

Notes & Group Questions from August 8-14 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)

EZRA 7:1 - NEHEMIAH 9:21

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?**

1 CORINTHIANS 4:1 - 9:18

8/8 - Alright... 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 it's 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 word's 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?**

PSALM 30:1 - 33:22

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?**

PROVERBS 20:28 - 21:12

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 snifty 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?**

Group discussions:

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

Each group is encouraged to close in prayer.

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

- My favorite verses or passages:
- What I learned from the readings:
- My questions for further study:

- How God spoke to me through the Word:
- Something I want to change or grow in my life based on the Word:
- My prayer points based on the Word:

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