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

PROVERBS 17:1 - ISAIAH 16:14 (daily reading schedule at: www.oneyearbibleonline.com)

6/1 - Proverbs 17 verse 5 is quite convicting for us to consider: *"Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who rejoice at the misfortune of others will be punished."* That is a powerful realization - if you mock the poor, you mock God. If you care for the poor, you care for God. I have a friend who met Mother Teresa many years back at her home for the sick & dying in Calcutta. And my friend when he met her was trying to tell her all the great stuff he was doing in his life and in his ministry. But, Mother Teresa really didn't care to hear about all his ministry stuff. All she said to him was "Do you want to meet Jesus? Do you want to meet Jesus?" And of course he said "Yes! Of course I do Mother Teresa." So, she led him by the hand down a hall and into a room where a man was on his deathbed. She sat my friend down at a chair by this man's bed. And she placed my friend's hands on this dying man's hands. And she said, "Now you will meet Jesus." And she left the room... and left him in the room with the dying man for about 30 minutes. And you know what - my friend met Jesus that day in a way he had never done so before. **Q: So, how about you. Do you want to meet Jesus? If you've already met Jesus, when and where did you first meet Him?**

6/1 - Proverbs 17 verse 6 is an amazing Proverb today: *"Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children."* The obvious slam-dunk commentary is the grandchildren portion - and I've got an image below for you on that one. But I really want to camp out on "parents are the pride of their children." This is beautiful! You'd think it would go the other way around - and certainly it works the other way around nicely: Kids are the pride of their parents. But parents being the pride of their children - this is great! (and very reminiscent of the Commandment to honor your father and mother) And something each of us should really meditate upon and remember as our parents get older. They are going to need us to care for them. And they should be our pride! **Q: How are your grandchildren or parents your glory or pride? Why do you think the Bible places so much emphasis on the importance of family in our lives? Do you agree with the Bible?**

6/1 - Proverbs 17 verse 7 teaches us today: *"Eloquent words are not fitting for a fool; even less are lies fitting for a ruler."* This is a great reminder, once again, to not lie. One thing I've noticed that people do a lot these days is exaggerate... and I gotta say it makes me uncomfortable. Exaggerating feels like a lie to me. Why exaggerate? Why not just tell it like it is. I mean, I think it's okay to encourage or market or get excited about things truthfully. But, why exaggerate? Particularly when it comes to factual numbers... why exaggerate those? **Q: How about you - do you exaggerate? Think this might be a very close cousin to a lie? If so, can you focus on just telling things straight, like they are?**

6/1 - Wow. Proverbs 17 verse 9 is a challenging one for me today - *"Disregarding another person's faults preserves love; telling about them separates close friends."* I get the wisdom of it initially. Makes sense. Makes me think about a marriage relationship really... :) **Q: But, what about speaking the truth in love? Isn't there is a time and place to let folks know about something that is maybe a major issue that needs some attention?** If someone is doing something wrong that is harming them or others around them, shouldn't we speak up? I know there is a fine line here... I need to meditate on this Proverb a bit more... (This is the beauty of the Bible! We will not understand every single verse every single time. Could take years! The Bible's got depth, that is for sure. I am glad you are on this journey into the depths of the Bible with me this year.) **What are your thoughts on this Proverb? When do we close our mouth to preserve love and when do we not close it?**

6/1 - Yikes... Proverbs 17 verse 13 is no joke - *"If you repay evil for good, evil will never leave your house."* Let us be diligent and prayerful to make sure we never repay evil for good... **Q: Have you ever**

seen this wisdom of this Proverb in your life or lives around you?

6/1 - Proverbs chapter 17 verse 14 today is a great reminder that the best way to end a quarrel is to stop it before it starts! *"Beginning a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out."* Once the quarrel starts, the waters can quickly flow out of control like a flood. **Q: Is there a simmering matter in your life that you need to address quickly and head-on before it breaks out into a quarrel? Before the floodgate opens?**

6/1 - Proverb 17 verse 16 is interesting to consider: *"It is senseless to pay tuition to educate a fool who has no heart for wisdom."* This is a great question for each of us to ask ourselves. **Q: Today in your life - do you have a heart for wisdom? What type of "tuition" are you paying to gain wisdom / to be educated? Are you paying the "tuition" of time invested in studying the Bible each day?**

6/2 - Proverbs 20 verse 1 today reminds me of the need for and success of modern day [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) - *"Wine produces mockers; liquor leads to brawls. Whoever is led astray by drink cannot be wise."* I don't have personal experience with AA, but have heard very good things about it from several friends. I do love the AA Serenity Prayer - I think this prayer is a great prayer for all of us - "God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference." Amen. **Q: What is your relationship to alcohol? Do you think Christians should drink alcohol?**

6/2 - Proverbs chapter 20 verse 3 is such great wisdom: *"Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor; only fools insist on quarreling."* I once was a fool who insisted on quarreling with Tony back in about 3rd grade :) after either I beat him or he beat me in the 50 yard dash at Field Day. Tony kept trying to avoid the fight with me. But I kept on pressing it. And I got whupped! It was really a great learning experience for me. I have avoided fights ever since! Don't get me wrong. I don't think we are called to be submissive and let people walk all over us. I think we can confidently and strongly hold our ground on important issues - without fighting or quarrelling. **Q: How about you? Do you avoid fights? Do you realize this is a mark of honor? Or do you insist on quarrelling? Think this is a good idea...?**

6/2 - Proverbs 20 verse 6 definitely gives me something to think about: *"Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is really faithful?"* This is a challenging Proverb for me because I feel like I have many good friends. Many who are loyal. And some who even seem faithful. But... yet... there are still times on occasion when these friends do let me down. Or I know for a fact I let them down on occasion. It's our human nature. Fortunately for us, long after this Proverb was written, we were given the most faithful friend we could ever dream up or imagine in Jesus. Jesus really should be our best friend. I had a friend kind of shock me with this thought by continually referring to Jesus as his best friend at a lunch we had a few years ago. For some reason I was very comfortable with Jesus being my savior. But my friend? My best friend? Well, it was a new concept to me. And maybe this is a new concept to you. I do honestly believe Jesus wants to be our best friend. And he will undoubtedly be the one true and loyal and faithful friend we all can have - now and forever. **Q: So, is Jesus your best friend?**

6/2 - Proverbs 20 verse 7 today is a wonderful reminder that the way we live our lives today sets an example for children: *"The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children after them."* **Q: What type of example are you setting for children in your life? Are you walking with integrity? Do you believe children will be blessed after you because you walked with integrity?**

6/2 - Proverbs 20 verse 10 is convicting - *"The LORD despises double standards of every kind."* I am afraid that I often do have double standards in the way I live my own life. I am afraid perhaps we all do to a degree. We hold ourselves to one standard when we are at church and among our friends and maybe even typing on this blog... :) But, then, late at night or early in the morning or during the day perhaps we let this standard - this Christian standard - simply go. We become judgmental. We gossip. We complain. We lust. We give in to our old addictions. We fall prey to a double standard. Please don't ever forget that God calls us to the highest standard! And he sent us his Son Jesus to set us free

from the bondage of sin from the bondage of double standards. Through faith in Jesus we are gifted with the Holy Spirit living within our very bodies, which is an amazing blessing to consider! God gives us everything that we need to live a life of high moral standards. **Q: Will we pray unceasingly to let our double standards go? Will we leave the double standards behind once and for all? Will we stop living our lives with two faces?**

6/2 - Today in Proverbs 20 verse 11 we read – *“Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.”* This is an interesting Proverb for me to meditate upon. I focus in on the word “actions” here. Basically this Proverb to me is saying that actions matter. Our actions don’t save us or make us right with God, but they matter. Even children are known by their actions. **Do you think that you and I are known by our actions? If so, what are our actions saying to others? Is our conduct pure and right?** I have some friends who seem to think that actions do not matter – particularly once we are in relationship with Jesus. I get very nervous with this line of thinking. I think particularly once we are in a relationship with Jesus, we are called to follow Jesus and we are called to holiness. We are called to be saints. Yes, saints. Now, don’t get me wrong – we will stumble. We will fall. We will not be perfect this side of heaven. Even after being in relationship with Jesus we will make mistakes. But, I believe we are called to live our lives such that we incrementally start to look more and more like God’s own son, Jesus. I believe we are called to love like Jesus. Forgive like Jesus. Give like Jesus. And this list goes on – check out the Beatitudes in [Matthew 5](#) for a nice list of actions for us to emulate. So – even a child is known by his actions. **Q: What would people say about you based on your actions these days? Would they see that you are becoming more and more like Jesus with each passing day, week, month, and year? Do you think your actions matter?**

6/2 - Proverbs 20:12 today teaches us: *“Ears to hear and eyes to see--both are gifts from the LORD.”* Amen! It is interesting that this Proverb doesn’t mention our mouths to talk... Seems like this Proverb is really a good reminder that listening and seeing are amazing gifts. Gifts that allow us to listen to others and enjoy God’s beautifully created world. And yes, I do believe our mouths are gifts too for communication to others. But it is interesting that we have 2 ears and 2 eyes, and just 1 mouth. **Q: Think there is a message in this math equation for us? :)**

6/3 - 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?**

6/3 - 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?**

6/3 - 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?**

6/3 - 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?**

6/3 - 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?**

6/3 - 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 you remain pure and holy in the midst of it?

