

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Introduction

How do you introduce a prisoner to Jesus? There are several approaches used in jail and prison ministry. The method I chose to use was to have the prisoners I was working with read what God had to say in the Bible. Only one prisoner has completed the process of reading through the entire Bible. He is now leading another prisoner through the process as he goes through the Bible a second time.

This process began over 18 months ago when a good friend from church introduced me to jail ministry. I was assigned several young men to visit, but one in particular seemed open to this process. He was being kept in isolation and at the time I began visiting him the death penalty was hanging over his head. I'm quite certain that he was willing to talk with me just to get out of his cell. If that required reading his Bible then he would do it. We began with John and when he completed that we started to read through the Bible.

In the beginning I wrote and just gave him the readings for the week. Over time I saw the need to provide some commentary and questions to assist him in his reading. That is how this document began. The notes from John have been merged in with the daily readings. I chose a chronological reading plan because I felt that was the best way to understand the story of God. It isn't a perfect chronology, but it seemed to work.

The comments are not all original with me. I've attempted to identify sources where they were identifiable. The comments are not intended to answer every theological question. Instead, they are intended to provide answers to some of the obvious questions that a first-time reader of the Bible might have.

This document is a work in progress. I'm going through it again attempting to improve the comments, add questions, and make the format more consistent. I would appreciate your help. If you have received a copy of this please send me your email address so that I can send you updated versions when they are available. I encourage you to contact me with questions and corrections as you work with this material.

I may attempt to turn this into a book someday. For now, you are free to use this for ministry without charge.

Grandpa

grandpa@mygrandmatime.com

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Weekly Bible Reading Plan with Comments

Week 1, Day 1 --- Genesis 1-3

Week 1, Day 2 --- Genesis 4-7

Week 1, Day 3 --- Genesis 8-11

Week 1, Day 4 --- Job 1-5

Week 1, Day 5 --- Job 6-10

Week 1, Day 6 --- Job 11-14

Week 1, Day 7 --- Job 15-17

Week 1, Day 1 --- Genesis 1-3

You are not an accident. God created you on purpose for a purpose. This is where the Bible begins, with God and with creation. The Bible is a long story about God's love for people. He didn't create us because He needs us. He created us because His love overflowed and He wanted to share His love with creatures that were like Him. To be like Him we had to be free and unfortunately the first man and woman used that freedom to make a bad choice. It would be easy to blame them, but I know that I would have made the same choice in the same situation.

God's desire is to be with you just as He walked with Adam and Even in the garden in the cool of the day. I hope you'll let Him be with you as you walk through the incredible love story found in the Bible.

Week 1, Day 2 --- Genesis 4-7

Adam's and Eve's sin resulted in all of us having knowledge of good and evil. The result for their children was jealousy and murder. Since there was only one family at this time Cain would have married his sister. Adam and Eve probably had many more children than those who are mentioned. The human race grew rapidly and although they knew who God was they grew more and more evil. People finally grew so evil that only one good man remained and this is when God determined to start over. I can't imagine the ridicule that Noah must have endured as he built a huge boat on dry land. Everyone was invited to come into the ark, but no accepted the invitation.

Week 1, Day 3 --- Genesis 8-11

The flood covered the earth and the ark had to be getting crowded as babies were born to the animals on board. Eventually the rain stopped and the water flowed back into the oceans and evaporated into the sky. Noah and his family were able to leave the ark and begin normal life. Probably the biggest change is that prior to this time people were all vegetarians. Now people could kill and eat meat.

The other thing we learn from this passage is a lesson of respect. Noah gets drunk and falls asleep naked. One son wants to expose him to his brothers showing great disrespect for his father. The result is that he is cursed and his family will be servants to the families of his brothers. The names are hard to read, but they are important. Through all these names we can follow the ancestors of Jesus and God prepares for Him to come thousands of years in the future.

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Week 1, Day 4 --- Job 1-5

Job is a very challenging book. The biggest challenge is that you can't accept as true everything that is said in the book. The book explores the nature of God and suffering. It does this by looking at how different men understand these things, especially in response to suffering.

Job is a very good man. He is so good that he catches the attention of God. Satan, who is an angel, comes to talk with God and questions Job's character. Basically, Satan says that Job is only good because God rewards him with good things. Satan believes that if the good things are removed then Job will curse God. I will never understand why God accepts Satan's challenge, but He does. He allows Satan to remove everything of value from Job except his life.

The first response we see is Job's and it is genuine. He wishes that he had never been born. His suffering is so intense that he forgets all of the good that he has already experienced in life. Job does have friends and they come to attempt to comfort him. They have no understanding of what is going on. What they do is give words to the way most people think. There is some truth in what they say, but their basic assumption is false. They assume that Job has done something evil and that is why he is suffering. Most of us do suffer when we do wrong. However, there are many who do not suffer who have done great evil and there are those who suffer who are totally innocent. Job's friends want life to be fair and so they comfort him by accusing him.

Listen to Job as the story continues and see how much you can identify with what he is feeling.

Week 1, Day 5 --- Job 6-10

Job's story is written as poetry. Poetry describes things in word pictures that are designed to connect with our emotions. Some of the word pictures may be hard to understand since we are not herders of animals who live off the land and who depend on God through the sun and the rain for survival.

Job falls for an old lie from Satan. It is a lie that everyone seems to fall for at one time or another. Job believes that he has been wounded by God and that God is not good. His friends can only be relied on when times are good and this is a disappointment. Job asks what he is guilty of. He suspects he is guilty of something, but he can't identify what it is. I think one of the reasons God has included this story in the Bible is to help us understand how important it is for us to understand eternal life. Job has no hope because he has no concept of eternal life. For Job this life is all there is. He is seeking forgiveness, but doesn't know where to find it.

Bildad actually speaks some truth. God is just. He doesn't see the big picture, but he is correct when he says that if we confess God will forgive. Job responds with truth and an incredible understanding of God's might and power. Unfortunately, Job sees God as impersonal to powerful and distant to talk to. Job speaks for all of us when he pleads for a mediator. This is a prayer that God will answer when Jesus comes.

Job ends this section by repeating the lie that he really believes. He believes that God's presence in his life is what is causing his suffering. He doesn't understand that the situation is just the opposite. It is because God has withdrawn that he is hurting. We can see from the outside that what he needs to be praying is for God's presence.

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When have you felt the most hopeless? How have your friends responded to your situation? How do you think God is going to respond to Job?

Week 1, Day 6 --- Job 11-14

Zophar may be the worst of the friends. He is so convinced that Job's suffering is caused by Job's sin that he makes incredible accusations against Job. Job must be a sinner because if he is not then Zophar and his friends are in trouble.

Job responds by pointing out the obvious that everyone knows. All around us are evil people who are not suffering. It was true then and it is true today. There are consequences to our behavior, so we do suffer for certain kinds of evil. Addictions of all kinds damage the body and mind and result in suffering for the addicted. However, there are many more forms of evil that do not have the same kinds of natural consequences. We often see the people who do the greatest evil growing prosperous and enjoying what we describe as the good life while we see good people suffering through all sorts of pain.

Again, Job assumes that his suffering is because God's hand is on him. He assumes that God is close but silent and that the result is intense suffering. He is confused and is crying out for the opposite of what he needs. What he needs is God's healing touch, but since he doesn't know God as well as he thinks he does, he is afraid to ask for it.

Week 1, Day 7 --- Job 15-17

I'm sure at some point in your life you've experienced or been a part of piling on. A conflict has started and one side is winning. As soon as the outcome is clear everyone joins in to participate in the victory. The suffering of the victim is increased as everyone else seems to join in on the other side.

Eliphaz is the last of the three friends and he is just piling on. He doesn't really say anything new, but repeats again what the others have said. In his mind the evil do suffer. For this reason, Job must be evil. Notice the other part of this. Since Eliphaz is not suffering he must be righteous. Job knows that isn't true. Eliphaz knows that isn't true if he stops and thinks about it a little while.

So Job makes his appeal to the only person that can help. He responds only briefly to Eliphaz and then quickly directs his words to God. He is angry and he doesn't understand, but still he recognizes that God is God and he is not. It is always okay to express our emotions directly to God as Job does. We don't understand and God knows that.

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Week 2, Day 1 --- Job 18-19

Week 2, Day 2 --- Job 20-24

Week 2, Day 3 --- Job 25-28

Week 2, Day 4 --- Job 29-31

Week 2, Day 5 --- Job 32-34

Week 2, Day 6 --- Job 35-37

Week 2, Day 7 --- Job 38-39

Week 2, Day 1 --- Job 18-19

Bildad responds by giving his own perception of death and it sounds a lot like hell. He is right that most people die and quickly are forgotten. A few grieve and mourn, but life goes on and very few people make it into the history books and are remembered.

Job realizes this, but his concern is that he has been forgotten while he still lives. He is isolated from all human contact except for these three comforters who are no comfort. What is happening through all this? Notice this verse:

I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth. Job 19:25 (NIV)

In spite of the fact that Job does not understand what is going on and that he blames God for everything Job still desires God. Job's heart has been revealed during his suffering. His greatest desire is for God and that is why God had such great confidence in Job and was willing to let him do battle with Satan.

Are Job's friends working for Satan or for God?
Who is winning the battle for Job right now, Satan or God?

Week 2, Day 2 --- Job 20-24

Have you ever been in an argument where both people involved are absolutely convinced they are right? Their voices get louder and louder. In most arguments like this it isn't long before the name calling begins and if it goes on very long the argument might get physical. Job's comforters are frustrated. They are convinced that he is guilty of some great sin and that this is why he is suffering. They are convinced that he is being punished. In their minds this has to be true or they are in great trouble.

Job does not respond directly to their accusations. Instead, he continues to turn toward God. In some ways he desires the same thing that his comforters assume is happening. Job desires justice. He desires that the wicked who spend their lives in darkness be punished now for their wickedness.

Job speaks a great truth, but I don't think he knows exactly what he is saying.

But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. Job 23:10 (NIV)

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This is God's love and goodness at work. Job is being tested. God is confident that he will pass the test and that the result will be even greater purity in Job's life. Suffering comes as a test. When you are suffering do you turn toward God or away from God? What do you learn from Job's example?

Week 2, Day 3 --- Job 25-28

Job and his comforters agree on one thing. The wicked are not rewarded in the long-term. They die and lose all they have accumulated. In general their families suffer for generations after them. The life of an evil person may appear to be good now, but in the end it does not pay. From our perspective we know this is true. The person who lives this life without God will spend eternity without God. That is hell and I don't want to be there and be without God forever.

Job and his comforters also disagree on one thing. They are certain that Job is guilty of great evil. It must be a great evil to justify his great suffering. Job is not guilty and will not change his mind about that for anyone.

This passage ends with a chapter on wisdom. Wisdom is a rare thing and it must be sought after. I wonder what caused men to first dig in the earth for precious stones and metals. Whatever the reason once the first precious stone was found and polished others began digging and searching. It should be that way with wisdom. Some have searched and found it. However, it isn't that way with wisdom. Most of the world pursues foolishness. Don't miss the last verse of this passage. It is the key to life.

Week 2, Day 4 --- Job 29-31

The words of Job are not ended with this section because God will come and ask for a response. Job has the same expectation and understanding as his comforters and that is why he is confused. His expectation for all the good that he did was that he would be blessed with health and wealth. For all of his life until very recently this had been true. Now he is confused and disappointed. He is doubting God's goodness which is the very thing that Satan wants him to doubt.

What do you think will happen now? How will all this be resolved?

Week 2, Day 5 --- Job 32-34

Elihu's argument is a little different. The one thing he gets right is the character of God. God is sovereign and this means that God is completely in charge. God is also not silent. The difficulty is that we want God to shout and more often than not He wants us to be quiet and listen. Elihu finds Job rebellious. Do you think Job is being rebellious in his comments to God?

Week 2, Day 6 --- Job 35-37

I'm not certain that even Elihu knows it, but his purpose is to announce God. God is about to show up and he is preparing the way. He doesn't really understand what is going on any better than anyone else, but he does understand that God is good and that God has a purpose to be trusted.

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The following verse summarizes what he is saying.

Beware of turning to evil,
which you seem to prefer to affliction. Job 36:21 (NIV)

It does not matter what caused the difficulty we are in. What matters are our choices about how to deal with the affliction. When trouble comes of any kind we have a choice to make, this is especially true with any kind of physical suffering. We can look for a way out of the trouble and Satan is only too willing to offer a number of choices, generally quick fixes, that will allow us to temporarily escape the trouble we feel. God offers us another choice. That choice is to endure the trouble, trial, suffering, or affliction and learn from it. God's desire is that we go through trials and that we grow stronger through them. God's desire is that we go through trials and that we grow closer to Him as we depend on Him.

I'm currently in Florida and we had a thunderstorm the other night. The rain came down in huge quantities and the thunder rolled. I'm certain the water is needed, but the rain, thunder, and lightening also damaged things. Some people were probably thanking God for the rain and others were probably cursing God because of the rain. What are you choosing to do as God speaks into your situation?

Week 2, Day 7 --- Job 38-39

God finally speaks. Read this passage through several times. Maybe the first time you read it think about the God who is speaking as if He is your father. How does it sound? What do you hear?

No matter how many times you have read this I want you to read it one last time. This time read it remembering that God is love. God desires the absolute best for you, just as He desires the absolute best for Job. God is good. In fact, He is the only one who is truly good. There is no evil in God. There is no selfishness in God. There is no darkness in God. How does it sound now? What do you hear God saying to you?

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Week 3, Day 1 --- Job 40-42

Week 3, Day 2 --- Genesis 12-15

Week 3, Day 3 --- Genesis 16-18

Week 3, Day 4 --- Genesis 19-21

Week 3, Day 5 --- Genesis 22-24

Week 3, Day 6 --- Genesis 25-26

Week 3, Day 7 --- Genesis 27-29

Week 3, Day 1 --- Job 40-42

In these chapters God describes some powerful beasts. We do not know if they were real physical creatures or intended to create an image of creatures so large that man would find it impossible to control them. For me, the description of Leviathan is a perfect picture of the dragons of children's stories. When I read this I know where the idea came from.

The point of all this is that no matter how powerful the creature, the creator is always able to control His creation. God is in charge and nothing is a threat to Him. Job recognizes God's power and might and repents. What does Job have to repent of? What has Job done wrong? Job believes after talking with God that it has been wrong for him to question God's will. This is hard for us. Our sin is very clear most of the time. We are unwilling to follow God so we rebel against God's will. Job had no choice.

The last chapter explains why I made some of the comments I did at the first of the book. God tells us that Job's friends have not told us the truth about who God is or what was happening. It is important to understand that God did not have to reward Job with a second life of wealth and prosperity. That God did that is an incredible sign of His love and goodness.

Week 3, Day 2 --- Genesis 12-15

I'm sure whole books have been written about these 4 chapters. Abram, who becomes Abraham, is one of the most important characters in the Old Testament. His descendants will be called Jews, Hebrews, and Israelites. In the beginning of Abram's relationship with God a promise is made and an expectation set. The promise is that Abram will have countless descendants and the expectation is that these descendants will take the blessing they receive from God and pass it on to others. Unfortunately, this rarely happened during the time of the Old Testament.

Abram was not perfect. There were times when he was afraid and he took things into his own hands in an attempt to control what was going to happen. Every time Abram does this it turns out bad. Every time he completely trusts in God the situation turns out well.

In chapter 15 God makes a covenant with Abram. A covenant is a promise. It is like a contract, but with a critical difference. A contract is between two parties and designed to protect the two parties. A contract establishes the minimum expectations for the relationship. A covenant is also between two parties, and is based on the promises that the two parties make for the benefit of the other party. In God's case, the promise that God makes are of much greater benefit to Abram than anything that Abram can provide back to God. A covenant is a way of expressing in a physical way that each party has the other party's best interests at heart.

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For the rest of the Old Testament you'll be following the story of Abraham's family. It is a crazy and mixed up story that gets confusing and discouraging at times. Through it all God will finally bring Jesus to earth and it will all start to make sense.

Week 3, Day 3 --- Genesis 16-18

Impatience and lack of trust always cause us problems. Abram and Sarai try to help God keep His promise and their solution causes great division in their family. This division continues to this day as the children of Ishmael, the Arab nations, continue to fight with the children of Abraham, the nation of Israel. God did keep His promise and as a part of keeping that promise He changes the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah.

When God comes to visit Abraham it is probably Jesus who makes the appearance. He isn't called Jesus because He hasn't been born and given an earthly name. We know now from the New Testament that the physical representation of God is named Jesus. His appearances in the Old Testament are very rare, but there are a few very special occasions when He shows up. Announcing that Isaac is coming is just such an occasion.

At the end of chapter 18 is the first extended prayer in the Old Testament. We might not think about it that way at first, but Abraham is talking to God and He is making requests. Abraham is acting as a priest as he speaks to God on behalf of the people of Sodom. A recent sermon by Tim Keller pointed out that Abraham is exploring something really important in this prayer. Abraham is trying to discover if the righteousness of a few can save many. He doesn't know it, but he is looking forward to Jesus. The truth is that the righteousness of the right one can save everyone. In the case of Sodom there wasn't even one who was righteous and you'll see what happens tomorrow.

Week 3, Day 4 --- Genesis 19-21

It is hard to imagine a place as evil as Sodom. Middle Eastern custom is that foreigners and travelers are given food and a place to stay even if they are your enemies. This was not true in Sodom. Instead, the men of Sodom wanted to sexually assault the angels of God who came to rescue Lot and his family. God prevents this and rescues Lot and his daughters, almost against their will. Somehow Lot and his family had become very comfortable in Sodom. They had become so comfortable with the evil around them that they did not want to leave. Lot did not trust God and never experienced the blessings that God could have provided.

Abraham trusted God most of the time, but there was one situation where he consistently did not trust God. He was married to a very beautiful woman and he was afraid that men would kill him to take away his wife. His solution was terrible. It demonstrated a tremendous lack of trust in God and lack of love for his wife. The amazing thing is that every time Abraham tells a ruler that his wife is his sister and gives her to him God provides wealth for Abraham through the process.

Abraham and Sarah now have a son and in the chapters to come the direction of the story will change.

Week 3, Day 5 --- Genesis 22-24

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Three chapters and three love stories. Each is unique and none of them match up with the romantic tales that we hear today.

In yesterday's reading Abraham was so afraid of the people around him that he lied to protect himself. He demonstrated that he loved himself more than he loved his wife. He also demonstrated that he didn't fully trust God. God loves Abraham and wants Abraham to be able to trust him with everything. God knows that Abraham loves his son more than anything. The question is, does he love Isaac more than he loves God. Abraham passes the test. In Hebrews 11:17-19 we learn that Abraham trusted that God could raise Isaac from the dead. Abraham's love for God was sealed forever on the day on the day he was willing to sacrifice Isaac.

Abraham also loved his wife Sarah. This chapter may not be as much love story as it is an interesting lesson in how to negotiate in the Middle East. It does demonstrate that Abraham is willing to go to great lengths to honor his wife after her death.

Sometimes I think we ought to return to the customs of the past when it comes to marriage. In our country marriage is all about feelings and as feelings shift marriages fall apart. We try out relationships and that doesn't help. Instead we develop all sorts of bad habits that keep us from developing long-term relationships based on commitment to another person. Isaac and Rebekah never met until the day they married. Their love for each other grew even though you will learn that neither of them was a perfect partner. God put them together and they stayed together. That definitely takes love.

Week 3, Day 6 --- Genesis 25-26

The story of Isaac is brief. He is a faithful man and except for lying about his wife just like his father, he is a good man. Isaac inherited a great deal of wealth from his father Abraham and he manages it well. He becomes powerful and wealthy, but has no children. It is kind of funny that God chooses to begin a nation with two couple who are unable to have children. Sarah has one child and Rebecca has two. This would have been very unusual for this time.

