

**One Year Bible Blog – Monthly Notes - [www.OneYearBibleBlog.com](http://www.OneYearBibleBlog.com)  
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**Notes & Group Questions for December 1 - 31 readings (Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below)**

**OLD TESTAMENT (daily reading schedule at: [www.OneYearBibleBlog.com](http://www.OneYearBibleBlog.com))**

12/1 - Daniel chapter 8 is quite a chapter! I'm not 100% sure how to post up on this chapter - so I went over to bible.org to see what they had to say and I came across this paragraph over there - "*Daniel chapter 8 is a preacher's nightmare. Even noted scholars hesitate to be dogmatic in their interpretation of this chapter. Daniel himself has not the foggiest notion of the vision's meaning, even after the angel Gabriel has interpreted the vision for him.*" [I think I better just link over to what bible.org has to say about this chapter today.](#) This is in the blog world what one would call a punt! :) The closing verse 27 of chapter 8 certainly stands out to me today: "*Then I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for several days. Afterward I got up and performed my duties for the king, but I was greatly troubled by the vision and could not understand it.*" **Q: Do you think you'd be physically exhausted & sick if you saw a vision like Daniel saw in this chapter?**

12/2 - Daniel chapter 9 today has an amazing prayer from Daniel! Confess your sins, be humble, praise God and petition for others. What a prayer. If you liked Daniel's prayer in today's readings as much as I did, here are two more that I think you'll appreciate - one from Ezra [at this link](#) - and one from Nehemiah [at this link](#). (okay, this is completely a geeky Bible thing here - but I just noticed that all 3 of these amazing prayers are in chapter 9 of their respective books! :) So, if you are forgetting how to pray and feel like you need some inspiration, just remember: Daniel 9, Ezra 9, and Nehemiah 9!) I'll just highlight the opening verses of Daniel's prayer in verses 4 & 5: "*O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and keep your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations.*" What a great way to open in prayer - praise God and then confess your sins. **Q: Do you believe that God is indeed a great and awesome God? That God always fulfills his promises of unfailing love to those who love him and keep his commands? Have we sinned? Have we rebelled? Have we scorned God's commands?**

12/2 - Chapter 10 verses 12 & 13 are worth considering: "*Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way.*" This is encouraging to me that our prayers are heard in heaven. What is maybe discouraging is that our answers or help needed for our prayers can be blocked by fallen angels / demons, as we see in these verses. The spirit prince of Persia being a demon of some sort blocking the angel from getting to Daniel to answer his prayer. A good book that I would recommend to dive more into what this spiritual realm and the spiritual battles between angels might be like is "[This Present Darkness](#)" by Frank Peretti. It is a powerful read.

12/3 - Daniel chapter 11 today is phenomenal when you realize that these prophecies were made in 537 B.C. and covered events for about 300 or so more years following that date. Essentially, we are getting a history lesson in this chapter - in advance of the history unfolding! This chapter really made me realize how "in control" God really is of everything. Which is actually very comforting for me, and hopefully is for you. I look at it this way - if God knows what is going to be transpiring hundreds of years in advance - if not thousands and millions of years in advance - **Q: why are we worrying about what's going to happen tomorrow? :) Or why are we fretting over what happened yesterday?** A quote I heard many years ago and occasionally bubbles back up into my mind is this: "Let go. And Let God." Let go, and let God. Meaning - let go of your worries and fears about yesterday or tomorrow and let God take the reins. He's got the reins anyway... **so why fret & fuss over our worries and fears?** Somehow the sweep of this prophecy seemed to make me realize that we often worry too much about really insignificant stuff...

12/3 - There is a lot going on in this chapter - I'll point out a couple of highlights. Verse 3 & 4 discuss Alexander the Great (336 - 323 B.C.): "*Then a mighty king will rise to power who will rule a vast kingdom and accomplish everything he sets out to do. But at the height of his power, his kingdom will be broken apart and divided into four parts.*" Many of the remaining verses then dive into kings of the line of Ptolemy in the south kingdom, or Egypt, and kings of the line of Seleucus/Antiochus in the north kingdom, or Syria. Verse 31 covers 168 B.C. when an altar to the pagan god Zeus Olympius is set up in the Temple in Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes: "*His army will take over the Temple fortress, polluting the sanctuary, putting a stop to the daily sacrifices, and setting up the sacrilegious object that causes desecration.*" Tell you what - there is so much going on in this chapter, [I recommend jumping over to bible.org at this link](#)

to read up more on what's happening. It really is fascinating stuff.

12/4 - Today we finish the book of Daniel! What an amazing read this book has been for me this year. I have been blessed by it. I hope you have too. It is always interesting to dive into prophecies and angels and such. I have to admit that I don't think about these types of things too often in my day to day life. However, I know they are real. And as I read the book of Daniel I am reminded of God's amazing story and where it is ultimately leading.

12/4 - In Daniel chapter 11 verse 36 onwards we are looking at verses prophesying about the anti-christ and end times. The verses just prior to 36, in yesterday's readings, referred to Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C., but we are looking at the future here in today's verses in chapter 11. To get some more context on these verses today, check out [2 Thessalonians 2:3-4](#) and [Revelation 13:5-8](#). A portion of verse 36 does stand out to me today: *"For what has been determined will surely take place."* **Q: Do you believe these prophecies in Daniel have been determined? Do you believe they will surely take place?**

12/4 - Daniel chapter 12 is called "The Time of the End" or "The End Times" in many Bible descriptors. However, over at bible.org Bob Deffinbaugh calls this chapter "The Hope of Heaven". I like that! Here's an excerpt from Bob's essay: "Daniel 12 is the crowning chapter of this prophecy, as well as its conclusion. It takes the believer to the high-water mark of Christian hope—the assurance of the resurrection of the dead. Let us listen and learn, and gain hope and comfort." Check out Mr. Deffinbaugh's full essay on Daniel chapter 12 [at this link](#).

12/4 - Verse 2 stands out in Daniel chapter 12: *"Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt."* This is one of the first clear mentions of a resurrection in the Old Testament. The phrase "everlasting life" appears only here in the Old Testament! Pretty fascinating. Seems like this chapter is in some ways bridging Old Testament / Old Covenant theology to New Testament / New Covenant. **Q: Do you believe that after death some will rise to everlasting life? And some to everlasting contempt?**

12/5 - Alright, today is a big day! We start The Book of the Twelve, or the Minor Prophets. Basically, this means we are in the last 12 books now of the Old Testament, and all of them are pretty short books by various prophets. These 12 prophets were contemporaries of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and their books parallel these three books. These 12 aren't called "minor" prophets in that they were "lesser" than others - but, they are called "minor" because their books are shorter. The first prophet of The Book of the Twelve we start today is 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 unending 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)*

12/5 - 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?**

12/5 - 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 worshiping 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?**

12/5 - 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?**

12/6 - 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 worshiping 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?**

12/7 - 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?**

12/7 - 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?**

12/7 - 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?**

12/8 - 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.

12/8 - 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?**

12/8 - 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!)

12/8 - 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!

12/9 - Today we start and finish the book of Joel! The book is basically about locusts. :) Well, okay, more than that. This book was written by pretty much an unknown author. There are 12 other Joel's mentioned in the Old Testament, and none are thought to be this book's author. Joel's name means "The Lord is God" or "Yahweh is God." Not a bad name eh! This name is actually the reverse of Elijah - "God is Lord/Yahweh". Different commentators estimate that this book was probably written between the 8th and 5th centuries B.C.

~ Joel ~

Author: Joel

Date: Ninth century B.C.

Content: This beautifully written book uses a plague of locusts to describe symbolically God's coming judgment on Jerusalem. Just as locusts devour the land, so will the enemy armies devour Jerusalem unless the nation repents of its sins. If the people do respond, there will be a time of prosperity and a return of God's favor. God's favor is seen as going beyond the immediate future to a time when God would pour out his Holy Spirit upon all flesh. The New Testament sees this as being fulfilled at Pentecost.

Theme: Joel's message is one of coming judgment if Jerusalem does not repent. Just as surely as the locusts strip the trees bare, so will God strip bare the land. Joel also speaks of coming prosperity, and final blessing, if the people respond in faith. (Above commentary is from *"The One Year Bible Companion"* pp. 15-16)

12/9 - Joel chapter 2 verse 13 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you."* I like that - tear your hearts. One of my favorite musicians, David Wilcox, often talks and sings about hearts not working right - until they are broken. I think he's actually preaching the Gospel message with this

thinking. When we finally get to the point of surrendering our lives to Jesus, we come with broken-open hearts. Hearts that have been torn. We've given up our pride. We're reading for God to fill our hearts instead. And as this verse tells us - God is gracious and merciful. **Q: Has your heart been torn for God?**

12/9 - Joel chapter 2 verses 28-32 are amazing! *"Then after I have poured out my rains again, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. In those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, men and women alike. I will cause wonders in the heavens and on the earth--blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon will turn bloodred before that great and terrible day of the LORD arrives. And anyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. There will be people on Mount Zion in Jerusalem who escape, just as the LORD has said. These will be among the survivors whom the LORD has called."* I didn't realize until recently that these verses were quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost - seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection - in the book of Acts. Check out the similarities at this link, [Acts Chapter 2 verses 16-21](#). Back to Joel chapter 2 verse 29: *"In those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, men and women alike."* We are in those days... **Q: Has God's Spirit been poured out upon you? Into your heart?**

12/10 - 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?**

12/10 - 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?**

12/10 - 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?

12/11 - 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?**

12/11 - 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?**

12/11 - 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?**

12/12 - Today we finish up the book of Amos! Obadiah is up next tomorrow! I like this part of the year in the Old Testament as we move through the Minor Prophets at a quick pace. 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?**

12/12 - 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?**

12/12 - 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?**

12/13 - Today we start and finish the book of Obadiah - the shortest book in the Old Testament! Obadiah was a prophet from Judah, who prophesied against Edom, Israel's neighbor to the southeast of Jerusalem & the Salt Sea. Edom was a descendent of Esau - and Israel a descendent of Jacob. Esau & Jacob were the twin sons of Isaac and fought during their lifetimes, and the fighting of the nations of Israel & Edom continued throughout the Old Testament. A quick flashback of Jacob & Esau is here from Genesis 25:23 - *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."* There is some uncertainty over when Obadiah prophesied. It was either approximately 853-841 B.C. when Edom rebelled against Judah during the reign of Jehoram - in which case Obadiah would be a contemporary of Elisha. Or, more likely, it was approx 605-586 B.C. when Babylon was attacking Jerusalem - in which case Obadiah would be a contemporary of Jeremiah.

12/13 - Verse 15 stood out to me in Obadiah today: *"As you have done to Israel, so it will be done to you."* This is a good reminder to do unto others, as we would have done unto us... Or, what goes around, comes around? :) God was upset that Edom sat around and did nothing while their neighbor Israel was attacked. They could have done something, but did nothing. **Q: In our world today are our neighbors are being attacked - or hurt - or starving - or dying of AIDS? If so, should we be doing something about it? Should we be like the Good Samaritan, caring for our neighbor? Who is your neighbor?**

12/14 - 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*)

12/14 - 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?**

12/14 - 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?**

12/14 - 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!

12/14 - 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?**

12/15 - 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?**

12/15 - Today in Micah chapter 2 verse 11 we read this powerful verse to consider: *"Suppose a prophet full of lies were to say to you, 'I'll preach to you the joys of wine and drink!' That's just the kind of prophet you would like!"* **Q: At times in our lives, do we pick and choose the "prophets" we will listen to? Do we pick and choose the pastors or teachers we will listen to? Do we look for people that will tell us basically what we want to hear? Instead, is it maybe okay for a pastor or teacher to "afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted"? Is it maybe okay if we get uncomfortable with some things we read in the Bible - at first read. But, then, do we start to reflect on and study what the challenging passages of the Bible really are saying and mean? Are we seeking Truth more than seeking being "comfortable" in our religion and our lives? Or are we just seeking comfort above all else...**

12/15 - Chapter 4 verse 1 stood out to me: *"In the last days, the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem will become the most important place on earth. People from all over the world will go there to worship."* What are the most important places on earth today for most people? Could it be the movies, sporting events, work, vacations, etc. **Q: What are the most important places in your life? Should church (be it a cathedral or a house church) and coming together with others to worship God perhaps be the most important place on earth? Is it?**

12/16 - Okay, we get an amazing few verses in Micah today, which are perfect for the Christmas Advent season we are in! Keep in mind that these verses were written 700 years before the birth of Jesus. Micah was the Old Testament prophet who prophesied that the Messiah, Jesus, would be born in Bethlehem. Reading these verses in Micah chapter 5 verses 2 through 5 gives me the chills... *"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies until the time when the woman in labor gives birth to her son. Then at last his fellow countrymen will return from exile to their own land. And he will stand to lead his flock with the LORD's strength, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. Then his people will live there undisturbed, for he will be highly honored all around the world. And he will be the source of our peace."* Wow... I love it! Please read these verses again. Perfect for the Christmas season!