6/3 - 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...?**

6/4 - Today we read 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?**

6/4 - 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?**

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

6/5 - Today we begin the book of Ecclesiastes! We will be reading about the vanity of life apart from God in this book. I think some people may find this to be a depressing book. I find it hopeful! Yes, indeed life is depressing apart from God. But life with God is an unending beautiful adventure. (certainly with some trials along the journey...) I pray the book of Ecclesiastes draws you into thanksgiving for the amazing life we can indeed have in relationship with Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit!

~ **Ecclesiastes** ~

Author: Probably Solomon, the son of David

Date: Probably tenth century B.C.

Content: This difficult book displays the dark philosophy of one who sought to find peace apart from God, but in the end realized that only futility is to be found there. The only possible solution to life's puzzle concludes this book: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13) Leading up to that positive statement is a series of pictures, each one portraying the futility of life without God. Wealth, wisdom, popularity, and pleasure are all put down as so much vanity. Only when a man turns from this world to God will he find true happiness.

Theme: There is a negative lesson to be learned from this book. It is a series of things not to do. It shows the emptiness of trying to live for oneself and to please oneself alone without considering the needs of others or considering God our Maker. There is a positive side, however. If one can see how not to live,

perhaps then he will see what he ought to do and be spared the heartaches of living a wasted life. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 10)

Fantastic commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes titled "**On The Wings of Eternity**" is [at this link](#) and commentary titled "**The Theology of Ecclesiastes**" is [at this link](#). **Q: How has the book of Ecclesiastes stood out to you over the years? Has this been an important book to you?**

6/6 - I heard a good chunk of today's readings in the book of Ecclesiastes at a wedding a few years ago. And really, these verses work out quite nicely for a wedding if you think about it. Chapter 4 verses 9 through 12: *"Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. And on a cold night, two under the same blanket can gain warmth from each other. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."* Pretty good stuff for a wedding, eh? The kicker is that last little bit about the triple-braided cord. The pastor at the wedding I was at said that God is the third strand in the triple-braided cord in marriage. I like that! Two people come together in marriage, and it's good. But, throw God into the mix of the marriage, as I'm sure we would all want to do, and you've got a very strong triple braided cord! Great stuff. **Q: If you are married, is there a triple braided cord in your marriage? Is God always part of your marriage? Part of your every day life?**

6/7 - Our readings in Ecclesiastes today reminded me of Solomon's writings in Proverbs! (It was likely the same author of both books - well, most of the Proverbs - hence the connection) It seemed like a series of Proverbs in today's readings - albeit with a more pessimistic view than the typical Proverbs we read... but still, overall great teachings and great reminders of how empty and vain life is apart from God. I love Chapter 7 verse 20, which is something we all probably need to be reminded of: *"There is not a single person in all the earth who is always good and never sins."* And certainly that was true back then and now. Jesus was the only one ever to walk the earth who never sinned. Now, to go along with verse 20 we later read verse 28, which I'm thinking probably did not make women too happy to read: *"Just one out of every thousand men I interviewed can be said to be upright, but not one woman!"* Now, first and foremost, keep in mind this is the author of Ecclesiastes' opinion or experience - not God saying this. Scripture does not declare anywhere that women are morally inferior to men. The bottom line of this verse is that basically no one is upright - men or women. The next verse 29 then says: *"I discovered that God created people to be upright, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path."* This verse again reminds us that though we were created for righteousness, we are broken. We are sinners. We are in need of a Savior. **Q: How about you? Do you know anyone who is always good and never sins? Anyone who does not need a Savior to forgive and heal them of their brokenness? Do you believe God created people to be upright? Without God and Jesus in our lives, do you think we are in severe danger of following our own downward path...?**

6/7 - Now, another verse that says "women" but that I think could just as well say "men" is chapter 7 verse 26 - *"I discovered that a seductive woman is more bitter than death. Her passion is a trap, and her soft hands will bind you. Those who please God will escape from her, but sinners will be caught in her snare."* This verse stood out to me as I read it, for one very modern and very dangerous reason: internet pornography. Now, I know I don't need to tell anyone reading this that internet pornography is an incredibly serious problem affecting far too many people. Many of whom are Christians. The reason this verse stood out to me was the reminder that internet pornography is literally a snare that so many people are caught in. They can't escape it. Well, they can, but it's not easy on their own. I have a hunch that someone reading this is addicted to internet pornography. Or, maybe isn't addicted - yet - but checks it out on occasion. Let me warn anyone who ever goes to an internet pornography site - it is a snare! A trap. Like chapter 9 verse 12 in Ecclesiastes today says: *"Like fish in a net or birds in a snare, people are often caught by sudden tragedy."* Visiting a pornography website even once is a sudden tragedy that has come to your doorstep. You will then be like a fish in a net or a bird in a snare. You will need much prayer and counseling to escape it's lure. I write this to warn folks too who have never visited an internet

pornography site, but maybe someday in the future will be tempted to do so. Don't do it. Ever. Run from it. Flee. Actually, I've had to think about this because I know some of my friends (friends from many years ago - who I still try to witness to) watch pornographic movies on occasion. I know it happens at bachelor parties, etc. Honestly, I don't go to bachelor parties at all these days - unless I know for sure there won't be any of this nonsense. But, I have a hunch someday I may be surprised at some gathering where a porn movie will be shown. And guess what? I will run. Literally, I will flee that location of wherever that movie is being shown, and I won't look back. Why? I won't just sit there and let that stuff pollute my mind. Pollute my very soul. Pornography is exactly that - soul pollution. It pollutes your soul! I realize I've been typing way too long on this issue - but I do so because I know it's a major issue for our society today. It is a major issue for the church. Please let me encourage you in that if you are ever in a situation with friends that pornography or strippers or anything like that appears that you literally run. Flee. And don't look back. And don't fret about what your friends think. Your soul is so much more important. If anyone reading this is currently struggling with pornography, let me encourage you to talk to someone you trust about it immediately, and get help. Today. Go to counseling. You cannot get out of the snare on your own. You may succeed for short periods of time, but long-term you are going to need some help. But, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and his precious blood poured out on the Cross for our sins, yes, indeed you can be freed of the snare of pornography. You quickly need to run toward your freedom in Christ now; connect with pastors, friends & counselors who can keep you accountable and give you tools to beat this; and then please don't ever look back to that which pollutes your very soul. In Christ, my brothers and sisters, we are forgiven. And Forgiveness will heal us. If we will let Him. **Q: How do you avoid the traps and tragedies of sexual temptation and sin your life today? Do you ever literally run away from it?**

6/7 - 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?** 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?**

6/8 - 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?**

6/8 - Well, Jeroboam didn't last very long before worshipping other gods as we read in 1 Kings 12! Keep in mind Jeroboam's name as we continue to read through the book of Kings - you will continue to hear about "Jeroboam's sin" and "the sin Jeroboam caused Israel to commit" many times in our upcoming readings - even long after he is dead. Not a legacy one would want to leave behind... Interesting story about the man of God from Judah prophesying against the altar at Bethel. The man of God delivers his prophecy and then shuns Jeroboam's invite to go to his palace for food and a gift. The man of God appears very strong. And then later... he lets down his guard. And he falls prey to the lie of the old prophet. Now why on earth the old prophet decided to pursue the man of God and tell this lie is beyond

me. If anyone has insights on this, please post up in the Comments below. I think the lesson here for us today is this - we cannot let down our guard when it comes to spiritual matters. I think sometimes we think we can - but we simply cannot! If we do let down our guard, then we often stumble. And thanks to God's grace we can recover from that stumble. But, there is always the dangerous risk that our stumble could be very severe, as it certainly was for the man of God in today's readings... **Q: Have you ever let your guard down and stumbled? How do you keep your guard up from the tricks and attacks of the flesh, the world or the Enemy?**