Isaac and Rebecca initially lived with the Philistines near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The dispute over wells causes them to move further inland. They move to a wilderness area that is about halfway between the coast and the Dead Sea.

In these times the birthright was very significant. As the oldest son Esau would inherit the bulk of his father's estate. His family would be the family known as the children of Isaac and Abraham. It was a very significant thing. He traded it all away for a bowl of stew. What's the worst bargain you have ever made?

Week 3, Day 7 --- Genesis 27-29

I am blessed with a wonderful family, but even within our family there are difficulties. Abraham's family had all sorts of issues and those issues became more numerous with every generation. Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, and the amazing thing is discovering who His ancestors were.

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The nation of Israel begins with Jacob. Jacob was a coward and a liar. He was also very shrewd and became wealthy by cheating first his brother and then his uncle. First, Jacob cheated his brother Esau with a very lopsided trade for his brother's birthright. The birthright was a son's place in the will. Jacob traded to go from second place to first place and that meant he got the bulk of his father's wealth. In today's reading Jacob steals Esau's blessing. The blessing was very significant. Through the blessing a father passed on to his son God's plan for the son. The blessing wasn't just nice words. It established what God would do. In Jacob's case the blessing he received meant that it would be through his family that Jesus would come. Jacob's descendants would be God's special people.

In Romans 9-11 Paul explains that this was really God's choice and not Isaac's choice. What still puzzles me is why God would choose a liar and a cheat like Jacob to be the father of His special people.

Jacob needed to leave the area where his family lived and found a good excuse in his need to find a wife. He traveled east to his uncle's territory and there he immediately fell in love with Rachel. It seems that this whole family is full of schemers and Jacob's uncle Laban tricks Jacob into marrying his oldest daughter. Having multiple wives is not God's desire, but Jacob ends up with two wives and endless conflicts as a result.

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Week 4, Day 1 --- Genesis 30-31

Week 4, Day 2 --- Genesis 32-34

Week 4, Day 3 --- Genesis 35-37

Week 4, Day 4 --- Genesis 38-40

Week 4, Day 5 --- Genesis 41-42

Week 4, Day 6 --- Genesis 43-45

Week 4, Day 7 --- Genesis 46-47

Week 4, Day 1 --- Genesis 30-31

Sons were very important to a man in Jacob's day. The more sons a man had the larger he could build his farm or flocks. Rachel was his most beautiful wife, but it was Leah who provided Jacob with sons. It might seem that having 4 wives would be fun, but keeping these 4 women happy was a big challenge. The family that resulted was a mess. Rachel even brought idols into the family so that her sons learned to worship both God and idols. This would be a problem for Israel for most of their history.

Neither Jacob nor Laban understood the science of genetics. At first it appears that Jacob is being really devious and that there is power in the sticks. What is really going on is that God is blessing Jacob and preparing him for a return to his homeland. Even though Jacob knows this he is still a coward and a liar at heart. Rather than dealing with Laban directly Jacob runs away. The only reason that Jacob is not killed is because God intervenes.

God is in control. He is able to bless with material wealth and He is able to provide physical protection. Eventually, Jacob would learn to trust God, but it would take many years.

Week 4, Day 2 --- Genesis 32-34

The Jordan River is both a physical boundary of the land of Israel and a symbol of spiritual decisions in the life of Israel and individuals. For Jacob crossing over the Jordan was a decision to be where God had called him to be, to obey God. When he crossed the Jordan his life and the lives of all his family would be at risk. The land was filled with foreign peoples who were powerful and much more numerous. He was also returning to the land of his brother who he had stolen from. In a sense we all go through what Jacob went through at various points in our lives. We wrestle with God. God wants us to surrender and we don't want to. In Jacob's case he wrestled with a physical representation of God. This may have been an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. Jacob finally surrenders, but only because he is completely overpowered. His new name is Israel and the nation of Israel will struggle with the issue of surrender throughout its history.

Jacob is shrewd and he plans well for his reunion with Esau. They greet each other and Esau does not attack Jacob. They are pleased to see each other, but they are not reconciled. Esau returns to his home and Jacob heads another direction. In the future their families will become bitter enemies.

Jacob's sons proved to be as shrewd as their father and more violent. There is no question that Dinah was abused when she was raped by Shechem. Shechem's father was the law of the land,

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so there was little way to punish him beyond what they did. From this time on the children of Israel will rarely experience peace.

Week 4, Day 3 --- Genesis 35-37

Family descriptions are very important in the Old Testament. The lists of names establish the relationships of peoples and nations to their ancestors. All of chapter 36 is a description of what happens to Esau's family. You will see the Edomites come up again and again as enemies of Israel.

Multiple wives are definitely a problem. There is no way one man can meet the needs of multiple women. I don't know who initiated the affair, but Reuben sleeps with one of his father's wives. It is possible that because of his shame Reuben was willing to go against his brothers and rescue Joseph from death.

There are several stories in the Old Testament that provide a shadowy picture of what is coming in the New Testament. The story of Joseph contains many things that look a lot like the story of Jesus. He isn't like Jesus in that he is apparently a little arrogant and his brothers certainly don't like him. He is his father's favorite. This is one case where Jacob isn't very smart. He sends Joseph to check on his brothers and almost gets him killed. His brothers toss him into a cistern, a big hole in the ground for storing water, and they sell him into slavery for a small amount of silver. The brothers betray Joseph and he will turn out to be their savior.

Week 4, Day 4 --- Genesis 38-40

You might wonder why this first story is included in Genesis. Take a look at Matthew 1:3 and you'll get an idea. It would seem to us that if God was preparing to send His son that He would make certain that all of His ancestors were the best people. Not only would they be the best people, but they would all be children of Israel. We might think that, but this isn't what God did. Jesus came from a line of the best and the worst. What Judah and Tamar did was wrong, but God uses the sons who were the result of their sin to build a line of kings. We often try to help God out and the amazing thing is that He is able to take our help and make something good out of it.

Joseph is a much better example. There is one key principle to learn from his encounter with Potiphar's wife. When temptation, especially sexual temptation, appears ready to trap you then turn and run. There is no glory in sin. Even when Joseph ran he ended up suffering, but his suffering was with a good conscience. As you'll see, God was working through all of this for Joseph's good and His glory.

The story ends in a gruesome way. One of the gifts Joseph had been given by God was the ability to interpret dreams. His interpretations came from God and were always right. At this time the king was the law and the king decides to forgive the cupbearer and execute the baker. For the baker's sake I hope they cut off his head before they stuck him on the pole. I know this wasn't always the case. Being impaled on a pole seems like a horrible way to die. The worst part of this story is that the cupbearer doesn't remember the kindness that was done for him. How often have you forgotten to do what you promised?

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Week 4, Day 5 --- Genesis 41-42

Famine is still common in many parts of the world, but it is something that we don't experience in our country anymore. We have the resources to get food from wherever it is produced in the world and to produce food even when the weather does not cooperate. This isn't true in many parts of the world and it was not true in Joseph's day.

When Joseph interprets the dream it seems obvious to us. It may have been that God hid the meaning of the dream from Pharaoh's advisors so that Joseph could be brought to the position he was. Joseph went from prison to prince in a single day.

The rest of Genesis will be the story of Joseph's interaction with his family. Why do you think Joseph keeps asking his brothers to bring Benjamin to see him? What should the brothers have done when they found the money in the sack on the way out of town? What do you think it will take for a family so divided to be reconciled?

Week 4, Day 6 --- Genesis 43-45

Some stories have very happy endings. However, before the happy ending Joseph's brothers have to pass a test. They have to demonstrate that they really care about their family, including Rachel's son Benjamin. They pass the test and the whole family ends up moving to Egypt. Do you remember the dreams that began this story? Have they come true?

Rick Warren who wrote *The Purpose Driven Life* says this, "God never wastes an experience." Whatever you have gone through God can use for good. You may not see how at this point in your life, but if you continue to seek God and follow Him you'll begin to see how He can work in your life just as He did in Joseph's life.

Week 4, Day 7 --- Genesis 46-47

You may have noticed that God's people go back and forth between Egypt and Canaan. Egypt is the land of preparation and it is also the land of slavery. Canaan is the Promised Land, the land of rest. Seventy people in Jacob's family travel from Canaan to Egypt. They will become a nation of millions, but they will also become slaves.

The list of names in this reading is not the first you have seen and you will see many more before you finish reading through the Bible. Names are important and these lists are important because they provide a link between generations. You will see many of these names again as various groups of people are assigned different roles within the nation of Israel based on their family or tribe.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 5, Day 1 --- Genesis 48-50

Week 5, Day 2 --- Exodus 1-3

Week 5, Day 3 --- Exodus 4-6

Week 5, Day 4 --- Exodus 7-9

Week 5, Day 5 --- Exodus 10-12

Week 5, Day 6 --- Exodus 13-15

Week 5, Day 7 --- Exodus 16-18

Week 5, Day 1 --- Genesis 48-50

Once again a father blesses his sons. Some of the blessings are very positive and others may seem limiting. The incredible thing is that they all came true. There are two that are amazing to me. Simeon and Levi were incredibly violent men. Their families would become warriors and would continue to be violent. The family of Levi became the priests in Israel. Their responsibility was the care of God's house so they were not given a portion of Canaan to be their own. Judah is the take charge one of all the sons. His children will become the kings of Israel and through his family line Jesus will be born. All this was predicted by Jacob almost 2000 years before Jesus was born.

Week 5, Day 2 --- Exodus 1-3

There is a gap of several hundred years between the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus. The family of Jacob has become the Israelite people. They are a nation inside the nation of Egypt. They are multiplying faster than the Egyptians, so the Egyptians decide to enslave them and attempt to limit their increase. It doesn't work and a cycle of more population growth and more oppression begins. This cycle is still being repeated in various cultures today.

The mother of Moses has great faith and cunning. She obeys the letter of the law by putting her son in the Nile, but she puts him in a place where he will be noticed. Her plan works and Moses is adopted into the family of Pharaoh. Moses grows up as an Egyptian. He goes to Egyptian schools and probably serves in the Egyptian army. By the time he kills the Egyptian he is 40 years old and probably a powerful and visible leader within Egypt.

Moses goes from the palace to the desert as a result of the murder of the Egyptian. He begins his family and cares for sheep for another 40 years. He is finally ready to lead his people out of Egypt. What would it take for God to get your attention? How would you respond if God called you with a new direction through a burning bush experience?

Week 5, Day 3 --- Exodus 4-6

What would you do if God spoke to you in a clearly audible voice making it very clear that He was God? What would you do if in addition to the voice God demonstrated supernatural powers that you could see and touch? We wonder sometimes why people don't do what God wants. Moses demonstrates for us that it is possible to know who God is and still resist doing what God desires.

The passage about the circumcision of Moses' son is a very difficult few verses to understand. My understanding is that it was very important for Moses to demonstrate that he was a Hebrew,

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

a child of Abraham, and that meant that his sons needed to be circumcised. God wanted to make certain this was right before Moses return to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. It is very important for leaders to model what they tell their followers to do.

Leaving Egypt was going to be a big change for the Hebrew people. They were slaves, but they were comfortable slaves. They lived in a very prosperous and powerful nation. They had few responsibilities. They complained about their bondage, but at the same time they were comfortable with it. Their situation had to get worse before they would be willing to leave Egypt. When their situation got worse they complained. Moses took their complaints to God and God responded in the way God typically responds. God had made a promise and He was going to keep it. How many times does the phrase "I Am the Lord" appear in chapter 6? Why is that so important?

Week 5, Day 4 --- Exodus 7-9

The hard work convinced the Israelites that they were in bondage and needed to be set free. It takes a series of plagues to convince the Egyptians that they want to set the Israelites free. Egypt was a land of many gods. The Pharaoh was god of all these gods. He viewed himself as divine and all powerful. The plagues are a direct attack on his thinking that he is divine.

Each plague is directed against one of the Egyptian gods. The plagues get worse and worse. As they get worse God protects the Israelites by limiting the area where the plagues take place. I find the plague of hail one of the most interesting. God announces that there is going to be a terrible storm. If the Egyptians believe and stay inside they will be fine, but if they are caught outside they will be killed. God gave them a choice and a chance.

Have you ever been determined to demonstrate that you are in control? The Bible tells us that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God could have done this directly and He has the power and position to do that. It could also be that the continuous pressure that God put on Pharaoh through the plagues made Pharaoh more and more stubborn. Some people give in to pressure quickly. Other people get more and more determined. They won't bend so they eventually break. Think about situations in your life where you have been like Pharaoh. Maybe there are times when God has been trying to get your attention, but you have been determined to do things your own way. How is that working for Pharaoh in this situation?

Week 5, Day 5 --- Exodus 10-12

I had never seen a locust until I traveled to Africa. They look like grasshoppers, only they are much larger. They are greatly feared because of the amount of vegetation that they can eat. As the plagues progress Pharaoh becomes less and less respected even by his own people.

The final plague is important for many reasons. For the Israelites the plague of death resulted in the Egyptians sending them away with great wealth. For us it is a picture of what will be required to set us free from our bondage. It is easy to forget that the Israelites were slaves by the time we reach this point in the story. They had no power and were helpless. They cannot be freed without someone dying. The Egyptians die because they have refused to recognize God. The lambs die so that the Israelites might be protected from the angel of death.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Remember this story. It is incredibly important and will help you understand what happens when Jesus comes as the lamb of God and dies for our sins.

Week 5, Day 6 --- Exodus 13-15

The Egyptians and Israelites reluctantly separated. The Egyptians had lost a workforce of 600,000 people and in spite of the deaths of their sons they wanted that workforce back. The Israelites had lost the security of their slavery. Now they had to depend on God and themselves for their day to day provision and this was frightening. One last event was needed to separate them so that they would stay apart.

God leads the people to a place where they are pinned between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. From a human perspective they are dead. They are not trained or equipped for battle and on their own they would all die. However, God has a plan and He provides a way out. The path through the sea provides rescue for the Israelites and destruction for the Egyptian army. If God had not done this the Israelites could have been pursued by the Egyptians all the way to the Promised Land.

When they were safe on the other side the Israelites sang a new song. My hope is that someday you'll be able to write and sing a new song.

Week 5, Day 7 --- Exodus 16-18

No one likes change. In fact, we don't even like changes that are good, but we especially don't like changes that we think are bad for us. The Israelites never mention the work they no longer have to do. No one ever mentions that they are no longer beaten as slaves. All they can think about is that they do not have abundant food and water. They grumble and complain constantly to Moses and for a time he allows their complaints to make him miserable.

God hears the complaints and answers in a special way. He provides food for the Israelites that will keep them strong and healthy. They had never seen food like this before, so they called it "what is it". The Hebrew word that means this is manna. They were on the move, so they did not plant seeds and then harvest a crop. Instead, God provided this food every day, so they harvested every day except Saturday. Saturday, or the Sabbath, was a day of rest. Pay careful attention to God's instructions in these verses and how the Israelites responded. Why do you think that some of the Israelites didn't follow God's instructions.

God speaks to us in many ways. In the final chapter of today's reading God speaks to Moses through his father-in-law Jethro. Moses is exhausting himself taking care of all the people. There are over 1 million people and every dispute has to be resolved by Moses. Obviously, many disputes aren't getting resolved and Moses is getting exhausted. Jethro's advice is incredibly practical and Moses is wise enough to accept it and everyone benefits.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 6, Day 1 --- Exodus 19-21

Week 6, Day 2 --- Exodus 22-24

Week 6, Day 3 --- Exodus 25-27

Week 6, Day 4 --- Exodus 28-29

Week 6, Day 5 --- Exodus 30-32

Week 6, Day 6 --- Exodus 33-35

Week 6, Day 7 --- Exodus 36-38

Week 6, Day 1 --- Exodus 19-21

Have you ever seen metal burn? All that you have to do is place metal in pure oxygen and it will burn up just like wood. That is what God's holiness is like. He is so pure that anything less than perfect that comes into His presence is consumed. This is why God goes to such great lengths to warn the Israelites when He prepares them to meet with Him.

In chapter 20 you will find the Ten Commandments. All the rest of the law that you will read in the following chapters is an expansion on these 10 laws. In the New Testament the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is an expansion and explanation of these 10 laws. On first reading these you may think that God is being very restrictive. Some people think He is being mean and that all God ever says is no.

I think that what God is attempting to do is to describe Himself. He is trying to help us understand who He is and how to live in relationship with Him. He is telling us how to live a life filled with love, joy, and peace. In chapter 21 God begins providing Moses with the next level of detail in the law. As you read this you'll find the basis for most of our laws today. Our laws may read differently, but the principles behind them come from these laws first spoken by God to Moses.

Week 6, Day 2 --- Exodus 22-24

There is a very important principle in God's law that we seem to have lost. Whenever a crime is committed there is a victim. Our current justice system makes little or no provision for the victim. When we speak of the debt being repaid to society we are simply speaking about the time served in jail. There were no jails in Sinai desert. The person who harmed someone else was not locked away. Instead, they were required to go to work to compensate, make restitution, to the person that was harmed. What do you think about the principle of restitution?

There is another principle that we do not understand well or practice. This is the principle of celebration. We like to party, but we party without purpose. God's parties were great parties. They generally lasted a week and God absolutely intended for people to have a good time. He also intended for people to remember who made the party possible and to honor Him with their celebration.

In the middle of the presentation of the law God reminds the people of where they are going. He lets them know why it is going to take time to possess the Promised Land. God also predicts what is going to happen if the people do not complete the job of capturing the land.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Finally, God makes a covenant with the people. A covenant is a set of promises that two parties make to each other. It is different from a contract. A contract focuses on protecting each of the parties from harm by the other. A covenant focuses on building a relationship based on mutual benefit. In this case, God's desire is to bless the people. They can participate in His blessing by agreeing to be His people.

Week 6, Day 3 --- Exodus 25-27



This is a picture of a model of the tabernacle.

(Image from <http://koti.phnet.fi/petripaavola/Tabernacle>)

It is roughly to scale, so you can get an idea of what it looked like. The tabernacle was designed to be portable, because the people would be on the move for the next 40 years in the desert.

I can't wait to get to heaven and find out what all of the parts of the tabernacle represent. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament makes it clear that the tabernacle is an image of the reality of heaven.

We are provided with some clues in the New Testament, but everything is not explained. For example, we know that the Most Holy Place represents the dwelling place of God and this is the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation.

I don't know what translation of the Bible you are using, but if you are using one that describes the dimensions of the tabernacle in cubits you need to know that a cubit is approximately 18 inches. It varied over time because it was the distance from the King's elbow to his finger tips.

Why do you think God was so specific in His instructions to Moses about the way the tabernacle was to be built?

Week 6, Day 4 --- Exodus 28-29

How long do you think it would take you to learn this process so that you could do it from memory? I've read it many times and the only way I could do it would be to have the instructions right in front of me. Even then I'm certain I wouldn't get it perfectly right. Preparing to be the connection between God and the people was a very complicated thing. Coming into God's presence required a great deal of preparation.

As you read through today's chapters think about how privileged we are to be able to come into God's presence with none of this preparation. Instead, all that is required is that we be in Christ. If we are in Christ, then we can come into God's presence at anytime and we have His presence with us in the Holy Spirit at all times.

Week 6, Day 5 --- Exodus 30-32

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Today's reading begins with pleasant things and ends with disaster. God is in the process of giving Moses the Ten Commandments. As God describes the building of the tabernacle He continues to emphasize the Sabbath. It is very difficult to rest. I believe that even though we live under a new covenant that the principle of the Sabbath remains. It is one of God's principles that I have the greatest difficulty with. Resting on the 7th day requires that I trust God to help me get accomplished what I need to accomplish on the other 6 days. What are you doing to make one day of the week a special day of rest?