12/16 - In Micah chapter 6 verse 8 I read a commentary that the following verse is the "most memorable statement in the OT defining a proper relationship to God". Here it is: *"No, O people, the LORD has already told you what is good, and this is what he requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."* Not a very big and complicated list, eh? Do what is right. Love mercy. And walk humbly with God. **Q: How are you doing on these things?**

12/16 - Micah chapter 7 verse 7 definitely stood out to me in today's readings: *"As for me, I look to the LORD for his help. I wait confidently for God to save me, and my God will certainly hear me."* I love the confidence and surety of this verse from Micah. **Q: Where do you look for your help? Will you wait confidently for God to save you? Do you believe that God will certainly hear you?**

12/17 - Today we start and finish the book of the prophet Nahum! Nahum prophesied against Nineveh, about 100 years after Jonah prophesied against Nineveh. Nahum was prophesying between 663 and 612 B.C., when Nineveh was at the height of its power. Nineveh was capital of the Assyrian empire and it had control of the Fertile Crescent area. Assyria had recently conquered Israel, the northern kingdom, and was threatening and causing much suffering to Judah. Nineveh was eventually conquered by Babylon in 612 B.C., as Nahum prophesied. Chapter 1 verse 7 stood out to me in today's reading: *"The LORD is good. When trouble comes, he is a strong refuge. And he knows everyone who trusts in him."* This is a comforting verse. **Q: Do you seek God when trouble comes? Do you realize that he is a strong refuge - if you will seek him and let him be a strong refuge for you? Do you know that God is good? Do you trust in him?**

12/17 - Chapter 3 verse 18 jumped out at me for some reason today: *"O Assyrian king, your princes lie dead in the dust. Your people are scattered across the mountains. There is no longer a shepherd to gather them together."* For some reason this verse made me very thankful that we do indeed have a shepherd to gather us together today. The shepherd whose birth we will be celebrating in about a week. A shepherd who was born in a stable in a little town called



Bethlehem. **Q: Will you allow Jesus be your shepherd this Christmas season? Will you allow Jesus to gather you together with others to celebrate his birth?**

12/18 - Today we start and finish the book of the prophet Habakkuk! This is a great book & there is a lot going on in it. In some ways it reminded me of the end of the book of Job, with the conversation going on between Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk was a prophet from Judah who prophesied between the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. and Babylon's invasion of Judah in 588 B.C. Assyria fell in 612-605 B.C. and Babylon was becoming the world's dominant nation. In the first 2 chapters of this book Habakkuk argues with God about God's ways, and then in the 3rd chapter Habakkuk responds with an incredible prayer to God. In the first 2 chapters the big questions are - 1. Why does evil seem to go unpunished? and 2. Why does God not seem to respond to prayers? Reminds me of the Psalms! :)

12/18 - Chapter 3 verses 18 & 19 are powerful verses for us to consider in our own lives in the midst of challenging times: *"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains."* **Q: Do you rejoice in God? Are you joyful in God as your salvation? Even in the midst of challenging times in your life? Do you trust that God will bring you to safety?**

12/19 - Today we start and finish the book of the prophet Zephaniah! Zephaniah was different from some of the recent prophets that we have read in that he came from royal lineage. He was the descendent of King Hezekiah. Thus, Zephaniah writes about the upper class, courts, and priests with quite a bit of authority and clarity. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah. He prophesied in approximately 640-620 B.C. The purpose of his prophecies were to announce God's coming judgment against Judah. But, as we see with the other prophets, Zephaniah also writes about God saving a remnant of people who love and honor God with their lives - thus preserving and carrying on the covenant promise to Abraham. A good overview of the book of Zephaniah is at bible.org [at this link](#). The link includes a funny opening line: "The Book of Zephaniah is probably best known for being the least known book of the entire Bible." :)

12/19 - Zephaniah chapter 3 verse 5 stood out to me in today's readings: *"But the LORD is still there in the city, and he does no wrong. Day by day his justice is more evident, but no one takes notice--the wicked know no shame."* As you read the 4 preceding verses, you'll note that God is calling the people and leaders of Jerusalem to the carpet for their sinful ways. And in the midst of all this, comes this beautiful verse 5. God is still there in the city. In the midst of all the chaos and shame. And even through all of this, God's justice actually becomes more and more evident. I think this verse really jumped out at me today because I read a horribly depressing story in the paper recently about just some awful things that were done to children in a nearby city. And this story reminded me that we indeed live in a fallen world. There is evil in our world that invades the hearts of men and women. And yet, even in the midst of all of this chaos and shame in our world today, *"The LORD is still there in the city, and he does no wrong. Day by day his justice is more evident, but no one takes notice--the wicked know no shame."* **Q: Do you take notice of God in our world today? Even in the midst of everything else going on that may attempt to distract you from God? Is God's justice (and love and compassion and mercy and call to holiness) becoming more and more evident to you each day of your life? This very evening, do you believe that God is still there in the city? Will you take notice?**

12/19 - Chapter 3 verses 11 & 12 also stood out to me in today's readings: *"I will remove all the proud and arrogant people from among you. There will be no pride on my holy mountain. Those who are left will be the lowly and the humble, for it is they who trust in the name of the LORD."* We of course continue to see the sin of pride coming up over and over again in the Old Testament. Here God reminds us that pride and arrogance are not attributes of those who love him. It is indeed the lowly and the humble that better reflect the attributes of those who love and trust God. **Q: Is pride something that you struggle with? Do you realize that pride can be a hindrance to a fully loving and obedient relationship with God? Will you lay down your pride and seek humility? Will you seek to place your trust in God rather than your own abilities? When was the last time you bowed low before God?**

12/20 - Today we start and finish the book of the prophet Haggai! This is the second shortest book in the Old Testament, with Obadiah being the shortest. This short book does have a lot to offer! Haggai prophesied in 520 B.C. about 18 years after the Jews had returned from exile in Babylon in 538 B.C. When Cyrus, king of Persia, conquered Babylon, he issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. About 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem and began building the temple's foundation in 538 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel. However, neighboring nations were alarmed by the rebuilding of the temple and politically stopped the progress in 536 B.C. Here is where the story picks up with the prophet Haggai encouraging the process of the temple rebuilding to commence. A good overview

of the book of the prophet Haggai is online at bible.org [at this link](#).

12/20 - Today in Haggai chapter 1 verse 3 we read: *"So the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?"* What stands out in my mind when reading this verse is the concept of tithing. Check out this amazing verse in Malachi 3:10 on tithing (which we'll read on December 31st) - *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* It is very rare in the Bible that God says "test me" and follows it up with an incredible promise of a blessing. **Q: Will you test God with a tithe to your church, ministries, and nonprofits this next year?**

12/20 - Chapter 1 verse 8 is a strong one for us to consider as well: *"Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD."* I think the key word in this verse is the very small but very powerful - **Go**. Go.... **Q: Where in your life is God calling you to go? Is there something God is calling you to do? If you are obedient in this calling, do you believe it will bring pleasure to God? Will you go?**

12/21 - Today we start the book of the prophet Zechariah! You'll note that we are now at the 2nd to the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi is after Zechariah – and we'll be camped out in this book for quite a few days. Zechariah was a prophet during the post-exile (returned from Babylon) period at about the same time Haggai was a prophet. Both started their prophecies in 520 B.C. – however, Zechariah prophesied for many more years going forward – probably until about 480/475 B.C. Zechariah's name means, "The Lord remembers," which is fitting for this book. God is remembering his covenant promise to the Israelites in this post-exilic period. Zechariah's prophecies are similar to Haggai's in that he is encouraging the Israelites to rebuild the temple. Zechariah is a wonderful book, filled with 8 night visions, 4 messages, and 2 oracles.

12/21 - Chapter 1 verse 3 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD Almighty."* What a great calling and promise from God! Return to me – and I will return to you. **Q: Are there areas in your life where you need to change your ways and return to God? If you change our ways, or repent, and return to God, do you believe that God will also return blessings to you for this act of repentance? Will you return to God? Why would this be wise? Is it a risky waste of time to be apart from God? Will you no longer turn back?**

12/21 - In verse 8 we begin to read about Zechariah's night visions. It is interesting to note that all 8 of his visions in this book take place in 1 night. Visions are different from dreams in that Zechariah is in an awake state while these visions occur. You'll note that the four horsemen described here are very similar to the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" described by John in Revelation chapter 6, which we recently read. The four horns in verse 18 are thought to represent Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Persia and the four blacksmiths in verse 20 are thought to represent Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and Greece.

12/22 - Today in Zechariah we read about the future prosperity of Jerusalem, the Exiles being called home, and cleansing for the high priest. Chapter 2, verses 4 & 5 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Hurry, and say to that young man, 'Jerusalem will someday be so full of people that it won't have room enough for everyone! Many will live outside the city walls, with all their livestock--and yet they will be safe. For I, myself, will be a wall of fire around Jerusalem, says the LORD. And I will be the glory inside the city!'"* My mind took me to the thought of the holy heavenly Jerusalem being chocked full of people who love God! And a wall of fire - holy protection - surrounding everyone in a heavenly Jerusalem and providing safety. And God's glory reigning eternally... I don't think this is quite proper exegesis on this passage... :) but I like the thought!

12/22 - Chapter 1 verse 13 also jumped out at me during this Christmas season: *"Be silent before the LORD, all humanity, for he is springing into action from his holy dwelling."* **Q: I think sometimes we get so busy during the Christmas season that we forget to be silent and to be still. We can just go, go, go - rush, rush rush - and maybe miss the true meaning of Christmas? Don't forget the song, "Silent Night, Holy Night...." Can you find time and space to be silent before the Lord this Christmas? And time and space to reflect upon what the advent of Jesus as a baby in the manger means to you?**

12/22 - Chapter 3 verses 8 & 9 were also beautiful for me today in this Christmas season as we think about the birth of Jesus: *"Listen to me, O Jeshua the high priest, and all you other priests. You are symbols of the good things to come. Soon I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. Now look at the jewel I have set before Jeshua, a single stone with*

seven facets. I will engrave an inscription on it, says the LORD Almighty, and I will remove the sins of this land in a single day." **Q: Are you looking forward to the coming of the Branch? What does the Branch symbolize to you? Verse 9 above also looks beyond Christmas and toward Good Friday - How were our sins removed in a single day? Do you believe that your sins were removed by Jesus on the cross on that single day?**

12/22 - And chapter 3 verse 10 also works well in this Christmas season! :) *"And on that day, says the LORD Almighty, each of you will invite your neighbor into your home to share your peace and prosperity."* **Q: Will you have an opportunity over this next couple of weeks to invite someone into your home to share in your peace and prosperity? Or, if not, can you find an opportunity to go out and share your peace and prosperity with others? Maybe volunteer at a place that has neighbors that really need your peace and prosperity this Christmas season?**

12/23 - Today in the book of the prophet Zechariah we read about Zechariah's visions of a Lampstand and Two Olive Trees, a Flying Scroll, and a Woman in a Basket. Chapter 4 is essentially a vision of encouragement for the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem - not by their own might, but by relying on the Spirit of God. The rebuilding will be led by Zerubbabel, the political leader of Jerusalem at this post-exilic time, as well as by Joshua, the priest - and these two are represented by the 2 olive trees in the vision. The bowl of oil held by the lampstands in the vision represents God's power through his spirit. Chapter 4 verse 6 stood out to me in today's readings: *"It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty."* **Q: How often in our own lives do we try to do things by our own force or our own strength? And not look to God? Would we ultimately lead more productive and peaceful and joyful and restful lives if we instead allowed God's Spirit to move in our lives? Or will we continue to try to do things by our own force and strength?**

12/23 - Verse 10 is a great reminder for each of us - *"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand."* **Q: If we do feel led by the Spirit of God to work on something - and it turns out to be maybe something bigger than ourselves - do we sometimes get discouraged by the task before us? Do we despise small beginnings?** Be encouraged to know that God rejoices in small beginnings! Take the first step! Take the plumb line in your hand! (I will be honest - it's not always easy to get motivated for typing in this blog each evening. Most days I am motivated - but not always. Sometimes I just have to "take the plumb line in my hand" - get started with the typing - and God shows up....)

