pants for streams of water. Like this deer, I pray that I long for God in the same way. As I flee from sin. As I am tired. As I am weary. As I run from death. I need God. I long for God. **Q: How about you? Do you long for God these days as a deer longs for water? Are you consistently drinking from the true Living Water?**

8/29 - I think Psalm 43 verse 5 starts off with a couple of questions that then answer themselves by the end of the verse - *"Why am I discouraged? Why so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again--my Savior and my God!"* I would agree with what this verse is getting at. If I find myself to be discouraged or sad, it comes as no great surprise to me that I have been putting my hope in things other than God. I have been perhaps even praising false idols. And the sure fire way to be freed from the discouragement or sadness? To put my hope once again in God and God only. And to praise him again! I think this Psalm verse is a great reminder to make sure we are not placing our hope in anything other than God. For anything other than God will only leave us empty in the end. **Q: How have you overcome discouragement or sadness? Has praising God ever lifted your spirits when you were feeling down?**

8/30 Psalm 44 verse 3 is a wise statement about where the Israelites and our true strength and victory in life comes from - *"They did not conquer the land with their swords; it was not their own strength that gave them victory. It was by your mighty power that they succeeded; it was because you favored them and smiled on them."* **Q: As you look back on your life and at the good things that have happened to you, do you think that these things occurred because of your own power or work alone? Or, do you think it is possible that God's hand was blessing your life through all of those good things - even if maybe you did not notice God was there at the time?**

8/31 - Every time I read Psalm 44 verse 23 it reminds me of one of the amazing aspects of the Psalms - that the Psalms are people like us speaking to God - and in all sorts of emotional ways: *"Wake up, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Get up! Do not reject us forever."* This type of verse reminds me that it's okay for us to not always talk to God in our "church voice." It's okay to get a little bit passionate in our prayers to God. I think God would prefer us to be real with him - where we are right now or at any given moment - rather than try to put on any special facades for God. If ever you feel like you are at a loss for words for what you might want to say to God - how you might be needing to pray to God - surf through the Psalms... you'll very likely find voice for what you are trying to say. **Q: How are the Psalms standing out to you this year as you read them? Are they giving voice to some of your prayers? Do you ever pray the Psalms?**

PROVERBS 20:13 - 22:13

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?**

8/8 - I love Proverbs 20 verse 29 today! "*The glory of the young is their strength; the gray hair of experience is the splendor of the old.*" I think the beauty of this Proverb is to show that there are unique values & contributions we can make both when we are young and when we are old. When we are young we are full of strength. We can do much and

with much energy. However, when we are young, we do not have much experience, so we will likely make some mistakes in our youthful zeal. When we are older, we are blessed with experience. So that when we act, we act wisely. We know how to spend our time and what type of activities are important. We don't have the strength perhaps that we had when we were younger. We may not be able to do as much with as much energy. But the experience focuses us, such that we can prioritize what we do. **Q: Whether you are young or old, are you utilizing your strength or your experience for Kingdom purposes? Are you spending your time on things that have eternal value rather than things that are fleeting and temporal? How are you using your strength and experience for God this very day?**

8/9 - Proverbs 21 verse 2 is so true - "*People may think they are doing what is right, but the LORD examines the heart.*" Interesting Proverb to meditate upon. **Q: Do you suppose it is possible that we may think we are doing what is right, but that it's not really right? Why would this happen? Do you believe that God examines your heart?** I am so thankful that he does examine our hearts! I am afraid that at times we may deceive ourselves. We may start down a path or course that we think is right - or that our friends or the world tells us is right - but it's not. The "governor" (in both senses of the word) that can keep us from continuing down this foolish path is God. God constantly examines our heart. And he can instantly see if our motives are not pure. Then, the trick becomes for us to actually listen to God. This can be the challenge. I heard a sermon recently at church about how God came to the prophet Elijah in a whisper. And that God comes to us today oftentimes in a whisper - in that still small voice. All this to say - I hope you are thankful that God examines your heart. And - I hope you find time to really be still before God and let him tell you if the motives of your heart are not pure. Let him tell you if you are doing something that you think is right, but that is not. **Who better is there to truly examine your heart than God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?**