The tabernacle was a super-natural structure. The people who came out of Egypt did not have the skills required to build such a work of art. The Holy Spirit comes upon some of the people and fills them with the skills needed to create what God had designed. God is still doing this today, giving people abilities and skills far beyond natural talent to accomplish great things for Him.

40 days is a long time. It was an especially long time for the Israelites to wait for Moses to come down from the mountain. All the signs of God's presence remained, but the people became anxious and wanted to move. What always amazes me about this chapter is that God allows Aaron to remain as the high priest after this. He was not a leader, but a follower. When Moses was present he followed Moses, but when Moses was away he followed the people. Still, God forgave him and allowed him to continue to lead and serve. God is far more patient and forgiving than we can imagine.

Week 6, Day 6 --- Exodus 33-35

Moses quickly recognizes something that the people did not. He understands that without God's presence they will not survive their journey to the Promised Land. Moses is a true leader. He understands what is needed and pursues it for himself and by doing that provides an example to the people. He desires to really know God. He knows he is an imperfect man, but he understands enough of who God is to desire a personal relationship with Him.

Notice where the tent of meeting is at this time. This is important because the location is going to change in the future and the change is both real and symbolic. At this time it is outside the camp. The only people who truly have an experience of God's presence are Moses and Joshua. What would it be like to be Joshua? What do you think Joshua is being prepared for? What do you think he is doing in the tent?

When the Israelites left Egypt they plundered the Egyptians and gathered up a large number of valuables. God provided all of this material for the Israelites. Now He is giving them the opportunity to give some of it back to build His temporary home.

Week 6, Day 7 --- Exodus 36-38

God knew something that the Israelites didn't know. He knew that this temporary place of worship would have to last for several hundred years. The people probably thought that it was silly to make all this investment in something they would replace in a year or two. They didn't realize that they would be wandering in the desert for 40 years and that it would then take several centuries before they had a leader strong enough and wealthy enough to build a temple.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

This is one of the high points for the Israelites and I think that this is why it is recorded in such detail. The people had rebelled against God by making and worshiping the golden calf. Now they have repented and their repentance is genuine. They recognize that everything belongs to God and the offering that they bring is so generous that Moses has to tell them to stop. It is a rare thing, but they obey God to the smallest detail and that is what Moses records for us here.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 7, Day 1 --- Exodus 39-40

Week 7, Day 2 --- Leviticus 1-4

Week 7, Day 3 --- Leviticus 5-7

Week 7, Day 4 --- Leviticus 8-10

Week 7, Day 5 --- Leviticus 11-13

Week 7, Day 6 --- Leviticus 14-15

Week 7, Day 7 --- Leviticus 16-18

Week 7, Day 1 --- Exodus 39-40

What do you do when special guests are coming to visit? Maybe you remember a time when someone special was coming to stay with your family. At our house, when we have guests coming, we do special cleaning. The house never looks better than when guests are expected. The Israelites were expecting a very special guest. God was going to come and stay with them. They followed instructions and God did come and live with them.

Week 7, Day 2 --- Leviticus 1-4

Week 7, Day 3 --- Leviticus 5-7

God is a God of props. What that means is that God recognizes our need for physical things to be able to understand spiritual things. There are two main purposes to the Old Testament sacrificial system. The immediate purpose was to maintain the relationship between God and His people. The longer-term purpose was to give a picture of Jesus. I found the following description on the Internet that I think does a good job of explaining these connections.

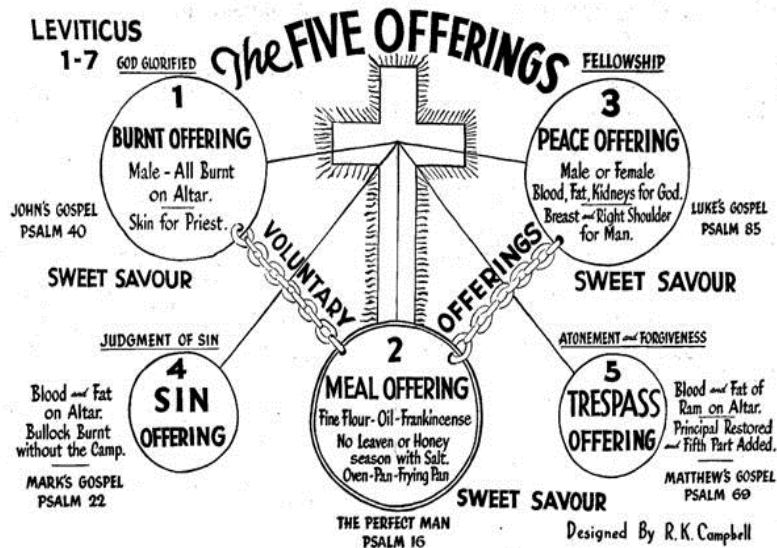
The Five Offerings Of Leviticus 1-7

Chart And Brief Outline

By R K Campbell

In these five offerings we have a most wonderful presentation in typical language of types and shadows of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). All these offerings taken together give us a full view of Christ and His great sacrificial work on the cross of Calvary. They are like so many mirrors arranged around the Lord and the cross so that each one reflects a special view of His Person and work.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically



1. The Burnt Offering

Here we have the highest aspect of the work of Christ where He is seen offering Himself up entirely to God to do His will even unto death. The whole offering, except the skin of the animal, was burnt upon the altar and all went up to God as a sweet savour. It pictures Christ who gave Himself as "a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Eph. 5:2). Christ is not seen here as bearing our sins, but as accomplishing the Father's will, glorifying Him and vindicating the holiness and majesty of His throne. This theme is especially prominent in John's Gospel and in Psalm 40.

2. The Meal Offering

This offering typifies Christ as the perfect and sinless Man and presents to us His wonderful Person and His spotless life which was ever an offering of a sweet savour unto God. There was no shedding of blood in this offering so it speaks of the perfections of Christ's Person and life rather than of His death. The fine flour pictures His sinless humanity with its evenness of moral qualities, the oil pictures the grace and power of the Holy Spirit which characterized His life, while the frankincense is emblematic of the sweetness and fragrance of His Person and life.

3. The Peace Offering

This was also an offering of a sweet savour to God. The blood, the fat and the kidneys of the offering were put upon the altar as "the food of the offering made by fire unto the Lord" (Lev. 3:11). This was God's part. Then the breast was given to Aaron and his sons and the right shoulder to the offering priest. This was man's part. Thus God and man both fed on the same offering which speaks of communion and fellowship and typifies the communion which the believer in Christ enjoys with God on the ground of the work of Christ at the cross and His blood shed there for our sins. We are at peace with God through the work of the cross and can feed upon Christ in fellowship with the Father. Luke's Gospel and Psalm 85 especially present this theme.

4. The Sin Offering

We come now to the non-sweet savour offerings. The special feature of this offering is in the whole bullock being burnt upon the ground outside the camp of Israel after the blood and fat were put upon the altar for God. This offering was for sin and pictures to us Christ who was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and endured the judgment and wrath of God against sin in our stead as our substitute. The holiness of God and the awfulness of sin are brought out in the bullock being entirely burnt up outside the camp. It pictures Christ, forsaken of God, as our Sin-bearer as given in Psalm 22 and Mark's Gospel.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

5. The Trespass Offering

Here sin is looked at as a trespass against the government of God. Amends had to be made for the wrong done and the fifth part added to it. Atonement was made by the blood of the offering, and the trespasser was forgiven. This offering presents Christ who died for our sins and trespasses on the cross restoring that which He took not away (Ps. 69:4). He has not only answered to God for our sins and paid our debt by His shed blood, but has added the fifth part, as it were, bringing more glory to God and more blessings to man than were had before sin was committed. This is the first view the sinner gets of the Cross of Christ. Psalm 69 and Matthew's Gospel present this aspect of the offering of Christ.

R. K. CAMPBELL

Week 7, Day 4 --- Leviticus 8-10

After reading through the past several chapters how clear are you on what the priest was to do each day? I don't know about you, but even with the repetition of the instructions I'm confused. I think it was a little easier for Aaron and his sons. Moses got the instructions from God. Moses then showed Aaron and his sons what to do. Aaron and his sons then did everything they had been instructed to do while Moses watched. It turns out that this is how you teach anyone to do anything.

God allows us great freedom in our relationship with Him, but there are some things that are not up to us. God was very serious about the instructions He provided for the daily sacrifices. I can only assume that Nadab and Abihu thought that they would add to what God instructed some of what they learned in the observing the worship of idols in Egypt. Whatever, they did was disrespectful of God and God's Holiness burst out and consumed them. They were not protected by the blood of the sacrifice and they died. In contrast, it appears that Aaron and his other sons also failed to follow God's exact instructions on occasion. However, God very willingly forgave their mistakes because their desire was to do what He had instructed.

Week 7, Day 5 --- Leviticus 11-13

We eat anything these days. We can do that because we understand about bacteria and know how to cook just about anything to make it edible. This wasn't true in the desert several thousand years ago. These laws seem restrictive to us, but they were very loving and protective for the Israelites. Without these laws many would have died. Instead, as the Israelites observed these laws they became one of the healthiest people who ever lived.

Disease is one of the greatest threats to a people living closely together. The Israelites were traveling together and dwelling in tents. They had no running water and no sanitation facilities. An infectious disease could wipe out the entire population. God provides the priests with rules and instructions for protecting the people from the spreading of disease.

We are just now learning how dangerous mold and mildew are. We used to think they just looked awful. Now we're discovering that they can be the cause of all sorts of illness. My son's family in China is having to move because my daughter-in-law has been struggling with one lung ailment after another because of the mold in their apartment.

This portion of the scripture is hard to read through, especially because it is hard to see how it is relevant today. As you read think about what God might be telling us to avoid today.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 7, Day 6 --- Leviticus 14-15

I don't understand the purpose behind all of these regulations about cleanliness. The most important thing to understand is that there is a difference between being ceremonially unclean and being guilty of sin. Sin is always a choice and separates a person from God. There are many things that a person could not control that could make them ceremonially unclean. A woman's period is probably the best example. Sometimes confusion about this results in people thinking that God views sexual intercourse as a bad thing. This is not true as will become clear in reading through the rest of the Bible. More than anything I think God wanted His people to recognize how different and special He is. Coming into His presence to worship required preparation. This is something we've lost.

Week 7, Day 7 --- Leviticus 16-18

The Passover is important, but the day of atonement is the most important day in the Jewish year. It was the one day of the year when the High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. The word atonement means to cover over. Once a year the sins of the people were covered over by the blood of the lamb. The sacrifices offered allowed the High Priest to enter into the presence of God. Many years later Jesus would come and His sacrifice would cover over our sins forever. His sacrifice also enables us to enter into the presence of God at any time. You can read more about this in Hebrews 9 and 10.

The priests became the butchers for the Israelites. Animal sacrifices were common and often offered to other gods (idols) than Jehovah God. God knew that sacrificing to idols would lead the people away from Him, so he required that all sacrifices be made to Him.

From chapter 18 we get our understanding of incest. All sexual relations outside of the marriage relationship between one man and one woman are sin. God's intent is that our sexual relationship be special and exclusive, just as we are to have one God we are to have one sexual partner. In today's world this may seem old-fashioned, but we would have healthier families if we followed these instructions.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 8, Day 1 --- Leviticus 19-21

Week 8, Day 2 --- Leviticus 22-23

Week 8, Day 3 --- Leviticus 24-25

Week 8, Day 4 --- Leviticus 26-27

Week 8, Day 5 --- Numbers 1-2

Week 8, Day 6 --- Numbers 3-4

Week 8, Day 7 --- Numbers 5-6

Week 8, Day 1 --- Leviticus 19-21

These laws can seem very restrictive, but what kind of community would exist if all these laws were kept? Which of these laws would you find hardest to obey? What would have to change for it to be easy to obey?

The punishments may seem harsh, but remember there were no prisons. In fact, the people were going to be living in tents and wandering in the desert for 40 years. There were two basic methods for keeping the people pure. One was the death of the offender. This applied to idolatry in any form and sexual sin. The second was restitution which was applied in any case of theft or negligence that caused material damage.

Week 8, Day 2 --- Leviticus 22-23

How do you treat something that is special? Special things get special treatment. God wants the people to recognize that He is special. He is unique and He is pure. The laws may seem difficult to understand and hard to follow, but they were a constant reminder that Jehovah God was different from all the gods of Egypt or any other people they might encounter.

It is easy when reading through Leviticus to think of God as a person who always says no. This isn't true. The celebrations in chapter 23 are a great illustration that God wants to say yes. Three times a year the Israelites were to gather as an entire people to celebrate God's provision for them. The first celebration came in the spring, around the time that we celebrate Easter, and was to remember the escape from Egypt and the Passover. The festivals begin and end with a special Sabbath when the people were to do no work. In between was a big party with much food and drink.

The second celebration was of the harvest. It came 50 days after the Passover celebration. It was to be a reminder that God provides. The third celebration came in the autumn. It is a long celebration that includes the Day of Atonement. After the Day of Atonement the people lived in tents or booths for a week. This celebration was to keep the people from forgetting that their ancestors lived in tents for a long time when they first came out of Egypt.

All of these celebration look up to God as the provider for Israel. They also look back at historical events to keep alive the memory of God's rescue of the people from Egypt.

Week 8, Day 3 --- Leviticus 24-25

God's desire was that the Israelites be a holy nation. The punishment in chapter 24 may seem extreme, but it should give you an idea how serious the offense was in God's eyes. Today people

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

use the name of God or the name of Jesus so casually and negatively that it is hard to imagine a time when people were actually afraid to pronounce God's name. Stoning is a very personal form of execution. I think the reason for this form is that it involves the community in the process. Everyone who participated would be working to prevent this situation from occurring again in order to prevent having to go through another execution.

God owns everything. That is the basic principle of chapter 25. The Sabbath year for land is very good farming practice and the Amish people continue to use it to this day. Land needs rest just like people need rest. The year of Jubilee was a great concept. As far as I can tell from the Old Testament the Israelites never really practiced it. It required a great deal of trust and that never seems to have lasted very long with these people.

Week 8, Day 4 --- Leviticus 26-27

As you read through chapter 26 think about what kind of future the Israelites would have. If you were given these clear choices in terms of God's action toward you and your family, what would you do?

Chapter 27 is a bit of a mystery. There are no examples in the Old Testament of the Israelites doing what God instructs, so we don't understand exactly what is being described in this chapter. The principle that seems clear is that we can't give things to God and then take them back any time we want without paying a price. The other thing is that the price is greater than the value of the thing.

We are introduced to the concept of redemption and this is a very important concept. To redeem is to buy back. When we sin we are sold into slavery to Satan. The price to buy us back is the life of Jesus. That is how much we are worth to God.

Week 8, Day 5 --- Numbers 1-2

It would seem that during their first year in the desert the Israelites camped anywhere they wanted. The big thing was that when they started out Moses and Joshua lived outside the camp and God's presence with them was also outside the camp. In the beginning of their second year in the desert God begins to prepare them for conquering the land and organizes them. He also moves Himself from the outside of the camp to the center of the camp. This is where God should be in our lives – right at the center.

The tribes of Israel are listed in various ways throughout the Bible. Jacob had 12 sons and so 12 tribes. For some reason there is no tribe of Joseph. Instead, we have the half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. They are as large as the other tribes, but only count as a half a tribe each. I find it interesting that even after several hundred years the sons of Rachel (Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin) camp together instead of being mixed in with their brothers.

This is a hard book to read because there are many difficult names and much repetition. I encourage you to stay with it. There are some wonderful and important stories in this book mixed in with all the counting.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 8, Day 6 --- Numbers 3-4

Have you noticed how organized everything is? God has a plan for everything. Look at the way the camp is organized. In the middle is the tabernacle. Around the tabernacle is the tribe of Levi. These are the priests and workers in the tabernacle. Priests are to be a bridge between God and the people and here are the Levites between the presence of God in the tabernacle and that people. Outside the circle of the Levites are the rest of the tribes.

What are some practical reasons for organizing the people this way?

Week 8, Day 7 --- Numbers 5-6

How do you get rid of jealousy? At this time women were definitely second-class citizens. That isn't God's design, but it was the reality. The testimony of a woman was not valid in court. So, if a husband suspected his wife of adultery there was nothing she could do to convince him otherwise. God provided a way. God provided a super-natural way for a woman to prove her innocence. This doesn't mean that the husband automatically would forget his jealousy. It does mean that in the community she would be proven faithful. It is important to remember this section because it explains why it was so hard on a woman to be without a child. The assumption would be that she was under a curse.

I have no idea why anyone would voluntarily take the Nazirite vow. However, there are several examples in the Old Testament of people who take this vow. The key is that when you make a vow to God you had better keep it.

The final thing is a blessing from God to His people.

Number 6:24-26

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

I pray this blessing for you and I pray that you will turn your face toward God so that you can see and experience His grace and have peace.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 9, Day 1 --- Numbers 7

Week 9, Day 2 --- Numbers 8-10

Week 9, Day 3 --- Numbers 11-13

Week 9, Day 4 --- Numbers 14-15 - Psalm 90

Week 9, Day 5 --- Numbers 16-17

Week 9, Day 6 --- Numbers 18-20

Week 9, Day 7 --- Numbers 21

Week 9, Day 1 --- Numbers 7

Repetition is important. Take the time to read through every description. What do you discover? Think about the time that it took to write out all these descriptions with a quill and ink on parchment, a lamb's skin. Why does God have Moses write all of this out for the people to remember?

Week 9, Day 2 --- Numbers 8-10

I can't imagine what it would be like to shave my whole body, especially with a sharp knife. I do know that if I went through that I would know that I was doing something very special. It was important for the Israelites to get their religious practices established before they began to move in the desert. In their first year they have built the tabernacle, dedicated the Levites, and celebrated their first Passover. Now they are ready to begin the journey to the Promised Land.

There are many times when I think I would like God's guidance to be as clear as the cloud over the tabernacle. The truth is that His instruction in the Bible is that clear and I tend to ignore more than obey. There are times when we need to make a decision between options and we do desire guidance. The Bible clearly instructs us to seek guidance when making an important decision. There is an important lesson on guidance here in Numbers 10. In addition to the cloud Moses was on speaking terms with God. In spite of this, or because of this, Moses asks his brother-in-law Reuel to continue traveling with them specifically to provide guidance on where to camp. Moses did not ignore the desert expert that God had provided. Sometimes we are so determined that God will not speak to us that we ignore the help He has already provided in a person who has traveled the way we're going before.

Week 9, Day 3 --- Numbers 11-13

Sometimes we think that if God would just show His power to everyone that everyone would submit to Him and the world would be perfect. These three chapters illustrate that this isn't true and never has been true.

God fed the people every day. They got the same thing every day, but they got perfectly nutritious and tasty food that they only had to gather. How did they respond to this supernatural provision? They complained. Be very careful what you complain about and what you ask God for. I think that God's anger burned hottest against those people who were so focused on the quail that they totally turned away from God's presence in the tabernacle in the middle of their community. Some people died because their hunger for quail completely eliminated their hunger for God. What do you get hungry for that leads you away from God?

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Aaron and Miriam had a different kind of hunger. They wanted recognition. Miriam was apparently at the center of their rebellion and she is the one who receives the punishment. She does get recognition, but not the kind that she was looking for. She and Aaron were very fortunate that they had a humble and forgiving brother.

Chapter 13 is a turning point in the book. The people have come to the edge of the Promised Land and God has them send in spies to see what this new land is like. Based on the report that comes back from the spies what do you think the people are going to decide to do? Should the people have any doubt about God's power to lead them into the new land?

Week 9, Day 4 --- Numbers 14-15 - Psalm 90

Sometimes the minority is right. That was certainly true in this case. Ten spies said the land couldn't be conquered and the people believed them. Caleb and Joshua confidently proclaimed the goodness of the land and the power of God. They were right, but the people chose to believe the majority and rebelled against God.

