

Notes & Group Questions from September 5-11 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)

ECCLESIASTES 10:1 - ISAIAH 9:21

9/5 - Ecclesiastes chapter 12 verse 13 is the key verse in this entire book! *"Here is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person."* Take a moment to meditate on this verse. Do you agree with this teaching? Do you fear God? What does it mean to fear God? (Bible.org has a good overview of fearing God [at this link](#) - scroll down on that page to the commentary on verses 11-22) Are you obedient to God's commands? Do you believe this is your duty? We finish up the book of Ecclesiastes today, and what a finish it is! Song of Solomon begins tomorrow! I love Ecclesiastes chapter 10 today. It's basically a series of rapid Proverbs. Great great stuff. I had forgotten about this gem of a chapter in the Bible. This chapter is again a great reminder of why Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, wrote many of the Proverbs. He had godly wisdom no doubt! I love verse 1 in this chapter today - *"Dead flies will cause even a bottle of perfume to stink! Yes, an ounce of foolishness can outweigh a pound of wisdom and honor."* This is a powerful truth for us to take to heart. We can so often live our lives with wisdom and honor... and then, we let an ounce of foolishness seep into our lives and it outweighs all of our wisdom and honor! This is so true... I think this is particularly true if we are harboring any unchecked sin in our life. We need to put that sin in check! We need to repent and flee from that sin. Otherwise we are harboring an ounce of foolishness in our lives that can outweigh our pounds of wisdom and honor... and this is just as bad as a dead fly in a bottle of perfume! What a great analogy by Solomon. Think of unchecked sin in your life a dead fly in the perfume of your life... it is a sad but true analogy... Get that dead fly out of your life! **Q: What is a dead fly that you need to get out of the perfume of your life?**

9/5 - I love verse 18 as well - *"Laziness lets the roof leak, and soon the rafters begin to rot."* This is so very true, of course. **Q: Are there any areas of laziness in your life where you are letting some "roofs leak"? Are there "rafters rotting" in your life? Will you pray to God for freedom from your laziness in those areas of your life and will you simply go and fix the roof?**

9/5 - Ecclesiastes chapter 12 verse 13 is the key verse in this entire book! *"Here is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person."* Take a moment to meditate on this verse. **Q: Do you agree with this teaching? Do you fear God? What does it mean to fear God? Are you obedient to God's commands? Do you believe this is your duty?**

9/6 - Today we begin the Song of Solomon! Now, for those of you that have not read Song of Solomon before, let me say this up front – this is a book for married folks y'all! :) Well, yes, us single folks can read it, but we would do well to know that this book is all about the beauty of love and, yes, sex - within marriage. As we all know, love and sex can get so very twisted by our modern world these days.

~ Song of Solomon ~

Author: Solomon

Date: Tenth century B.C.

Content: This book, about the love of Solomon and a Shulamite woman, consists of a series of lyrics or songs, hence the designation in the text: the Song of Songs. It is a simple but moving piece, describing the longing of two lovers for one another, of the struggles that need to be overcome, of the tender feelings that love awakens, and of the joy that the lovers find in being together. The young women of Jerusalem, who appear with Solomon and his beloved, add to the dramatic effect of the story by adding observations of their own.

Theme: The most obvious meaning of this narrative is that human love, which was ordained by God, is good and holy when enjoyed in obedience to the commands of God. Many interpreters have found a symbolic meaning in the book, however, and point to the love of God for Israel or the love of Christ for his church. Seen in this way it underscores the teaching of the New Testament that God is love (1 John 4:8). (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 10-11) **Q: How has the Song of Solomon stood out to you over the years? Have you studied this book before? What have you learned? What do you hope to learn from the book this year?**