8/10 - Proverbs 21 verse 3 is powerful today - "*The LORD is more pleased when we do what is just and right than when we give him sacrifices.*" Have you ever had a stage in your life where you got this Proverb backwards? Have you ever been so focused on "giving sacrifices" to God that you forgot to simply do what is just and right? This reminds me of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They were focused on their religious duties - on giving proper sacrifices to God on the proper days and times. But in the meantime they forgot to simply do what was just and right to those around them. And Jesus called them out on it. And if we're not careful, Jesus can call us out on it too. Which is good. A rebuke can be good to bring us back into a loving relationship with God and other people. **Q: Today in your life, are you more focused on simply doing what is just and right before God and people, or are you perhaps more focused these days on "giving sacrifices" to God? Which do you think is more pleasing to God?**

8/11 - Proverbs 21 verse 4 couldn't be much more straightforward! "*Haughty eyes, a proud heart, and evil actions are all sin.*" I actually needed a little help for what the word haughty really means. Here's what I found in the dictionary for haughty - disdainful: having or showing arrogant superiority to and disdain of those one views as unworthy; "some economists are disdainful of their colleagues in other social disciplines"; "haughty aristocrats"; "his lordly manners were offensive"; "walked with a prideful swagger"; "very sniffy about breaches of etiquette"; "his mother eyed my clothes with a supercilious air"; "shaggy supercilious camels"; "a more swaggering mood than usual"- W.L.Shirer **Q: Have you ever been haughty? Can you see how being haughty is a sin?**

8/12 - Today in Proverbs 21 verse 5 we read – "*The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.*" This is quite a convicting Proverb for me, as I often find myself acting very hastily. I like to hustle and move fast all too often - and then try to plan later. . . I had a great conversation recently with a friend who recently completed a 5 year strategic plan for her own life, which was fascinating to me and seemed incredibly beneficial to this friend. I have another friend that does this type of significant planning in his life as well. Now, I don't know that all of us are called to have 5 year strategic plans for our own lives! :) However, I do think this Proverb advocates planning. Planning is diligent. And planning leads to profit – whereas haste leads to poverty. **Q: So, how do you plan in your life? Do you pray to God regularly to show you what His Plan is for your life? Do you then seek to follow what God's plan is for you? Do you set goals and plans based on where you believe God is leading you? Do you think there would be value in setting goals and plans in your life?**

8/13 - Proverbs 21 verse 10 teaches us today: "*The guilty walk a crooked path; the innocent travel a straight road.*" **Q: How is the course of your life path these days? Is it a straight road? Or is there perhaps some crookedness in your path? If so, will you repent of whatever is leading you to crookedness and let God lead you along the straight road?**

8/14 - Proverbs 21 verse 11 today is fascinating - "*A simpleton can learn only by seeing mockers punished; a wise person learns from instruction.*" **It makes me wonder how we learn things today? Do we learn by seeing others punished? Or, do we learn simply by instruction?** I believe that by diving into the One Year Bible here, we are seeking to learn by instruction. Hopefully we are exhibiting some wisdom in doing this. :) And then I guess I think about folks that unfortunately end up in jail. Did they miss the boat on learning from instruction? Are they now only going to learn by seeing others punished? And by seeing themselves punished? I don't know why I go toward people being in jail here. For some reason I occasionally wonder what is the difference between me and a person that ends up in jail? Or, what is the difference between me and a homeless person? Maybe this Proverb gives us some indication. Maybe - though I know it's more complex than just this Proverb. All this to say - I really don't think there is necessarily a huge difference between someone living a "normal" life versus someone who ends up in jail or homeless. I think there may be a finer line than we realize. And - in light of this - and more importantly in light of God's extravagant love for us, I believe we are called to love and serve those who are in jail or who are homeless. I know there are some great prison ministries out there. Chuck Colson's [Prison Fellowship](#) comes to mind. And there are so many more. And of course there are some great shelters and programs to rehabilitate the homeless and help move them forward in their lives. **Q: Will you take the time to share your wisdom and blessings with someone in prison or on the streets? Will you teach them how they can learn from instruction instead of only learning from others (or themselves) being punished?**