6/9 - Alright, now we are getting into the story of the Kings! I really like this portion of the Bible. I am fascinated by the back-and-forth stories and timelines of the Kings of Israel and the Kings of Judah. The one very unfortunate thing you will notice over and over are verses like 1 Kings 14 verse 22: *"During Rehoboam's reign, the people of Judah did what was evil in the LORD's sight, arousing his anger with their sin, for it was even worse than that of their ancestors."* Or verses like 1 Kings 15 verse 3: *"Abijam committed the same sins as his father before him, and his heart was not right with the LORD his God, as the heart of his ancestor David had been."* And we will read far too few verses like verse 11 as we read about the Kings of Judah and Israel: *"Asa did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight, as his ancestor David had done."* I think what is interesting to note in all of these verses - and in the verses to come about future Kings we will read about - is that it really didn't much matter what the Kings "did" in their reigns. Their wars or their building of cities or whatever really didn't matter compared to did they sin against God or not? Did they lead Israel or Judah into sin or not? Did they love God or not? And I think this is the same for our lives today. God does not so much care what our careers are or what our social status is or how many friends or how much money we have. God cares whether we love Him with all of heart, mind, soul and strength. God cares whether we are sinning against Him or not. As Jesus tells us: *"seek first the kingdom of heaven, and all of these things will be yours as well."* So, yes, God ultimately does care about our lives and careers and friends and such too - but he first wants us to seek a right relationship with Him - and then everything else will flow from our relationship with God. Someone should have let some of these Kings of Israel and Judah know this! **Q: What can you and I learn from the story of the Kings of Judah & Israel? How are you leading others and yourself toward God or toward sin in your life today?**

6/10 - 1 Kings 15 verse 26 stood out to me right away today: *"But he did what was evil in the LORD's sight and followed the example of his father, continuing the sins of idolatry that Jeroboam had led Israel to commit."* The key word that stood out to me in this verse is "example." I think sometimes we can forget that every action we take is an example to others. We are either exemplifying godly behavior or ungodly behavior. Obviously Jeroboam exemplified ungodly behavior - and unfortunately, since he was king of Israel, his bad example had far reaching effects. Even though you or me aren't king of any land, I do believe that the examples we set have bigger impacts than we realize. Our kids, our parents, our siblings, our neighbors, our co-workers, the stranger on the street, the person at the coffee shop, are all watching what we do. How we behave. Who we are. Our very lives are examples to so many people each and every day. **Q: What type of example are you setting with your life? Do you realize that people are literally following your example each and every day?**

6/10 - 1 Kings 16 is quite the chapter full of drama! It's like a soap-opera. As I was reading this chapter, and in particular when Zimri was plotting to kill Elah, I was reminded of Macbeth's old quote - "Heavy is the head that wears the crown." Indeed very true in this chapter! Great readings in 1 Kings 17 today! We are introduced to the prophet Elijah! And what an introduction. I love the visual of Elijah being fed by ravens. Elijah was completely dependent on God for his food delivery via birds. **Q: How are you dependent on God for you food? For your life?**

6/11 - Wow! Great readings today in 1 Kings 18. This is an amazing chapter of the Bible, and one that I heard a wonderful sermon on a couple of years ago. This is strong stuff. One thing that kind of got me chuckling was the subtitle the New Living Translation puts at the top of this chapter - "The Contest on Mount Carmel"! For some reason this got my mind thinking of WWF Championship Wrestling... yes... strange place for my mind to wander I realize. :) But then, this imagery kind of stuck with me

throughout the readings and I definitely think Elijah threw down a WWF level taunt in verse 27 when the prophets of Baal were not having any luck getting their fire started: *"About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or he is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or he is asleep and needs to be wakened!"* Perhaps he is relieving himself?? The prophet Elijah puts even Hulk Hogan's WWF taunt's to shame! :) Okay... in all seriousness... 1 Kings 18 is an amazing chapter. There were several verses that stood out to me. First was verses 17 and 18 when Ahab meets Elijah - *"So it's you, is it--Israel's troublemaker?" Ahab asked when he saw him. "I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead."* I love Elijah's directness and boldness to Ahab. Ahab tries to go after Elijah and maybe intimidate him, since Ahab is King. And Elijah does not back down one iota - he tells Ahab exactly why Ahab is the troublemaker. I love that. **Q: I wonder about our lives today. If someone comes after us and maybe attacks our faith or integrity falsely in some way, will we immediately stand up for our faith like Elijah did to King Ahab?** Verses 20 & 21 are powerful - *"So Ahab summoned all the people and the prophets to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent."* **Q: What a great question - and one that we may need to ask ourselves - "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him!" Are we wavering at all in our commitment to God? Are we being silent like the people were when Elijah asked this question? Let us not waver between two opinions... If the Lord is God, are you following him? Wholeheartedly?**

6/11 - Great chapter 19 today! We are introduced to Elisha, who will be mentored by Elijah to succeed him as a prophet at the end of First Kings 19 today. However, before we get to Elisha, we read about Elijah being very "dejected" in the desert to say the least. Some commentaries on this early portion of chapter 19 are not super-kind to Elijah for heading to the desert. Commentaries I think wisely suggest that verses 9 & 13 demonstrate God trying to gently let Elijah know he's off course and feeling too sorry for himself, when asked twice in these verses: *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* This kind of reminded me of Jonah fleeing from God's will on the boat. (which we'll read about later this year). And this kind of reminded me of me - and maybe you too. :) **Q: Have you ever had that nagging question enter your heart or mind when you suddenly realize that you are off course from God's will in your life? That question of: "What are you doing here??"** I know I have... Praise God when we are actually able to hear and understand that question and get out of the desert and back to life and back to loving this hurting world!

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

in a simple gentle whisper this very moment?

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

6/11 - I couldn't quite remember why Jezebel was cast in such a bad light in our readings a few days ago. Today I remember why... It is great to see Elijah show up on the scene and say to Ahab in 1 Kings 20 verse 20 - *"I have come because you have sold yourself to what is evil in the LORD's sight."* How sad. **Do you see people today still selling themselves to what is evil in God's sight?**

6/12 - Today in First Kings 22 Ahab is not happy about the Arameans occupying Ramoth-gilead at the beginning of today's readings. King Jehoshaphat of Judah wisely suggests that they should consult God before going into battle against the Arameans. At which time King Ahab of Israel trots out his 400 yes-men "prophets" who say they should definitely go to war and that they will be victorious. I love Jehoshaphat's reaction to these 400 yes-men in verse 7: *"But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the LORD around, too? I would like to ask him the same question.""* Ahab's reaction in verse 8 is quite telling... *"There is still one prophet of the LORD, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but bad news for me! His name is Micaiah son of Imlah."* This verse really stands out for me in a big way in our world today. I wonder if sometimes we - you and me - look for supposed "prophets" of the Lord that are yes-people to our particular likings - instead of looking for Truth. Meaning... and I'm just putting this out there, so bear with me. **Q: Do we sometimes maybe even decide to attend a particular church because it tells us basically what we want to hear?** It keeps us in our comfortable place... we get yes-messages... When, instead, should we be okay with attending a church that will give us some challenging and convicting messages on occasion? Biblical messages mind you - which surely can be challenging to our modern ears at times. I heard somewhere once before that church should be a place that "comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." I like that... Now, don't get me wrong. I am not saying we need to be in super-strict churches per se. I just think we should really watch for churches that are giving a yes-message all the time to our particular likings verses churches that teach the Truth. I don't think church is the only area of where we might default to looking for yes-messages. I think this can happen in books we read, TV we watch, or even with friends or with work. **Are we listening to 400 yes-people in our lives or are we okay with 1 Micaiah coming in and sharing a perceived "bad-news" message?** (which may ultimately be very good news if we'll just listen to it... if Ahab had really listened to Micaiah's message in today's readings, think he still would have rushed out to battle?)

6/14 - Today we begin the book of Second Kings!

Author: Unknown

Date: Sixth century B.C.