These people were not put behind bars, but they were given a death sentence. They were condemned to wander around the wilderness until everyone over 20 had died. Only Caleb and Joshua and their families would live, and even they were condemned to 40 years in the wilderness. When God says, "God and I will be with you." it is best to go.

The reminder about sacrifice is a reminder about God's desire for relationship. Everyone sins, but not everyone sins in full defiance of God's desire. God is basically warning that sacrifice is only beneficial to those who desire to do His will and desire a relationship with Him.

The way Moses prayer is put together is a very good way to pray. Moses starts his prayer by recognizing who God is. He continues by confessing the sin of the people, including himself. Finally, he asks God for a blessing. Try praying today and begin by telling God what you know about Him.

Week 9, Day 5 --- Numbers 16-17

What do you learn about God in this story? It is important to understand who God is. The first thing I see is that God is sovereign. This means that God is always in charge. God may have delegated authority to Moses and Aaron, but when they people rebelled against them they were rebelling against God. The second thing I see is that God is incredibly powerful. He can do for real, things that we can only imagine. I see that God can be angered. When God's anger and His power come together dramatic things happen to the people who have made Him angry.

What does it take to get your attention? If you are determined to do something bad what has to happen to stop you? For most of us, it takes a significant event to stop our willful rebellion. It is important to remember in this story that there is a group of over one million people who will have to live together under God's rule for 40 years in the wilderness if they are ever to make it into the Promised Land. God wants them to know that He loves them, but they are throwing a temper tantrum. They disobeyed God and now they don't want to deal with the consequences. How would you get the attention of over one million people who are acting like whiny 3-year

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

olds? Every time I read this I'm amazed at God's patience in working His plan so that Jesus could come and we could all come into His presence through Jesus.

Week 9, Day 6 --- Numbers 18-20

God's design was that there would be designated people who would focus on serving Him and His people. They wouldn't have to earn a living in the conventional way because they would be provided for by the people they served. So the priests and the Levites were to live on the sacrifices and offerings brought by the people. The amount they received was a percentage of what the people earned. If the people prospered then the priests prospered. If the people were impoverished then the priests were impoverished.

Many people today still don't understand the concept of germs or bacteria. God doesn't provide the people with the science, but rules surrounding death are designed to protect the people from disease.

Much time has passed by the time we reach chapter 20. The people have been wandering in the wilderness almost 40 years and Moses and Aaron are very frustrated with them. When the people complain because of lack of water Moses and Aaron do the right thing and turn to God. God's response is full of grace and He instructs Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock and water will pour out. It is supposed to be very clear that it is God who is providing the water. Instead, Moses and Aaron gather the people and then Moses strikes the rock with his staff claiming credit for producing the water. It was a big mistake. God still provided the water, but Moses would not get to lead the people into the Promised Land. Moses was still very special to God, but there are consequences to our sin. This story is always a reminder to me that no matter how long I have loved and served God I must still obey. I want to finish well and receive all that God has promised.

Week 9, Day 7 --- Numbers 21

The conquest of the Promised Land begins in this chapter. However, before it begins the Israelites must once more deal with the issue of who is in charge. Once again the people complain. They have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Everyone who was 20 years or older when they arrived at the Promised Land the first time has died. The oldest of the group had lived in Egypt, but only as children. Still they want to go back there.

They want to return to slavery rather than trust in God. This scene must have been incredibly frightening. Poisonous snakes enter the camp and begin to bite the people. As usual, they don't cry out to God, but they do cry out to Moses to cry out to God. God hears and provides a solution. It seems a very odd solution since God has instructed the people not to make idols. The snake represented everything that was evil. Satan is often described as a serpent. I think God is asking the people to be totally honest and look directly at the cost of their sin.

In John 3:14 Jesus looks back to this event. The bronze snake on the pole is a picture of Jesus on the cross. To come to God and be healed we must look at the cost of our sin. The Israelites looked at the snake on the pole and we must look at Jesus on the cross.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 10, Day 1 --- Numbers 22-25
Week 10, Day 2 --- Numbers 26-27
Week 10, Day 3 --- Numbers 28-30
Week 10, Day 4 --- Numbers 31-32
Week 10, Day 5 --- Numbers 33-34
Week 10, Day 6 --- Numbers 35-36
Week 10, Day 7 --- Deuteronomy 1-2

Day 1--- Numbers 22-25

This week you get introduced to one of the most fascinating men in the Old Testament. He is an example of someone who believes in God, but who does not do what God desires. Leviticus 19:26 prohibits the practice of divination. Divination is basically seeking to use the powers of the spirit world that are opposed to God for personal gain.

In this story God appears to change His mind, but then we find in Number 23:19 that God does not change His mind. God knows that Balaam's desires are evil and still God is able to use Balaam to bless Israel. Unfortunately, we learn from other places in the Bible that Balaam knew Israel's weakness. He is not successful in helping Balak to defeat them, but his action against Israel is enough to get his name mentioned as an example of evil leadership all through the Bible. Check out the following verses if you want to learn more about Balaam. (Joshua 13:22; 24:9,10; Nehemiah 13:1,2; Micah 6:4,5; 2 Peter 2:15,16; Revelation 2:14)

- Why does God tell Balaam not to go, then let him go, and then oppose him when he does go?

The following story illustrates the importance of doing the right thing. They say that everyone has his price and it appears that Balaam did. Maybe the young man in this story has his price as well, but it is much higher than most.

Rob Mouw played on the soccer team in his senior year at Wheaton Christian High School. In the final seconds of a big game against favored Waubonsie Valley, with his team behind by one goal, Rob was dribbling the ball in front of him, running at full speed toward the opponent's goal. Just before he shot the ball, though, he caught sight of the scoreboard. The clock read 00.00. But like any good athlete, Rob shot the ball anyway and it went in. The referee signaled that the goal counted, and the game finished in a tie. Rob had a choice to make. He could say nothing and avoid a loss. After all, it was the referee's job to decide the calls, not his. Or Rob could do what was right. Rob asked the referee whether the official time was kept on the scoreboard or the referee's stopwatch. The referee said the scoreboard time was official and then ran off the field.

Rob went to his coaches and explained that just before his kick, he had seen zeros on the scoreboard clock. Since he hadn't heard a whistle, he kept playing. But his goal was late, and he didn't think it should count. His coaches agreed, and so they went over to the opposing coaches, explained what had happened, and conceded victory to Waubonsie Valley. Listen to what this young man of integrity said after the incident: "Every time in your life you have an opportunity to do right, you should be thankful. For a person to know what right is, and then not to do it —

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

that would be a sin. To have won the game — I mean, really, who cares? Doing the right thing is more important. It lets you have peace.” But that wasn’t the end of the story.

Sometime later Rob received a handwritten letter from a total stranger that said,

“Dear Rob, I read the newspaper story about you. I love sports and true sportsmen. My faith in our future was renewed and lifted by the story. Never lose your principles. Always stand for what’s decent and right. That’s what you told us all when you refused the victory at that game.”

The letter was signed by former President George Bush.

You know, when we do what’s right — it sometimes gets the attention and approval of the newspaper and even U.S. presidents. It always gets the attention and approval of God. Jerry White reminds us that: Ethics to the government is law. Ethics to the philosopher is a concept. Ethics to religion is morality. But ethics to God is OBEDIENCE.

Day 2 --- Numbers 26-27

God reminds the Israelites of their sin and the fact that it led to their wandering around the Sinai wilderness for 40 years. There are two results of the registration. The first result is that the Israelites now know how the land will be divided. As a result of the courage of Zelophehad's daughters they even know how to deal with a situation where a man has no sons. The second result is that the people are reminded that they have just spent 40 years in the wilderness so that everyone who was an adult the last time they were at this place has had a chance to die. Special note is made twice of Korah and his followers. It is clear that God's discipline in that situation had been appropriate and meaningful.

No leader lives forever and Moses already knows that he won't be crossing the Jordan river to enter the Promised Land. The Israelites need a new leader and he must be a very strong one. Transitions in leadership are often difficult and God makes certain that Israel knows who its new leader will be as Joshua is commissioned.

The big lesson for me from today’s reading is that sin has consequences and many remain even after God forgives. God and Moses are certainly as close as ever at this point in time. However, Moses will still die and he will not lead the people into the Promised Land. However, his story is not completed. Moses will have a last word and the readings over the next several days build up to that.

Day 3 --- Numbers 28-30

The instructions about sacrifices are very detailed and I admit very puzzling. I don’t understand all the significance of each of the elements. What I do see as God provides these instructions is that He intends for there to be a rhythm to life. We are to depend on God and the sacrifices helped Israel mark the times and the seasons. This listing of sacrifices is very different from Leviticus. The emphasis is on the calendar.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Do read chapter 29. What do you notice in the middle of the repetition? Remember that writing materials were very scarce. The writer could not use **BOLD** or underline to draw attention to something important. The common method for emphasizing the importance of something was to repeat it. The sacrifices for the feast of tabernacles must have been very important because they are repeated for each day of the festival.

There is also very important instruction in this section on vows. They are to be taken very seriously. What is also important is the instruction on relationship. We live in community with one another. Even today, if my wife commits to something she is committing me to it as well. Everything she does has an impact on me. People often makes vows or promises to impress someone. In this case a vow is intended to impress God. God is not impressed with the vow. God values obedience. He would much rather have us do the right thing without having made a promise to do it than to promise to do something that we don't do.

- Have you ever made a promise you had no intention of keeping?
- Why did you make the promise?
- How were your relationships impacted by not keeping your promise?
- How do you feel when someone makes a promise to you and doesn't keep it?

Day 4 --- Numbers 31-32

This story begins a pattern that will repeat itself all through the history of Israel. God will give a command for complete destruction and the Israelites will decide that some people or things are too more precious to them than obedience to God. The fact that they do not obey God is sin and what they keep inevitably leads to more sin.

It is hard to understand how a God of love could command the complete destruction of an entire nation, including women and children. It is important to understand that these people were incredibly evil. They were constantly killing one another. Their greatest evil was probably the routine practice of offering their own children as burnt offerings. I think there are two reasons that God commanded their complete destruction. The first reason was to prevent future generations from having to suffer through the evil of their culture. The second reason was to remove the temptation for the Israelites to bring portions of this evil culture into their own. God's love could not allow His children to be exposed to such evil and God's holiness demanded that the land be purified.

The lesson for us is that we are to completely obey God. Instead of trying to find the least we can do to be saved, we should seek to do all that God commands. Our lives will be better and our relationship with God richer as a result.

Day 5 --- Numbers 33-34

God told Moses to write a journal. Moses kept track of where the Israelites went and what happened along the way. I think the primary reason was so that they would always have a record of what God had done. The Bible is history. It is stories about real people and real places. More importantly it is the story of a real God interacting with those people. Myths don't go into the kind of detail that the Bible does when telling their stories. You could map the journey of the Israelites if you could identify all the places today.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Numbers 34 is like a deed. It maps out the boundaries of the land of Israel. The people of Israel today are still defending those borders. Notice that God did not give them all of what we today call the Middle East. Their inheritance had borders. Remember this as you are reading about the conquest. All the people of the land had to do to survive was to move outside the borders that God had defined. All the Israelites had to do to have peace was to destroy all the evil that was inside the borders.

Day 6 --- Numbers 35-36

The first five books of the Bible provide the foundation for our legal system today. Notice in these chapters the various definitions of murder and the right to trial by peers. There is even a distinction between murder and what we identify today as manslaughter.

There appears to be a conflict between the value that God places on life and the death penalty and war. The only way I can explain this is that human life is so precious to God that taking a life demands the highest penalty possible. The people that God is asking Israel to conquer in war had no respect for either God or human life and that is why God decided that they must be destroyed.

Day 7 --- Deuteronomy 1-2

Today the review of the past 3 books begins. The first 2 chapters you'll read today describe the time from the Exodus until the battles begin in Canaan. The people of the land are very evil and God will use the Israelites to purify it. As you read take note of the lands that the Israelites were not to conquer. God had made promises to others and He kept them. God is a keeper of promises.

God knows His people. The first time the Israelites came to this point they decided that it would be a good idea to scout out the land. Even Moses thought it was a good idea. It turned out to be a very bad idea. Instead of seeing God's goodness and faithfulness in what He was giving them, they instead saw a task that was bigger than they were. They looked at the task and not at God and were afraid. They turned back and spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. This time they do not scout the land. Instead, God leads them into battle and gives them a victory. He exercises their faith and it grows stronger. Now they are ready to take the land.

God uses history to communicate His faithfulness to us. That is why this book is so important. Most of the things in it are repeated in other places. This is a good reason to take special note of what God thinks is worth repeating.

- When have you known the right thing to do and not done it because it seemed too hard?
- What would you have done if you were totally confident that God was with you?

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 11, Day 1 --- Deuteronomy 3-4

Week 11, Day 2 --- Deuteronomy 5-7

Week 11, Day 3 --- Deuteronomy 8-10

Week 11, Day 4 --- Deuteronomy 11-13

Week 11, Day 5 --- Deuteronomy 14-16

Week 11, Day 6 --- Deuteronomy 17-20

Week 11, Day 7 --- Deuteronomy 21-23

Day 1--- Deuteronomy 3-4

Moses gets into what turns into a very long sermon. The key message is that the children of Israel are not to add or subtract from the law that God has given them. From what we read in the book of Judges it would seem that they subtracted a lot. The real problem was that they added to what God had said and then added some more. They added so much to what God had said that they couldn't see God anymore. In these two chapters God claims to be sovereign, which means Lord or King. He is God and there is no other. There is a God who knows you and invites you to know Him.

God makes a promise through Moses in chapter 4. In verse 29 God promises that if you search for Him with all your heart then you will find Him. It doesn't matter where you are or what you've done. One of the first places to look is in history. That is why God had Moses record these events for the people so that when they needed to look for God they could easily find them in their history. Everyone has a history. If you look very carefully and with all your heart you'll find God in your history as well.

- When has God very clearly been at work in your life?

Day 2 --- Deuteronomy 5-7

In chapter 5 Moses repeats what we know as the Ten Commandments. They begin with commands that are all about respecting God. In the middle is one command about respecting family. The remaining commands are about respecting the people in the community around us. These commands tell us a lot about what God cares about and who He is.

In Deuteronomy 6:5 God summarizes all the law. Jesus called this the greatest commandment. God desires what is best for Israel and what is best is purity, an exclusive relationship with Him. God knows that the Israelites will not be able to resist the temptation to worship idols if the people currently in the land remain. This is why they must be completely destroyed.

- Why did Israel have to fight to take the land?
- Why didn't God wipe out the people of the land?

The answers to these questions help us understand why God doesn't just immediately remove all the evil desires from our lives.

Day 3 --- Deuteronomy 8-10

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

The Israelites who arrived at the Promised Land had spent much time in the wilderness, but no time in slavery in Egypt. Moses tells them that it is very important to remember where they came from. They also need to remember who brought them to this point. We also see in this section God's desire that the Israelites care for people who are hurting even if they aren't Israelites. God's plan was to bless Israel so that they could bless all the nations around them.

We're introduced to a cycle that is very important to understand. It was repeated over and over with the Israelites and you'll see it as you continue reading. The people are oppressed and cry out to God for release. Slavery in Egypt is the best illustration. God rescues the people. The Exodus is the primary example used through all the Bible. God provides for His people. Every day the Israelites were walking in miracles as their shoes did not wear out to pick up food provided by God. The people take God for granted and begin to worship other gods. This will happen within two generations after entering the Promised Land. The people are oppressed by foreign nations and the cycle repeats itself.

- What does Moses recommend to prevent this cycle from happening?
- What do you need to remember to get you growing in your relationship with God?

Day 4 --- Deuteronomy 11-13

For Israel to continue to be faithful to God it was essential that each generation pass on their faith to the next generation. Moses repeats the instruction on how to do that. The Israelites were to make their sacrifices to God in only one place. They were to avoid idolatry at all costs. Idolatry is worshipping something that has been created rather than the Creator God. I once heard idolatry described as worshipping anything that gives you permission to do what you wanted to do anyway. An example would be a man who wants to have sex worshipping a fertility goddess who demands sex as a form of worship. Israel fell away from God over and over again as a result of idolatry. They could never say they hadn't been warned.

- What are the things in your life that could easily become idols?

Day 5 --- Deuteronomy 14-16

This section is like reading the constitution of Israel. There is an apparent contradiction in this section. First God says there are to be no poor and then later He says they are to care for the poor. The first is the ideal and the second is the reality. Note that God does not command economic equality. Instead, what He desires is generosity. Everyone should have enough and some will be blessed with more than others.

One of the things that Israel was to do regularly was celebrate. We've forgotten how to do this. We know how to seek pleasure and many have been destroyed in the process. We don't know how to enjoy God's provision in a way that leaves us feeling better and with stronger relationships when we're done than when we started. All of these celebrations and the sacrifices associated with them were based on faith. When I sacrifice the first born ox I have to believe that God will provide another one and another one. I have to believe that my current oxen will remain strong and healthy until the second born and third born are old enough to work. As long as the people were faithful to God this was true and they had many reasons to celebrate and much to celebrate with.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

- What are some things you do because you believe that you have to depend on yourself to survive?
- How would your behavior change if you really knew that God was going to provide all you needed tomorrow and every day after that?

Day 6 --- Deuteronomy 17-20

It was never God's intention (ideal) that Israel have a king, but the reality is that they will. Instead, they were to have judges who would be local officials in their communities who could make decisions when conflicts came up. They wouldn't need a king to lead the army and protect them because God was their King and Protector. Only one king even came close to God's instructions here, and even David didn't keep all these guidelines. His son Solomon would break them all and the kingdom went steadily downhill from his reign on.

I think our judicial system would totally change if we held to the requirement of at least 2 or 3 witnesses. Of course, this requirement made total sense in a community where everyone knew everyone else. Idolatry is a big deal to God, but there is one other thing that really matters to Him. Any form of divination, attempting to contact the spirit world, is absolutely forbidden. The spirit world is very real and it is opposed to God.

Some people think the God of the Old Testament is always mean and angry. In chapter 20 God describes the approach the people are to use when going to war against nations outside their borders. Think about it this way. How would you react to a threat to your children that is in your house or neighborhood? Compare that to how you would react to a threat to your children that is in another state. What we tend to miss in this is how much God loves His children the Israelites. He wants the very best for them and He knows how easily tempted they will be to be unfaithful.

- What should have been removed from your home and neighborhood?
- How far would a loving father go to protect his children?

Day 7 --- Deuteronomy 21-23

The law is very practical. For example, the Israelites are instructed to put borders, a railing, on their roofs so that no one falls off. Deuteronomy 22:13-30 makes it very clear to me that God intended sex for marriage. Our culture almost totally disregards this now and I think we have lost more than we know. This is without thinking about what happens to children in an environment where adults are not committed to life-long relationships with one another.

God's welfare system is described in chapter 23. The Israelites were primarily farmers. They had very few cities. If people were without a job or without money they could enter anyone's field and eat from the produce there. However, they couldn't take more than they could eat. Later when you read the story of Ruth you'll discover how this worked out in real life.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 12, Day 1 --- Deuteronomy 24-27

Week 12, Day 2 --- Deuteronomy 28-29

Week 12, Day 3 --- Deuteronomy 30-31

Week 12, Day 4 --- Deuteronomy 32-34 - Psalm 91

Week 12, Day 5 --- Joshua 1-4

Week 12, Day 6 --- Joshua 5-8

Week 12, Day 7 --- Joshua 9-11

Day 1 – Deuteronomy 24-27

Justice is a consistent theme throughout the Old Testament. Justice basically means making things right. In chapter 24 we get a glimpse at what that looks like. The situation in Israel was much like many places in the world today. People struggled each day to earn enough to buy food for that day. Many people, especially orphans and widows, had only one set of clothes and probably went hungry often. To be an orphan or widow was to be without a family. Where the family was absent, the community was to step in and help. As you continue to read watch what happens in Israel and how God responds.