8/15 - Today in Proverbs chapter 21 verse 13 we read - "*If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.*" **Q: Do you believe this Proverb is true? Do you truly understand and realize that there are poor in the world today? Do you know in your heart and mind that there are over 1.2 billion people in our world today living in abject poverty (living on less than \$1 / day). Do you believe they are crying out? Are you listening to their cry? And how are you responding? Are you responding to the poor today like you would want God to respond to you if you were crying out? I'll leave you with this powerful quote from Mother Teresa - "Do we share with the poor, just like Jesus shared with us?" Do we? Do you?**

8/16 - Well... it doesn't get much more straightforward than Proverb 21 verse 16 today: "*The person who strays from common sense will end up in the company of the dead.*" **Q: Do you believe this Proverb is true? If we stray from common sense, will we end up in the company of the dead? How do you define what is common sense in your life? Do you believe that the Bible is common sense? Can you learn common sense from the Bible? Is there any better source of common sense out there? Will you not stray from this True source of common sense?**

8/17 - Proverbs 21 verse 17 is quite fitting for our modern day - "*Those who love pleasure become poor; wine and luxury are not the way to riches.*" **Q: How often does our culture preach to us that pleasure should be sought out at all costs? "If it feels good, go for it!" seems all too often to be the beck & call of our modern day. Why do you suppose this Proverb says those who love pleasure become poor? Why would wine and luxury not be the way to riches? What type of poverty is this Proverb referring to - spiritual poverty? Material poverty? Both? Do you love pleasure? Do you love wisdom? Which of these 2 do we read about more in Proverbs as being something we should love?**

8/18 - Proverbs 21 verse 19 I'll let someone else pick up in the Comments... :) Verse 20 is intriguing - "*The wise have wealth and luxury, but fools spend whatever they get.*" Why do you suppose this is? Do the wise spend money? Do they save money? Do they give money away to their church and charities? And fools spend whatever they get... on what? Maybe there is a difference in how the wise and fools interact with money. I guess some foolish pursuits that come to mind on how one might spend money would be potential addictive behaviors such as gambling, pornography, or drugs. It's probably safe to say that the wise aren't too into these types of things. **Q: How are you doing with money these days? Are you spending it wisely? Are you saving it? Are you giving it away to your church and charity? Do you think it matters how we spend our money? If a \$100 bill appeared in your hands right this very moment, what would you do with it?**

8/19 - Proverbs 21:21 is a great one to live by! "*Whoever pursues godliness and unfailing love will find life, godliness, and honor.*" **Q: What is godliness? What is unfailing love? Are you pursuing both of these? Do you believe that in this pursuit you will find life? Godliness? Honor? Are these worth pursuing? If so... pursue!**

8/20 - Proverbs 21 verse 23 today teaches us: "*If you keep your mouth shut, you will stay out of trouble.*" This Proverb is so wise that I will say no more! :) **Q: How have you learned the truth of this Proverb in your life?**

8/21 - Proverbs 21 verses 25 & 26 are fantastic - *"The desires of lazy people will be their ruin, for their hands refuse to work. They are always greedy for more, while the godly love to give!"* What an interesting juxtaposition of how the lazy are greedy and they have strong desires, while the godly love to give! Beautiful. **Q: Do you love to give? What was the last intentional (not random) act of kindness you performed? Do you perform intentional acts of kindness regularly?**

8/22 - Proverbs 21 verse 27 is one of those that makes you go "ouch" - *"God loathes the sacrifice of an evil person, especially when it is brought with ulterior motives."* Well, not the evil person part making me go ouch, so much as the "ulterior motives" part. I do think there is so much wisdom in Jesus' admonition to give without letting the right hand know what the left hand is doing. I am afraid that sometimes I have not only let the right hand know when I'm giving - but many other people as well! That's ulterior motives. And it's not right obviously, as we see in this Proverb today and as we hear from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. **Q: How about you and your giving or acts of kindness - Do you give with pure motives? With no ulterior motives? With no strings attached?**