12/23 - In chapter 5 we read about the vision of the flying scroll - which is a very large scroll with a purpose of encouraging repentance with a clear message of judgment. The second vision of the woman in the basket is essentially purging sin from the land of Jerusalem, and plopping it down in a more fitting place where they will build a temple for it! To worship the sin... Babylon... **Q: Are there areas in our life where we need to deposit some sin into a basket, close the lid, and let the basket be taken away to another place far from us? Is it possible that there are areas of sin in our life where we actually worship the sin somehow? Will we turn away from this false idol worship and return to loving God whole-heartedly?**

12/26 - I love it! In today's readings Zechariah prophesies 500 years in advance about Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey to a hail of Hosanna's (days before his death - popularly known as Palm Sunday) in chapter 9 verse 9: *"Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey's colt."* **Q: This reminds me of a saying of one of my classmates in a Bible study class: "You can't understand the New Testament if you don't understand the Old Testament!" Q: How have the prophecies in the Old Testament this year strengthened your faith in the New Testament? How have they strengthened your faith in Jesus?**

12/27 - We continue to read some incredible prophecies from Zechariah today about Jesus, the Messiah, coming in 500 years! In chapter 10 verse 4 today Zechariah calls Jesus the "cornerstone": *"From Judah will come the cornerstone, the tent peg, the bow for battle, and all the rulers."* Why do you think Zechariah called Jesus the cornerstone? You'll recall that we read earlier in the year this passage in Matthew chapter 21 verse 42: *"Then Jesus asked them, 'Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures? 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see.'"* **Q: Have you heard Jesus referred to as the cornerstone in our world today? Is Jesus the cornerstone of your church? Is Jesus the cornerstone of your life?**

12/27 - In Zechariah chapter 11 verses 12 & 13 we have a foreshadowing of Judas betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver - and Judas' money being used to buy the potters field: *"And I said to them, 'If you like, give me my wages, whatever I*

*am worth; but only if you want to." So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—this magnificent sum at which they valued me! So I took the thirty coins and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the Lord." (hopefully you caught Zechariah's sarcasm in "this magnificent sum"...)* A couple things to note here - 30 pieces of silver was the price of a slave among the Israelites in ancient times. Paying this price to Zechariah was an insult. However, paying this price for the life of Jesus was an unfathomable insult. Our Lord's life was sold for 30 pieces of silver... During this Christmas season this is really sad to think about - it's sad to think about this at any time, but somehow just celebrating our Lord's birth 2 days ago, and then now thinking about how his precious life was sold for 30 silver pieces is just incredibly sad for me today. Zechariah was rejected. Jesus was rejected. **Q: Think it's possible that if you and I really live our lives for God - really live our faith - that we too may be rejected some day? That perhaps someday our lives could be sold for just 30 pieces of silver?** (There are modern day martyrs whose lives were taken for much less than this amount...)

12/28 - Today in Zechariah chapter 12 we begin the second oracle in the book of Zechariah! It is interesting to note that the Hebrew term for "oracle" or "the word of the Lord" is only used 3 times in the Old Testament - here in 12:1, in Zechariah 9:1 and in Malachi 1:1. This indicates that Zechariah chapters 9 through 14 were likely written at about the same time as the book of Malachi - the last book of the Old Testament - which we'll be reading in a couple of days! :) This 2nd oracle in Zechariah consists of the final siege of Jerusalem and Jesus' return as Messiah to defeat Israel's enemies and establish his kingdom. Chapter 12 verse 10 is a powerful Messianic verse in today's readings: *"Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on all the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died."* The first sentence indicates a pouring out of the Holy Spirit. In the second sentence it appears that Jesus is speaking in the first person - here in the Old Testament! The use of the word pierced here is similar to Psalm 22:16 - *"they have pierced my hands and my feet"* and John 19:34-37 - *"Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced.""* Chapter 13 verse 7 is another powerful verse about Jesus: *"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, the man who is my partner, says the LORD Almighty. Strike down the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn against the lambs."* This last sentence is quoted by Jesus just before his arrest in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27. It is applied to the scattering of the apostles, but can also be considered for the dispersion of the Jews in A.D. 70 after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. **Q: And yet, even after the sheep were scattered, do you realize that Jesus is seeking after his lost sheep? Have you been found by Jesus? How are you helping other lost sheep find Jesus in your life?**

12/29 - Today we finish the book of the prophet Zechariah! Only one more book in the Bible to go with Malachi, which we'll read over the two remaining days of this year. In Zechariah chapter 14 today we read about the Lord's reign on earth - this reading fits in very nicely with the Revelation readings we have been going through recently. Verses 6 through 8 gave my imagination a great workout today: *"On that day the sources of light will no longer shine, yet there will be continuous day! Only the LORD knows how this could happen! There will be no normal day and night, for at evening time it will still be light. On that day life-giving waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half toward the Dead Sea and half toward the Mediterranean, flowing continuously both in summer and in winter."* How does this sound to you? Not bad, eh. The light and the life-giving waters sound wonderful to me! **Q: When it comes to the continuous Light mentioned in these verses, where do you suppose the continuous Light will be coming from? Or - rather than from where - perhaps I should ask from Whom do you suppose the continuous Light will be coming from... Are you looking forward to this Light? Are you looking forward to eternity with the Light?**

12/29 - Verse 16 is interesting: *"In the end, the enemies of Jerusalem who survive the plague will go up to Jerusalem each year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Shelters."* Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion has a great Question of "Why will there still be an Old Testament Feast during the Messiah's Kingdom?" And an answer that basically says the Feast of the Tabernacles (also called Shelters or Booths or simply Sukkot) will still be appropriate because it is a festival of thanksgiving, celebrating those who love God with all their soul. The other feasts of the Old Testament won't be celebrated as they were all fulfilled - The Passover in Jesus' death - Day of Atonement in Jesus' Salvation - Feast of Firstfruits in Jesus' resurrection - and Pentecost with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

12/30 - Today we start the very last book of the Old Testament by the likely last prophet of the Old Testament era, Malachi! Some say Joel was the last prophet, but most commentaries suggest Malachi. There is some great stuff in this

short book... particularly when we get to tomorrow's readings. The name Malachi means "my messenger." Malachi was written in approximately 430 B.C. and he was likely a contemporary of Nehemiah. Malachi was written to the returned exiles in Jerusalem well after the temple had been rebuilt under governor Zerubbabel in 516 B.C. By 430 B.C. there was a spiritual malaise in the land. It is speculated that this is in part because Jerusalem was then just a small province in the large Persian empire. But, the big reason is probably because the glorious future of God sending his Messiah, Jesus - as pronounced by Isaiah, Haggai and Zechariah and other prophets - had not yet come to fruition.

12/30 - Chapter 1 verse 2 stood out to me in today's readings: *"I have loved you deeply," says the LORD.* I guess this really resonated with me since we are now reading the last book of the Old Testament. As I look back on our readings earlier this year - all of the books of the Old Testament that we have read and all of the interaction between God and his covenant people, I have to absolutely nod my head in agreement with these words from God in verse 2. God loved deeply in the Old Testament. And God loved deeply the New Testament. And God loves us deeply today. **Q: Do you believe that God loves you deeply? And do you believe that he always will? Do you in turn love God deeply? Today will you reach out and jump in to the deep end of the pool of God's love?**

12/30 - Verse 7 also stood out to me: *"You have despised my name by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar."* The chapter goes on to describe how blind, crippled, and diseased animals were sacrificed to God - which were unacceptable holy sacrifices to God per his laws in Leviticus 1:3 and Deuteronomy 15:21. We are no longer under the law of these sacrifices, as Jesus was the final sacrifice once and for all on the cross. **Q: However - I wondered to myself as I read this verse, do we still offer "defiled sacrifices" to God in some ways today in our lives? Do we give God maybe the left-overs of our life? Our left-over time, finances, energy, prayers, love, etc.? Should we instead be giving God our best sacrifices - our firstfruits, our early morning energy, our constant prayers, our deepest love? Indeed, as Oswald Chambers puts it, are we giving God our very [Utmost for His Highest](#)? Are you giving God the very best of who you are? Every day? Or is God typically just getting your leftovers?**

12/30 - Did anyone else catch a couple of Delirious? (Christian worship band) lyrics from their song "Lead Me" in Malachi's readings today? :) How about chapter 2 verse 17: *"You have wearied the LORD with your words."* What a sad statement to think about - we can weary God with our words... do you suppose this is still possible today? Have we wearied God with our words? And then another Delirious lyric in verse 13: *"You cover the LORD's altar with tears."* What does it mean to flood God's altar with our tears? When would this be good? When would this be not so good...? As Delirious continues to sing in "Lead Me": "Great God, our promises we've broken. Oh Lord, forgive me..." Beautiful tune.

12/31 - Today we finish the book of the prophet Malachi, and it is an awesome 2 chapters we read today! The first half of Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 is prophesying 400 years in advance of the coming of John the Baptist, who will prepare people's hearts for Jesus by preaching repentance of sins: *"Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me."* This is a great thing to reflect on as we close out one year and begin anew. **Q: Do we need a messenger from God to encourage us to repent from our sins? Will we listen to that messenger and make way for the coming of Jesus into our hearts and lives?** The second half of verse 1 then prophesies that Jesus is indeed coming to usher in the new covenant, or the new testament: *"The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the LORD Almighty.* The Good News for us today is that Jesus has come already for the forgiveness of sins and Jesus is coming again in glory!

12/31 - Verse 2 tells us this about Jesus: *"For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal or like a strong soap that whitens clothes."* **Q: Will you allow Jesus to refine you through his holy fire? And make you pure through his holy soap?** (Okay, I realize this is a bit cheesy wording here - has anyone ever called Jesus holy soap before?? :)

12/31 - Verses 6 & 7 are so powerful for us to reflect upon: *"I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already completely destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my laws and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.* As I reflect back upon our One Year Bible readings this year, it is so true that God does not change. He has shown so much compassion over and over again to the Israelites in the Old Testament. And he continues to show so much compassion to us today over and over again. **Q: In light of God's holy and unchanging love and compassion for us, will we return to Him? As you look back on our One Year Bible readings this year, do you agree with God's statement here that He does not change? Do you believe that all the way from the Old Testament's Genesis to the New Testament's Revelation God does not change?**

12/31 - Verse 10 is one of my favorites and one of the most challenging in the Bible: *"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!"* This verse has and will continue to be interpreted so many ways. Check out the NIV translation of Malachi 3:10 (slightly different than the NLT version above) - *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* It is very rare in the Bible that God says "test me" and follows it up with an incredible promise of a blessing. **Q: This next year, will you test God with a tithe? This next year, will you trust God with your tithe?**

12/31 - Chapter 4 verse 2 makes me smile with the metaphor of us being compared to a calf frolicking in a field: *"But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture."* **Q: Do you want to be set free? Truly free from your burdens and doing things that you do not want to do? Will you entrust your life to the Sun (Son?) of Righteousness, Jesus?** And then - are you looking forward to leaping with joy like a calf let out to pasture?? :) I love this metaphor... it will stick with me.

## NEW TESTAMENT

12/1 - First John chapter 2 is full of tons of wisdom today! Verses 5 & 6 are so strong: *"But those who obey God's word really do love him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did."* **Q: Do we realize that obeying God's Word, the Bible, demonstrates our love for God? Do we live our lives as Jesus did? Do we really love God? Do we obey God's Word?**

12/1 - Verse 9 certainly gives us much to consider in our lives: *"If anyone says, 'I am living in the light,' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness."* **Q: Are you living in the light?**

12/1 - Verses 15, 16 & 17 are worth looking at. Bible commentaries suggest that the "world" in these verses is not the created world or people - but the world of sin, which is the dominion of Satan. *"Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever."* **Q: Are we doing the will of God in our lives? Do you want to live with God forever? Do you continually pray to God to deliver you from lust & pride?**

12/2 - First John 2 verse 27 stood out to me today: *"But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you all things, and what he teaches is true--it is not a lie. So continue in what he has taught you, and continue to live in Christ."* After we come to believe in Christ as Savior of the World - through his life, death on the cross for our sins, and resurrection - we are then blessed with the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit. And indeed the Holy Spirit will come to live within us. **Q: Do you believe that the Holy Spirit within you can teach you all things? Teach you what is true? Will you continue in what the Holy Spirit has taught you? Will you live in Christ?**

12/2 - First John 3 verse 1 is encouraging: *"See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are!"* **Q: Do you know that our heavenly Father loves you? Do you know that you are a child of God?**

12/3 - First John chapter 3 verse 9 is powerful in today's readings! *"Those who have been born into God's family do not sin, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they have been born of God."* Keep in mind that this does not mean that as a Christian you won't stop sinning completely and be perfect. However, you will be in the process of being sanctified and your life will be shown as someone who is compelled to do what is right, because God is in you, versus having a life that shows you are compelled to sin, if you were without God. But, this verse is still great for believers to reflect upon - we do not want to sin anymore and we're in the process of sinning less and less through sanctification - until the day we are in heaven with Christ when indeed we will never sin again. **Q: Do you realize this is your eternal purpose?**

12/3 - Today in First John chapter 3 verse 16 we read: *"We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters."* This is a powerful verse for us to reflect

on. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He gave up his life so that we may have eternal life with the Father through faith in him. Jesus' giving up his life for you and me is real love. **Q: How might we be able to show real love toward others? How might we be able to give up our lives for others? Not necessarily are we being called to death on a cross - but how about a figurative death in our lives on how we invest our time, energy, & passions? Is it possible that our indulgence in luxury goods and how we waste precious time could cost the very lives of someone else in need somewhere in the world? Can we give up our "life", our luxury goods, and our wasting of time so that we can show real love for others? Will we? Will we follow Jesus in the giving up of our own life for the sake of others?**