Children were incredibly important. The expectation was that everyone married and had children. God's instruction here sounds very strange because it could end up with a man having more than one wife. However, it was normal for the oldest brother to get married first. There was no birth control, so normally the new family would have children before the second son married.

Moses concludes this section with instructions on how the Israelites are to remember what he has just told them. Every year they are to make a special offering. However, it isn't just the offering that is significant. They are to repeat the story of how they got to where they are so that they never forget that they are God's chosen people.

- Who cares for the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows in our country?

Day 2 – Deuteronomy 28-29

Moses begins by listing in detail all the things that God promises to provide for the Israelites as long as they are faithful to Him. This is a very clear promise of physical blessing. God doesn't promise to make the people wealthy in the way we think about wealth. He does promise to provide the people with an abundance. They will have no reason for discontent. However, there is a choice. The people can desire more than God provides and seek after it by worshiping other gods. The result will be that they will lose all they have. These are not chapters for children to read. The descriptions of what will happen to the people are gruesome. Unfortunately, they also come true.

This section includes a variety of blessings and curses. Both meant something at this time. Words had power and I think they still do, but we don't act like they do. God makes the choice for the Israelites very clear. He is a good parent and will follow through on what He says.

There is one statement that might be hard to accept.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Deuteronomy 28:63 (NIV) Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you.

Maybe you had a car that was really special to you. You loved that car, but one day it got really dirty. In fact, you went through some road work and it got some asphalt stuck on it. Now what are you going to do? If you don't do anything the car will get dirtier and dirtier and you'll never enjoy it the same way again. It needs to be cleaned. The cleaning will be hard work and if the surface of the car could feel it wouldn't feel very good when you were scrubbing off the asphalt. However, the result will be good for the car and you will enjoy the process because you know what the result will be. God promises that if the Israelites allow themselves to get dirty that He will take great pleasure in cleaning them up. This is a good thing.

- Did your parents follow through on what they said?
- What impact does saying one thing and doing another have on your relationship with someone?

Day 3 – Deuteronomy 30-31

Good news, bad news, and then good news. I think the promise of restoration in chapter 30 is the one that should give us the most hope. God knows that they people will turn away from Him. They will ask Him to leave and things will go very bad. However, no matter how bad they get God promises that the people can always return. Maybe this is why the descriptions in the previous chapters are so gruesome. God wants the people to know that He has already anticipated their evil and is ready to forgive and restore.

We think it is God's presence that is terrifying and we are wrong. As Christians we are promised that God will be present with us always. It is when God's removes His presence that evil takes over and evil destroys. God knows how rebellious the people are and He clearly warns them. He also makes certain they know who their new leader will be to avoid any unrest when Moses dies.

The song that God asks Moses to write in in tomorrow's reading.

- Are you experiencing blessings or curses in your life right now?
- What do you need to do to experience God's presence and blessings?

Day 4 – Deuteronomy 32-34 - Psalm 91

Have you ever heard a song like the one in chapter 32? There are several things in this song that are consistent themes all through the Bible. God is the creator. We owe our very existence to Him and because He created us we have a purpose. God is powerful. Nothing can stand against God, not anything in the physical world and not anything in the spiritual world. God is a holy and jealous God. God is a loving father who loves His children. He will destroy anything that threatens to turn His children away from Him.

Moses then blesses all the tribes. There is a special blessing for his own tribe. After the blessings are completed Moses and God once again spend some special time alone together

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before Moses leaves the earth to live with God forever. We know this is where Moses is because Moses comes to visit with Jesus when Jesus is on earth.

Psalm 91 is a shortened and positive version of the song that Moses instructed the people to sing. The devil quotes this song to Jesus when he tempts Him to jump off the temple. The devil twisted the meaning, but it is a wonderful song of hope and security.

- As you read through the blessings which tribe would you have wanted to be born into?
- How would Moses describe your tribe, the family and community you grew up in?

Day 5 – Joshua 1-4

The words “be strong and very courageous” are repeated over and over to Joshua. God would perform miracles and He was certainly on Israel’s side. However, He would not hand the land over to them without effort. Joshua will face many challenges and he will need to be both strong and courageous to succeed. God establishes Joshua as the leader with the crossing of the Jordan. What happens is all due to God’s power, but it is Joshua who gets the credit in the eyes of the people.

There are a number of famous women in Jesus' ancestry and you meet one of them in today's reading. (see Matthew 1 if you want to see her name in the list of Jesus' ancestors) She is a prostitute and a very effective liar, but she does have one incredible redeeming quality. She recognizes who God is and decides very quickly that He can save her and her whole family. This time the spies have a very different experience.

When the Israelites left Egypt they crossed through the Red Sea. They had little faith and God parted the waters before they entered into the Sea. Their faith has grown and God asks them to step into the water believing that it will part for them. This is how faith works. If you say I'll believe in God when He does this you will probably be disappointed. If God says to do something and you do it in faith, you'll constantly be amazed.

The Israelites didn't have cameras so that they could take pictures of everyone crossing through the Jordan on dry land. Instead they created a pile of stones as a reminder to them and to future generations of God's power and faithfulness.

- What establishes someone as a leader?
- What did your family do to help you remember important things in the past?
- What are you dealing with that calls for faith, strength, and courage?

Day 6 – Joshua 5-8

Now the action really begins and it begins with a very strange story. The Israelites have their backs to the river. They are in a very vulnerable position. God tells them to disable their army for several days by having all the men circumcised. This requires great trust because the men will be in great pain and unable to fight for several days. At the end of the time the people celebrate the Passover with produce from the land they are beginning to occupy.

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Jericho is captured just the way God says, but in a way that only God can receive the glory. Sieges were common in this time. The walls of a town prevented a foreign army from entering the city. Generally, the city had supplies that would enable it to survive for a year or more. The common method for defeating a walled town was either to wait a very long time or to build ramps of dirt that would allow the army to scale the walls. God didn't do either. He simply made the walls fall down.

The story of Achan teaches the dangers of partial obedience. God desires holiness or purity. When the people obey and follow God's instruction in dealing with Achan they are once again victorious. The reward for their obedience is that they get to keep the spoils of Ai.

- Why do you think complete obedience is so important to God?
- Why didn't Achan obey?
- Why did Achan hide what he had taken?

Day 7 – Joshua 9-11

What is the first thing everyone should do when confronted with a significant decision? For the wrong answer look closely at Joshua 9:14 and what happens. It is really very simple. When the people ignore God they suffer. Whenever they seek God's help He provides and they are blessed. It seems so simple. Why didn't they learn and increasingly seek God's help? Why don't we ask for God's help more often? In spite of everything, the Israelites succeed in conquering the land.

- How would your life be different if you had asked for God's direction when you had big life choices to make?

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Week 13, Day 1 --- Joshua 12-15

Week 13, Day 2 --- Joshua 16-18

Week 13, Day 3 --- Joshua 19-21

Week 13, Day 4 --- Joshua 22-24

Week 13, Day 5 --- Judges 1-2

Week 13, Day 6 --- Judges 3-5

Week 13, Day 7 --- Judges 6-7

Day 1 --- Joshua 12-15

It seems to me that Joshua has aged while Caleb still has not. Remember that these were the only two Israelite men over 20 who survived the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Maybe the burden of leadership has aged Joshua the way it ages all leaders. The Promised Land had boundaries, just like our lives. God blessed the Israelites, but He also set limits. They conquered much of the land, enough to get comfortable, but then they didn't finish the job.

Day 2 --- Joshua 16-18

This section describes the process for dividing up the lands to the tribes. Each of the tribes stopped far short of what God intended and had promised. You can see signs of trouble coming for the future. Ephraim and Manasseh were the two largest and most powerful tribes. When Joshua told them that they could have more land simply by going out and conquering it they responded in fear.

- What were these two tribes forgetting if they were discouraged by iron chariots?
- What do you think will happen as a result of not completing what God asked them to do?

Day 3 --- Joshua 19-21

This section of scripture is always hard to read. It just seems like a list of unpronounceable names. What is amazing is that some of the cities still exist so there are some clues that can be taken from these lists to get an idea of how the land was distributed. Here's what I noticed. I know that Simeon is one of the tribes that becomes a part of the Northern Kingdom. Their allotment of land was the most southern portion of the land. I'm going to be watching now to see if there is any indication as to when they move from the south to the north and give up their land.

The cities of refuge were extremely important. There was no police force in these days, but there was a justice system. It would be very difficult for the family and friends of a victim to provide a fair trial, so God has the accused run to a town where the elders can give an objective judgment. God also knows how difficult it is for us to forgive, so he has the accused remain away even when innocent to reduce the temptation for the family of the victim to take revenge.

Joshua 21:43-45 is a very important set of verses. God kept His promise and the Israelites had a land of their own.

Day 4 --- Joshua 22-24

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The concept of one God and one place to worship God was very unusual at this time. Most of the peoples of the earth worshiped idols. Their idols were wood, stone, or precious metal images of multiple gods. They had these in their houses and many times on the hills near their towns. When the western tribes heard that the eastern tribes had built an altar they were afraid that the eastern tribes had very quickly deserted God to follow their own gods. They understood their agreement with God and knew that He would destroy them all if this was the case.

The people want to do things right. They fear God, but don't understand His love for them. We need both. If we see God only as powerful and holy we will eventually rebel even if we are punished. If we see God only as loving and forgiving then we will eventually ignore Him and do whatever we want. God is all of these things. He is truth and grace in one person. Truth sets the boundaries and grace makes it desirable to live within them. The people of Israel have a choice and Joshua once again presents it.

The recording of this choice process may be shorter than it was with Moses, but Joshua basically goes through the same process with the Israelites before he dies. He renews the covenant and as long as the leaders of his generation are alive the people keep it.

- What is the most significant promise that you have made, but not kept?
- Why didn't you keep it?

Day 5 --- Judges 1-2

The first couple of chapters of Judges overlap with the end of Joshua and are a review. This review gives us a little better understanding into why the land was not totally conquered. The people begin to worship other gods just as God had predicted. God in His goodness presented the possibility of eliminating the evil. Instead, the people immerse themselves in evil. The book of Judges is going to show the consequences of this choice over and over.

The city of Jerusalem is mentioned twice in the first chapter. On the surface it seems that the tribe of Judah completely destroys it, and then we are told that the tribe of Benjamin fails to conquer it. We know that Jerusalem was not completely captured and controlled until much later in the reign of King David. Jerusalem was on the border between Judah and Benjamin. It is most likely that Judah was able to conquer the portion of the city lying in their territory, but that Benjamin failed to complete the task.

- Why do you think the people so quickly turned to idols?
- How do you respond when someone doesn't quickly give you what you want?

Day 6 --- Judges 3-5

You might have gotten the impression that women never did anything significant in the Bible. The story of Deborah should change that impression. The pattern you see in these chapters will repeat itself over and over again. The people are tested and they fail the test. They make bad choices and suffer the consequences. Eventually, the consequences are so severe that they cry out to God. God sends a hero to save them. However, notice that their salvation always comes in cooperation with God. After the battle there is peace for a time. Forty years would have been

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about one generation. It is a rare thing when the peace lasts for multiple generations. In Deborah's song you can see that the rivalry between the tribes is very apparent. King Saul and King David will eventually pull the tribes together, but only for a very brief time.

- What do you learn about God from these chapters?

Day 7 --- Judges 6-7

This section includes the story of Gideon. It is a favorite children's Bible story, but we only tell the positive parts. The story doesn't begin very well and ends very badly. The constantly repeated phrase in this book is "the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord". When they repented and they had a really good judge then they were blessed with 40 years of peace. I think there are two lessons from this section. First, God wants us to choose Him and He won't force us to do that. Second, He is strong enough to defeat all enemies. He can even use cowards like Gideon.

- What does Gideon know about God before the battle?
- How much does Gideon trust God before the battle?
- How would you expect Gideon to act after God gives the Israelites a great victory?

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Week 14, Day 1 --- Judges 8-9

Week 14, Day 2 --- Judges 10-12

Week 14, Day 3 --- Judges 13-15

Week 14, Day 4 --- Judges 16-18

Week 14, Day 5 --- Judges 19-21

Week 14, Day 6 --- Ruth 1-4

Week 14, Day 7 --- 1 Samuel 1-3

Day 1 --- Judges 8-9

There is a huge spiritual leadership vacuum in Israel. No one is helping the people maintain their relationship with God. The result is that the people experience periods of peace, but violence and immorality are the norm. Gideon has a brief moment when he recognizes God's rule and then he quickly forgets and makes the ephod. His prosperity and success do not result in good.

- What similarities to your own story do you see in this story?
- What seems to be the greatest danger for the Israelites?

Day 2 --- Judges 10-12

There is something unusual in chapter 10. It isn't that the Israelites turn away from God to serve idols. The unusual thing is that they actually return to worshiping God before He rescues them.

Jephthah knows his history. He seems to be a very intelligent man and makes an excellent response to the king of the Ammonites. In spite of his intelligence and the Spirit of God within him Jephthah makes a very foolish vow. Remember what God said about the foolishness of making vows. I think this story is here as a very clear reminder. Jephthah sinned in making the vow in the first place. Then, I think he sinned when he kept the vow. The Bible is unclear, but I think that Jephthah sacrificed, killed, his daughter. I am certain that God would have preferred that he break his vow rather than kill his daughter.

Keeping his vow in this way did not bring Jephthah or Israel peace. The tribes are jealous of one another and when they aren't fighting outside enemies they are fighting each other. Many from the tribe of Ephraim die as a result. There is no peace in the land and we begin to see many judges with very short times in their role.

- What could Jephthah have vowed that would have truly honored God?
- What is the worst promise you have ever made?

Day 3 --- Judges 13-15

The land is evil, but there are always people of God living in evil lands. Manoah and his wife are a couple who know God and who are doing their best to honor Him. They are told they are going to have a son. This chapter is an argument for life beginning at conception. Not only is the son to be born to be a Nazirite, but his mother is to keep the Nazirite vow from the time of conception on. The Nazirite vow was a vow of purity and a part of it was refrain from drinking anything that had alcohol in it. (for more information return and read Numbers 6) Since any alcohol the mother drank would be passed to the baby she was not to drink either. Manoah's

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

wife understands what God is up to. She trusts God and I suspect that this is why God chose her to be Samson's mother.

Samson is incredibly strong, but he is not a typical leader. He really has no ambition other than to satisfy his own desires. His greatest weakness is his love for women and God uses that to free the Israelites and punish the Philistines.

- Why does God use Samson to rescue the Israelites?
- How is Samson like many of the heroes of today?

A Simple Prayer

NIV Judges 13:8 Then Manoah prayed to the Lord: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."

One of my projects over this coming year is to document all the prayers in the Bible as I read through it. I admit that I started looking for clues to how to pray the right way. What I'm finding already is changing my thoughts on prayer. I got a late start on this project, so I'm beginning in Judges. Judges is a very discouraging book, but in between all the rebellion and disaster there are a few really positive stories. Today's prayer comes out of one of those stories.

Manoah and his wife did not have any children. They were to become the parents of Samson and God had some special instructions to give them. We often expect God to communicate to the strong and powerful, but the truth is He usually communicates to those who we least expect. In this case God sends an angel with a wonderful message for Manoah's wife. She tells her husband and that leads to this wonderful prayer.

We so often make a big deal out of forms and posture when it comes to prayer. The only thing that we find here is that Manoah addresses God in a very respectful way. I think his attitude is the key to the effectiveness of his prayer. He is a simple man who genuinely desires to do what God desires. His request is simple, direct, and specific. He is an unusual man at this time of history because he is a man of great trust. He trusts his wife and he trusts God. There is no indication in the story that the man questioned his wife in any way regarding the message from the angel. Instead, he responds immediately with this prayer.

Day 4 --- Judges 16-18

As long as Samson kept the letter of his vow his strength remained. The vow of the Nazirite was supposed to indicate someone who had set himself apart for God's special use. Samson kept the letter of the vow, but not the spirit. It certainly seems that he desired women more than he desired to be used by God. Samson broke his vow and his strength leaves. In the end he dies, but the way he dies is a huge defeat for the Philistines. His time of suffering in prison brings him to the place where he finally recognizes that God is the source of his strength.

The Law is very clear about the making of idols. The next two chapters illustrate the depth to which Israel was falling. While I'm certain there were exceptions, it does seem that the majority of the people in Israel are not living according to God's instructions.

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- Why did Samson let Delilah know his secret?
- How many examples can you find in just this short section of violations of God's law?

Prayer is not about me

Very early on in the Bible we discover that having our prayers answered is not dependent on either proper form or our goodness. Samson is one of the most interesting characters in the Bible. His strength is tied to keeping a vow that includes not cutting his hair. However, outside the conditions of his vow he does not keep the law of God. He does have a relationship with God, but I don't think it is one I would want to copy. Here I am already focusing on Samson and I think that misses the point.

Now Samson was very thirsty, and he cried out to the Lord, "You have accomplished this great victory by the strength of your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of these pagan people?" So God caused water to gush out of a hollow in the ground at Lehi, and Samson was revived as he drank. Then he named that place "The Spring of the One Who Cried Out," and it is still in Lehi to this day. Judges 15:18,19 (NLT)

God has a plan. After 40 years of disciplining the Israelites at the hands of the Philistines God decides to send them a deliverer. That deliverer is Samson. God gives Samson great strength and with that strength Samson takes vengeance on the Philistines. Samson doesn't come to God with a request. Instead he makes a demand and God provides exactly what Samson asks for. God has a plan and it certainly won't come to pass if Samson dies, so he causes water to come out of the ground. I don't think God is even surprised when Samson names the spring after himself. God isn't looking for credit or thanks. The water flows from His power and goodness.

Then Samson prayed to the Lord, "Sovereign Lord, remember me again. O God, please strengthen me one more time so that I may pay back the Philistines for the loss of my eyes." Then Samson put his hands on the center pillars of the temple and pushed against them with all his might. "Let me die with the Philistines," he prayed. And the temple crashed down on the Philistine leaders and all the people. So he killed more people when he died than he had during his entire lifetime. Judges 16:28-30 (NLT)

Samson does pray one more time and his attitude is different this time, but I don't think it is his attitude that motivates God to answer the prayer. God's will is to destroy the Philistines and Samson's request is in line with God's will.

I think one of the first lessons we must learn is to stop trying to manipulate God through prayer into helping us accomplish our will. Instead, the more we surrender to God's will and desire to see it accomplished the more likely we are to see God at work through us and our prayers.

Day 5 --- Judges 19-21

Judges ends in a very depressing way. The writer describes the evil as being as bad as Sodom and that was very evil. (see Genesis 19 for a comparison) It was the custom in that time for travelers to stay in the home of someone in the town they were visiting. It was expected that someone would open their house and provide food and lodging. This was true even if the person who was traveling was a known enemy. The opposite was true in Gibeah this night. The

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town square was a dangerous place and it is obvious that a band of bullies ruled the town. The man's wife is raped and murdered.

The man sends a very graphic message to the tribes of Israel. It draws them together as nothing else has in many years. It seems like it should be simple for the army of all Israel to destroy one town, but Benjamin pulls itself together to defend the evil town. The result is that all Israel suffers loss for allowing this evil to exist.

The tribe of Benjamin is punished for their part in the evil that occurs, but the punishment doesn't seem to make Israel better. There is no real turning toward God. The solution for preserving Benjamin is man's solution and not God's solution. When the writer tells us that Israel had no king there is a double meaning. The obvious meaning is that they did not have a physical king to rule over them. The less obvious meaning is that they did not recognize God as their king. This was the real problem.