8/23 - Proverbs chapter 21 verse 29 today is subtle but so true: *"The wicked put up a bold front, but the upright proceed with care."* **Q: Have you ever seen folks that put up a bold front, but don't have much behind it all? And then seen those that are so humble and maybe even seem quiet, but then deliver incredible fruits?** As Jesus said - you'll know a tree by its fruit. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit and a good tree cannot produce bad fruit. This Proverb is a great reminder that the front / the sales pitch / the first impression is not the fruit! It's what comes next and what is delivered with quality and consistency that comes next. **Do you put up a bold front at times? Or do you make it a habit to instead proceed with care?** Let us be an upright people!

8/24 - Today in Proverbs 21 verse 31 we read: *"The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD."* How does this Proverb speak to you? For me it is a reminder that anything we do in our life is dependent on the Lord. If we want to be successful in life – in our jobs, ministries, marriages, friendships, anything – we will only be successful if the Lord is with us. So, how do we know if the Lord is with us? My first suggestion is prayer. I believe we should commit every thing we do to prayer. I will admit that lately my prayer life has not been very good. And I've noticed the effects of it. I want victory in so many areas of my life – but it seems like I am too often "saddling up" the horse without seeking the Lord's guidance and wisdom and blessing. **Q: How is your prayer life these days? Are you committing everything you do to prayer? Are you earnestly seeking through prayer the Lord's guidance, wisdom and blessing, knowing that victory rests only with the Lord?**

8/25 - We have a beautiful Proverb verse 1 to start off the 22nd Chapter of Proverbs! *"Choose a good reputation over great riches, for being held in high esteem is better than having silver or gold."* **Q: Do you believe this Proverb to be true? Which do you seek after more - a good reputation or money?** You know though, the more I think about this Proverb I have some concerns about it. Only in that if we seek after having a good reputation, then we may really be focusing on ourselves and how other people look at us, rather than focusing on Kingdom things. We may decide to do something because it's "popular", rather than it being "right." We may give to the poor with blazing trumpets because this will help our reputation - but Jesus clearly said we should not do this. Does this make sense? I mean given the choice of a good reputation or being rich, this Proverb is clearly true. But it's not enough. That's why we need to read the entire Bible to get the full context of everything else that surrounds any 1 particular verse in the Bible, like this one. One verse is not enough. It's Truth. But not enough. We need the entire Bible. Good for you for going through the One Year Bible this year! Please do keep up your study of the entire Bible beyond just this year. We need the entire Bible for our entire life...

8/26 - Proverbs 22 verse 2 is a great reminder that our wealth or status does not affect who we are in God's eyes or in God's very hands: *"The rich and the poor have this in common: The LORD made them both."* As we are all created by God, we should not ever consider ourselves better than anyone - nor lesser than anyone - because someone else has a different set of finances than we do. If you think about it, every single person you meet has a different set of finances than you do. Some are richer, some are poorer. And yet we all have this in common - God made us. **Q: How might this affect how you view others in this world? Do you literally and consciously realize that God made each and every one of us?**

8/27 - Proverbs 22 verse 6 today teaches us: *"Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it."* You know, this verse actually reminds me of quite a bit of recent work I've had the good fortune to participate in or observe when it comes to early childhood education. 85% of a child's brain develops in the first 3 years of

their life. **Think this is a critical period of time to teach children?** Certainly after the age of 3 we still have so much opportunity to teach children to choose the right path. I am becoming more and more convinced that education for children is so critical here in our own backyards and throughout the world. And unfortunately, as we all know, quality education is not happening in many sectors of our society and our world. Let me encourage you to please invest in childhood education in your own backyard and around the world. Find a child to mentor. Teach a Sunday school class. Invest in nonprofits working on childhood education. Sponsor a child through World Vision where they will get a fantastic Christian education. **Q: Will you join me in personally getting involved with and investing in organizations that teach our children to choose the right path?**