9/7 - Today we finish up the Song of Solomon! Song of Solomon Chapter 8 verse 4 stood out to me today when the young woman says- *"I want you to promise, O women of Jerusalem, not to awaken love until the time is right."* This is an interesting concept I think - of not awakening love until the time is right. The reason I bring this up is because I know tons

of people who are single. And probably a lot of folks reading this blog are single. And I've come to realize that single people can oftentimes stress out over being single... as if they are never going to get married. Which, perhaps for some, may be true. I do honestly believe that some are called to live a life of singleness. However, if you are single I think stressing about it does no good. Trying to "awaken love before the time is right" does no good. In fact, it can be very bad. I know of some folks that have gotten themselves in bad dating situations, simply because I think these folks were trying to "awaken love before the time is right." My thought here is that the Young Woman from Song of Solomon is absolutely right. If we are single, we need to remember that everything is in God's hands. If God has a plan for us to get married, then we really don't need to stress about the timing of it all. It will happen when it should happen. When the time is right. And to try to awaken love before the time is right typically does not work out well. So, that's my two cents today. :) I just hope that if you are single and feel like you've been single for too long, don't stress out about it! God's timing and God's plans for your life are indeed a mystery - but a beautiful mystery. He will awaken love when - and if - the time is right. Let us always remember in all areas of our life to "Let go and Let God"... **Q: How have you learned the wisdom of "not awakening love until the time is right" in your life? How do you share this wisdom with others in your life?**

9/8 - Today we begin the book of the prophet Isaiah! A powerful quote from Bible.org [at this link](#) about this book is: "The Book of Isaiah is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. While little is known of the personal life of the prophet, he is considered to be one of the greatest of them all. The book is a collection of oracles, prophecies, and reports; but the common theme is the message of salvation. There was, according to these writings, no hope in anything that was made by people... There would be a purging of the nation because God is holy. Before the nation could inherit the promises made to the fathers, it would have to be made holy."

~ *Isaiah* ~

Author: Isaiah

Date: Eighth century B.C.

Content: Isaiah's long ministry lasted almost sixty years and covered the reigns of four kings, the last one being Hezekiah, the reformer. Isaiah was sent primarily to Judah, although his message concerns the northern kingdom of Israel as well. He lived through the awful days of the civil war between Israel and Judah in 734-732 B.C. and saw the destruction of Israel by Assyria in 722 B.C. the grim lesson taught by Israel's fall was not lost on Isaiah, and he used it to encourage Hezekiah to trust in the Lord. The Lord delivered Judah from the mighty Assyrian army by sending a plague to destroy the camp. Isaiah also looked beyond his own time to the coming exile of Judah and the deliverance that God would provide.

Theme: Isaiah was one of Jesus' favorite books and he quoted it frequently, because the central theme is salvation. God is seen as the Savior of his people, who redeemed them from Egypt, who will redeem them from their coming captivity, and who will send his beloved Servant to bear the sins of us all (Isaiah 53:6). God freely offers to pardon all who will turn to him in repentance and faith. The future kingdom of God on earth is also described in exquisite detail as a time when men will lay down their swords and, in peace, sing praises to God their King. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 11*)

9/8 - Today in Isaiah chapter 1 verses 2 and 3 we read these words of the prophet Isaiah: "*Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."* **Q: These words were spoken to the Israelites in the 8th century B.C., but do you suppose they can apply to our modern world today as well? Do we know God? Do we truly understand God?** I do think that sometimes we can forget that God is our Father. We are his children. He has brought us up. And we have rebelled. Is an ox at times smarter than us in terms of knowing who its master is? Do we truly know who our master is? I'm afraid sometimes I live my life as if I am my own master. I am "master of my own destiny!" Well. . . am I really? What about you. **Q: Who is your master day in and day out? Do you know your Master? Do you understand?**

9/9 - Isaiah chapter 5 verse 20 was directed at Judah in the 8th century B.C., but I wonder if this verse can have application to our world today? "*Destruction is certain for those who say that evil is good and good is evil; that dark is light and light is dark; that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter.*" Can you think of any examples in our modern world where evil is portrayed as good and good is portrayed as evil? I can think of far too many examples unfortunately. This twisting of good and evil, light and dark, bitter and sweet did not make God happy back in eighth century B.C. **Q: Think God is happy about this twisting of good and evil today?** This makes me think of Gordon Gekko's infamous lines from the movie Wall Street: "I am not a destroyer of companies. I am a liberator of them! The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed -- for lack of a better word -- is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms -- greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge -- has marked

the upward surge of mankind." **How do you suppose Isaiah would react to hearing these words from Mr. Gekko...? :) How should we react? Or... do we react at all?**