12/4 - First John chapter 4 verse 1 starts us off with quite a warning today: *"Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world."* The interesting thing about this verse for me today is the implication to "see if the spirit they have comes from God." Meaning, that the spirit some have come from the opposite of God - the devil. A bit scary to think about this and realize this. But, it's true. There is good and evil in the world, and good and evil spirits influencing people. It's better if we realize this. It is a fallen world. **Q: Do you believe this verse to be true? Do you believe there is both good - and evil - in the world? Do you believe there are many false prophets in the world?**

12/4 - Verses 7 through 21 are incredible verses on LOVE! A fun Bible fact for you here - the word love appears 43 times in First John overall - and 32 times in the short section of 4:7 through 5:3. We're in the Christian love section here! :) Certainly verses 9 & 10 here are well worth each of us reflecting upon: *"God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."* **Do you believe these verses to be true? Do these verses maybe remind you of a similar verse John wrote in his Gospel? John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** It is awesome that we have these verses to reflect upon - along with Daniel chapter 12 verse 2 above. **Q: See any ties between these verses from the Old & New Testaments regarding eternal life?**

12/5 - We finish the book of First John today! What a great book it has been for me this year. I hope it has been a blessing for you as well. Verses 3 & 4 in 1 John chapter 5 are powerful: *"Loving God means keeping his commandments, and really, that isn't difficult. For every child of God defeats this evil world by trusting Christ to give the victory."* **Q: Do you love God by keeping his commandments? Do you trust Jesus to give you the victory over evil in this world? Does your trust in Jesus make keeping God's commandments not difficult?**

12/5 - Verses 14 & 15 are good reflections on how we should pray - and that we should pray: *"And we can be confident that he will listen to us whenever we ask him for anything in line with his will. And if we know he is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that he will give us what we ask for."* **Q: Do you pray confidently, asking God for things that are in line with his will? Do you know that God is listening to your prayers? Are you sure that he will give you what you ask for, if it is in line with his will?**

12/5 - And verse 21 is a powerful end to this book of 1 John: *"Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts."* **Q: Is there anything in your life that might take the place of God in your heart? Will you turn this idol over to God? Will you keep away from this idol? Will you allow God to take the primary place in your heart and your mind?**

12/6 - Today we read through the very short letter of Second John! This letter, like First John, was written by one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John son of Zebedee - who also wrote the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. This letter was essentially written to continue to dispel Gnosticism, which was a twisting of Christianity - it basically meant salvation through knowledge (gnosis is Greek for knowledge). Gnostic teachers were traveling throughout the land at the time this letter was written, and this letter warns people to not encourage this false teaching in any way.

~ **Second John** ~

Author: John the apostle

Place: Uncertain, probably Ephesus

Date: A.D. 85-95

Content: This short letter was written either to a Christian woman whom John knew or to a church personified as a woman. In any case, it was written to encourage true Christian love and to warn against the deceivers who were coming into the world. John charges the believers not to participate in their evil, but to stand for the truth no matter what that cost.

Theme: The need for Christians to be alert and diligent when it comes to false doctrine is the theme of this letter. We must be aware that false doctrine exists and we must be ready to deal with it, if confronted. All the while, however, we must live out the love of God in our lives. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 34*)

12/6 - Verses 5 & 6 certainly stand out in this short letter: *"And now I want to urge you, dear lady, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we had from the beginning. Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning."* **Q: Are you loving others frequently & consistently in your life? Do you demonstrate love for others consistently? Do you love God's commands? Do you love others as Jesus loved you?**

12/7 - Today we start and finish the book of Third John! Yes, it is quite a lengthy letter... :) This letter, like the 2 before it were written by the disciple John in about 85 to 95 A.D. The purpose of this letter is actually somewhat the opposite of the purpose of Second John. In Second John - see yesterday's post below - we learned that John was warning against providing hospitality to traveling false teachers. In Third John, John is asking Gaius to show hospitality to traveling teachers - but teachers that are teaching the truth. The unfortunate aspect of today's letter is that there is a bit of a dictator leading the local church named Diotrephes who is not welcoming in traveling teachers who teach the truth - the Gospel. So, I think we can learn from Second John & Third John that hospitality is obviously a very good thing - though, we should exercise caution with hospitality when there is danger of propagating a false teaching.

~ **Third John** ~

Author: John the apostle

Place: Uncertain, probably Ephesus

Date: A.D. 85-95

Content: This short letter is a personal note from John the apostle to his friend Gaius, encouraging him to support the traveling evangelists who are preaching the truth. He warns Gaius against such men as Diotrephes who refuse to help in spreading the gospel and commends others, such as Demetrius, for helping.

Theme: Christians are to support one another in the work of Christ. Not to do so is the work of Satan, who seeks to destroy the believers. John stresses that all believers are bound together as Christians and should work for the common good of all. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 34*)

12/7 - Verse 11 stands out in this letter, following John's writing about Diotrephes behavior - *"Dear friend, don't let this bad example influence you. Follow only what is good. Remember that those who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God."* **Q: Do we have examples of good and bad leaders in our life? Do we follow only the example of the good? Do you believe following the example of people doing good is proof that we are children of God?**

12/8 - Today we start and finish the book of Jude! Revelation begins tomorrow!

~ **Jude** ~

Author: Jude, a brother of Jesus

Place: Uncertain

Date: A.D. 65-70

Content: It is not known to whom this letter was addressed, but the problem that Jude confronts is very clear. Jude is urging the believers to stand firm against some false teachers and the false doctrine that they bring. In a lengthy passage Jude gives examples of judgment in the past that God visited upon sin, as well as a devastating description of the evil lives of those false teachers. Jude closes with an exhortation to the Christians to stand fast in the power of God who will keep us from falling.

Theme: The danger of false doctrine and the need for constant vigilance by the church is the theme of this book. Jude admonishes us to examine what people say and the kind of lives that they live so that we may approve what is pleasing in the sight of God. We may call upon God to help in this with full assurance that he will hear and answer our prayer. (*Above commentary is from "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 34-35*)

12/8 - The letter of Jude carries forward some of the themes in John's letter's we've recently read about false teachers. This letter was written in about 65 A.D. From Jude & John, it seems like there were obviously some issues of false teachers back in the early church. People that twisted the truth of who Jesus was. I read a commentary today which said the twisted truths back then were basically these: 1. Jesus was not divine. He was just a man who was infused with the divinity of "the Christ" when he was Baptized in the Jordan, but that the divine nature left him before he died on the cross. (this would be a huge issue for theology... it ain't true folks...) and 2. Once you believe in Christ and your sins are



forgiven, then you have a license to do whatever you want in life. You're home free. Feel free to be as immoral as you want. (again not true of course...). Early Gnosticism was a part of the problem with these lines of thinking. The early Gnostics basically believed that anything of matter/material/flesh was bad, and anything of the spirit was good. Hence, their belief that Jesus really couldn't have been a man and God at the same time - and that once they were saved/ believed in Christ, then their sins were forgiven in the spiritual realm, so they could do whatever the heck they wanted. They veered way off the path of Truth... All this to say - it is so easy for theology to get twisted around. It happened back in the early church as we see in Jude's letter today, and in John's previous letters. And it happens today. Something I heard recently that I liked and that I believe is so true. The Gospel is not complicated. It's simple. If you want the straightforward simple truth of the gospel, head for the Gospel of John in the New Testament and everything you basically need to know is there. That's it. We don't need to complicate things so much that we get ourselves caught up in ideas that basically create barriers to our relationship with God. God who loves us so much and wants to be in relationship with us... we have a good way of complicating this very simple love relationship! :)

12/8 - Verse 24 is so wonderful at the end of Jude's letter today:- *"And now, all glory to God, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and who will bring you into his glorious presence innocent of sin and with great joy."* Great joy indeed I believe can only be found through our relationship with God! There are other temporary happinesses we experience in life. But great joy... that's God.

12/9 - Today we start the book of Revelation! I have to confess that I have been a bit nervous about blogging through the book of Revelation. But here goes nothing! :) Revelation has been called "The Revelation of John", but really this book is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". It is believed that the apostle John wrote this book. He also wrote the Gospel of John and the letters of First, Second, and Third John. There was some dispute about the apostle John writing this book in the third century by a bishop named Dionysius - as he thought the writing style of this book was so different from the Gospel of John & his letters. But most do believe that the apostle John did indeed write the book of Revelation on the Island of Patmos, off the coast of Ephesus, or modern-day Turkey. It is said that one of the major purposes of this book, written in circa 95 A.D., was to encourage Christians to resist the Roman empire's demands of emperor worship. The other important thing to note is the Revelation is apocalyptic literature, which means that its writing is highly symbolic. There are basically 4 lines of thinking on how to interpret the book of Revelation, which I think are helpful to consider before diving into this book. I am editing these comments below from bible.org at this link: [Please check out this link](#) for more details on these 4 points below and the book of Revelation overall - these comments were edited on bible.org from M. C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*.

"(1) The **preterist** approach believes that "Revelation is simply a sketch of the conditions of the empire in the first century."

(2) The **historicist** view (or continuous-historicist view) "contends that Revelation is a symbolic presentation of the entire course of the history of the church from the close of the first century to the end of time."

(3) The **futurist** approach usually argues that "all of the visions from Revelation 4:1 to the end of the book are yet to be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and following the second advent of Christ."

(4) In the **idealist** approach, "the Revelation represents the eternal conflict of good and evil which persists in every age, although here it may have particular application to the period of the church."

12/9 - Into the readings today... Chapter 1 verse 8 certainly stands out in today's readings, as we hear from Jesus himself: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega--the beginning and the end," says the Lord God. "I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come, the Almighty One."* I like that - the Alpha & Omega. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus is the beginning and end of all things. Jesus is God. In verses 17 & 18 today we hear this similar theme from Jesus again to John: *"Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave."* It is awesome that Jesus uses the term Living One here. This is very similar to Old Testament verses we hear about God being a Living God. Jesus is also truly Living today in our lives. **Q: Do you believe Jesus is the Alpha & Omega? The Living One?**

12/10 - Revelation chapter 2 begins our journey of Jesus' messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor! (modern day Turkey). Depending on what type of Bible you read, you might notice that **ALL of the words in chapter 2 in today's readings are highlighted red** - meaning, we are hearing directly from Jesus in these verses, so it's good to pay attention here! :) The beginning of Revelation 2 verse 2 stands out to me today - *"I know all the things you do."* Short and simple.... **Q: Do you suppose this is true about Jesus and your life? Do you think Jesus knows all of the things you do? Even every single thing that you think?**

12/10 - Verse 7 certainly stands out today as well from Jesus: *"Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God."* The tree of life takes us back to the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve ended up eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge - which gave them the knowledge of good and evil. God then banished them from the Garden before they could eat from the tree of life and live eternally. The tree of life represents eternal life, and as we see in this verse it is offered to all who are victorious. **Q: What does it mean to be victorious? Do you want to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God? Will you listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying?**

12/10 - Verse 17 is intriguing! *"Everyone who is victorious will eat of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it."* The second sentence is very intriguing to me - a white stone will be given with a new name upon it. I need to do some more research on what exactly this means. If anyone has thoughts on the white stone / new name, please share.