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

Theme: God's control over the affairs of men and nations is constantly seen throughout this book. The rulers of men may think they are in control, but even the enemies of God's people fit into God's plan by executing judgment upon the wayward nations of Israel and Judah. It must be stressed that sin invariably

brings judgment upon the people and righteousness brings God's blessing. Second Kings also shows that God never sends his judgment without a warning first; in this instance, the warning came through the prophets who were sent. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 6-7)

6/14 - 2 Kings 1 today... wow... Elijah is not to be messed with when he is sitting on top of that hill! Elijah asks a very poignant question twice in this chapter - "*Is there no God in Israel?*" **Q: This is a question each of us will need to ask in our lives at some point - "Is there or is there no God in my life?"** Hopefully we've already answered this question affirmatively. It's a sad state of affairs to imagine a country without God. It is a sad state of affairs to imagine our own lives without God. Today in 2 Kings 2 we read about Elijah going up to heaven in the whirlwind! Elijah was taken to heaven without dying. He is the 2nd person in scripture to do so - Enoch was the first (see [Genesis 5:21-24](#)). Jesus of course was also taken to heaven in bodily form after His resurrection from the dead (see [Acts 1:9](#)). **Q: How did the life of the prophet Elijah stand out to you? What can we learn from Elijah?**

6/14 - In 2 Kings 3 verse 3 today we are reminded that King Jeroboam's legacy is held out as a unfavorable legacy... "*Nevertheless he (Joram) continued in the sins of idolatry that Jeroboam son of Nebat had led the people of Israel to commit.*" That is an interesting thing to think about - a legacy. Jeroboam's legacy was obviously not one we'd like to have. **Q: So, what type of legacy would you like to have? And what type of legacy are you in fact leaving these days?** The more I think about my legacy, the more I simply hope and pray that my legacy is something along the lines of "one who loved God and loved people." Pretty simple really. But also really tough in our modern world full of so many distractions! And I am not so sure that I am really leaving this legacy some days. I don't want to pursue this type of legacy for the wrong reasons - for any sort of appearing "righteous" or prideful reasons. But I in fact I really do want to spend the rest of my days simply loving God and loving people. Whatever else I do - career, ministry, whatever - pales in comparison to loving God and loving people. I even hesitate to write this hope for a legacy on this blog - I feel like I should go back and delete everything I just wrote. Except - I think this might be the type of legacy we are called to as Christians. Remember the two great commands Jesus gave us in Matthew 22:37 & 39 - "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Love God and love people. **So - whaddya think? Is this a good legacy for us to aim for? Should we be aiming for a legacy at all? What will your legacy be?**

6/15 - Okay, so 2 Kings 2 verses 23 & 24 are some of the most unique verses in the Bible no doubt... "*Elisha left Jericho and went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, a group of boys from the town began mocking and making fun of him. "Go away, you baldhead!" they chanted. "Go away, you baldhead!" Elisha turned around and looked at them, and he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of them.*" Zondervan's NIV Study Bible has some good commentary on these verses as follows: "The youths from Bethel no doubt assumed that Elisha was going up to Samaria to continue Elijah's struggle against royal apostasy. Some believe that the youths, in their mocking, were telling Elisha to ascend to heaven as Elijah had done. By calling Elisha "baldhead" the youths from Bethel expressed that city's utter disdain for the Lord's representative, who, they felt, had no power. Elisha pronounced a curse that gave warning of the judgment that would come on the entire nation of Israel should it persist in disobedience and apostasy." **Q: Have you ever been mocked? How might Jesus suggest we react to mocking? Curses or turning the other cheek? Might there be an appropriate time for curses and a time for turning the other cheek?**

6/15 - Interesting readings in 2 Kings 4 about the Shumanite woman, her son and the prophet Elisha today! You'll note that in verse 20 her son dies, and in verse 21 she places her son on Elisha's bed - in part so that no one will know that her son died. As she gets to verse 22-24 she is saddling up on a donkey to go straight to Elisha without anyone in her family knowing her son had died. As the Shumanite woman nears Mount Carmel Gehazi, Elisha's servant, comes out to greet her and still she won't even tell him that her son has died! She says everything is fine. She wants to deliver the news first and directly to Elisha! I like this woman's focused faith. She knew that Elisha delivered the Word that she would

have a son in previous day's readings, and now that her son had died, I think she had faith that Elisha, being a prophet in relationship with God, would be able to revive her son. **Q: Do you have a focused faith like this when it comes to your relationship with God and Jesus? Do you always take your problems directly to the One who can truly revive you?** In chapter 5 we get to the story of the healing of Naaman. I found it very interesting that Naaman needed to humble himself and wash up in the waters of the lowly river Jordan! Know anyone else that did some "washing up" in the river Jordan?? :) **Maybe all of us somehow need to humble ourselves and symbolically be washed up in the river Jordan to receive true healing?**

6/16 - 2 Kings 6 today opens up with a very interesting little story about the floating ax head! :) Apparently in those days the iron in an ax head was very costly - far too costly for prophets to have been able to afford. Hence, they had to borrow it. If the prophet who lost the ax head had not been able to recover it, he would have then had to have become an indentured servant for a period of time to the person he borrowed it from to pay back the cost. So, Elisha's recovery of the ax head I think demonstrates a simple moral of this opening story in today's readings: God cares for the welfare of those who love God. **Q: Whaddya think on this moral of the floating ax head story? Have you had experiences in your life where God has done some small things - or maybe even big things - that don't seem super spiritual at first glance, but simply saved you a lot of heartache/costs/time? I know I have...** Praise God that He floats ax heads and even "floats" you and me too!

6/16 - Today in 2 Kings 6 verse 27 we will read this verse that King Joram says to an Israelite during a time of a severe famine – *“If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you?”* I think the thing to note in this verse is that the King realized he could not end the famine on his own, but that only God could end the famine. (I think the King may have actually been trying to blame God for the famine - and certainly Elisha he blames later in the chapter). **Q: I wonder about this in our lives today – do we try to help others and even try to help ourselves using our own power and without relying on God at all? And maybe sometimes even blame God for problems we see, like this King? Do we think we can end a “famine” or whatever problems we see at work, in our community, in our family, or in our world all on our own? Or should we be asking for God’s help in these areas of our lives?** I've been thinking about this more and more lately – about how little I truly pray for others. I see areas of my life, my family, my community, my work, my church, my favorite charities, our world, that need some help. Need some changing. Need some love. And sometimes I think that I can institute these changes all on my own! Which is foolish. Instead, I should be praying for God's providence and work in these areas of my life where I see a “famine.” Yes, I do think that God will oftentimes answer our prayers by encouraging us to “do something” to work on a change. But, we'd be wise to prayerfully approach all areas of our life and to pay attention to where God is asking us to “do something” – and to pay attention to where God is flat-out doing the work! **Q: Are there any “famine” areas in your life? In your personal relationship with God or others? In your work, church, community? Are there “famine” areas you see in our world? Will you today begin praying to God about these “famines” in the knowledge that famines can truly only end if God is involved in the work? Will you allow God to get involved in the famine areas of your life? Will you pray more consistently than ever before for the famine areas you see in your life?**

6/16 - Second Kings 8 begins with a wonderful example of God's "perfect timing." It was no coincidence that the king was talking with Gehazi about the time Elisha brought a boy back to life when the woman from Shunem walked in with her son! God knew that the Shumanite woman was faithful and obedient to Him, so He orchestrated the timing so that she would get her house and land back - after God perfectly timed her to be out of the country for 7 years to avoid the famine! **Have you ever had the experience of God's "perfect timing" in your life?** My hunch is that you have - even if you haven't realized it. I have had some experiences where I have consciously realized that God's perfect timing was at work - and sometimes I've quickly said the prayer under my breath of "thank you God!" But, I also now can look back on my life and now see so many instances of God's perfect timing. Hindsight is 20/20. **Q: When is the last time you experienced God's perfect timing? Think it could have been today - even if you don't realize it right now?** Elisha's interaction with Hazeal demonstrates Elisha was certainly a prophet

of God's! Elisha was not condoning what Hazael is going to violently do, but he was just stating the facts of what was going to happen. Verses 11 & 12 are sad to read - *"Elisha stared at Hazael with a fixed gaze until Hazael became uneasy. Then the man of God started weeping. "What's the matter, my lord?" Hazael asked him. Elisha replied, "I know the terrible things you will do to the people of Israel. You will burn their fortified cities, kill their young men, dash their children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women!"*