9/10 - Wonderful readings today in Isaiah chapter 6 as Isaiah is commissioned as a prophet by the Lord! Great stuff! The seraphim mentioned in this chapter are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible by name, though they do seem similar to the "living creatures" described in [Revelation 4:6-9](#). It is intriguing to note that even the seraphim with two of their wings "covered their faces" (verse 2) before God. No wonder Isaiah got very scared in verse 5 because he saw the Lord with his own eyes in this vision! It is thought by some commentaries that this vision of Isaiah's may have taken place in the Temple in Jerusalem. Below are two pieces of artwork depicting the seraphim and verse 3: *"In a great chorus they sang, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty! The whole earth is filled with his glory!'"* Amen... In Isaiah chapter 7 today we read about the sign of Immanuel in verses 14 through 16! *"All right then, the Lord himself will choose the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel-- 'God is with us.' By the time this child is old enough to eat curds and honey, he will know enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong. But before he knows right from wrong, the two kings you fear so much--the kings of Israel and Aram--will both be dead."* I don't know about you, but when I read this today I immediately thought of the virgin Mary and Jesus. With good reason, as we'll recall from the gospel of Matthew chapter 1 verse 23: *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us.'"* Commentaries suggest that yes, indeed, these passages in Isaiah are ultimately wholly fulfilled in Jesus, who truly is "God with us." But, commentaries also suggest that this prophecy in Isaiah had a double fulfillment - first in a young woman from the house of Ahaz who was not married, but would marry and then have a son - and by the time the son was the age 2, the two invading kings would be destroyed. Then, the second fulfillment of this prophecy was indeed in the One we now celebrate as the true Immanuel, Jesus Christ, God with us! **Q: What is your reaction to reading prophecies about Jesus here in Isaiah? Do you believe these truly are prophecies of Jesus? Why do you suppose God orchestrated these New Testament prophecies in the Old Testament times?**

9/11 - I got chills today when reading Isaiah chapter 9 about the hope in our Messiah, Jesus Christ! Keep in mind that the book of the prophet Isaiah was written in the 8th century B.C.... 800 years before Jesus walked this earth! Verses 1 & 2 start off this chapter in such a beautiful way: *"Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will soon be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light--a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow."* Compare these verses to the Gospel of [Matthew chapter 4 verses 12 through 17 at this link](#) when Jesus begins his public ministry. Amazing eh? Jesus Christ is the great light! The light of the world! And indeed, a light to the Gentiles! Verses 6 & 7 continued the chills for me as I read them - and reminded me of an incredibly beautiful song that is sung at my parent's church every Christmas: *"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His ever expanding, peaceful government will never end. He will rule forever with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David. The passionate commitment of the LORD Almighty will guarantee this!"* **Q: Do you believe that these verses were prophesying the coming of Jesus Christ 800 years later? Do you believe that Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor? Mighty God? Prince of Peace? Do you believe that Jesus rules forever with fairness and justice? Praise God for this prophecy in Isaiah that a child would be born to us!**

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1 - 12:10

9/5 - Second Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9 today is one of those verses that can really make you think about how blessed you truly are and why through Jesus: *"You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich."* I imagine that most of us reading this blog right now are living pretty nice lives overall. In most respects it may be fair to call us "rich." Many of us have rich lives in terms of where we live, our spiritual freedoms, and other freedoms. And why do we have these riches in our lives today? Because Jesus, the Son of God, came to this earth and made himself poor for our sakes. Jesus was born in a manger. He lived his life "homeless" in many ways. He was sinless, but yet died a criminal's death by execution on a cross. Jesus was very rich in heaven. But yet, because of his love and kindness, he made himself poor and died on a cross for us, so that we would be "rich." **Q: And now, realizing this, how are we utilizing our riches? Are we demonstrating love and kindness to others like Jesus did to us? Are we investing our lives - lives that were given to us by God and saved by Jesus - for Kingdom purposes? Are you living your life as if you are literally working for God in all that you do?**