12/11 - Revelation chapter 2 verse 19 is awesome as Jesus says: *"I know all the things you do--your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things."* **Q: How are you doing in these areas in your life? Are you focusing on love, faith, service and patience? Are you constantly improving in these areas in your life?**

12/11 - Revelation chapter 3 verse 3 is powerful from Jesus: *"Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again."* My thought here is that sometimes we are so on fire for our faith in Jesus and God – particularly when we first believe. And then this fire and initial strong faith begins to wane over time. And to a degree, this is okay. We will not be on the "mountaintop" all of the time – we must traverse through the valleys as well. **Q: But, if perhaps we've been camped out in the valleys for a bit too long now, is it possible that we might need to go back to what we heard and believed at first? Might we need to hold to these first beliefs more firmly? And turn to Jesus again? This Advent and Christmas season, will you return to Jesus once again? Will you return to the Manger in Bethlehem?**

12/12 - Today in Revelation chapter 3 we read about The Message to the Church in Philadelphia and Laodicea. Verse 8 today is powerful, from Jesus: *"I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can shut."* Jesus has opened the door for us to enter God's kingdom through faith in him. No one can keep us from entering through this open door - besides ourselves. **Q: Will you walk through the door Jesus has opened for you?**

12/12 - Verses 15 and 16 are convicting words from Jesus! *"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth!"* **Q: Are you hot or cold in your faith for God these days? Or maybe lukewarm? Will you live now and tomorrow with only a hot faith in God? Hot Tamales Hot? :)**

12/12 - Verse 20 is beautiful from Jesus: *"Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends."* As we read above - the door to entering into the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus is open and no one can shut it - except maybe we will shut the door ourselves in our own lives. **Q: If you have shut the door, is it possible that you hear Jesus knocking on the door? Is it possible Jesus is calling to you from the other side of the door you have shut? Will you open it? Do you want to share a meal with Jesus as friends?**

12/13 - Revelation chapter 4 today is an amazing chapter, where we get a great glimpse of worship in heaven! Verses 1 & 2 are an awesome start to this chapter with John first seeing an open door in heaven and then being instantly in the Spirit! *"Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.' And instantly I was in the Spirit."* Verse 3 stands out today with a great glimpse of God's glory - *"The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones--jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow."* You'll note that there is not a clear description of God, as he is often described as dwelling in an "unapproachable light". But I think the gemstones and the emerald rainbow are pretty good starters for envisioning God's glory... **Q: Can you imagine seeing God face to face some day? Does this make your heart leap with excitement and joy?**

12/13 - Verse 4 stood out in today's readings as well: *"Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads."* It is said that these 24 thrones represent both the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus. Thus, representing all righteous and redeemed men and women before and after Jesus' life. Verses 6 & 7 will remind us of the seraphs in Isaiah and the cherubim in Ezekiel - *"In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. The first of these living beings had the form of a lion; the second looked like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth had the form of an eagle with wings spread out as though in flight."* These creatures are said to represent aspects of the attributes of God. The lion representing majesty & power. The ox representing faithfulness. The human representing intelligence. And the eagle representing sovereignty. Verses 10 & 11 is a beautiful look at elders worshiping God! *"The twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one who lives forever and ever. And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created."* **Q: Imagine yourself in heaven with a crown of some sort. Will you lay down your crown before the throne of God and worship God in this same manner? Do you believe that God is worthy to receive all glory, and honor, and power? Do you believe that it was for God's pleasure that everything exists and was created?**

12/14 - Revelation 5 is another beautiful chapter looking at worship in heaven! And in this chapter we see the worship of Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb, who opens the scroll. It is interesting that Jesus is described first as the Lion of Judah in verse 5 and then as a Lamb in verse 6. This demonstrates both Jesus' authority and power (lion) and Jesus' submission to God's will (lamb). Verse 9 is certainly powerful in today's readings: *"And they sang a new song with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were killed, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus' blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation? How do people accept this gift - this ransom? Are the stakes high enough that we should accept this ransom?**

12/14 - And verse 12 is powerful: *"And they sang in a mighty chorus: "The Lamb is worthy--the Lamb who was killed. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus is worthy to receive power? And riches? And wisdom? And honor? And glory? And blessing? Will you give these things to Jesus in your life today?**

12/15 - Revelation chapter 6 begins the first of 3 seven-part judgments with the opening of the seals on the scroll! The seven trumpets in chapters 8 & 9 and the seven bowls in chapter 16 are the remaining two. The unsealing of the seals on the scroll by Jesus in this chapter sets in motion events that will bring about the end of human history. Verse 12 today tells us: *"I watched as the Lamb broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became as dark as black cloth, and the moon became as red as blood."* The imagery of the four horsemen in this chapter comes from Zechariah chapter 1 verses 8-17 and chapter 6 verse 1-6. In chapter 1 of Zechariah verses 8-10 we read: *"During the night I had a vision--and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses. I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are." Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth.""* This is a good example of how John is utilizing a lot of imagery for the book of Revelation from the Old Testament. And of course it is a great example of how the Old Testament is fulfilled by the New Testament. A portion of verse 8 should be noted about the 4 horsemen: *"They were given authority over one-fourth of the earth."* Some commentaries have noted that this demonstrates that even in the end of days, God is continuing to show compassion. He only allows the four horsemen to do their work over 1/4th of the earth, giving everyone in the other 3/4ths of the earth an opportunity to repent and turn to Jesus.

12/16 - Revelation chapter 7 verse 3 in today's reading tells us: *"Wait! Don't hurt the land or the sea or the trees until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants."* Commentaries suggest that the seal represents the name of God being stamped on the foreheads of his followers - to protect them from the coming judgments. This imagery is very similar to Ezekiel 9:4 - *"Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."* Verse 4 tells us: *"And I heard how many were marked with the seal of God. There were 144,000 who were sealed from all the tribes of Israel."* Some interpret this to mean 144,000 descendents of the actual Jewish tribes during the time of tribulation. Others interpret this passage to be symbolic of all the faithful believers who live during the time of tribulation. Verse 12 is very powerful in that it has 7 attributes of God: *"Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and forever."* **Q: Will you attribute to God - Blessing? Glory? Wisdom? Thanksgiving? Honor? Power? Strength?**

## Forever....?

12/17 - Revelation chapter 8 transitions from the breaking of the seals on the scroll to the trumpets! In Old Testament times trumpets represented the announcement of important events or times of war. Here we will see plagues that are more devastating than the seals, but not as devastating as the bowls to come in Revelation chapter 16. The eagle in this chapter represents swiftness and destruction. When the eagle speaks of "all who belong to this world" in verse 13, it is referring to people who are not in relationship with God. Verses 3 & 4 in this chapter today are beautiful: *"Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great quantity of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people, to be offered on the gold altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of the saints, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out."* I love that analogy of the incense mixing with the prayers of the saints. **Q: Do you believe that your prayers reach God's altar in heaven?**

12/18 - Revelation chapter 9 brings forth the 5th and 6th trumpet plagues at the end times! A note on the star in verse 1 - this is likely an angel that descends from heaven with the key from Jesus to open the abyss. The fierce demonic locusts in today's readings are intense. You will recall that very recently we read about locusts in a similar fashion in the Old Testament in [Joel chapter 1 through chapter 2 verse 11](#). Verses 20 & 21 in this chapter stand out: *"But the people who did not die in these plagues still refused to turn from their evil deeds. They continued to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood--idols that neither see nor hear nor walk! And they did not repent of their murders or their witchcraft or their immorality or their thefts."* Even in the midst of such destruction and horror, many people do not repent. **Q: Is it possible that we receive much less severe signs in our own life today to repent, and we ignore them? Why do we ignore the signs? Is this wise?**

12/19 - Revelation chapter 10 brings forth the angel and the little scroll! Note that this scroll is not the same as the scroll in Revelation chapter 5, verse 1. This first scroll contains a revelation of judgments against evil, whereas this little scroll's contents are not disclosed - though, it may contain a judgment as well. You will recall from our readings of Ezekiel earlier this winter that, similar to John in this chapter, Ezekiel was instructed in a vision to eat a scroll that was sweet to taste but contained judgments against Israel. From Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 3 you'll recall: *"Then he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."*

12/19 - Revelation Chapter 10 Verse 1 in today's readings has some cool stuff going on in it - *"Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, surrounded by a cloud, with a rainbow over his head. His face shone like the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire."* The angel being surrounded by a cloud recalls God speaking to Peter James and John on the mountain of the Transfiguration in Matthew chapter 17 verse 5 - *"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'"* The rainbow over the angel's head recalls God's promise to Noah after the flood to never destroy the earth by water again, as we see in Genesis chapter 9 verses 15 & 16 - *"I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."* And the angels feet being like pillars of fire recalls the pillars of fire and cloud that guided and protected the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, as we see in Exodus chapter 13 verses 21 & 22 *"By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people."*

12/20 - Today in Revelation chapter 11 we read about the Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet bringing the third terror! The two witnesses in today's reading are modeled after Moses and Elijah. They may be representing two actual believers who will be martyred or they may be symbolic of all testifying believers in the final days. In verse 11:7 we have the first mention of the beast in the book of Revelation - the enemy that comes from the bottomless pit and wages war in the hearts and lives of men and women. In verse 11:8 allowing dead bodies to lie out in the street is a major violation of decency. In verse 15 things begin to shift in big ways as we read: *"Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: 'The whole world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.'"* **Q: Is the whole world now part of the kingdom of God? What are some examples of why or why not?**

12/21 - In Revelation chapter 12 today we read about the Woman and the Dragon! The woman is representative of the believing Messianic community and the twelve stars represent Israel's twelve tribes. The red dragon is Satan. In verse 5

we read about Jesus: *"She gave birth to a boy who was to rule all nations with an iron rod. And the child was snatched away from the dragon and was caught up to God and to his throne."* The "caught up" part of this verse is representative of Jesus' ascension into heaven. In verse 7 we read about Michael the Archangel, who we recently read about in the book of Daniel chapter 12 verse 1 when Daniel is prophesying about the end times: *"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people-everyone whose name is found written in the book-will be delivered."* In the remainder of the chapter we see a war in the spiritual realm, with Satan becoming alarmed that his time is short and increasingly angry at those who love God. Verse 10 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, 'It has happened at last--the salvation and power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ!'"* What a great proclamation! **Q: Are you looking forward to the salvation and power and kingdom of God? And do you believe in the authority of Jesus Christ?**

12/22 - Okay, I know I'm doing some serious hermeneutics stretching above today in the Zechariah readings... I'll try to get back to some exegesis here in Revelation chapter 13! Today we read about the beast that comes out of the sea and the beast that comes out of the earth. This is a pretty intense chapter that ends in the infamous number of the beast, 666. One thing I learned from reading Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion book today is that the 3 sixes could represent the unholy trinity of Satan - which is comprised of Satan, the first beast, and the false prophet coming up in Revelation chapter 13. Also, the number 666 was probably applied to the emperor Nero, whose Greek letters in his name represent numbers that total 666, by John's 1st century readers. The other way to look at this number is that each of the numbers fall short of the holy numbering of 777 - which represents complete perfection. In verse 1 we read: *"And written on each head were names that blasphemed God."* Back in the Roman empire many emperors assumed titles of deity and require worship of them, which would obviously be blasphemous to God. An example was the [emperor Domitian](#) (AD 51-96) required people to address him as Dominus et Deus, which means "our lord and our god".

12/22 - Verses 13 - 15 should be warning to us to not fall for false signs and wonders that do not come from God... as we read about the beast from the earth - *"He did astounding miracles, such as making fire flash down to earth from heaven while everyone was watching. And with all the miracles he was allowed to perform on behalf of the first beast, he deceived all the people who belong to this world. He ordered the people of the world to make a great statue of the first beast, who was fatally wounded and then came back to life. He was permitted to give life to this statue so that it could speak. Then the statue commanded that anyone refusing to worship it must die."* The danger of these above verses can best be demonstrated by Deuteronomy chapter 13 verses 1 through 4 - *"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him."* **Q: How do these 2 sets of verses - from Revelation and Deuteronomy - speak to you? Are there possibly even false signs and wonders and false idols in our world today which draw our attention away from loving God with all of our heart and soul? Will you hold fast to God?**

12/23 - Today in Revelation chapter 14 we read about Jesus (the Lamb) and all believers (the 144,000) in the heavenly Jerusalem (Mount Zion). I love verses 4 and 5 in this chapter: *"For they are spiritually undefiled, pure as virgins, following the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been purchased from among the people on the earth as a special offering to God and to the Lamb. No falsehood can be charged against them; they are blameless."* **Q: Are these 2 verses attractive to you? Do you want to be like this someday in heaven? Spiritually undefiled? Pure? Following Jesus wherever he goes? Blameless?**

12/23 - We then read about the Three Angels and In verse 8 we read: *"Then another angel followed him through the skies, shouting, 'Babylon is fallen--that great city is fallen--because she seduced the nations of the world and made them drink the wine of her passionate immorality.'"* Babylon, as we know from our recent readings in the Old Testament, such as Daniel, was in ancient Mesopotamia and the commercial, political, and religious center of a world empire led by Nebuchadnezzar. Some commentators believe that John is writing about Rome here when he says Babylon - and that John uses the term Babylon because it would be too dangerous for him to say Rome. Some others believe this reference to Babylon refers to the time of the antichrist in the end days, and represents the corrupt political and religious systems of the world in the end times. Verse 12 is likely referring to the end times, but it does make me think about the persecuted Christians in our world today - *"Let this encourage God's holy people to endure persecution patiently and remain firm to the end, obeying his commands and trusting in Jesus."* There are thousands, if not millions, of Christians in our world

today who suffer for their belief in Christ. They are persecuted. Today. **Q: How can we encourage these holy people of God who are enduring persecution today? Prayer is certainly one thing we can do, as a starter. Have you heard of the International Day of the Persecuted Church? [Please visit their website by clicking on this link - and then click on the links on their home page to check out some great ministries that are serving the needs of the Persecuted Church.](#)** Thank you for considering praying and getting involved in the Persecuted Church.