Verse 13 is also sad because you will notice that Hazael doesn't get upset by the violent predictions in Elisha's proclamation, but only wonders how someone like him would pull off something like this... *"Then Hazael replied, "How could a nobody like me ever accomplish such a great feat?"* I love Elisha's final instructions to the young prophet concerning his anointing of Jehu as King of Israel in 2 Kings 9 verse 3 - *"Then open the door and run for your life!"* Not your typical instructions from a prophet, you wouldn't think - but if a prophet gives you instructions like these, you better follow them! :)

6/17- Well... Jehu kills a lot of people in today's readings in 2 Kings 9 & 10. I realize that the violence in the Old Testament can often bring up a lot of questions. Rather than me diving into why there is violence in the Bible - I'll defer to a couple of theologians [at this link](#) and [at this link](#) - and I'll give you 3 images below from a very young theologian. :) Unfortunately, our human history is full of violence - from Cain and Abel until this very day. The Bible does record human history. There will come a day where there is a new heaven and a new earth, free from violence. That day has not come yet - but will with Jesus' Second Coming. Most Biblical commentaries agree that Jehu was carrying out justice for the sins of the Kings of Israel and the worship of Baal. Jezebel's death was predicted by the prophet Elijah because of her sins. A brutal death that it was. I think one thing for us to keep in mind is that sin does bring death. As Paul teaches in Romans 6:23 - "The wages of sin is death." Jesus saves us from this deserved death when we come to him in faith and surrender our lives to him. But, let us not forget the severity and risk of sin and the risk of not being in relationship with Jesus. Without Jesus saving us, the wages of sin truly is eternal death. 2 Kings 10 verses 25-27 seem to demonstrate Jehu's initial apparent zeal for God - *"Then Jehu's men went into the fortress of the temple of Baal. They dragged out the sacred pillar used in the worship of Baal and destroyed it. They broke down the sacred pillar of Baal and wrecked the temple of Baal, converting it into a public toilet. That is what it is used for to this day."* But we soon learn in verse 31 - *"But Jehu did not obey the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He refused to turn from the sins of idolatry that Jeroboam had led Israel to commit."* It is thus thought that Jehu's action of destroying the idols of Baal was more political than spiritual - as Baal worship was associated with the dynasty of Ahab, whereas the golden calves had a longer history in the northern kingdom of Israel and were valued by most people. And keeping the golden calves would keep people from Israel traveling to the southern kingdom of Judah to worship God in Jerusalem. **Q: What is your reaction to reading about violence in the Old Testament? Are there any parallels to violence in our world today?**

6/18 - Eventful readings today in 2 Kings 11 for the coming of a 7 year old king of Judah, Joash! It is great to see that in 2 Kings 12 Joash is passionate for the repair of the Temple in Jerusalem. 2 Kings 12 verse today 9 tells us: *"Then Jehoiada the priest bored a hole in the lid of a large chest and set it on the right-hand side of the altar at the entrance of the Temple of the LORD. The priests guarding the entrance put all of the people's contributions into the chest."* **Q: If God can work all things together for the good of the nation of Israel through a 7 year old boy turned King (Joash), do you trust God can work all things together for good in your life? (Roman 8:28) What is something recently in your life that seemed unlikely or small (like a 7 year old king) that God turned into a good in your life?**

6/19 - Today we read about the passing of the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 13! I am sad that our readings of Elijah and Elisha are now behind us. I don't know what it was about these 2 prophets, but I loved them. Sure, they were a bit rough and gruff at times, but also very tender. They'd send fire down from heaven to kill the prophets of Baal and bears from the trees to kill mockers, but then they'd care for widows. **Q: I'm wondering if in our lives today we should be a mix of rough & gruff at times, but also very tender? Should we be rough and gruff toward those that are modern day "prophets of Baal" and tender toward those who need God? I have to confess, I'm rarely rough and gruff toward anyone - well, okay, maybe myself! :) Do you think rough and gruff should be in our personality mix at all**

today?

6/19 - Even once Elisha passes on, his bones still give life! I think this is simply because of the life-giving power of God whom Elisha represented during his life. It wasn't the bones themselves that gave life. It was God. 2 Kings 13 Verses 20 & 21 tell us: *"Then Elisha died and was buried. Groups of Moabite raiders used to invade the land each spring. Once when some Israelites were burying a man, they spied a band of these raiders. So they hastily threw the body they were burying into the tomb of Elisha. But as soon as the body touched Elisha's bones, the dead man revived and jumped to his feet!"* In 2 Kings 14 today we read about King Amaziah of Judah. I'm not sure if you caught this - I barely did - but we read about the ancient city of Petra, which is located in modern day Jordan, in verse 7: *"It was Amaziah who killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He also conquered Sela and changed its name to Joktheel, as it is called to this day."* Sela/Joktheel is the same city as Petra. **Q: I'm curious of anyone reading this has visited the ruins of Petra in Jordan? Can you post up reviews in the Comments? Are they worth visiting? How about visiting the Holy Land? Have you been? Did it change your perspective on the Bible or grow your faith?** I have heard they are incredible! In fact, [Bruce Feiler's book, Walking the Bible](#), has a wonderful chapter on Petra - I highly recommend this book! I hope to visit Petra someday.

6/20 - In 2 Kings 15 today we read about several kings in very short order! The thing that amazed me was that things were obviously going from bad to worse in the northern kingdom of Israel with the kings, whereas things appeared a bit more stable in Judah (for this chapter...). 2 Kings 15 opens up with Uzziah reigning in Judah for 52 years - whereas Israel I think has 6 or so kings during Uzziah's reign, most of whom are assassinated! We will see how this all plays out over the next couple of days in our 2 Kings readings. There are definitely some ramifications coming for Israel based on how things are going down in these days.

6/20 - Today we start and finish the book of Jonah! There is so much information to consider in this short 4 chapter book. I definitely encourage you to do some further study on this book in a Commentary or online.

~Jonah~

Author: Jonah

Date: Eighth century B.C.

Content: Jonah was a prophet who was born in Israel (see 2 Kings 14:25) and called by God to preach repentance to Assyria (the capital city was Nineveh) – the nation that was shortly going to destroy Israel in 722 B.C. On receiving the call, Jonah's nationalistic spirit would not allow him to offer salvation to the pagans, so he attempted to flee from God by ship. He was thrown overboard, swallowed by a great fish, disgorged on the shore, and finally obeyed God's command by going to Nineveh to preach. His success there angered him, however, and God taught him an object lesson by means of a plant. Jonah's experience in the fish is used in the New Testament (see Matthew 12:38-41) as an example of Jesus' burial and resurrection.

Theme: The basic theme of Jonah is found in 4:11, where God declares his love for all men, whether Israelites or not. Jonah was unable to love the Assyrians properly, but God desired nothing for them but their good and their salvation, and he sent a prophet to offer repentance unto life. The book also shows the power of God and his control over the forces of nature. (*Above commentary is from "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 17*)

6/20 - Jonah is called by God to prophesy to the city of Nineveh - which was not part of Israel or Judah - but was a "Gentile" city to the east. If you are wondering why Jonah got so grouchy with God's command - this is why. Jonah did not think he should be prophesying to Gentile nations - because, as we read later in the book, Jonah knows that God is a compassionate God who will show mercy on Nineveh. Last thing to point out before we check out some verses. There is some dispute over whether Jonah is a real history when it comes to him being in the belly of a whale for 3 days. **Q: I guess this comes down to the basic question of whether you believe in miracles or not?** If you do believe in miracles, then it is of course possible that Jonah lived in the belly of the whale for 3 days. I believe in miracles... As some

contemporary song says, I'm a miracle myself... Check out what Jesus had to say about Jonah's history of being in the belly of the whale in Matthew chapter 12 verse 40: *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* Here we see Jesus compares his 3 days of death, burial and resurrection to Jonah's 3 days in the belly of the whale... **Do you believe in miracles?**

6/20 - Jonah chapter 1 verse 3 stood out to me in today's reading: *"But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction in order to get away from the LORD."* **Q: How often in our own lives are we like Jonah? Do we sense God wanting us to do something? For others? And we run in the opposite direction of God's will? If we do this, might we bring storms upon our lives as Jonah did? Might we even bring storms upon other people's lives by disobeying God's will as Jonah did? Will we learn from Jonah?**

6/20 - Chapter 2 Verse 8 also stood out to me: *"Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies."* **Q: Do you believe that God wants to show us mercy all the time? But, it's possible that we sometimes literally turn our backs on God? Will we turn back toward God, and God only? And not turn away again? And receive his mercies?** Please don't ever turn your back on God... Don't turn your back on all of God's mercies!