9/6 - Second Corinthians chapter 8 verse 23 stood out to me today - *"If anyone asks about Titus, say that he is my partner who works with me to help you. And these brothers are representatives of the churches. They are splendid examples of those who bring glory to Christ."* I like that last sentence a lot. I believe each of us are called to be splendid examples of those who bring glory to Jesus! **Q: How is your example these days? How are you bringing glory to Jesus in your life these days?**

9/7 - Today in Second Corinthians chapter 9 verses 6 through 8 we read these words of Paul's - *"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."* Great verses! A lot of ground is covered in these verses. **Q: Do you believe that we reap what we sow? What are you sowing? What have you decided in your heart to give? Do you give without reluctance? Do you give without compulsion? Are you a cheerful giver? Do you realize that God graciously gives you all that you need so that you will participate in good works? Are you participating in God's grace that he is freely giving to you?**

9/8 - Wow... I love Paul's words to the church in Second Corinthians chapter 10 verses 3 through 5: *"We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds. With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas, and we teach them to obey Christ."* This is incredibly powerful for us to realize. We are human. God is God. We are not God. But, good news is that we have access to God's "weapons" through our relationship with his son Jesus. And trust me. In this fallen world, we need God's weapons. We need his strength. We need his grace. We need his forgiveness. We need his miracles. We need his Son. These are the only ways that we will knock down the Devil's strongholds in our lives and in others lives. How do we access God's mighty weapons? My personal opinion is that prayer is one of the best things we can do in this regards. I don't know about you, but I do not pray enough. However, just lately I've been praying a bit more, and I'll tell you, God has moved! Prayer is such a beautiful mystery. We need it like the air we breathe. Please pray. Other ways to access God's mighty weapons are certainly reading and studying God's Word daily, investing in a church community at least weekly (even more is better via small groups, etc.), and confessing and repenting and fleeing from sin. Then, with God's weapons we are called to introduce others to who God is and teach them to obey Christ. **Q: How are you accessing God's mighty weapons these days? Are you praying? Are you reading and studying the Bible daily? Are you investing in a church community weekly? Are you confessing and repenting and fleeing from sin? Or are you relying on your human plans and methods to make it through the day? Are you relying on worldly weapons? Will you seek instead God's mighty weapons?**

9/9 - Paul's words in Second Corinthians chapter 11 verse 14 are some of the scariest words in Scripture for each of us to take to heart: *"Even Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light."* **Q: Do you believe these words of Paul's are true? How would you know if something that appears to be good on the surface is not really good at all?** Let us pray for discernment in this regards! Let us not ever be fooled by Satan and his disguises!

9/10 - Amazing words from Paul today in Second Corinthians chapter 11 verse 30! *"If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am."* Why would Paul say he would rather boast about things that show how weak he is? Why would Paul want to be weak in any way? Why would you or I want to be weak in any way? If you must boast, what are you boasting about these days?

9/11 - Paul's words in Second Corinthians chapter 12 verses 7 through 10 about the thorn in Paul's flesh are so powerful for each of us to consider for our lives today as well! *"But to keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* Biblical commentaries can basically all agree that we do not know what Paul's "thorn" was. There is some interesting speculation out there. Some think that the thorn is Paul's flesh was perhaps something that literally affected his flesh - a health issue of some sort. Some think it could have been a disease of the eyes, epilepsy, or even malaria. Whatever the thorn was, it was something that affected him very seriously. And it kept Paul humble in the midst of his incredible ministry. **Q: Why do you suppose that Paul was given a thorn in his flesh? Do you suppose**

you or I might have thorns in our flesh today? What might those thorns be in your life today? And why might those thorns be there? Is there anything you can learn from Paul about your thorns? Can you learn to live with the thorn in your flesh realizing that God's power in your life actually works strongest when you are weak? Do you believe that God's power can actually work through the thorn in your flesh for God's glory? Will you accept where you are weak, so that in that area of your life God will be strong?