12/26 - Today in Revelation chapter 17 we read about the woman and the beast. **Q: How have our readings in Revelation about the beast affected your faith or outlook on end times? Do you believe these writings in Revelation are true?**

12/27 - In Revelation chapter 18 today we read about the fall of Babylon. This is one of those chapters in Revelation that can be interpreted in many ways by many different people - **with the overriding question and interpretation revolving around who is Babylon that John is referring to here?** Most commentaries that I have read suggest that John is referring to the Roman empire of the 1st century in this chapter. Much of Revelation is eschatological - end times prophecy - and some commentaries suggest that this chapter is too. But it seems that most commentaries look at this chapter as a prophecy toward the fall of the Roman empire - an empire that in John's time was a "cult of emperor worship". An empire that John wrote about here to warn the early Christian churches to be on guard against because it stood against God and His people. However - other commentaries do consider Babylon in this chapter to represent the political and religious system of the world in general under the rule of the antichrist. And some others see this chapter to be about a literal Babylon in Mesopotamia that is rebuilt and restored in the end times. **Q: What is your take on Babylon? What does Babylon represent?** Since we're nearing the end of the book of Revelation, and in particular because of the questions this chapter 18 can bring up, this is probably a good time for me to re-post this information below about the book of Revelation - same info I posted up when we started Revelation chapter 1 on December 9th. There are basically 4 lines of thinking on how to interpret the book of Revelation, which I think are helpful to consider before diving into this book. I am editing these comments below from bible.org at this link: [Please check out this link](#) for more details on these 4 points below and the book of Revelation overall - these comments were edited on bible.org from M. C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*.

"(1) The **preterist** approach believes that "Revelation is simply a sketch of the conditions of the empire in the first century."

(2) The **historicist** view (or continuous-historicist view) "contends that Revelation is a symbolic presentation of the entire course of the history of the church from the close of the first century to the end of time."

(3) The **futurist** approach usually argues that "all of the visions from Revelation 4:1 to the end of the book are yet to be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and following the second advent of Christ."

(4) In the **idealist** approach, "the Revelation represents the eternal conflict of good and evil which persists in every age, although here it may have particular application to the period of the church."

12/28 - Revelation chapter 19 verses 7 through 9 discuss the wedding feast of the Lamb (Jesus) in powerful language: *"Let us be glad and rejoice and honor him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. She is permitted to wear the finest white linen."* (Fine linen represents the good deeds done by the people of God.) And the angel said, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." And he added, "These are true words that come from God." The wedding feast of the Lamb is the end of human history - the judgment of the wicked and the wedding of the Lamb and his bride, the church. **Q: Are you looking forward to the wedding feast of the lamb? Do you want to be there? Do you believe the words - blessed are those who are invited to the feast? Have you accepted the Invitation?**

12/28 - Revelation chapter 19 utilizes the Hebrew for Hallelujah! four times in the first six verses - but it is interesting to note that Hallelujah is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Though, certainly we are reading Hallelujah frequently now in the Psalms! (such as today's Psalm 147). The Hallelujah's in this chapter, along with verse 16 in today's readings - *"On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords."* - reminded me of Handel's Messiah. **Q: How has Handel's Messiah been part of your life? Does it affect your faith in any way?** The rider on the white horse in chapter 19 is not the rider of the white horse from earlier in the book of Revelation, chapter 6 verse 2. The rider in this chapter is Jesus, returning as Warrior-Messiah-King. It's interesting to note that many of the Jewish faith in the 1st century were looking for their Messiah to come as Warrior-Messiah-King, and thus they rejected Jesus as Messiah, who came then as the Suffering Servant. However, it is powerful for us to keep in mind that Jesus is indeed coming again - and when he returns it won't be in his previous role as the Suffering Servant. That debt has been paid. Jesus will return as Warrior-Messiah-King!

12/29 - In Revelation chapter 20 today we read about the Millennial Reign of Christ! There are 3 basic beliefs in the 1,000 years described in this chapter: 1. *Amillennialism* (means we're in a figurative 1,000 years now) describes the present reign of Jesus in heaven, along with deceased believers and currently living believers - all of which will be followed by Jesus' second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and Jesus' reign over the new earth eternally. 2. *Premillennialism* (means Jesus will come before a literal 1,000 years) also believes in the present reign of Jesus in heaven that is moving toward a time when Jesus returns again, the first resurrection occurs, and there will be a reign of Jesus on the current earth as we know it for 1,000 years. Then will come the final general resurrection, the final judgment, and then the eternal kingdom on the new earth. 3. *Postmillennialism* (means Jesus will come after a literal 1,000 years) believes that the entire world as we currently know it will be converted to Christianity and this will bring a millennium of peace - then to be followed by Jesus' second coming, the general resurrection, final judgment, and the eternal kingdom. Hopefully this makes some sort of sense on these three views? :) I read a commentary that said the key to remember with all 3 of these views is that they are simply timing differences. In all 3 views, Jesus returns again. Jesus reigns. Forever.

12/29 - Verses 11-12 get into Judgment, which is obviously quite a topic to attempt to cover in a daily blog... :) *"And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in the books, according to what they had done."* So... I am going to defer to someone much smarter than me on this one, and HIGHLY encourage you to read Lehman Strauss's article entitled ["The Future Judgment of the Believer" at bible.org at this link](#). **I encourage you to check this link out if you'd like a glimpse toward what happens after we pass on from this life** - including a very interesting look at 5 crowns that can be given / received! Actually, if you are really interested in learning more about what happens after we die, Mr. Strauss at bible.org has a great 10 part series called "Death and Afterward" [at this link](#). **Q: Are you looking forward to your future judgment? On what - or should I say Whom - will you rest your case?**

12/30 - Revelation chapter 21 is definitely one of my favorite chapters in the Bible! It is what our very hearts long for! Today we read a wonderful glimpse of the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God. Certainly verses 3 and 4 are powerful for us to reflect upon: *"I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever."* **Q: Are you looking forward to that day when God will be among his people? When he will remove all sorrows and pains?**

12/30 - And verses 23-25 are so beautiful to meditate upon: *"And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations of the earth will walk in its light, and the rulers of the world will come and bring their glory to it. Its gates never close at the end of day because there is no night."* **Q: Are you looking forward to this everlasting light? The light that can come only from God and Jesus, the Lamb?**

12/31 - Today we finish the book of Revelation with a glorious chapter describing the New Jerusalem in heaven, and with a clear reminder that Jesus is coming again! Chapter 22 verses 1 & 2 are so beautiful: *"And the angel showed me a pure river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, coursing down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations."* This river combines the elements of the river in the Garden of Eden - see [Genesis 2:8-14](#) - and the river flowing from the temple in Ezekiel's vision - see [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#). I love this idea of this "river of life". There are so many beautiful allusions to God and grace being like water or a river in the Bible - particularly in the Psalms. A river that heals us. I love this. There is a great song by Steven Curtis Chapman about diving into the river. I think it's called "Dive" on his Speechless CD. This song of his reminds me so much of these verses. One of his lyrics goes something like: "The River's deep, the river's wide, the river's water is ALIVE! So sink or swim, I'm diving in!" **Q: Do you want to dive into this holy river of God? Do you want to be healed and purified by it's waters? Will you dive in?**

12/31 - Verse 8 is powerful for us to reflect upon, where we see an angel speaking to John after he fell to worship the angel: *"No, don't worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers the prophets, as well as all who obey what is written in this scroll. Worship God!"* **Q: My thought here is that do we sometimes worship other people in our life? And does this worship of other people ultimately take away from our worship of God?** Meaning, I

think it might sometimes be tempting for us to "worship" our pastors or ministers or spiritual mentors. **But, should we do this?** I think we would do well to remember that these people in our life are simply servants of God, like this angel. They are not God. We are called to give our hearts and minds and souls and worship to God and God only.

12/31 - Verse 20 (almost) closes out the book of Revelation with these words: "*Come, Lord Jesus!*" **Q: Are these three words a prayer of your heart? Should they be?** It's only recently that I started praying these words from my heart, and it is an amazing thing to truly pray and truly desire. Come Lord Jesus!

## PSALMS

12/1 - Psalm 120 is the beginning of 15 Psalms known as "songs of ascent!" This could mean the ascent of the stairs to the Temple in Jerusalem - or more likely the annual religious pilgrimages and the ascent to Mount Zion in Jerusalem. **Q: Are you ready for the next 15 Psalms of Ascent?** Verse 1 in this Psalm should be encouraging to each of us: "*I took my troubles to the LORD; I cried out to him, and he answered my prayer.*" **Do you have troubles in your life? Have you brought them to God in prayer? Will you? Will you allow him to answer your prayer?**

12/2 - Psalm 121 is the second in this series of 15 Psalms of ascent that were likely written for religious festivals when people were making their pilgrimages to Israel. I love verses 3 & 4 today - "*He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep. Indeed, he who watches over Israel never tires and never sleeps.*" How about that! God does not sleep! This reminds me of other parts of the Bible where it talks about God being pure light and having no shadows. God is also so perfect that he does not sleep! I like that... Allows me to sleep better at night. I'll no longer need to count sheep now! :) And the closing verse 8... wow... "*The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.*" **Q: Do you believe this is true? Do you believe that God watches over you - always?**

12/3 - Psalm 122 is the third in this series of Psalms of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This is a joyful Psalm today! Today in Psalm 122 verse 1 we read - "*I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'*" **Q: Have you ever had this experience? Have you ever rejoiced when someone invited you to attend church? Have you ever given this experience to others? Have you said to others in your life, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'**? **Do you make it a regular habit to invite people to church? Does church bring joy to you? Do you think it might then also bring joy to others? Others who are waiting for you to simply invite them? Will you? Will you rejoice with those around you through the simple & graceful act of an invitation? Are you yourself part of a church community? Are you attending church on a regular basis? Do you believe that being in community with other Christians each week will help grow your relationship with God? If you are not part of a church community, will you seek one out this upcoming week?**

12/3 - And verse 6 is so true then as we've been reading in Daniel & Ezekiel recently - and still true now - "*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*" **Q: Will you join me in praying for the peace of Jerusalem?**

12/4 - Psalm 123 is a short one, but a great one. I love the beginning of verse 2 and 3 - "*We look to the LORD our God for his mercy....Have mercy on us, LORD, have mercy...*" **Q: Do we look to the Lord for his mercy? What would God's mercy to us look like? Why would we need God's mercy? Do we pray to the Lord this simple prayer - "Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy"?**

12/5 - I read in a commentary that Psalm 124 was likely a call and response from a Levitical priest and worshipers. Verses 1 through 5 were likely spoken by the priest and verses 6 through 8 were the response of the people. Great way to read this Psalm! Even though this Psalm title says it is a "Psalm of David", some commentaries believe this Psalm is post-exile from Babylon based on verse 8: "*We escaped like a bird from a hunter's trap. The trap is broken, and we are free!*" Though, I could see that verse apply to Davidic times too. Verse 8 is a joyful response that hopefully each one of us can sing confidently: "*Our help is from the LORD, who made the heavens and the earth.*" Amen and Amen!

12/6 - Psalm 125 has great verses in 4 & 5: "*O LORD, do good to those who are good, whose hearts are in tune with you. But banish those who turn to crooked ways, O LORD. Take them away with those who do evil. And let Israel have quietness and peace.*" I love that closing line - let us have quietness and peace! What a great prayer. Don't we all wish for quietness and peace in our lives? One thing I'll recommend - which I am trying so hard to learn myself - is to take a Sabbath day of rest each week. Just rest. Just be peaceful. Just be with God. One day a week. It will dramatically change the other 6 days of your week without a doubt. **Q: Will you join me on this quest for quietness and peace in our lives by taking a Sabbath day of rest once each week?**



12/7 - Psalm 126 has a great verse today. I always love the verses in Psalms that speak about water! I don't know what it is about these verses, but here's verse 4: *"Restore our fortunes, LORD, as streams renew the desert."* **Q: Do you believe that God can restore your life like water restores the desert? Will you allow God's water into all the nooks & crannies in your life that are in need of renewal? Do you believe that God is living water? Are you thirsty for that living water in your life? Will you drink the Water?**

12/8 - Psalm 127 verse 1 I think I heard for the first time verbally a couple of years ago on a Habitat for Humanity job site. Each morning the volunteers would take turns leading devotions before the day's build. One morning a volunteer read Psalm 127 verse 1 to all of us, which was absolutely fitting for working on a Habitat house - *"Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good."* Great stuff and I believe this verse is not only applicable to working on Habitat houses, but is very applicable in our own lives as well. **Q: Are there things we are building or creating in our life that might be outside of God's will for our life? Are we building these things on our own? If so, should we be building these things? Will we take to prayer all that we build in our lives and seek God's guidance and blessing upon our work? Is God building our life or are we attempting to build with our own power? Is God protecting our life or are we attempting to protect ourselves with our own power?**

12/8 - Speaking of work, I also love verse 2 in this Psalm: *"It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones."* Great verse to combat our workaholic tendencies, no? :) **Q: Do you overwork yourself these days? What for? Is this pleasing to God? Are you taking a Sabbath day of rest once a week to simply be in relationship with God? To enjoy God's rest?**