8/28 - We read great wisdom in Proverbs 22 verse 7 today: *"Just as the rich rule the poor, so the borrower is servant to the lender."* This Proverb reminds me of some of the "Get Out of Debt" seminars and books that are out there. I haven't read any of the books, but I did attend a half day seminar a while back, and I found it to be really good. It is true that we are so caught up in a cycle of debt here in the U.S. - and I imagine in other countries too. The thing I remember from the half day seminar is that we will never get out of debt if we cannot control our "appetites." If we cannot stop buying and spending and consuming beyond what we really need, we'll continue to be in debt. And once we are in debt, we are indeed slaves to the lender. Slaves to our credit card companies. Pretty scary when you think about it. I pray that if you are struggling with debt, you do check out a seminar or book - don't buy the book if you can help it! :) Get it from the library. We need to stop our impulses to "BUY NOW" or "DON'T MISS OUT" on x, y or z. Let's get out of debt and get out of slavery to our lenders. Literally cut up that credit card if that's what you need to do to control your out-of-control spending... **Q: How are you doing on debt in your life today? Any debt books or seminars you can recommend?**

8/29 - I love Proverbs 22 verse 9: *"Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor."* It reads like an additional Beatitude from the book of Matthew / Sermon on the Mount. And it's so straightforward. Blessed are those who are generous. Why? Because they feed the poor. Doesn't get more straightforward than that! Although, I will say that we can be generous not only with our money, but in so many ways that we live our lives. We can be generous in spirit - to feed the poor in spirit. We can be generous with our time - to feed those who are time-starved. We can be generous with our encouragement - to feed those who are feeling down. We can be generous in our prayers - to feed those who may not yet know how to pray. And yes, of course, we can be generous with our finances - to feed those who are physically hungry. **Q: What are some ways that you are generous with the poor? What are some ways you'd like to be more generous to the poor?**

8/30 - Proverbs 22 verse 12 is convicting - *"The LORD preserves knowledge, but he ruins the plans of the deceitful."* This Proverb reminds me that we truly need to examine our motives. **Why do we do what we do? Why do we give? Why do we love?** Why do we volunteer? And this list goes on. And I think we need to continually pray that we are doing what we do for pure motives. Not for any hidden agendas. Let us not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. Because, if we are acting with hidden agendas - selfish motives - it is deceitful. Deceitful to others and deceitful to ourselves. We may be tricking ourselves into thinking we are doing something for pure motives when truly there is a selfish agenda in the shadows. God's grace and love and knowledge can of course heal us of our impure motives. And this indeed may be a process over the course of our lifetime. I guess this Proverb jumped out at me because I am realizing that there are times when I do not act with pure motives - particularly when it comes to doing something that on the surface looks good. I am unfortunately oftentimes subconsciously looking for some glory. And ultimately, I know that selfish plans will fail. They will be ruined. **Q: How about you? Why do you do what you do? Why do you give? Why do you love? Why do you volunteer? Is it all for the glory of God? Or is there any hint of wanting your own glory?**

8/31 - Today we read in Proverbs chapter 22 verse 13 - *"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside!' or, 'I will be murdered in the streets!'"* How does this Proverb speak to you? To me it is a reminder of all of the excuses I can make for not participating in God's will for my life. I strongly believe that God has an amazing purpose and an amazing plan for each of our lives. I also believe that we can often do a very good job of refusing to participate in God's plan for our life. We either think that God's plan really isn't all that good, so we'll do things our own way. Or we are simply lazy or afraid or cowardly or who knows what. We make a million excuses for why we won't get on with God's plan for our life! **Q: How about you? Do you believe that God has an amazing purpose and plan for your life? Do you know what it is? If not, will you seek it? In either case, are you actively working on Kingdom things in your life these days? Are you living out in your life the call of the Gospel to actively love and serve others each and every day? Or are you making excuses?**

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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