6/20 - In Jonah chapter 4 verse 2 we read a verse that I have to confess made me chuckle when I first read it: *"So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I knew how easily you could cancel your plans for destroying these people."* I love it! Jonah complaining to God about how gracious He is! :) **Q: Is it possible that we do this in our own lives too? Do we complain to God about how good he is to others? Are we at times like Jonah or the Prodigal Son's brother, showing jealousy toward God's goodness and grace toward others? Shouldn't we instead rejoice in this, realizing that God shows this same unfailing love toward us too?**

6/21 - Today we start the book of Amos! Amos was a unique prophet in that he was a shepherd and fig grower. His prophecies come from about 760 to 750 B.C. at a height of Israel & Judah's prosperity - materially. (not spiritually...) Though Amos was from Judah, his messages were primarily directed at Israel. Amos chapter 1 verse 2 sets the stage for this book and the prophecies to come: *"This is his report of what he saw and heard: "The LORD's voice roars from his Temple on Mount Zion; he thunders from Jerusalem! Suddenly, the lush pastures of the shepherds dry up. All the grass on Mount Carmel withers and dies."* Then in the remainder of chapter 1 and 2 there are prophecies against Israel and Judah's surrounding neighbors all starting with - *"The people of _ (fill in the blank) _ have sinned again and again, and I will not forget it. I will not let them go unpunished any longer!"* **Q: Is it possible that this blank could maybe be filled in on our life or habits at times? Is it possible that this blank could be filled in by nations in our world today? If God were to punish, might it be a holy discipline to bring us back to repentance and right relationship with God?**

6/21 - In chapter 4 verse 2 it stood out to me how Judah was being called to the carpet as well as the neighboring nations: *"They have rejected the laws of the LORD, refusing to obey him. They have been led astray by the same lies that deceived their ancestors."* **Q: Do we obey God today in our lives? Are there areas in our life where we might be deceived - either by others, or maybe even in our own minds?**

6/21 - And Israel is called to the carpet in verses 6 & 7: *"They have perverted justice by selling honest people for silver and poor people for a pair of sandals. They trample helpless people in the dust and deny justice to those who are oppressed."* It seems that God is very interested in the care of the poor back then. Do you think he is still interested in the care of the poor today? Are we caring for the poor & the oppressed in our world today? In your life, are you caring for the poor & oppressed? Consistently? How?

6/21 - Today in Amos chapters 4, 5, & 6 we read about Israel's failure to listen, a call to repentance, and warning of coming Judgment. Chapter 4 verse 13 stood out to me in today's readings: *"For the LORD is the one who shaped the mountains, stirs up the winds, and reveals his every thought. He turns the light of dawn into darkness and treads the mountains under his feet. The LORD God Almighty is his name!"* Here we are reminded that God is the creator of all things, and he still is in control of what happens in the present time. He is the past, present, and future. I like that phrase, "reveals his every thought." Meaning, God wants His ways, His character, His thoughts, His love to be known by all. **Q: Do you believe God reveals His every thought to us? Where might we best find out what God's every thought is? Do you want to know God's thoughts above all else?**

6/21 - I think chapter 5 verse 14 today is a good reminder and warning to each of us: *"Do what is good and run from evil--that you may live! Then the LORD God Almighty will truly be your helper, just as you have claimed he is."* I believe that sometimes we think we can overcome evil through our own sheer will power. Or that we can change evil. This verse reminds us to simply RUN! I like that reminder. Sometimes you just gotta get out of Dodge to avoid evil influencing you or overtaking you. **Q: Are there temptations or bad habits in your life that you have been trying to overcome, battle, change - and perhaps you should just RUN from them? Flee from them? So that you may truly live?**

6/21 - Amos chapter 6 verse 5 stood out to me for some reason today: *"You sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and you fancy yourselves to be great musicians, as King David was."* I guess a couple of things jumped out at me here. **Q: First, the singing idle songs to the sound of the harp made me ask myself, are we sometimes idle with our time? When perhaps God is wanting us to be purposeful or intentional with our time? Don't get me wrong - rest is good. But, is idleness good? I think rest can be purposeful and intentional and healthy. Or it can potentially be just the opposite. Next - do we sometimes fancy ourselves to be "great musicians as King David was" - meaning, do we sometimes try to pretend to be someone who we are not? Are we masking over who we really are, and playing fake? Should we instead be real? And sincere? And intentional and purposeful? I guess I'm just getting at here - are there times when we are being fake? When, perhaps God is simply calling us to simply be real? To be who we are? Who are you? If you need to, will you take off your mask and just be who God made you to be?**

6/22 - Today we finish up the book of Amos! Today in Amos we read about Amos & Amaziah's interactions, visions of Locusts, Fire & a Plumb line, Ripe Fruit, God at the Altar, and then finish up the book with a Promise of Restoration. I like the beginning of Amos chapter 7 a lot. Here we see Amos praying for the forgiveness of Israel's sins and asking God to forgo the visions of Locusts & Fire. This is a good reminder to each of us to pray for others, and not just only for ourselves. Also, in chapter 7 verses 14 & 15 stood out to me when Amos was speaking with the priest Amaziah: *"I'm not one of your professional prophets. I certainly never trained to be one. I'm just a shepherd, and I take care of fig trees. But the LORD called me away from my flock and told me, 'Go and prophesy to my people in Israel.'"* This reminds me of something I actually heard from Mac Powell, the leader singer of Third Day, at one of their concerts. Mac reminded us all that sometimes we think that the only way we can really be serving God and others in big ways is if maybe we are pastors or missionaries. And Mac reminded us that this is not the case - all of us, no matter what our profession or walk of life, can serve God and others in big ways! We are all pastors and missionaries in the kingdom of God! I like that. And here's Amos saying, "hey - I'm not a professional prophet. I'm just doing what God asked me to do." **Q: What might God be asking you to do in your life to love and serve Him and others?**

6/22 - Amos chapter 8 verses 11-13 are a great reminder of how fortunate we are to have the opportunity to read God's word, the Bible - where not everyone in our world today has this blessing. Actually, I have to admit - these are some of the most breathtaking verses for me in all of the Bible. For some reason I pay attention so acutely every time I hear these verses... this is scary stuff to consider... *"The time is surely coming," says the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine on the land--not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the LORD. People will stagger everywhere from sea to sea,*

searching for the word of the LORD, running here and going there, but they will not find it. Beautiful girls and fine young men will grow faint and weary, thirsting for the LORD's word." **Q: Is it possible that we self-impose on our own lives famines? Famine's from hearing and reading God's word? If you are in the midst of a famine from God's Word, the Bible, will you seek out an opportunity to read God's Word each day? Do you thirst for God's Word? Will you drink from it?**

6/22 - Amos chapter 9 verse 11 is a great Messianic foretelling of the coming of Jesus: *"In that day I will restore the fallen kingdom of David. It is now like a house in ruins, but I will rebuild its walls and restore its former glory."* And verse 13 a foretelling of a Garden of Eden-like paradise to come: *"The time will come," says the LORD, "when the grain and grapes will grow faster than they can be harvested. Then the terraced vineyards on the hills of Israel will drip with sweet wine!"* **Q: Are you looking forward to this time? Do you want to be part of the restored kingdom of David?**

6/22 - In 2 Kings 15:13-14 today really showed how tough it was to be king in Israel in these days - *"Shallum reigned in Samaria only one month. Then Menahem son of Gadi went to Samaria from Tirzah and assassinated him, and he became the next king."* Reading about Shallum only reigning one month reminds me of how the hearts of men and women are sometimes - that very thing in our world which we seek so strongly, sometimes can be our very downfall. I have no doubt that Shallum wanted to be king very badly - he assassinated King Zechariah in public in verse 10! And yet, becoming king for Shallum did not give him control over all things - he himself was killed just 1 month into his reign. **Q: This all makes me think about us today - is there anything in this world that we are striving after that may not be all that it's cracked up to be? Might we risk "gaining the whole world, but losing our soul" in some of our pursuits? Is there anything in this world today that you are pursuing that you are putting above your relationship with God? If so, will you let it go? Will you focus primarily on your relationship with God first and foremost?** Will you follow the truths of Matthew 6:33 - *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Let us not be greedy in this short and precious life!