- How did the town of Gibeah become such an evil place?
- Why didn't the people of Israel continue to seek God's direction after their victory over Benjamin?

Day 6 --- Ruth 1-4

For some background on the concept of the kinsman-redeemer go back and read both Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Leviticus 25:23-28. The basic idea was that the family line was to be preserved and land kept in the family. If husbands died before they had children, then close relatives were to take responsibility for preserving the man's name and his land.

Naomi is one of the most normal people in the whole Bible. She has a relationship with God and expresses both joy and anger toward Him. In the Old Testament there are characters, events, and places that illustrate in a shadowy way something that God is going to do in the New Testament. Ruth was this kind of character. She is an Old Testament illustration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is a poor young woman who is willing to do whatever God asks. She trusts God and gives birth to a line of kings.

This story was probably written early in the reign of King David to establish his right to sit on the throne even though he had a Moabite in his family line. It is also a good illustration of how God seems to work. Something really bad happens and God works through it for good. Remember that this story occurs during the same time described in the book of Judges. The culture overall is headed in a very bad direction, but there are still people who recognize and honor God in Israel.

- How would you feel toward God if you lost your spouse and children?
- What does God want you to remember even in the worst of circumstances?

Day 7 --- 1 Samuel 1-3

Once again we are reminded that there are believers in Israel. There always are believers, because God always preserves a few. Hannah makes one of the few vows in the Bible that is kept. This one faithful woman is the beginning of change in Israel.

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There have been prophets in Israel before this, but this section is a good description of how prophecy works. God speaks to Samuel and then Samuel speaks to the people. The messages are clearly from God because they come true.

- How well do your desires match God's desires for you?
- How would you respond if you heard God speak to you?
- How would you know it was God who was speaking?

A Model of Praise

We generally think of bargaining with God as a bad thing, yet it seems to be common in the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 1:10-12 Hannah recognizes that only God can help her. She prays a very simple prayer in the form of a vow. She appeals to God's character by drawing attention to the misery she experiences as a childless wife and then she asks for a son. She doesn't just ask for a child, but she specifically asks for a son. If God provides her with a son, then she will give the son back to God. She has made her request to the right person and God honors her request and more. In 1 Samuel 2:21 we are told that Hannah was given 6 children, 4 sons and 2 daughters.

We can learn much from Hannah's simple prayer. It is short and specific. There was no question about who answered the prayer, at least in Hannah's mind. In response she prays one of the most eloquent prayers of praise in the Bible. The focus of the prayer is God, specifically His sovereignty. In 1 Samuel 2:1-10 she pours out her heart in praise to God who has lifted her out of her misery and provided her with a son. As eloquent as it is it is not a perfect model for what and how to pray. We don't know if she prayed this prayer in the hearing of Elkanah's other wife, but there is a line that seems directed her way.

"Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed." 1 Samuel 2:3 (NIV)

How often we use prayer to communicate to others more than to God. It seems that we think prayer gives us license to say things indirectly that we'd probably never say directly. Even Hannah's eloquent praise is diminished by a self-serving criticism. Remember her words of praise and resist the temptation to talk to others when you're talking to God.

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Week 15, Day 1 --- 1 Samuel 4-8

Week 15, Day 2 --- 1 Samuel 9-12

Week 15, Day 3 --- 1 Samuel 13-14

Week 15, Day 4 --- 1 Samuel 15-17

Week 15, Day 5 --- Psalm 11 - 1 Samuel 18-20 - Psalm 59

Week 15, Day 6 --- 1 Samuel 21-24

Week 15, Day 7 --- Psalm 7 - Psalm 27 - Psalm 31 - Psalm 34 - Psalm 52

Day 1 --- 1 Samuel 4-8

We desire to worship something we can see, understand, and control. The Philistines understood their god Dagon, so even when they recognized the power of the God of Israel they wanted nothing to do with Him. All they had ever worshipped were idols, so it is easy to understand why they thought Israel's God was in the Ark of the Covenant.

The reaction of the Philistines is understandable. Unfortunately, so is the reaction of the Israelites when the Ark is returned. They had become so used to worshipping other idols that they made an idol of the Ark. The ark was normally hidden behind a curtain so that it wouldn't be seen as an object of worship, an idol. It will be a long time before the Ark is returned to the tabernacle.

Samuel was a great leader in Israel. He was the first leader in a long time to lead the people back to God. Still, he wasn't able to pass on his love for God and justice to his sons. I don't know why Israel thought a king's sons would be better than Samuel's. God gives them warning, but they are so anxious to be like everyone else that they ignore the warning.

- Why did 70 men die for looking at or into the ark?
- What do you learn about God in these chapters?

Day 2 --- 1 Samuel 9-12

Saul begins as a very reluctant king. He is the kind of person who would be the normal choice for king at this time. He is big, strong, and wealthy. God even gives him a great victory to help in pulling the people together. At the same time God's choice is interesting because of the tribe that Saul is from. Remember that Benjamin was the smallest tribe because they had been slaughtered by the rest of Israel for their unwillingness to deal with sin in their tribe.

When Samuel transfers power to Saul he has some very important reminders for the people. The Israelites are never to forget that God rescued them from Egypt. They are also reminded that their prosperity is not dependent on their king, but on their obedience to God. Samuel's parting comment is a promise to continue praying for all Israel. They will need it.

- Have our reasons for picking leaders changed?
- God tells us that the purpose of a king is to restrain the people?
- Why do we need restraining?
- What would we do if we didn't have government?

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Day 3 --- 1 Samuel 13-14

This section is an overview of the life and reign of Saul. There is an important lesson in chapter 13. Saul and the Israelite army are in a difficult situation. They know that they need God on their side to win the victory. Saul thinks that he can gain God's help and approval by offering a sacrifice. He knows that Samuel should be the one to do that, but Samuel doesn't come when Saul wants him to. Saul attempts to please God with the sacrifice, but doesn't trust God enough to wait. By doing this he demonstrates that his heart is only concerned with his personal agenda. He has not placed God first and God tells him that he will be the last king from his family.

This passage also explains why the Israelites so desperately needed God's help. They didn't have metal weapons. The only way they would get them is from Philistine soldiers that they killed. Jonathan is a courageous man of faith and he will do many great things during his life. If he has any flaw it is that he does not respect his father.

- What is Jonathan's greatest sin in this section?
- When have you been unwilling to wait for God?

Day 4 --- 1 Samuel 15-17

1 Samuel 15: 22,23 is worth memorizing. It reveals that God desires obedience more than anything else. As you read through the Bible you'll notice that this never changes. Saul rebels against God and David obeys. The timing in this section may seem confusing, but 1 Samuel 17:14,15 explains that David is going back and forth between his home and Saul's camp.

This section presents a dramatic comparison of two powerful men. Saul is a great warrior, but he fears the people more than he fears God. David is a young shepherd who loves and fears God more than anyone or anything. Both achieve great victories, but God's response is very different because of their different attitudes towards Him.

- Why did Saul and the soldiers keep the best of the sheep and the cattle after defeating the Amalekites?
- How is the phrase, "It is easier to ask forgiveness, then to get permission.", similar to Saul's attitude?

Day 5 --- Psalm 11 - 1 Samuel 18-20 - Psalm 59

Saul cannot accept the fact that God is going to take the kingdom away from him. He cannot rejoice in the victories that David is providing for Israel, because he quickly recognizes that David is the future king. The only solution Saul can think of is to kill David. This rivalry between Saul and David will last as long as Saul lives.

David and Jonathan had a very special friendship. It was very typical for a new king to kill all his rivals. David is not going to do that, because of the promise that he makes to Jonathan. The Psalms are an expression of love and emotion. It is a book of poetry or songs. Today's psalms express David's trust in God.

- What are the most important characteristics of God to David?

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- What would you like to tell God today?

Day 6 --- 1 Samuel 21-24

David is on the run for his life from Saul. This is probably the best time of David's life. The contrast between Saul and David is dramatic. Saul has innocent people killed while David defends the unwanted. There is no question that David could have killed Saul in the cave. He doesn't do that and even keeps his men from killing Saul for him.

Remember that the ephod contained the Urim and Thummim. We don't know exactly what these were, but we suspect they were two stones that were identical except for their color. When the priest was asked a yes or no question to present to God he would reach in and pull out one of the stones. One stone stood for yes and the other for no. There was no chance involved. God spoke through the stones that were chosen. David always sought God's advice and help while Saul sought the advice and help of selfish men.

- If you were evaluating the armies of Saul and David like you would evaluate a sports team, who had the better army?
- Whose advice do you seek when you are in a difficult situation?

Day 7 --- Psalm 7 - Psalm 27 - Psalm 31 - Psalm 34 - Psalm 52

In addition to being a great warrior, David was also a great poet and musician. He wrote and played songs that he played to calm Saul's spirit. I doubt that any of today's psalms were in the group David played for Saul.

Hebrew poetry is different from our poetry. In Hebrew poetry the key form is the repetition of an idea in slightly different words. In this reading plan the psalms are matched up with the story either by the introduction or by the topic. So, today's psalms were all written during a time when David was on the run for his life. As you read the psalms notice how many times they mention things that will come true in Jesus' life. For example, 'bones will not be broken'.

- What parts of God's character give David confidence during his time of trouble?
- What is the most important thing you have discovered while reading these psalms?

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 16, Day 1 --- Psalm 56 - Psalm 120 - Psalm 140-142

Week 16, Day 2 --- 1 Samuel 25-27

Week 16, Day 3 --- Psalm 17 - Psalm 35 - Psalm 54 - Psalm 63

Week 16, Day 4 --- Psalm 18 - 1 Samuel 28-31

Week 16, Day 5 --- Psalm 121 - Psalm 123-125 - Psalm 128-130

Week 16, Day 6 --- 2 Samuel 1-4

Week 16, Day 7 --- Psalm 6 - Psalm 8-10 - Psalm 14 - Psalm 16 - Psalm 19 - Psalm 21

Day 1 --- Psalm 56 - Psalm 120 - Psalm 140-142

David wasn't in prison, but he had no freedom. He was in hiding and if found he could be killed. The threat against his life was real, but so was his trust in God. The psalms are emotional expressions of David's faith. They are also prayers. When you can't think of what to say to God you may find that one of David's prayers fits your situation. Read the psalm aloud to God and He will hear.

- How do these psalms make you feel?
- Which of these psalms do you most identify with? Why?

Day 2 --- 1 Samuel 25-27

It is normal to reward someone who does us a favor even if it is not requested. David was a shepherd and knew how to protect flocks. Nabal had become wealthy because of David's protection. When he refused to share with David he was wrong. However, David was even more wrong to desire revenge. David's vengeance would have gone far beyond what Nabal's insult deserved. Nabal is saved by a very intelligent wife.

Saul will not give up. His focus is on killing David when it could have been on defeating the Philistines and expanding the kingdom. Once again David honors Saul and refuses to kill him even when he has the opportunity.

I think if David had completely trusted God he would have stayed in Israel. It is impossible to know how God might have honored his trust. However, David decides to take up a life of deception and move into Philistine territory.

David is a great man, but not perfect. In the psalms David expresses his trust in God, but in today's passages he also seeks revenge and runs from Saul. He also shows the weakness that will lead to the dividing of his kingdom when he takes two wives.

- How does David demonstrate his lack of trust in God in today's chapters?
- What are you doing that demonstrates that you trust your own ideas more than God's?

Day 3 --- Psalm 17 - Psalm 35 - Psalm 54 - Psalm 63

I don't know what order these psalms were actually written in. As you read them I think you can see David's confidence in God's plan growing. This is the wilderness time of David's life. In the wilderness we learn to depend totally on God. The other important lesson that David teaches us is that we must depend on God for vengeance. God's goodness and love never fail.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

- What are the common threads that run through all these psalms?
- How is your own situation similar to David's?

Day 4 --- Psalm 18 - 1 Samuel 28-31

The opening psalm in today's reading is a good example of what the psalms are all about. Remember that David only had words to communicate what he was feeling and experiencing. If David was living today he might have tried to make a movie. Imagine the special effects that would be required to communicate what David is saying. David is painting a word picture. He is trying to communicate some very important ideas in words alone.

In today's section Saul is desperate for guidance and seeks out a medium. This was absolutely against God's law. The spirit world is real, but the medium was surprised by Samuel. I think this is because her business was based on lies and deception. When the real Samuel appeared she was shocked. David is protected by God by being drawn away from one battle into another. David asks God for direction and receives it. Saul goes into battle and dies with most of his sons and the transition of the kingdom from Saul's house to David's house begins.

- What do you feel about God when you read through Psalm 18?
- How do you think it would feel to know that you were going to die tomorrow?

Day 5 --- Psalm 121 - Psalm 123-125 - Psalm 128-130

These psalms are part of a set of psalms called the psalms of ascent. They were songs the people sang as they traveled to Jerusalem at feast time.

- What do you feel as you read them?
- What do they tell you about God?
- What do they tell you about yourself?

Day 6 --- 2 Samuel 1-4

There are times when God is very active. There are other times when God allows things to work out through the normal affairs of men. The transition of power described in these chapters seems incredibly violent to us as Americans. We are used to a bloodless transition of power every 4 or 8 years. This was not normal in ancient times. The change of kings was almost always accompanied by violence even if the transition was within the family. David is very wise and this transition is actually a very peaceful one compared to what is to come.

Even though God had promised David the entire kingdom of Israel it took many years for him to become king of the entire nation. David understood politics while his generals understood power. David's approach wins over the people and unifies the nation with a minimum of bloodshed. However, watch Joab as the book of 2 Samuel continues. He is an important character and his life and David's life seem to be tied to each other.

- What did everyone expect David to do when one of his enemies was killed?

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

- Why could David mourn at the death of an enemy?
- How do you feel when an enemy suffers?

Day 7 --- Psalm 6 - Psalm 8-10 - Psalm 14 - Psalm 16 - Psalm 19 - Psalm 21

After you read these psalms describe the feelings David has for God.

- What do feel as you read these psalms?
- What have you learned about God from them?

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 17, Day 1 --- 1 Chronicles 1-2

Week 17, Day 2 --- Psalm 43-45 - Psalm 49 - Psalm 84-85 - Psalm 87

Week 17, Day 3 --- 1 Chronicles 3-5

Week 17, Day 4 --- Psalm 73 - Psalm 77-78

Week 17, Day 5 --- 1 Chronicles 6

Week 17, Day 6 --- Psalm 81 - Psalm 88 - Psalm 92-93

Week 17, Day 7 --- 1 Chronicles 7-10

Day 1 --- 1 Chronicles 1-2

The Bible often tells the same story from several different points of view. This is when reading through the Bible in the order that things happened becomes very interesting. Much of 1 Chronicles is going to parallel 2 Samuel, but the two books will emphasize different things. Both are books of history and will give us a lot of facts. Psalms will give us the inside emotional response of David, who is the central human character in the story. The purpose of today's two chapters is to establish David's ancestry. Most of the names are meaningless to us. However, look for Abshai, Joab, and Asahel in today's reading.

- What is their relationship to David?
- Who are the close relatives who have had a big influence in your life?

Day 2 --- Psalm 43-45 - Psalm 49 - Psalm 84-85 - Psalm 87

Today you will read a variety of psalms written by the Sons of Korah. I think they are placed here because we'll soon discover their function in David's kingdom. Check out this verse and then see if Psalm 84 makes more sense.

1 Chronicles 9:19 (New International Version)

Shallum son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his fellow gatekeepers from his family (the Korahites) were responsible for guarding the thresholds of the Tent just as their fathers had been responsible for guarding the entrance to the dwelling of the LORD.

While they guarded the entrance to the tabernacle, they apparently also wrote songs. Psalm 44 is a cry to God to come rescue the innocent. There were many times when Israel suffered as a result of its sin. However, remember Job. There are times when suffering and persecution come even to the righteous. Psalm 45 is a psalm in praise of King David. Psalm 49 speaks of the powerlessness of riches. 84 – This psalm includes a verse that is the basis for one of my favorite worship songs. “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” 85 – One of the amazing things about God is that in Him we find both grace and truth. That’s what this phrase is talking about. “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.” 87 – The glory of Jerusalem.

As you're learning to pray one of the best things to do is to find a psalm that speaks to where you are right now. When you've found one, read it aloud to God as if you were the one who wrote it. God will hear and understand.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

- Where would you like to spend the rest of your life?
- Which of these psalms best connects with your current situation?

Day 3 --- 1 Chronicles 3-5

I admit it. Today's section is a hard one to read because it seems to be just full of names and nothing else. Like most sections of the Bible there are some important things included with the names. There is both a positive and a negative. The positive is in 1 Chronicles 4:9,10. It is the prayer of Jabez. A book was written several years ago about these two verses that stayed on the bestseller list for over a year. The message of the book was that if we just pray for more we'll get more. Unfortunately, our desires for more are too often not desires for what God desires. In this case I think we will find our prayers frustrated. However, the positive is that Jabez saw God as his only source of hope and cried out to Him. The result was that God came to His aid.

Contrast that with the end of chapter 5. Verses 18-26 carry a clear warning. Three tribes were very blessed, but they used their blessing to pursue other gods and their own pleasure. As a result God's blessing was removed and they were taken into captivity.

This section of the book is like a movie trailer. It is a quick preview of what is to come in the next two books. It was probably written while Judah was in captivity or shortly after that to remind the people of their history. The lists of people were important because the people were attempting to establish their identity – which tribe they belonged to.

- Who are the important men and women in your family's history?
- What do you desire that only God can provide?

Day 4 --- Psalm 73 - Psalm 77-78

We return to the Psalms today and the first one must be read through from beginning to end. It is an illustration of why the Bible must not be read a verse at a time with each verse pulled away from those around it. Psalm 73 is one I identify with. I have a meeting to go to this morning and the words of this psalm match much of what I'm feeling. Asaph was jealous of those who were prosperous and evil. When we look only at this life it is easy to wonder why anyone would follow God. When we change our point of view and look toward God and eternity everything begins to make sense. Who have you been jealous of? What do you desire more than anything else?

In Psalm 77 Asaph expresses a common feeling and that is the feeling of doubt toward God. The way he suggests to resolve the doubt is to look back. What events does Asaph suggest the Israelites look back toward when they begin to doubt? What events do Christians look back toward when they begin to doubt?

Psalm 78 is a quick review of the history of Israel. It is not a pleasant history. God is consistently trying to win back the people He loves and the people are consistently unfaithful. The climax of the psalm is the selection of David as king. When do you think this psalm might have first been sung? How would you feel if you sang this song often as a part of your worship of God?

Day 5 --- 1 Chronicles 6

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

1 Chronicles will soon return to the story, but first the author is establishing the cast of characters. The lists of characters stretch all the way back to the Exodus and look forward to the time when Israel will be exiled to Babylon. Note in verse 39 the name of Asaph. All of the psalms in yesterday's reading were written by Asaph. This must have been an incredible time for worship in Israel. It appears that most of the psalms were written during this period of Israel's history.

Day 6 --- Psalm 81 - Psalm 88 - Psalm 92-93

Psalm 81 – Today includes more psalms written by Asaph. What do you hear in God's voice as it is spoken by Asaph in this psalm? Have you ever heard your father say anything similar?

Psalm 88 – This psalm is by the sons of Korah. They also had responsibilities at the tabernacle. People sometimes get the impression that they can only pray to God with happy prayers. In their minds it is never okay to complain at God or be angry with Him. One of the things that the psalms teach us is that God is comfortable and desires to hear our full range of emotions. Sometimes a psalm like this will end with a single phrase that seems to make it positive, a happy ending. This psalm does not end that way. Have you ever felt this way? More importantly, have you ever expressed feelings like this to God?