12/9 - Psalm 128 verse 1 stands out today: *"How happy are those who fear the LORD-- all who follow his ways!"* **Q: Do you think it is possible to be happy and to fear God at the same time? Do you believe a healthy fear of God is, well, healthy? Why would we fear God - God who loves us immensely? What is this Psalmist saying to us today in our lives?**

12/10 - Psalm 129 is a prayer for the continuing withering of Israel's enemies and verse 4 likely represents a celebration from Babylonian captivity - *"But the LORD is good; he has cut the cords used by the ungodly to bind me."* **Q: How about in our lives today? Has Jesus cut any cords used by the ungodly to bind you? Are there still some cords being used by the ungodly to bind you? Will you let Jesus cut those cords? Will you let Jesus free you from that captivity? Do you believe that Jesus is good and that he wants to cut the cords that bind you? Do you believe that Jesus cares for you?**

12/11 - Psalm 130 is amazing today! Each verse is jam packed with good stuff to think about.... Actually - if you get a chance - please read through each of these verses again, and meditate for a moment on each one and what each verse might be speaking into your life and your heart. I think you will find tons of relevant meditations in this Psalm for your life. Today in Psalm 130 verse 5 we read - *"I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him. I have put my hope in his word."* **Q: Are you counting on God in your life? Really counting on him? Have you put your hope in his Word, the Bible? Do you believe that reading and meditating and reflecting on the Bible can transform your life and your relationship with God? What is your plan next year to stay in God's Word each and every day? Should you have a plan to be in God's Word each and every day?**

12/12 - Psalm 131 verse 2 is a beautiful reflection! *"But I have stilled and quieted myself, just as a small child is quiet with its mother. Yes, like a small child is my soul within me."* What a great reflection and reminder to take 1 day a week as a Sabbath day of rest. A day to still and quiet yourself. Just like a small child is with its mother. **Q: Have you been still and quieted yourself recently? Why would David, the Psalmist, write about this? Why would this be a good thing to do?**

12/13 - Psalm 132 is a fantastic psalm of the King David era! It is thought that this Psalm may have been written for the dedication of the temple or it may have been used in a coronation ceremony. Verses 4 & 5 stood out to me today as demonstrating David's dedication to God - *"I will not let my eyes sleep nor close my eyelids in slumber until I find a place to build a house for the LORD, a sanctuary for the Mighty One of Israel."* **Q: What in your life is keeping you awake at night? Is it something of God's will? Or perhaps something worldly (not of God's will)? Will you pursue God's**

**will in your life, and leave worldly things behind you? Will you pursue building "a sanctuary for God" in your life above all else?**

12/14 - Psalm 133 is a great short Davidic Psalm about harmony! Verse 1 sets the pace of this psalm nicely: *"How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when brothers live together in harmony!"* **Q: Do you consistently seek harmony in your interactions with others? Do you pray for peace?**

12/15 - Psalm 134 is a great little Psalm! This Psalm is basically taking place as worshippers are leaving the Temple in Jerusalem for the night - and in the first two verses the Worshippers are speaking to the Levites (priests) in the temple - giving blessings to the Levites and asking them to bless God overnight. Then, in the third verse the Levites give a departing blessing to the worshippers as they leave the temple: *"May the LORD, who made heaven and earth, bless you from Jerusalem."* And that is certainly my prayer for each of you reading this - May God bless you!

12/16 - Today in Psalm 135 verse 3 we will read this very simple, yet profound verse – *"Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant."* The words I want to focus in on here are "the Lord is good." **Do you believe this to be true? Do you really – in your heart – believe that God is good?** I think this is important for us to really meditate upon. I'm afraid sometimes we get into our minds that maybe God is not always good. Maybe we start to think that God is out to get us. Or out to trick us. Really isn't looking out for us. Doesn't really like us. Doesn't really love us. These are all of course lies that come into our mind from the Enemy, the Destroyer. God is obviously good. So good. All of the time. And maybe sometimes we really need to remind ourselves of this. Even in the midst of challenges and struggles and addictions and hardships – God is good. God is there with us. God is leading us – and maybe even taking us through a hardship to bring us to the Promised Land on the other side. Our human minds will often not understand God's ways. But, I think for us to always remember that God is good is so important for our continuing growth in our relationship with God. **Q: So, again, do you believe the words of this Psalmist? Do you believe that God is good?**

12/17 - Psalm 136 is a liturgy of Praise to God as Creator and Redeemer. A Levitical priest singer likely led the recital, while either worshippers or a Levitical choir responded with the refrain. Cool Bible factoid here - the response "His love endures forever" is repeated 26 times in this Psalm, which is the numerical value of God's name "Yahweh" - back when Hebrew letters were also used as numbers. A lot of intricacies went into the Psalms... some of which do get lost in translation from Hebrew to English. Below is an image of the Hebrew letters yud, hey, vav, hey -- often depicted in English as YHWH or Yahweh -- spelling the name of God.

12/18 - Psalm 137 is a Psalm reflecting upon the Israelites exile in Babylon and about how much Jerusalem was missed. We also read about a call to punish Edom for their rejoicing in the fall of Jerusalem. As you'll recall, we recently read prophecies against Edom in the book of the prophet [Obadiah](#).

12/19 - Psalm 138 is an awesome Psalm of thanksgiving and praise to God from David! You'll note that the word Temple is used in verse 2 - and of course the Temple was built by David's son Solomon. It is thought that David used the word Temple in reference to the tent holding the Ark of the Covenant. Some have also thought that this Psalm possibly was written after David's time, in the post-exile period. Either way, it is a beautiful Psalm of praise. Psalm 138 begins a final collection of eight "Davidic" Psalms, which are framed by songs of Praise in Psalm 138 & Psalm 145 - and Psalms 139 through 144 are six prayers. In Psalm 138 today, verse 3 stood out to me - *"When I pray, you answer me; you encourage me by giving me the strength I need."* **Q: Do you believe that God answers your prayers? Maybe not exactly in the way you'd expect, but that they are answered? Do you believe that God answers your prayers through encouragement and by giving you strength?**

12/19 - Verse 7 stood out to me as well - *"Though I am surrounded by troubles, you will preserve me against the anger of my enemies. You will clench your fist against my angry enemies! Your power will save me."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus' power will save you in times of trouble? Or do you rely on your own power and maybe forget about Jesus during times of trouble? Will you rely on Jesus, realizing that only His power will ultimately save you?**

12/20 - Today we read Psalm 139! I LOVE this Psalm... and had somehow forgotten about it. Is this Psalm anyone's favorite Psalm out there? I would not doubt it if was. This is just an incredibly beautiful Psalm about how much God loves and cares for us. And just how well God knows us. Please read and re-read this Psalm this week if you can. And rejoice in how much God loves you and how much he knows you. Each of the verses in this Psalm are incredible. I'll highlight a few. Verse 3 - *"You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I*

*am.* **Q: Do you believe that God charts out your path for you? Do you believe that God gives you true rest? Do you believe God knows where you are every single moment of your life?**

12/20 - Verses 13 & 14 - *"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous--and how well I know it."* **Q: Do you believe that God was loving and caring and creating you in your mother's womb? Are you amazed by the complexity and wonder of the human body? Could it be anything other than the marvelous workmanship of a loving and creative and living God?**

12/20 - And verses 23 & 24 to close out the Psalm: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life."* **Q: Do you consistently ask God to search your heart and mind? Do you confess to God what is not right in your heart and mind? What needs healing? Do you ask God to even point out to you things that you may not realize are destructive to you and others in your heart and mind? Do you believe that this process of confessing your sins to God and asking for forgiveness and healing will lead you along the path of everlasting life?**

12/21 - Psalm 140 is a prayer for deliverance from evil. And this Psalm certainly should be a good reminder of the Lord's Prayer, where we pray – "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." **Q: What is the one thing that can truly deliver us from evil? Can we deliver ourselves from evil on our own? Or do we need something beyond ourselves for this deliverance?** Verse 7 in this Psalm gives each of us something to consider and should be an encouragement: *"O Sovereign LORD, my strong savior, you protected me on the day of battle."* **Do you believe God is your strong savior who will protect you from evil on the day of battle? Do you believe that perhaps every day is a day of battle? Do you believe that Satan or evil ever rests in attempting to tempt people? Should we pray for protection from evil on a very regular basis?** The Lord's Prayer / Our Father is one great way to do this each day...

12/22 - Psalm 141 is a beautiful prayer of David's - praying for deliverance from the wicked and their ways. Verse 4 is powerful - *"Don't let me lust for evil things; don't let me participate in acts of wickedness. Don't let me share in the delicacies of those who do evil."* **Q: Is this a prayer you could incorporate into your prayer life? What might be some examples of "delicacies of those who do evil"? Will you pray to God to avoid these "delicacies" and "treasures" that will ultimately fail you?**

12/23 - Psalm 142 is a prayer of David's when he was fleeing Saul and was hiding in a cave. David is praying for deliverance to God from his enemies. I thought verse 3 was powerful - *"For I am overwhelmed, and you alone know the way I should turn. Wherever I go, my enemies have set traps for me."* **Q: Have you ever felt this way? Overwhelmed? And traps every which way you look? And you have no idea which way to go? At a time like this, will you cry out to God as David did in this Psalm? Will you "pour out your complaints before him and tell him all your troubles"? (v. 2) Do you believe that God knows which way you should turn? Will you allow God to ""be your place of refuge"? In times like these, will you allow God to be "all you really want in life"? (v. 5)**

12/24 - Psalm 143 verse 8 stood out to me today - *"Let me hear of your unfailing love to me in the morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I have come to you in prayer."* I read somewhere before - I think it was [Bruce Wilkinson's book "Secrets of the Vine"](#) - that many great men and women of our Christian faith connect with God in the morning through prayer, reading the Bible, and other quiet time activities. Bruce even suggested that this is the preferential way to go - to start your day by spending time with God in the morning, rather than at night. Because he said this would then transform the rest of your day - in terms of being more conscientious of our relationship with God. This does make sense to me - and in fact, I have started reading the One Year Bible now in the mornings, and it is a beautiful way to start the day! I like what this Psalmist says - "Let me hear of your unfailing love to me in the morning." And it reminds me that somehow, somehow, it almost seems easier to me to connect with God in the morning. Actually - one other thing I used to do in the morning is read a page or two from [Oswald Chambers "My Utmost For His Highest."](#) And I am thankful that I did this in the morning for a season. **Q: How about you? Do you have some way that you connect with God in the morning? Are you able in some way to hear of God's unfailing love for you in the morning?**

12/25 - Psalm 144 verses 3 & 4 are fairly well known: *"O LORD, what are mortals that you should notice us, mere humans that you should care for us? For we are like a breath of air; our days are like a passing shadow."* **Q: If our days are like a passing shadow, how then should we be spending our days? What types of things should we be investing our**

**time & money into? What should we be investing our very hearts and minds into? Are you wisely spending your passing days in godly ways?**

12/26 - I love the imagery today in Psalm 145 verse 9! *"The LORD is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation."* **Q: Do you believe that God is good to everyone? Do you feel God's compassion being showered upon you right this very moment?**

12/27 - I love Psalm 146 verse 9 today: *"The LORD protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows."* **Q: If God protects foreigners, orphans and widows, should we protect these folks in our communities as well? How in your life today are you caring for orphans and widows and foreigners?**

12/28 - Psalm 147 was thought to have been written for Levitical singers on the happy occasion of the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem - see [Nehemiah 12:27-43](#). Psalm 147 was divided into two Psalms - verses 1 through 11 and 12 through 20 - in the Septuagint, the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament. However, the Hebrew text has the Psalm as one whole Psalm. Verses 10 and 11 are an incredible middle point of this Psalm that stood out to me today: *"The strength of a horse does not impress him; how puny in his sight is the strength of a man. Rather, the LORD's delight is in those who honor him, those who put their hope in his unfailing love."* These verses remind me that God really is not impressed with our shows of "strength" or "independence." God is much more impressed when we are dependent on Him. **Q: How are you honoring the Lord with your life today? Do you put his hope in his unfailing love? Or do you rely on your own strength?**

12/29 - Psalm 148 is a call for all creation to praise God! I love it. As I was reading this Psalm I was reminded of a song that we sometimes sing in church that goes something like - "Let everything that. Let everything that. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" I love how the Psalms can stir up worship songs in our minds! We read this in verse 5 - *"Let every created thing give praise to the LORD, for he issued his command, and they came into being."* **Q: Do you agree with this verse? That you came into being because the Lord commanded it? Do you give thanks to God frequently? And joyfully? Even in the midst of some challenging times in your life, can you still give praise to your Creator?**

12/30 - Psalm 149 is a beautiful song of praise today! Verse 3 I love: *"Praise his name with dancing, accompanied by tambourine and harp."* **Do you praise God's name with dancing and music?** Yes, I confess, I am a huge fan of the praise and worship thing going on in churches and with CCM artists and their concerts these days. I know this is not the only way to praise or worship God by any means. **Q: Are you praising God's name each day with the very "dance" of your life?**

12/31 - Psalm 150 is a wonderful end to the Psalter filled with a call to Praise God with all that we are! Give it up for God and God only!