6/22 - 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...

6/23 - Today we start the book of the prophet Micah! Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and prophesied in approximately 730 - 700 B.C., primarily to the southern kingdom of Judah. Micah's name means "Who is like the Lord?" This following quote is from bible.org's Hampton Keathley IV, Th.M. on the book of Micah: "Micah prophesied during a period of upheaval and crisis. The reign of Ahaz brought spiritual lethargy, apostasy and hypocrisy. The people still worshipped Yahweh, but it was ritual without life-changing reality. Their treatment of fellow Israelites violated the basic tenants of the Mosaic covenant as they failed to practice justice, or covenant loyalty-love and their pursuit of idolatry revealed their failure to walk humbly before Yahweh." This quote and much more on the book of Micah is [at this link](#). In Micah chapter 1, verse 8 stood out to me: *"Because of all this, I will mourn and lament."* Micah was obviously saddened by the sins of those around him and the harm they were causing to themselves and to others. **Q: Do we mourn and lament for the sins of others in our world today? Do we mourn and lament over our own sins? Do we pray for healing and repentance in the lives of others - and ourselves? Is it okay to grieve for others and ourselves because of sin? What should we then do with this grief?**

6/23 - 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?

6/24 - 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!**

6/24 - Isaiah chapter 11 in today's readings is an incredible Messianic chapter of the Old Testament! Check out a webpage outlining the Messianic prophecies from Isaiah chapter 11 and then their fulfillment in the New Testament [at this link](#). The life and character of Jesus is so clear in chapter 1 verses 1 through 5 today: "Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot--yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. He will delight in obeying the LORD. He will never judge by appearance, false evidence, or hearsay. He will defend the poor and the exploited. He will rule against the wicked and destroy them with the breath of his mouth. He will be clothed with fairness and truth." **Q: Does this sound like anyone you personally know? I pray so.**

6/24 - Then, verses 6 through 9 are such a beautiful reflection on the peace and safety of the coming Messianic age when Jesus returns: "In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard and the goat will be at peace. Calves and yearlings will be safe among lions, and a little child will lead them all. The cattle will graze among bears. Cubs and calves will lie down together. And lions will eat grass as the livestock do. Babies will crawl safely among poisonous snakes. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes and pull it out unharmed. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. And as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD." **Q: Can you imagine all of this? Can you imagine all of this ever taking place, apart from Jesus coming into our world? Do you look forward to experiencing the day of the lion and the lamb living together in**

peace? (Or as I heard a pastor quip once, the dog and the cat eating out of the same bowl! :)

6/25 - Today Isaiah chapter 12 is a very short chapter. But it is a wonderful song of praise to God! Verse 2 reads: "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." **Q: How does this verse resonate with you? Do you frequently sing songs of praise to the Lord? Do you trust in God? Are you not afraid? Is God your strength and your song?**

6/25 - In 2 Kings 16 today King Ahaz of Judah messes up big time... Whaddya think about his idea to remove the bronze altar from the Temple and install an altar that was designed in Damascus? Think God will be happy about this? Essentially King Ahaz swapped his security in God to placing his security in King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria and his pagan gods. Stay tuned to upcoming readings... Again - I come back to our lives today. **Q: Are we ever similar to King Ahaz in doing something in our lives that we know is not pleasing to God? Do we know what is right and what is wrong and sometimes choose what is wrong? Why do we do this? Can we stop doing this? If so, how? Might it help us to stop doing wrong things if the #1 priority in our lives today were God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit? What is the #1 priority in your life today?**

6/25 - Alright, today is a big day! We start Hosea. Hosea prophesied in about 750 B.C. in the northern kingdom of Israel - which was rare. Most of the prophets were in the southern kingdom of Judah. Hosea lived during the final / last days of the northern kingdom, which ended in 722 B.C.

~ Hosea ~

Author: Hosea

Date: Eighth century B.C.

Content: The book of Hosea consists of two unequal parts, the first containing Hosea's life (chapters 1-3) and the second containing Hosea's messages (chapters 4-14). Hosea was a prophet to the northern Kingdom of Israel prior to its fall in 722 B.C., and his ministry spanned some forty years. He was a contemporary of Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Hosea's unhappy marriage life depicted symbolically the state of affairs in his nation. Just as his wife left home for a life of prostitution, so Israel had left God to seek after false gods. But as Hosea continued to love his wife and finally brought her home again, so God continued to love Israel and promised to restore her someday.

Theme: Two things stand in marked contrast in the book of Hosea: the love of God and the waywardness of Israel. God is depicted as faithful, caring, forgiving, kind, and loving. God's unfailing love is the theme of the book. Israel is seen as faithless, straying, sinful, rebellious, and wanton. She is characterized by ignorance of what God requires and total lack of desire to please God. However, just as Hosea's love triumphed in the end, so will God's love work a miracle of transformation in Israel. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 15*)

6/25 - Hosea chapter 1 certainly stands out right away - with God commanding Hosea to marry a prostitute, Gomer. The purpose of this relationship is to parallel Israel's unfaithfulness to God. You'll note that the names of the children born to Gomer get progressively worse for the people of Israel - 1. Jezreel, or "God scatters" 2. Lo-ruhamah--`Not loved'- 3. Verse 9 provides the worse name that could be bestowed to symbolize God's relationship with Israel: "And the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi--`Not my people'--for Israel is not my people, and I am not their God." Ouch.... This is about as bad as it can get for Israel. Fortunately, we see redemption in verse 10: "Yet the time will come when Israel will prosper and become a great nation. In that day its people will be like the sands of the seashore--too many to count! Then, at the place where they were told, `You are not my people,' it will be said, `You are children of the living God.'" Whew! This applies to most of us reading this as well - Gentiles. This is the beginning of the mission to the Gentiles after the time of Jesus. **Q: Do you we believe we are part of this promise? That we are parts of the sands of the seashore? That we are children of the living God?**

6/26 - Chapter 2 is a powerful "legal case" against Israel and her unfaithfulness to God. Verse 8 stood out to me in this chapter today: "She doesn't realize that it was I who gave her everything she has--the

grain, the wine, the olive oil. Even the gold and silver she used in worshipping the god Baal were gifts from me!" **Q: Do we realize that everything we have comes from God? Everything? Do we misuse any of these gifts from God in our life in ways that would not be pleasing to God? Could God bring a "legal case" or "lawsuit" against us today for misusing his gifts to us?**

6/26 - Chapter 3 brings us redemption again for Israel. Verse 5 I believe applies to us today - we who are in the last days (all the days after the life of Jesus) - *"But afterward the people will return to the LORD their God and to David's descendant, their king. They will come trembling in awe to the LORD, and they will receive his good gifts in the last days."* **Q: Have you returned to Jesus? Jesus who is from the line of David? Is Jesus your king? Are you receiving God's good gifts through your awe and faith in God through Jesus?**

6/26 - Hosea chapters 4 & 5 are classic prophesying! If you ever think of a prophet in the Old Testament going around and stirring things up in the land - think of these 2 chapters... If you're just checking out this website and today's readings, I realize that they will sound very harsh on the surface. However, context from Jeremiah & Ezekiel & 2 Kings will help catch you up on why God is not happy here. Essentially the northern kingdom of Israel is worshipping Baal, an idol/false god, and not God himself. And the immorality in the land is skyrocketing. God's reaction here is actually a compassionate reaction - he is trying to reverse the immorality and bring people back to him in repentance. Verses 1 & 2 in chapter 4 set the stage for these 2 chapters: *"Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel! The LORD has filed a lawsuit against you, saying: "There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land. You curse and lie and kill and steal and commit adultery. There is violence everywhere, with one murder after another."* **Q: See any violations of the Ten Commandments in these 2 verses?** Verse 18 really stood out to me today: *"Their love for shame is greater than their love for honor."* **Q: Is it possible in our world today that there are people who love shame more than they love honor? It is possible that this happens in our lives at times? Will we pursue love of honor in our lives, leaving behind anything that might look like love of shame?**