PSALM 49:1 - 55:23

9/5 - Psalm 49 verses 1-3 are a fantastic teaching that the Word of God, the Bible, is for everyone, no matter what our lots in life may be - *"Listen to this, all you people! Pay attention, everyone in the world! High and low, rich and poor--listen! For my words are wise, and my thoughts are filled with insight."* **Q: Are you listening today? Are you paying attention to the wise words and insights of the Bible? Are you truly studying the Bible and then applying the Bible's teachings to your life?** Then, verse 15 in this Psalm is beautiful: *"But as for me, God will redeem my life. He will snatch me from the power of death."* **How about for you? Will God redeem your life? Like the parable of the lost sheep that we read about in [Luke 15:3-7](#), has Jesus saved you from being snatched from the power of death?**

9/6 - Psalm 50 verses 14 & 15 are beautiful words from God to Israel - *"What I want instead is your true thanks to God; I want you to fulfill your vows to the Most High. Trust me in your times of trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."* **Q: Do you believe these words can apply to us today as well? Are you giving true thanks to God each day? Are you trusting in God in your times of trouble? Are you giving God glory for all that he has done for you? How often do you say "thank you" to God?**

9/7 - Today we read one of my favorite Psalms! Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is David's humble prayer for forgiveness and cleansing after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed in battle. I believe that this Psalm can continue to be a humble prayer for forgiveness and cleansing for each of us today. This Psalm is read by many liturgical churches during the season of Lent as a penitential Psalm. A brief quote from this Bible.org about this Psalm is: "The application of the psalm to believers today should be obvious. We, like David, can and must have complete cleansing before we can fully and freely serve God in any capacity. Our eternal destiny may not be in doubt when we sin as believers, and neither was David's because he appealed to that covenant relationship, but our fellowship and service will be. God will not tolerate unconfessed sin, and so will hold us accountable if we do not confess." I've been trying to figure out my favorite portion or two of this Psalm to share with you. . . but I can't just pick one portion. It is all so powerful! Tell you what - I'm going to copy the full Psalm below in the NIV translation (my favorite for this Psalm). Please take a few moments to meditate upon this Psalm. **Q: My questions for reflection are these - Do you confess your sins to God? Do you confess your sins to others? And ask them to hold you accountable? When was the last time you confessed your sins to God? Do you have sins to confess to God today? Will you do so now?** I pray this Psalm opens up your heart to the amazing burden that is lifted when we confess our sins to God!

9/8 - Verse 9 in Psalm 52 stood out to me today - *"I will praise you forever, O God, for what you have done. I will wait for your mercies in the presence of your people."* **Q: Are you looking forward to praising God forever? Are you willing to wait for God? If things don't seem to be moving as quickly as you would like them to in your spiritual life, will you still wait for God? And will you do so in the presence of God's people? Do you believe that being part of a church community can help you during a time of waiting for the Lord? And do you believe that you can help others in your church to wait as well?** Then, together you can look forward to praising God forever for what he has done and will do!

9/9 - If you've ever asked yourself - or ever been asked - why do we need a Messiah? What is our need of Jesus? Well, I think this question is clearly answered in verses 2 & 3 of Psalm 53: *"God looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if there is even one with real understanding, one who seeks for God. But no, all have turned away from God; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one!"* This is why we need Jesus. With Jesus, we indeed seek for God. With Jesus, we are blessed with the Holy Spirit to begin to have some real understanding. But without Jesus.... well, it reminds me of the old DC Talk song "In the Light" - "What's going on inside of me? I despise my own behavior. This only serves to confirm my suspicions, that I'm still a man in need of a Savior!" Amen... **Q: Do you agree that apart from Jesus there no one in the entire human race who does good or has real understanding? Why do you suppose people who are not in a saving relationship with Jesus sometimes still believe people are basically "good?"**

9/10 - I like Psalm 54 verse 4 a lot - *"But God is my helper. The Lord is the one who keeps me alive!"* **Q: Is this true in your life? Is God the one who keeps you alive? Or are you trying to lean on other things as your source of life?** I believe it is such a blessing to surrender more and more to God until we get to the point where truly this true for us - God is the one - and only - who keeps us alive. I am not saying I am there yet - but I'm trying to get there. I'm trying to surrender more and more each day to God and to Jesus - all that I am - all that I am living for. I pray that in your life and in mine God will be the one who keeps us alive!