Psalm 92-93 – We aren't told who wrote these psalms. They are both psalms of praise. As I'm writing this it is very quiet early in the morning, and the only thing I can hear is the roar of the waves. They are probably a mile away, but I can still hear them. The waves always remind me of God. The surf may change in intensity, but it never stops. God never stops. He never stops loving us. He never stops being in charge.

Day 7 --- 1 Chronicles 7-10

Notice at the end of chapter 8 that there is a listing of Saul's descendants. What is significant about this list? What promise was kept for there to even be a list? All that you've been reading this week leads up to chapter 10. Saul and his sons have died. David is now king and the rest of the story can be told.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 18, Day 1 --- Psalm 102-104

Week 18, Day 2 --- 2 Samuel 5:1-10 - 1 Chronicles 11-12

Week 18, Day 3 --- Psalm 133

Week 18, Day 4 --- Psalm 106-107

Week 18, Day 5 --- 2 Samuel 5:11-6:23 - 1 Chronicles 13-16

Week 18, Day 6 --- Psalm 1-2 - Psalm 15 - Psalm 22-24 - Psalm 47 - Psalm 68

Week 18, Day 7 --- Psalm 89 - Psalm 96 - Psalm 100 - Psalm 101 - Psalm 105 - Psalm 132

Day 1 --- Psalm 102-104

In some ways these psalms should be read in reverse order. The last two are full of promises and descriptions of God. The first is a cry for help. You might find it helpful to go back and read Genesis 1 after reading Psalm 104. Take the time to write down the promises that God makes through these psalms. What is always true about God?

Day 2 --- 2 Samuel 5:1-10 - 1 Chronicles 11-12

We take for granted the smooth and non-violent transfer of power. We elect a new president and he comes into office without a major war occurring. This wasn't the normal thing in David's time. A new king typically came to power because his army had been victorious over the army of the previous king. David would go to war, but not against his fellow Israelites. God was preparing to bring in a time of peace, but war against Israel's enemies would be the first step. These were his warriors. Some of the names you'll never read again. There are others who will be important characters through the whole story. How old was David when he became king over Judah?

Day 3 --- Psalm 133

You probably know how hard it is for brothers to live in unity. Some of the images in this psalm may not make sense. For example, in a hot and dry climate the skin becomes dry and can crack. They didn't have hand lotion. Oil on the head and face would be a luxury, but would feel really good. Jacob's sons fought all the time. The tribes of Israel often fought against one another. For this one brief moment in history God brought them together under David. It must have been an incredible time.

Day 4 --- Psalm 106-107

Psalm 106 begins with praise and thanksgiving and ends with praise and thanksgiving. In between is a review of Israel's history from the Exodus to the Babylonian captivity. You haven't read about that yet, but it is close to the end of the story in the Old Testament. I think this psalm was written during the Babylonian captivity, many hundreds of years after David.

Psalm 107 contains a very important message. It describes a variety of circumstances where people are in trouble and God rescues them. I think the message is that our circumstances are continually changing, but God's love never changes.

Day 5 --- 2 Samuel 5:11-6:23 - 1 Chronicles 13-16

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

There is so much in this section of reading that it is hard to know where to begin. It is important to read both accounts of this period of history. They are written from different points of view, but together it is possible to get a more complete picture. For example, in 2 Samuel David and his men gather up the idols of the Philistines after battle. That could be good or it could be very bad. 1 Chronicles explains that they gather them up and burn them. That is very good. Notice that David always inquires of God before battle and the result is that he is consistently victorious.

There was a time when David was just like any other man and refused to read the instruction manual. The books of the law are very clear on how the Ark of the Covenant is to be moved from place to place. (see Numbers 4 for instructions on carrying the ark) It was to be carried on poles by the Levites and it was not to be touched by anyone. David chose the fast way to move the ark and the result was that when it was about to slip off the cart Uzzah reached out to steady it and died. This was an important reminder to David about how serious God is about obedience.

David goes back and reads the instructions and the second time he goes to get the ark he does it right. David throws a huge party to celebrate the return of the ark. There is singing and dancing and incredible amounts of food. David could have been the center of attention, but instead he removes his royal robes and dresses in the most simple common way he can. Saul's daughter Michal, David's wife, gets very upset that David is dancing with the common people. The result for her is that she never has a child and that was a terrible thing for a woman in that day.

This section ends with a psalm. It is a celebration song. I look forward to the day when I can hear it sung just as it was then.

Day 6 --- Psalm 1-2 - Psalm 15 - Psalm 22-24 - Psalm 47 - Psalm 68

In most of these psalms the emphasis is on the triumphant reign of God. God is the ultimate King. However, in the middle of your reading you'll come across Psalms 22-24. Psalm 22 is a prophetic psalm. It was written by David, probably at a period later in his life when he is really suffering. When you read Psalm 22 it is also a good idea to read the gospel accounts of the crucifixion. (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 19) How many specific things do you see in these accounts that are predicted by David in his psalm? David is beginning to paint a picture of a different kind of king. Watch for this picture as you continue to read through the Old Testament.

Day 7 --- Psalm 89 - Psalm 96 - Psalm 100 - Psalm 101 - Psalm 105 - Psalm 132

Psalm 89 begins praising God for His blessing on David. It describes the covenant that God made with David to keep David's family on the throne forever. This covenant was completed when Jesus became our King as he is from the family of David. The end of the psalm may have been written later, possibly from captivity, and seems to be a request for God to keep His covenant and restore a king from the family of David to the throne.

Psalm 96, 100, and 101 are songs of joy and worship. I'm reading this on a Sunday and one of the things I'm looking forward to is singing praise to God today. Through singing my spirit connects with God's Spirit. I believe that singing is one of the keys to spiritual growth. Pray for a day when you will be able to sing.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Psalm 105 is a song celebrating the Exodus.

Psalm 132 is basically a song in praise of Jerusalem. I would love to go visit there someday.

In your reading this week, what did the writers of the psalm celebrate? What do they say about God over and over again? It would be a good thing to pick one of these psalms and memorize it so that you always have it with you, even when you don't have your Bible.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 19, Day 1 --- 2 Samuel 7 - 1 Chronicles 17

Week 19, Day 2 --- Psalm 25 - Psalm 29 - Psalm 33 - Psalm 36 - Psalm 39

Week 19, Day 3 --- 2 Samuel 8-9 - 1 Chronicles 18

Week 19, Day 4 --- Psalm 50 - Psalm 53 - Psalm 60 - Psalm 75

Week 19, Day 5 --- 2 Samuel 10 - 1 Chronicles 19 - Psalm 20

Week 19, Day 6 --- Psalm 65-67 - Psalm 69-70

Week 19, Day 7 --- 2 Samuel 11-12 - 1 Chronicles 20

Day 1 --- 2 Samuel 7 - 1 Chronicles 17

This is really the high point of David's reign. There will continue to be border skirmishes as he gradually expands the kingdom, but in general the land is at peace. David's palace has been built in Jerusalem and he has settled there. The house for God would be the temple. God would not allow David to build it because David had been a man of war. God did promise David that his son Solomon would build the temple and he did.

You'll notice that there are only very small differences between these two chapters. The will continue to happen as we read through the stories of the kings, but in many cases you'll need to read both points of view to get the complete picture. The repetition tells us that this was an important interaction between God and David.

Pay close attention to the prayer of David. How does he address God? What does he say to God? What does he ask of God? Looking at David's example can help you learn how to pray.

Day 2 --- Psalm 25 - Psalm 29 - Psalm 33 - Psalm 36 - Psalm 39

Psalm 25 seems very appropriate for your situation. It is a song, but also a prayer. It is a prayer that asks for guidance from God. As you're learning to pray, try this. You don't have to be a poet. Try writing out this psalm in your own words and then reading it to God as a prayer.

Psalm 36 provides an interesting comparison between the wicked and the love of God. The wicked have no fear of anything or anyone. Fear is a good thing. It keeps us from doing all sorts of things we shouldn't do. Fear of getting burned should keep us from touching a hot stove. Fear of God may turn us toward Him, but it is God's love that draws us close to Him.

Compare Psalm 33 and Psalm 39. They are both written by David. How was David feeling when he wrote each psalm? Are there any emotions that can't be expressed to God? Who do you share your deepest feelings with?

Day 3 --- 2 Samuel 8-9 - 1 Chronicles 18

David is completing the job that Joshua and the Israelites left incomplete. Israel grows to its largest physical size under David. He conquers the people and areas that God intended to give to the Israelites, but that they failed to conquer. Everything is going well. What do you expect to happen next?

Day 4 --- Psalm 50 - Psalm 53 - Psalm 60 - Psalm 75

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Psalm 50 tells us that God is self-sufficient. God asks us to sacrifice. He asks us to give, but He doesn't need our gifts. In other places we will learn that what God desires is our heart. He wants our hearts to be like His heart. He wants us to care about what He cares about.

Psalm 53 would be discouraging if it weren't for Jesus. The psalm tells us that left on our own we don't become good.

Psalm 60 is a prayer before going into battle. What is David's concern? What is David's request of God?

Psalm 75 is full of images. I can't explain all of them because I don't understand all of them. One of them I do know because of reading Revelation. Verse 8 says that God's hand is holding a cup of wine. A cup of wine in God's hand represents God's wrath. When it is poured out it means that God's judgment on evil is being brought to earth.

Check out these verses if you want to see this image expanded. Remember to read the chapter around the verse to really understand what is being said.

- [Isaiah 63:3](#)
- [Jeremiah 25:15](#)
- [Revelation 14:10](#)
- [Revelation 14:19](#)
- [Revelation 16:19](#)
- [Revelation 19:15](#)

Day 5 --- 2 Samuel 10 - 1 Chronicles 19 - Psalm 20

What or who do you trust? The Syrians trusted in chariots and horses and they were defeated by David. David and his men trusted in God and they were victorious.

It is amazing the bad advice that kings are given throughout the Bible. In those days a king was like a mayor today. He was typically someone who ruled a city. A really powerful king would be a king over kings of multiple cities. Often they would fight against each other, but on occasion they would ally together and fight against a common enemy. While we probably consider it terrible to be naked from the waist down in public, the bigger disgrace to David's men was having half their beards cut off. Hair was very special to the Israelites and beards were not to be cut at all.

Day 6 --- Psalm 65-67 - Psalm 69-70

It is often hard to remember that David went through some very hard times before he came to the throne. We are often reminded by David's psalms that life was not always easy for him. The Bible tells us that David was a man after God's own heart. David loved God and God loved David. The result is an honesty and transparency in his psalms that is difficult for most of us to achieve. As you pray, do not search for the right words. Speak from your heart. God already knows all your thoughts and emotions. Your willingness to express them to Him out loud is what is very

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

pleasing to Him. Think about the various occasions when you might pray a prayer like each of these psalms.

Day 7 --- 2 Samuel 11-12 - 1 Chronicles 20

This is one of the saddest stories in David's life. The first part is easy to understand. David is the king. He sees a beautiful woman and he takes her. This was totally normal for other kings, but not for a king who feared God. When David feared he would be caught he made things worse. Instead of confessing and dealing with the consequences he added murder to his adultery. What would David likely have done if he lived in our time?

The last part of this story is difficult to understand. The easy part is that even when God forgives us there are consequences to our sin. In David's case the consequence was a rebellious family and trouble in his kingdom until the day of his death. Also, the child that was born as a result of his adultery died. I can think of many reasons why the child had to die, but I really can't be sure why God does this. I'll also never understand why God chooses the next child of Bathsheba to be the next king. Why do you think God loved Solomon so much? Why did David sin?

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 20, Day 1 --- Psalm 32 - Psalm 51 - Psalm 86 - Psalm 122

Week 20, Day 2 --- 2 Samuel 13-15

Week 20, Day 3 --- Psalm 3-4 - Psalm 12-13 - Psalm 28 - Psalm 55

Week 20, Day 4 --- 2 Samuel 16-18

Week 20, Day 5 --- Psalm 26 - Psalm 40 - Psalm 58 - Psalm 61-62 - Psalm 64

Week 20, Day 6 --- 2 Samuel 19-21

Week 20, Day 7 --- Psalm 5 - Psalm 38 - Psalm 41-42

Week 20, Day 1 --- Psalm 32 - Psalm 51 - Psalm 86 - Psalm 122

Today's psalms are all written by David around the period of time that he committed the sins of adultery and murder. In Psalm 32 David describes the importance of confession. Confession literally means to agree with. So, confession for a believer is to agree with God about the sin that has been committed. David gives us an example of what this looks like in Psalm 51. Psalm 86 demonstrates an incredible confidence in God's forgiveness. Read this psalm carefully. When do you think David wrote it? How does David view his relationship with God at the time he writes it? Psalm 122 is a prayer for peace. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom and it is a hard word to define. It describes a state of complete well being. We might say that when peace is present all is right with the world.

Week 20, Day 2 --- 2 Samuel 13-15

This is one of the saddest stories in the Old Testament. David was a great warrior and king, but a very poor father. His failure to discipline Amnon after he raped his sister almost cost him the kingdom. Not once in this story do I see David seeking God's guidance. Why is a story like this included in the Bible? What do you think is going to happen to Absalom? What kind of psalms would David write while all this is going on?

Week 20, Day 3 --- Psalm 3-4 - Psalm 12-13 - Psalm 28 - Psalm 55

These psalms were all written at a very low time in David's life. He was on the run for his life and he was running from one of his favorite sons. I don't know how I would respond in such a situation. I doubt that I could express the trust in God that David expresses. Just a few days ago I had a confrontation with a neighbor. It was very one sided. I have never been yelled at with such anger for such a long period of time before. I was terrified and thinking about and trying to resolve the conflict has resulted in days of trembling and fear. I cannot control him, so the situation may never be resolved. David's words comfort me because I know that I can trust God to provide a place of peace. As I'm writing this there is a storm blowing outside and here I sit warm and dry. God wants us to get to the place where we experience the same thing emotionally and spiritually. The storms of life will rage against the peace we desire, but God is a strong shelter where peace can always be found.

Week 20, Day 4 --- 2 Samuel 16-18

Spies and intrigue are not new things. This story has all of these things and more. The unfortunate thing is that this whole sad tale could have been prevented. If David had disciplined Amnon or reconciled with Absalom this story never happens. Instead, David ignored the problem and just hoped it would go away. Relational problems don't just go away. Sometimes

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

the anger and bitterness ruin people's lives. Occasionally, someone dies as in this story. Civil war is always ugly and in this case 20,000 men died. Why is God supporting David and working against Absalom? What do you think of David's decision to not lead the battle? Have you ever experienced the death of someone you loved? If so, how did you feel?

Week 20, Day 5 --- Psalm 26 - Psalm 40 - Psalm 58 - Psalm 61-62 - Psalm 64

David uses an interesting word in Psalm 26. It is the word integrity. It is a quality that David claims to have, but that very few can claim. It means that a person is the same on the inside as what people see on the outside. It says that a person is the same in every situation. I desire to become a man of integrity, but struggle with the desire to please and this causes me to change depending on the situation. How is your integrity? Are you the same person when you talk to me that you are when you're playing basketball with your fellow prisoners?

The rest of the psalms really center on a couple of really important concepts. The first is that God is the solution to our problems, even those that are the results of our own sin. The second is a very specific application of this. Vengeance is God's responsibility, but we are expected to rejoice when His justice is performed. We rejoice not because people suffer, but because God remains holy and cannot tolerate evil. It is hard not to take vengeance when I have been wronged. I can let go only because I know that God is just and He will execute judgment, so I don't need to try.

Week 20, Day 6 --- 2 Samuel 19-21

I think the cliché goes something like this – who needs enemies when I have friends like you? Joab was an incredibly powerful man, but he knew that his power was dependent on David remaining king. He was a violent man and murdered anyone who he felt would damage his position with David. He is also a very political man. He has a much better sense of what is happening with the people than David does.

In these stories you can see the beginnings of the division of Israel. It takes a strong king to hold them together. Why did they find it so difficult to get along? Why do we find it so difficult to get along?

Week 20, Day 7 --- Psalm 5 - Psalm 38 - Psalm 41-42

Psalm 5 – What have evil people used to keep you away from God? What are evil people saying now to try to pull you away from God?

Psalm 38 – David recognizes his sin. He also recognizes that his sin has created an opening for his enemies to attack him. Who does David turn to? Where do you turn when life gets difficult?

Psalm 41 – When do you think David wrote this psalm? I'm constantly amazed at David's confidence in his relationship with God. Even with all David's power and wealth his trust is in God.

Psalm 42 – This psalm should really make you think about what you desire more than anything. I find this difficult. I am blessed with so much that I rarely have that feeling of deep desire that I

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think David is trying to describe in this psalm. I know that my greatest and constant desire should be for more of God, yet I'm constantly distracted by other things. What do you desire more than anything?

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Week 21, Day 1 --- 2 Samuel 22-23 - Psalm 57

The psalms of David appear in other places besides the book of Psalms. When anything significant happened in David's life, he wrote a psalm. There is a part of Psalm 22 that has always bothered me. David claims that God has treated him well because of his righteousness, yet at this time in his life David has committed adultery with Bathsheba and has clearly sinned against God. As I thought about it today I think what David is saying is that in leaving Jerusalem and dealing with Absalom he did right. Remember that David was attacked and insulted as he left the city. An angry and unrighteous king could have had many people killed on his way out. In fact, they could have destroyed the city and left nothing for Absalom to return to. David didn't do that. He treated the people with mercy. I do think that God honored that.

How would you describe God? How would you describe His power? How would you describe His love? David uses the images that he knows to attempt to describe God. Think about the images he uses and the characteristics of God he is trying to describe. What images would you use today that might communicate with the same emotional impact?

Week 21, Day 2 --- Psalm 95 - Psalm 97-99

I began reading the first psalm and immediately began singing in my head. Many of the songs that we sing on Sunday mornings are based on the psalms. This happened to be a very familiar one with a melody I could remember. Singing to God is an important part of our worship. God commands us to sing. There is something that happens inside us when we sing that connects us with God. Did anyone in your family sing? Have you ever been a singer? Have there been any opportunities to sing while you've been in custody?

Week 21, Day 3 --- 1 Chronicles 21-22 - 2 Samuel 24 - Psalm 30

This is a difficult passage because there are significant differences between the two accounts that cannot be explained or explained away. There are other things that are very clear. Israel was beginning to place confidence in David and his army rather than in God. They were beginning the drift away from God that had been repeated over and over in Judges. David is warned, but does not consult God before having the census taken. David sins, but then does the right thing as king and takes responsibility for his own sin. In my experience, this is an uncommon thing for a leader to do. David is right to choose to trust in God's mercy. The punishment could have been much worse. Finally, David submits to God and the punishment stops. The purchase of the threshing floor is very important. Giving to God something that belongs to someone else is not sacrifice and it is sacrifice that is needed. When David purchases the threshing floor he is buying the location for the future temple.

David has many positive qualities, but he is human and he sins often. What character qualities does David demonstrate that you would like to see developed in yourself? Where are you and David alike and in need of change to be more like Jesus?

Week 21, Day 4 --- Psalm 108-110

What a contrast between Psalm 109 and Psalm 110. Psalm 109 is personal to David. It seems that he is at the end of his life and as king he has accumulated many enemies. David's feelings

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are strong and he desires vengeance, but does not take action. Instead, he calls on God to extract vengeance from his enemies. Read Acts 2:29-36 to see who David is talking about in Psalm 110. He is talking about a very different kind of king.

Week 21, Day 5 --- 1 Chronicles 23-25

What was your father's occupation? What was your grandfather's occupation? These three chapters are filled with names. They describe a system that we would strongly rebel against today. If you were a son in the family of Levi, then you were going to serve God. Your specific assignment after the time of David would be the results of the casting of lots. Casting lots could be done in a variety of ways. An example today would be drawing straws to see who gets the short straw. The difference is that God makes it clear in the Old Testament that He guides through what appears to be chance. So, David made the assignments and they continued for generations. That is why they are recorded here.