6/26 - Today we get 4 chapters of Hosea, with pretty much a continuation of prophesying by God via Hosea on what's going to happen to Israel due to her unfaithfulness and many sins. Hosea chapter 6's first 2 verses start things off on what seem like a hopeful note. However, commentaries suggest that this was a very shallow pledge by Israel: *"Come, let us return to the LORD! He has torn us in pieces; now he will heal us. He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds. In just a short time, he will restore us so we can live in his presence."* Even if this is a shallow pledge from Israel, I do really like verse 3 too: *"Oh, that we might know the LORD! Let us press on to know him!"* **Q: Are we pressing on in our lives to know God? Are we returning to God? Are we seeking to continually live in His presence?**

6/26 - God's reply to all of this in verse 6 is fantastic: *"I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices. I want you to know God; that's more important than burnt offerings."* **Q: Are there times in our lives where we try to bring "sacrifices" of prayer or pledges of repentance or works, when really what we should be bringing to God is mercy for others and just simply the desire to know God? Do our "acts" of repentance sometimes get in the way of our actual love relationship with God?**

6/26 - Chapter 7 Verse 16 stood out to me today as well: *"They look everywhere except to heaven, to the Most High."* **Q: If we are hurting, sad, tired, do we look to things other than God? Do we look to "quick fixes" from things of this world that are not healthy for us? Do these "quick fixes" really fix the problem? Are we looking everywhere except to heaven, to the Most High? Will we look only for the Most High - God?**

6/27 - Today we wrap up the book of Hosea! It's been a great read for me this year. It has been a good look at how the prophets of the Old Testament were warning Israel & Judah over and over again of their sins - sins that multiplied as we read in today's readings - and there was no repentance. Things just got worse. **Q: This did make me think today - if we continue to sin and sin and things get worse and worse in our lives and how we are adversely affecting other people's lives around us, is**

maybe the most compassionate thing for God to do - for us and others - to stop us from our path of destruction? My thought here in today's readings is that God is a compassionate God. Yes, he's throwing out some tough stuff in what he's saying - and will be doing - but for the end goal of getting people from stopping their sinful ways and harming themselves and others. Today, we are fortunate, compared to the Old Testament days, that we have Jesus Christ as a mediator for our sins between us and God - and not just a mediator - but a Healer. Jesus can heal us from our sinful desires and ways. So, while I do see God as being compassionate in the Old Testament & I am so thankful for his great compassion of sending his son Jesus to the earth for us. Without a doubt, God is good.

6/27 - Hosea chapter 10 verse 12 I loved today: *"Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of my love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you."* Beautiful verse! **Q: Are you planting good seeds of righteousness in your life? What would good seeds of righteousness be? Is it possible that faith in Jesus is a seed of righteousness that you should plant - and that would indeed harvest a crop of God's love in your life? To plant these seeds of righteousness, you may need to plow up some hard ground in your heart and you may need to seek God like never before. Do you think this plowing is worth it? Will you plow so that God may come into your life and shower righteousness upon you?**

6/27 - In Hosea chapter 11 verses 8 & 9 we read this about God's compassion: *"Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah and Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. No, I will not punish you as much as my burning anger tells me to. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy."* I absolutely love these verses. **Q: Do you believe that God will not give up on you? Do you believe that God's heart overflows with compassion for you? Do you believe that God is the one and only Holy and Living God, who is indeed involved in every single moment of your life? Do you believe God is closer than the air you breathe?** (Thanks to the musician David Wilcox for this last question. I love that thought - God is closer than the air we breathe!)

6/27 - The book of Hosea ends with a phenomenal verse - chapter 14 verse 9: *"Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those who are discerning listen carefully. The paths of the LORD are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in them. But sinners stumble and fall along the way."* This verse reminds me of the beauty of studying the Bible! The Bible gives us wisdom - and also we need wisdom to understand the Bible's teaching. But, the beauty is that the more we study the Bible, the more we gain wisdom, and the more that wisdom allows us to truly understand what we're reading in the Bible! It's a never-ending circle of elevation in our study of the Bible - we'll never fully "get it" all this side of heaven. But the more we study the Bible, the more I believe we'll be able to truly understand it and put it into practice. **Q: Do you believe this to be true? Have you found over time that studying the Bible becomes more and more interesting and you gain more and more insights and understandings?** This verse above I think also has a warning if we don't surrender our lives to Jesus, dive into God's Word, and put it into practice in our lives. There is the very real risk of stumbling and falling along the way... Let us not stumble!

6/28 - 2 Kings 17 is a HUGE and very sad chapter today! This is a huge chapter because it is the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel is invaded by Assyria and its people are exiled. It is so sad because the Israelites could have avoided this strife - but they chose to follow in the sins of Jeroboam and worship other gods. After much patience and many second chances by the True and Living God, Israel was allowed to be invaded & exiled for their disobedience. Sad stuff. You can learn more of the history of how this all transpired [at this link](#). In 2 Kings 17 verse 41 we will read this about the foreigners in Israel: *"Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols."* **Q: If the foreigners both worshiped God AND served idols at the same time back then, do you suppose that we can fall into this same trap today? What would some examples be today of both worshiping God and serving idols at the same time? Are there any areas of your life where you might be serving idols? Will you allow those idols to be turned over to God for his healing and transformation of you? Will you worship God only? Will you leave the idols behind?**

6/28 - Verse 15 stands out and relates to the paragraph above: *"They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless themselves."* How true is that? Maybe another way to look at it - you are what you worship! (like you are what you eat...) If we worship worthless idols, we become worthless ourselves. If we worship the true living God, we become more like his son Jesus. **Q: Would you rather be worthless or becoming like Jesus in this lifetime? And how about after this lifetime? So, who or what are you worshipping these days?**

6/28 - Today we are at the "beginning" of the prophet Isaiah, Chapter 1:1! (though we've read some of Isaiah in previous days) 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*)

6/28 - 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?**

6/29 - 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?**

6/30 - In Isaiah chapter 13 we are beginning a new section of the book. Chapters 1 through 12 were primarily chapters of judgment against the southern kingdom of Judah, as well as some mentions of the northern kingdom of Israel. Chapter 13 begins 11 chapters of judgment on other nations, beginning with Babylon. At this time in history (early 700's B.C.) Babylon was still part of the Assyrian empire. So this oracle from Isaiah was incredible in that it spoke of Babylon's destruction even before Babylon became a world power! Babylon brought about the downfall of Judah and Jerusalem later between the years of 605 and 586 B.C. But then Babylon would be conquered by Cyrus the Persian in 539 B.C. An interesting commentary I read on chapter 14 verses 12 through 15 is that some think Isaiah is giving a description of the fall of Satan from heaven in these verses. However, most commentaries seem to say contextually that these verses are about the king of Babylon. I do see how some could think that these 4 verses could apply to the fall of Satan - *"How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, 'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.' But instead, you will be brought down to the place of the dead, down to its lowest depths."*

6/30 - In Isaiah we will read many prophecies against cities and kingdoms. I realize these can be tough to read in some ways. As you read these prophecies, consider why these prophecies were written. Why were these prophecies proclaimed by Isaiah? Bible.org's excellent commentary on this section of the book of Isaiah titled **"The Burdens Upon the Nations"** is worth spending a few minutes reading [at this link](#). Today we read in Isaiah chapter 15 a message against Moab, or the Moabites! **Q: Now, the big question for each of us is how many sermons in your life have you ever heard that touch on the Moabites?? :)** I will admit that there is only one I can think of - and I actually just heard it on my iPod while jogging. From a previous post, many of you know that I'm a fan of Josh Harris and listen to his sermons often. Well, he has a recent sermon about the Moabites from [Numbers 22 through 25](#), where the Moabites were first fearful of Israel (Num. 22) because of their size, and they realized they could not defeat them in open warfare. So, they tried to get Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num 23 & 24), but Balaam wouldn't do it because God was giving him messages of blessings upon the Israelites! So, finally the Moabites decide to simply seduce the Israelites (Num 25) into worshipping their gods and this strategy worked! To the point where God ended up killing 24,000 Israelites with a plague (Num 25:9) because of their disobedience! Josh Harris does a great job of integrating this story of the Israelites and the Moabites into our lives and how we can fall prey to temptation just like the Israelites if we're not careful. [You can download an MP3 of this great sermon on temptation at this link](#). And you can check out more of Josh Harris' sermons online at this link: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/covenantlifechurch> **Q: Have you ever heard any great sermons on the book of Isaiah?**

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.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com this next week for daily commentary and questions for reflection.

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