## PROVERBS

12/1 - Proverbs 28:26 today teaches us: *"Trusting oneself is foolish, but those who walk in wisdom are safe."* This is a good reminder to seek wisdom continually in our lives. And not just to rely on our own senses. **Where can we find wisdom in our lives? Do you believe reading the Bible each day will bring wisdom into your life?** Actually, let me go off on a slight tangent here, but I think it's related. A while ago Dennis Prager had a call from a Christian guy on his radio show. (Dennis is Jewish) They were debating a subject and Dennis asked the caller where he gets his morals from - from his heart or from a religious text? (obviously inferring the Bible) The caller said he gets his morals from his heart. Which sounds like a good answer on the surface... but look at this Proverb again - *"trusting oneself is foolish."* And remember Jeremiah 17:9 - *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* This was a very powerful question I think Dennis asked the caller. And Dennis challenged the caller on the answer of saying he got his morals from his heart. Dennis' point was that our morals should come from the Bible - from God. **Q: What do you think on this point? Where do your morals come from? I do think that obviously we want to incorporate God's morals into our hearts... but will our morals first come from our hearts or from the Bible?** I'm with Dennis. I'm voting for the Bible as being the source of our morals. And I'll go one step further - I'm voting for Jesus, who is the Bible made flesh.

12/2 - Proverbs 28 verse 27 certainly stands on its own and is worth reflecting upon.... *"Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing. But a curse will come upon those who close their eyes to poverty."* **Q: Are your eyes open?**

12/3 - Proverbs 29 verse 1 teaches us today: *"Whoever stubbornly refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be broken beyond repair."* This Proverb has a very tangible example of stubbornness in the Old Testament through Eli's sons who died in 1 Samuel 2 verse 25 - *"If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" His (Eli) sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death.* Let us accept godly criticism, correction, teaching & discipline in our lives. Let us be broken before the Lord, so that we will never be broken beyond repair!

12/4 - Proverbs 29 verse 3 teaches us today: *"The man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but if he hangs around with prostitutes, his wealth is wasted."* This Proverb reminds me of how things played out for the Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Luke where he ended up feeding pigs after wasting his father's wealth. Fortunately, we have a graceful God who can redeem situations like this, if we will repent. Let us choose wisdom always. Let us love wisdom always. And let us bring joy to our heavenly Father!

12/5 - Today in Proverbs chapter 29 verse 7 we read: *"The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern."* **Q: Do you care about justice for the poor? Are you involved in caring for the poor locally and internationally on a regular basis? Do you contribute financially to organizations that care for the poor? Do you volunteer with organizations that care for the poor?** For some reason this Proverb reminds me of the Martin Luther King Jr. quote: "Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

12/6 - Proverbs 29:11 teaches us today: *"A fool gives full vent to anger, but a wise person quietly holds it back."* This is a great reminder of not letting anger take over our emotions. **Q: How are you doing with controlling your emotions these days? Do you allow emotions to take control over you? Is this healthy? Is this wise?**

12/7 Proverbs 29 verse 13 is a great reminder that we are all made in the image of God - *"The poor and the oppressor have this in common--the LORD gives light to the eyes of both."* **Q: Is one better than the other? Are both equal in God's sight? Should both be equal in our sight?**

12/8 - Proverbs 29 verses 15 & 17 are great reminders on the benefit of discipline in our lives! **Q: Do you realize, or believe, that God may discipline you on occasion? Do you believe this holy discipline is ultimately good for you? Do you think godly discipline help get you on the right road - and off the wrong road...?**

12/9 - It is very interesting that Proverbs 29 verse 18 may help answer these questions immediately above: *"When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is happy."* **Q: Do you see parallels to this Proverb and the Psalm verse above? (12/9) Are you accepting divine guidance in your life? Are you happy?**

12/10 - Proverbs 29 verse 20 is fairly well known: *"There is more hope for a fool than for someone who speaks without thinking."* This a good reminder to think before speaking! Do you ever speak without thinking? Is this foolish? Do you listen more than you speak when you are with others? Do you speak wisely? Thoughtfully? Let us each think as we speak! And let us not speak incessantly...

12/11 - Proverbs 29 verse 21 teaches us today: *"A servant who is pampered from childhood will later become a rebel."* **Q: This is a good reminder not to spoil others - and how about not spoiling ourselves?** For some reason this verse reminds me of this old adage, paraphrased here - "God, please don't make me too rich that I forget about you. Nor too poor that I curse you." Let us be cautious not to be spoiled, nor to spoil others in our lives...

12/12 - Proverbs 29 verse 23 teaches us today: *"Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor."* **How counterintuitive is this in our culture today?** This Proverb reminds me that Jesus' kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. The last shall be first. And the humble will be honored. **Q: How are you doing with being last and being humble these days? Are you comfortable with being "upside down" when compared to the world's values?**

12/13 - Proverbs 29 verse 25 teaches us today: *"Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but to trust the LORD means safety."* This is a great reminder to "respect all, but fear none" - except for God that is... :)

12/14 - Proverbs 29 verse 26 teaches us today: *"Many seek the ruler's favor, but justice comes from the LORD."* This is a great reminder that though we may seek justice through worldly institutions and rulers, justice truly only comes from God.

12/15 - Today in Proverbs chapter 30 verses 1 & 3 we read: *"I am weary, O God; I am weary and worn out, O God. I have not mastered human wisdom, nor do I know the Holy One."* This might be an appropriate thought for us in this busy holiday season - "I am weary God. I am weary and tired." **Q: If this is you, will you seek true rest? Rest that can be found only in a relationship with God? Will you seek the Holy One and seek true wisdom from God? As the late artist Rich Mullins sings, this holiday season is the "stuff of earth competing for the allegiance you owe only to the Giver of all good things?" Will you turn your heart and mind toward the Manger and leave the world behind? Will you allow the Holy One of Israel to be born into your heart once again this Christmas?**

12/16 - Proverbs 30 verse 5 is a strong teaching today: *"Every word of God proves true. He defends all who come to him for protection."* **Q: Do you believe that every word of God proves true? Does the Bible prove to be true? Do you believe that God will defend you if you come to him for protection? Do you believe that reading and studying and memorizing the word of God can provide spiritual protection for you?**

12/17 - Proverbs 30 verses 8 & 9 are two of my favorite Proverbs verses! *"Give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name."* Wow. **Q: Think there is some truth in this Proverb? Do you pray that God will give you neither poverty nor riches?**

12/18 - Proverbs 30 verse 10 today teaches us: *"Never slander a person to his employer. If you do, the person will curse you, and you will pay for it."* This is a great reminder to not speak untruths behind someone's back - particularly to their employer! If you attack someone's livelihood unfairly, you'll be attacked back. Simply a foolish idea. Bite your tongue and pray rather than say anything false or in anger to someone's employer...

12/19 - Proverbs 30 verses 11 through 13 are a great reminder of the commandment to honor our father and mother - unfortunately these verses are an ugly glimpse of what it looks like to ignore this commandment: *"Some people curse their father and do not thank their mother. They feel pure, but they are filthy and unwashed. They are proud beyond description and disdainful."* I pray this Christmas season that each of us has an opportunity to honor our father and mother in some special way. Let us be pure and truly humble in this area of life.

12/20 - Proverbs 30 verses 15 & 16 today tells us: *"The leech has two suckers that cry out, "More, more!" There are three other things--no, four!--that are never satisfied: the grave, the barren womb, the thirsty desert, the blazing fire."* The "grave" is a reminder to each of us that this earthly life is temporary... An old saying goes - "no one gets out of here alive." I don't think this saying took into account heaven - but you get the point for this earthly life. **What are you investing your temporary earthly life in? What is God calling you to do with your life? Next year, how will you live joyously to love and serve others and God?**

12/21 - Proverbs chapter 30 verse 17 teaches us today: *"The eye that mocks a father and despises a mother will be plucked out by ravens of the valley and eaten by vultures."* This Proverb is another great reminder to honor our parents, as one of the Ten Commandments teaches us. How are your eyes toward your parents these days?

12/22 - Proverbs 30 verse 19 tells us about the author's amazement of *"how an eagle glides through the sky."* This is a great reminder of God's creativity and how it is exhibited in nature!

12/23 - Proverbs 30 verses 21-23 are a continuation of the sayings of Agur, from probably around 700 B.C. during the reign of King Hezekiah.

12/26 - Proverbs chapter 30 verse 32 teaches us today: *"If you have been a fool by being proud or plotting evil, cover your mouth in shame."* The thing that stood out to me in this Proverb today is that being proud equals being a fool. Plotting evil also equals being a fool - and I'm sure we'd all quickly agree on that. But, being proud also equals being a fool! This is so important for us to realize. I am afraid that all too often we can default to being prideful, thinking that's appropriate, when indeed it is pure foolishness. Being proud = been a fool. Why do you suppose this is? What is it about pride that is so bad? I think it is in large part this: when we are proud we are turning our focus away from God and toward ourselves. We are relying on ourselves instead of God. We are glorifying ourselves instead of God. And when we look at Satan and

the Fall, we see that pride can even get to the point of trying to equate ourselves with God! This was Satan's great sin. Pride. And pride is a sin that we must be vigilant to guard against in our lives today, tomorrow and every day. Let us not be foolish by being proud! And when we find ourselves being prideful, let us cover our mouths in shame as this Proverb teaches and repent. **Q: Do you struggle with pride in your life? Do you agree with this Proverb that being proud = being a fool?**

12/27 - Today Proverbs chapter 30 verse 33 teaches us: *"As the beating of cream yields butter and striking the nose causes bleeding, so stirring up anger causes quarrels."* This is an appropriate Proverb for our Christmas season when we spend so much time with our families, no? :) I shouldn't joke about this I realize - but I think it's appropriate to address this issue. During the holiday season I am afraid that sometimes we bring up old battles or wounds when we spend time with our families - and we risk stirring up anger that causes quarrels. Don't get me wrong - I think it's ultimately better to bring things into the open with our families. That's how healing begins. But let us be careful that we don't just revert to some old "scripts" we have with our families that stirs up anger in ourselves or in them and then causes quarrels. Let us write some new redemptive and loving scripts instead! **Q: Do you ever stir up anger that causes quarrels in your family? Do some folks in your family stir up anger that causes quarrels? Will you pray that Jesus will introduce new redemptive and loving "scripts" in your family this holiday season? And will you make sure you no longer cause any stirring up of unnecessary anger?**

12/28 - Proverbs chapter 31 and the preceding chapter 30 are thought to be essentially an "appendix" to the overall book of Proverbs, as they are non-Israelite in origin. Chapter 29 was the final chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon. Proverbs chapter 31 verses 1 through 9 consist of 3 sayings that King Lemuel's mother taught him. The entirety of Proverbs chapter 31 demonstrates the significance and role of wise women in the ancient Near East, where the queen mother was often an influential figure. **Q: Who have been some wise women in your life?**

12/29 - Proverbs 31:8-9 today teaches us this powerful lesson: *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those who are perishing. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice."* **Q: Do you believe that God calling you to speak up in some way for the poor and helpless? Maybe it's somewhere in your city or neighborhood or home that this call is leading you to speak up... Will you speak up? Will we speak up?**

12/30 - Proverbs 31:10-24 is a great reflection upon a godly wife. I read a commentary that said such a wife is almost a personification of wisdom. I like that thought! And certainly it makes sense that a woman / wife would be a personification of wisdom rather than a man / husband... :) Just kidding! I'm a guy, so I can make this kind of joke right? **Q: In all seriousness, how about that thought for each of our lives - male or female - would it be a godly thing to move toward being a personification of wisdom?** Obviously I'd say that Jesus was the only human this side of heaven that will walk this earth as a pure personification of wisdom. But let us seek wisdom in how we live our lives each and every day. Let us seek God's Wisdom that is worth far more than rubies...

12/31 - Proverbs 31:25-31 are a continued great look at what a godly woman does. I really like verse 30 which seems so opposite of what our culture is often selling us today: *"Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the LORD will be greatly praised."* I think this holds so true for women and men - our beauty or good looks or outer appearances do not last. They are not eternal. What matters is what's inside - our relationship with and love of God and other people. So, I think this is a great reminder for us to focus on what's inside - which is what's eternal. And yes, our culture will continue to try to sell us on the latest fads to look better on the outside. **Q: Will you refuse to buy into that which will not last? Do you realize that holiness is beautiful?**

#### Group discussions:

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

**Each group is encouraged to close in prayer.**

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

- My favorite verses or passages:
- What I learned from the readings:
- My questions for further study:
- How God spoke to me through the Word:
- Something I want to change or grow in my life based on the Word:
- My prayer points based on the Word:

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