9/11 - Today we read Psalm 55 verse 22, which is a beautiful reminder to all who believe in the risen Lord! *"Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall."* Please do meditate on this verse a bit. **Q: Do you make it a habit of giving your burdens to the Lord? Or do you try to carry your burdens on your own strength? Is there a burden you are carrying today that you can give to the Lord? Will you? And do you trust that he will take care of you and not permit you to slip and fall?**

PROVERBS 22:20 - 23:5

9/5 - Proverbs 22 verses 20-21 today teach us: *"I have written thirty sayings for you, filled with advice and knowledge. In this way, you may know the truth and bring an accurate report to those who sent you."* These two Proverbs verses today actually tie in quite nicely with Psalm 49 verses 1-3 above. Let us know the truth of God's Word and then report it accurately to others! **Q: Actually, this is probably a good point for me to ask you if you are participating in a Bible study at your church? If not, can I encourage you to consider starting up a One Year Bible study / small group at your church this next year?** Seriously. Please think and pray about this leadership opportunity. I do realize not everyone is called to something like this. But - I think many of us are - probably more of us than we think are. If you have been going through the One Year Bible with us this year, you have learned much! I think you are in a great position to lead a One Year Bible study / small group at your church next year. All you need is a One Year Bible, perhaps the One Year Bible Companion book with Q&A teachings for each day's readings, and a willingness to take this opportunity on. **Will you think and pray about this? Will you talk to your pastor or the appropriate person at your church about this?** You don't need to know the Bible backwards and forwards to lead a group! You just need to take the initiative to lead, and invite others to join you on the journey. You will be amazed by how God moves in a Bible study! It will bless you and those around you immensely! **Will you lead someone (or a group of someone's) through the One Year Bible this next year?**

9/6 - Proverbs chapter 22 verses 22 & 23 teach us today: *"Do not rob the poor because they are poor or exploit the needy in court. For the LORD is their defender. He will injure anyone who injures them."* This is a strong warning to not rob or exploit the poor. I think we would do well to think of this not only in terms of the materially poor, but the spiritually or emotionally poor too. Let us not rob them or exploit them. For the Lord is their defender! **Q: How are you making sure that you don't rob the poor in your life these days?**

9/7 - Proverbs 22 verses 24 through 25 are a great reminder to pay attention to who our friends are: *"Keep away from angry, short-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul."* I've read somewhere that a good way to determine the character of a person is to take a look at who their friends are. Now, this is a bit tricky I think because none of our friends will ever be perfect. We should not look for perfect friends. We won't be perfect friends to others either. Jesus is the only one true perfect friend for each of us. But, there are certainly some "friends" who probably should not be people we spend a good deal of leisure time with. There may be friends who are into lying or pornography or who are angry or short-tempered (per this Proverb) that we need to be very cautious around, otherwise we may learn to be like them. Now, I do think we are called to be friends to people who may struggle with various things - including lying, pornography, being angry, etc. - but, we need to be very cautious and clear on our boundaries. This is a tricky one I know... Overall, I will say this - there are friends of mine that I have had to let go because I knew that hanging around them was simply not good for me. **Q: How about you? Are there any friends in your life that you may simply need to let the friendship go? When might this be the appropriate thing to do? When might it be the inappropriate thing to do?**

9/8 - We read an interesting Proverb today in chapter 22 verses 26 & 27: *"Do not co-sign another person's note or put up a guarantee for someone else's loan. If you can't pay it, even your bed will be snatched from under you."* I've always been intrigued by these types of Proverbs / verses in the Bible. Verses that basically say don't co-sign or guarantee anybody else's debt - unless of course we're talking about your kid! :) I do see the wisdom in this. If you co-sign / guarantee for somebody else, then be prepared to have to pay back that debt in full... Wow. This is pretty heavy to think about. We hear so much about staying out of debt - and typically think about our own personal debt. That's obviously

wise. And well, this Proverb today is saying don't take on other people's debt! That is very wise! Stay out of debt! Your own and particularly your friends! **Q: How are you doing with debt in your life these days? Are you avoiding debt? Paying it off if you have it? Vowing not to go into debt again?**

9/9 - Today in Proverbs chapter 22 verse 29 we read: *"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men."* The thing I love about this Proverb is that it encourages us to be skilled in our work. Whether we are teachers, or bus drivers, or accountants, or technicians, or full time moms, I do strongly believe we are called to be skilled in our work! **Do you really focus on your work and make sure you give 100% to your job? Do you avoid surfing the internet at work or chit-chatting for too long or checking personal emails? Do you work for your employer as if you were literally working for God? Do you believe that indeed no matter what your job is that you are really working for God? Do you want to give God your all? Will you give work your all?** Don't get me wrong – I'm not encouraging us to be workaholics. I just think that too often we can slack off a bit at work and think it's no big deal. I think it is just the opposite. I believe if we slack off at work we'll be more likely to slack off in other areas of our life, including our relationship with God. **Q: Are you skilled in your work? Do you realize that through your work you are not serving before obscure men, but you are indeed serving the King?**

9/10 - Proverbs 23 verses 1 through 3 today teach us: *"When dining with a ruler, pay attention to what is put before you. If you are a big eater, put a knife to your throat, and don't desire all the delicacies--deception may be involved."* This is a fascinating Proverb. I think the key to remember here is that if you are dining with a ruler that you really need to be very well prayed-up! Seriously. Rulers don't just mean presidents or politicians. I think of rulers as perhaps our bosses or key people in our community who are well known, but whom perhaps we don't know that well. If one of these people invites you to dinner, very simply put - beware. Why? Because... deception may be involved. It may not be involved - it may be a very innocent invite to dinner - but you should be cautious. If you are a woman and a well-known man invites you to a one-on-one dinner, and it seems out of context or strange in some way, my first inclination would be to not go. We all obviously know the risk in a situation like this. But men being invited to dinner by men, or men being invited to dinner by women, or women being invited to dinner by women all need to be careful too. One-on-one dinners with someone other than your spouse, someone you are courting, or a good friend could be risky business. I'll briefly share with you that I got put into a crazy bad situation once being invited to a dinner by a "ruler" in my community. I didn't see at all what was coming. (I'll spare you the details...) By the grace of God it all turned out fine in the end - in fact, in some ways I have never felt the Spirit of God rushing through me as powerfully as when I was in that horrible situation over dinner. But, it was a lesson learned! When dining with a ruler - pay attention to what is before you! Not only the food & drink... but the psychological game of deception that may very be before you as well... **Q: Have you ever had the experience of having to be "on your guard" when dining with rich or powerful people? Have you ever had someone in a position of power try to deceive you? How did remain pure and holy in the midst of it?**

9/11 - Proverbs 23 verses 4 & 5 today are a great teaching on the futility of pursuing worldly wealth - *"Don't weary yourself trying to get rich. Why waste your time? For riches can disappear as though they had the wings of a bird!"* **Q: Have you ever tried to get rich? Did it ever seem like perhaps that goal in and of itself was perhaps a waste of time? What else in life do you miss out on when you pursue nothing but riches? Is it possible that you miss out on God when you wholeheartedly pursue riches?** I do want to share with you a personal conversion of heart story here. When I graduated from college my one goal in life was "to make one million dollars by the age of 30." Seriously. And what a sad goal that turned out to be! I did go through a period of about 4 years of really pursuing that goal - and it led me into a job that was leading me down the path of being rich, but it was a job that I absolutely hated. The pursuit of that monetary goal was literally killing my soul. Fortunately God can redeem dumb goals like this and save us from our self-destructive habits. During that quest for riches God led me into a homeless shelter for teenagers where I finally had a conversion of heart experience to realize that there are people really struggling in our world - teenagers that have been physically, mentally, and sexually abused by their own parents in this case. And I realized in that homeless shelter that I was doing absolutely nothing for these hurting teens in my pursuit of cold hard cash. I was the one becoming cold! Well, praise God that he led me to eventually quit that high profile job and begin working for jobs that paid much less, but which have given me a great opportunity to have work / life balance. Jobs that have given me enough breathing room to grow in my relationship with God and others! So, back to you and your life today. **Q: Have you grown weary pursuing riches yet...?**

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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