Week 21, Day 6 --- Psalm 131 - Psalm 138-139 - Psalm 143-145

There are many ways to describe God. As you read through these psalms think about the words that David uses to describe God over and over again.

From DayBreaks <<http://daybreaksdevotions.wordpress.com/2011/06/14/daybreaks-for-061511-another-view-of-omnipresence/>>

Omnipresence is one of the attributes that we ascribe to Divinity (God). It is simply the concept that God is always everywhere. The Psalmist suggested this in Psalm 139 when he contemplated the nature of God: *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."*

Depending on what we're doing at the moment, we either are grateful for God's omnipresence, or we wish we'd never heard of it (usually when we are involved with sin). But, whether we are grateful or not, it doesn't really make any difference in the fact of His omnipresence. He's wherever we are whether we like it or not. This is what we usually mean when we talk about His omnipresence – the concept that no matter where we go in this world – we cannot escape His presence.

I am not a physicist, but I understand that things exist in three dimensions – physical things exist in the dimensions of space. I believe (I could be wrong about this) that there are really more than three dimensions – because we also exist in time, as well as space. I believe that time has been referred to as the fourth dimension. When we consider what that means in terms of God's omnipresence, the concept is staggering. As Calvin Miller put it: "...Christ's omnipresence. I cannot go where he is not. My future cannot be Christ-less. I have him with me even as I move into the future."

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I am not sure why this concept struck me so strongly. I've read the promise how He will never leave us many times. I have quoted the 23rd Psalm – that describes how the Lord goes with us even through the valley of the shadow of death - more times than I can count. Did you catch the significance of the phrase in Miller's writing? "My future cannot be Christ-less." That is the meaning of the omnipresence of God. He isn't limited to three dimension of existence. God's omnipresence extends beyond space through time. As His child, I will never be Christ-less!

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- What do these psalms tell you about God?
- What do they tell you about your own relationship with God?

Week 21, Day 7 --- 1 Chronicles 26-29 - Psalm 127

We have reached the end of David's life. I think at this point that David has two desires. The first is to ensure that the temple will get built. He makes that the focus of his final speech to the people and takes a great offering to ensure that the temple project is funded. His second desire is to transfer rule without bloodshed. God has made it clear that Solomon is to be king and David communicates that to the people before he dies. So Solomon begins his reign before David dies. There is some blood shed as you will soon see, but Israel does not experience civil war.

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Week 22, Day 1 --- Psalm 111-118

The psalms can be hard to read because they were never intended to be read like this. They are songs to be sung over and over. They are prayers to be said with deep emotion. There are a couple of phrases in these psalms that I think are really important.

^{111:10} The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.

If you really want to know the best thing to do you must begin by recognizing that God is in charge and that He has the power to back up His authority.

^{117:2} For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

Fearing God is a good thing, but it is even better when we recognize that His power is good because of His constant love that never fails.

^{118:29} Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!

It is often difficult to be grateful. Our circumstances are often not what we'd like them to be. Our circumstances vary, but God never does. He is always good and He always loves.

Week 22, Day 2 --- 1 Kings 1-2 - Psalm 37 - Psalm 71 - Psalm 94

Week 22, Day 3 --- Psalm 119:1-88

Week 22, Day 4 --- 2 Chronicles 1 - 1 Kings 3-4 - Psalm 72

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Week 22, Day 5 --- Psalm 119:89-176

Week 22, Day 6 --- Song of Solomon 1-8

^{3;5} I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the does of the field,
that you not stir up or awaken love
until it pleases.

I expect that you'll be surprised to find something like this in the Bible. Young Jewish boys were forbidden to read this book. There are two primary messages in this book. One is very clear and that is that God created sex and it is to be enjoyed to the fullest. Romantic love is not a creation of Hollywood. It is a creation of God. The other message is less clear, but is captured in the verse above that is repeated several times during the book. God designed sex for a committed relationship. We call that relationship marriage. I know our world considers that old-fashioned, but that is God's design. I hope you can see in this book that God intended sex for pleasure. The same God who inspired the book of Leviticus also inspired the Song of Solomon.

Week 22, Day 7 --- Proverbs 1-3

At this point you may decide to slow down your reading. There is much to think about in every verse of Proverbs. You will soon learn that Solomon did not apply what he taught and that is a common error of teachers. However, the things he taught are from God and are a practical guide to life. This is one of the most practical books in the entire Bible. How would your life be different if you had known and applied just what you've read so far? We haven't talked about memorizing scripture. Getting some verses inside your head to carry with you everywhere is a very good thing and a good place to begin would be to learn Proverbs 3:5,6.

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Week 23, Day 1 --- Proverbs 4-6

Week 23, Day 2 --- Proverbs 7-9

Week 23, Day 3 --- Proverbs 10-12

Week 23, Day 4 --- Proverbs 13-15

Week 23, Day 5 --- Proverbs 16-18

Week 23, Day 6 --- Proverbs 19-21

Week 23, Day 7 --- Proverbs 22-24

Week 23, Day 1 --- Proverbs 4-6

After reading this section, where do you think we are most easily tempted? Wisdom is understanding what God would do in a situation. God sees both the immediate and the far off consequences of actions and relationships. We often see neither. Recognizing that God always sees both and desiring to see things as He does leads to a much better life. As you read through Proverbs make an effort to identify one new idea each day that you want to apply to your life.

Week 23, Day 2 --- Proverbs 7-9

These chapters paint a picture of wisdom as a person. As you are reading through what images come to your mind from culture, time, and place? I can't help but think of television advertising. It promises everything, but delivers little. In some cases it delivers death. Wisdom has been forever. Wisdom is God's mind, so if I know and practice God's thoughts then I have wisdom.

Week 23, Day 3 --- Proverbs 10-12

Reading through Proverbs can be a little overwhelming. Some proverbs/verses are easily understood and possibly quickly forgotten. Others could be thought about for a lifetime and never fully understood or applied. Which one of these most connected with you?

Week 23, Day 4 --- Proverbs 13-15

I picked out two proverbs from today's reading that have meant much to me. The first one deals with money. It is the basic principle behind most teaching on money both inside and outside of Christianity. It basically says that if you spend less than you earn over a long period of time you will accumulate wealth. This is true. The opposite is also true and more typical of our culture. If you spend even a little more than you earn over a long period of time you will be in poverty. The bubble bursts at some point.

^{13:11} Wealth gained hastily will dwindle,
but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

The second one has to do with our relationship with God. There is no question that in the Old Testament God required sacrifices. What the people didn't understand was that the sacrifices were not a way for them to do evil and still be right with God. But this is what they did. They lived lives full of wickedness and thought that just making the right sacrifice would make everything right with God. It didn't. These people did not desire to be in right relationship with God. They were attempting to pay for their sins and it can't be done. It is much better to strive to live as God desires constantly depending on Him and demonstrating that through prayer.

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^{15:8} The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

Which proverb really caught your attention today?

Week 23, Day 5 --- Proverbs 16-18

I picked 3 proverbs to comment on out of this section.

16:2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,
but the LORD weighs the spirit.

This one I picked because it is personal. I work with a group of people to guide a missionary organization. I think we have made some bad decisions recently. Everyone is convinced that they are doing the right thing, but we have significant disagreement. In our own eyes, mine included, our motives are pure. God is the only one who really knows and I need to remember that.

16:33 The lot is cast into the lap,
but its every decision is from the LORD.

There is a very important principle in this verse that we don't apply very often anymore. It basically says that if you had to choose between two options and both were good that putting the options in a hat and then drawing one out would be a good thing. It says that ultimately God is in control and that he would make certain the best option was chosen.

18:1 Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment.

This is the most important one for you to remember. I hope that you will continually seek out relationships with people who can encourage you in your walk with God. It is my experience that this verse is very true. When people pull away from relationships with Christian friends there is generally something wrong. We don't isolate ourselves to do good. We isolate ourselves to do evil.

Week 23, Day 6 --- Proverbs 19-21

20:14 "Bad, bad," says the buyer,
but when he goes away, then he boasts.

There were several proverbs that meant a lot to me today, but I thought this one was the best one to comment on. It demonstrates how practical this book is. In our culture hardly anyone bargains for anything. In Eastern cultures everyone bargains for just about everything. Part of the bargaining process is for the buyer to degrade what he is buying. The buyer wants to pay as little as possible, then when he gets what he was after he can boast in the tremendous bargain he got.

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Week 23, Day 7 --- Proverbs 22-24

The format of the proverbs changes today. Many of them are several lines long and provide deeper instruction on the general themes that Solomon has been emphasizing through the book. What messages are you hearing over and over again? Why do you think these things are so important to God?

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Week 24, Day 1 --- 2 Chronicles 2-3 - 1 Kings 5-6

It took seven years to build the temple. It might not have been quite as amazing as the pyramids of Egypt, but it was an incredible work of architecture and engineering. I always marvel that they cut all the materials away from the site and then put it together like a puzzle on site. The amount of gold was incredible. Chronicles tells us that it wasn't the Jews who did most of the work in building the temple. Instead, it was the large population of people who descended from the nations that were never completely conquered. They were enslaved to do this work and are an indication of ongoing temptation to the Jewish people.

Week 24, Day 2 --- 2 Chronicles 4 - 1 Kings 7

It is interesting to compare the past couple of chapters with the instructions for building the tabernacle that are found in Exodus. There God provides the instructions and He sends the Holy Spirit to provide the craftsman with the ability to complete what He has designed. In the case of the temple it would seem that Solomon was the designer. He hires craftsman to complete his design. I think it is for good reason called Solomon's temple. God will come and dwell in it, but it is not God's temple. There is a subtle shift that happens with the completion of Solomon's temple as the people begin to place more emphasis on the temple than they do on God. Idolatry is a very subtle temptation. It is very easy to worship the wrong thing.

Week 24, Day 3 --- 2 Chronicles 5 - 1 Kings 8

What's the biggest party you've ever been to? Can you imagine a party with a million people? That's just a guess on my part, but I'm thinking that 120,000 sheep ought to feed a million people or more. This was a great day. Unfortunately, it was the high point for Israel and things started to go down from here. Solomon's prayer was prophetic. Everything he mentioned as an if became a reality in the future of Israel. Even Solomon will soon turn his back on God. This happens so often when God works through us to accomplish something great. We begin to think we did it and all too soon forget God.

Week 24, Day 4 --- 2 Chronicles 6-7 - Psalm 136

2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Psalms 136:26 Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

The dedication of the temple was a major event in the history of Israel. We know it was important because it is recorded at length in two separate histories. 2 Chronicles does include God's response. This history was probably written while the people of Israel were in captivity in Babylon. The people are being reminded that God made them a promise. They have turned from God and the land needs to be healed. They are being called to prayer. The New Testament includes similar promises for us. This is what Psalms 136 tells us. God's love is forever. He always wants us to return no matter what we've done.

Week 24, Day 5 --- Psalm 134 - Psalm 146-150

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Praise the Lord. When you watch a sporting even and something great happens do you sit quiet or do you jump and shout? I'm not a loud person and generally don't show much emotion, but I occasionally will make a shout when something really great happens. The game has to be important and the play has to be pivotal. The point of all these psalms is that God is always worth shouting about. God is greater than any single event that we might encounter on a day to day basis. There are as many ways to praise God as there are people, but He must be praised. How do you praise Him?

Week 24, Day 6 --- 2 Chronicles 8 - 1 Kings 9

Solomon's accomplishments are amazing. It is hard to describe this in modern terms. In his day Solomon was the wealthiest man in the world. It was like he had the wealth of an Arab oil sheikh and the power of the president of the United States. What these chapters are trying to communicate is that Solomon had everything a man could ask for. Solomon is going down and in these chapters there is a hint of what is going to take him down. The Israelites were instructed in the law to only marry other Israelites. Solomon's most famous wife is not an Israelite, she is Egyptian, and that is why she can't live in the house of David. She has to live by herself because contact with her would make an Israelite ceremonially unclean. Marrying women from other nations has always been a common way of making alliances, but it was not God's plan.

Week 24, Day 7 --- Proverbs 25-26

26:12 Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Solomon provides a very valuable warning toward the end of his own proverbs. It is very sad that he didn't listen to what he wrote. Pride is a dangerous thing. Maybe the worst kind of pride is the kind that is convinced that it knows everything. I have experienced this kind of pride in myself and it never results in good. The older I get the more I'm discovering how little I really know and how foolish I generally am. I have much to learn and I think that is a much safer attitude.

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Week 25, Day 1 --- Proverbs 27-29

Week 25, Day 2 --- Ecclesiastes 1-6

Week 25, Day 3 --- Ecclesiastes 7-12

Week 25, Day 4 --- 2 Chronicles 9 - 1 Kings 10-11

Week 25, Day 5 --- Proverbs 30-31

Week 25, Day 6 --- 1 Kings 12-14

Week 25, Day 7 --- 2 Chronicles 10-12

Week 25, Day 1 --- Proverbs 27-29

^{27:17} Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another.

Over and over the Bible makes it clear that we need relationships. Our relationships shape us, sometimes for good and sometimes for evil. It is easy and normal to pursue the relationships that encourage us to stay who we are. It is much harder to pursue the relationships that will challenge and change us.

^{29:26} Many seek the face of a ruler,
but it is from the LORD that a man gets justice.

When you're in trouble where do you look for help? Solomon is telling us that most people seek a person in power and seek to influence that person in order to get what they want. Many people who are seeking to influence a ruler are not seeking justice, but injustice. They are seeking favor. If we really desire justice we will seek God, because He is always objective and impartial. These attitudes are essential for dispensing justice.

Week 25, Day 2 --- Ecclesiastes 1-6

This is a very important book in the Bible, yet I find it strange that God let it be written and kept. It is written by Solomon toward the end of his life. I think Solomon realizes that he has missed the joy that God had for him. He has pursued everything but God and the result is a meaningless life. There are still nuggets of wisdom throughout the book, but tomorrow when you get to the ending it will all make much more sense.

Week 25, Day 3 --- Ecclesiastes 7-12

^{12:13} Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.

After all the words here is the conclusion. Recognize that the only person who can make sense of life is God. He is the one who holds the key to the present and the future. He created us and wrote the rule book. It only makes sense to approach life the way God designed it. It may not make sense to us along the way, but it will all make sense when we see Him in eternity.

Week 25, Day 4 --- 2 Chronicles 9 - 1 Kings 10-11

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

1 Kings 11 is one of the saddest chapters in the Bible. Solomon had everything. In the previous chapter he is described as the wealthiest and wisest man living. It is hard to imagine what he was thinking when he began to marry foreign women. Worse was when he abandoned his worship of God and began to worship idols, foreign gods. The book of Chronicles doesn't mention the negative because it is written to a people who need hope. God wants the people to see in Solomon what was possible. 1 Kings tells the whole story, including the consequences of breaking covenant with God. One of the great challenges in life is to finish well. Solomon didn't and the impact went far beyond his own house.

Week 25, Day 5 --- Proverbs 30-31

It seems that much of Proverbs is spent describing the danger of women, especially the adulterous woman. If the book ended in chapter 30 it would be easy to think that women were second class citizens and a constant danger. This is no truer than that all men are fools, which is another impression you could get from Proverbs. I hope you have had experience with some women in your life who are like the Proverbs 31 woman. Think about this – what does Proverbs say about this woman that would be the first thing our culture would describe?

Week 25, Day 6 --- 1 Kings 12-14

Solomon has died and the good times are over. The kingdom is split in two pieces. The northern piece which includes 10 tribes will not follow God, but instead builds temples to idols. The southern piece continues to worship God in Jerusalem, but tries to worship idols at the same time. The stories of both these kingdoms will be woven together through the rest of this book and the book of Chronicles. There are some great stories and some very strange stories in these two books. Prophets, people who speak for God, will play prominent roles in these books. Don't worry about trying to keep all the kings straight. Instead, watch how hard God works to bring the people back.

Week 25, Day 7 --- 2 Chronicles 10-12

If you compare today's reading with yesterday's reading it is easy to see the different perspectives. The two readings cover the same period of time. The book of Kings looks at the situation from the perspective of the northern kingdom – Israel. The book of Chronicles looks at the same time period from the perspective of the southern kingdom – Judah. I've read these stories many times and I still don't understand why a king like Rehoboam would lead his people away from God when they are blessed with peace and prosperity, but that is what he does. Then again, I have a great life, but I still choose to sin. What tempts you to sin, to turn away from God and do your own thing?

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Week 26, Day 1 --- 2 Chronicles 13-16 - 1 Kings 15:1-24

Asa was a good king. He was a much better than average king and he had a long reign. Unfortunately, he made the same mistake as many others. He relied on God and was blessed. This was not a mistake. However, after many years of being blessed he was threatened. In the past when he was threatened he trusted in God and God was faithful to rescue him. When Israel threatens him he turns to the king of Aram rather than God. It costs him far more than the money he gives the king. He loses God as an ally and protector. His reign ends in a whimper. God wants to be trusted. He is not pleased when we choose to trust in the people and things of this earth when we can completely trust Him.

Week 26, Day 2 --- 1 Kings 15:25-16:34 - 2 Chronicles 17

What a contrast. Which kingdom would you want to live in – Israel or Judah? I saw something in 2 Chronicles 17 that I hadn't seen before. A king of Judah actually sent priests and Levites out to teach the people the law of God. This is a rare thing and look at what happened as a result. The evil in Israel will continue, but out of this great evil will come two of the greatest prophets in the history of God's people.

Week 26, Day 3 --- 1 Kings 17-19

There is so much here it is hard to know where to begin. Elijah is the first of the great prophets and he speaks for God in the kingdom of Israel. Most of his time he spends alone. When he appears in public it is generally for a very dramatic confrontation. He feels isolated and after what appears to be a great victory he gets depressed. Why does he run away when God has just demonstrated His power in a very dramatic way? What do you learn about God from His interaction with Elijah?

Week 26, Day 4 --- 1 Kings 20-21

Ahab was a wicked man. In spite of this God protects the people of Israel and tries to win them back. He gives them victory over the Syrians, but instead of destroying the Syrians as they were instructed they make a treaty with them. Ahab is also very selfish, and his wife supports his selfishness with her evil. She murders a man so that Ahab can have a vegetable garden. As a result God promises to remove the kingdom from Ahab's family. Ahab does something unusual, he repents of his evil. God responds by extending Ahab's life.

Week 26, Day 5 --- 2 Chronicles 18 - 1 Kings 22

War was very personal at this time. It is obvious that the soldiers knew their enemy well enough that they could recognize him. It may have been the robes, but it also could have been that they Syrian soldiers would have recognized Ahab's face. The really important character here is Micaiah. He is a true prophet who desires nothing more than to obey God and deliver the message that God gives him. He speaks truth and it is rejected. The result is that Ahab dies. It is very dangerous to reject God's Word.

Week 26, Day 6 --- 2 Chronicles 19-23

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God keeps His promises even when we do terrible things that would justify Him breaking them. This section begins with a good king and ends with a good king, but in between are some very evil kings. I do not understand why the oldest son of Jehoshaphat does not follow God. His father had been blessed and the land was at peace. Unfortunately, he rejects his father and God and does evil. How would you like to have the following statement on your tombstone: "And he departed with no one's regret." This passage also gives us some insight into why God often calls for the complete destruction of peoples or families. Ahab's daughter is as evil as her mother Jezebel. As queen she has a very destructive influence on all of Judah. There is something wrong in Ahab's family and it will not cure itself. They must be destroyed if either Israel or Judah are to have any chance of repenting and returning to God.

Week 26, Day 7 --- Obadiah 1 - Psalm 82-83

How would you respond if someone was physically threatening someone you love? Judah was under attack from Edom. Remember that Judah was descended from Jacob and that Edom as descended from Esau, both sons of Isaac. They are a part of the same family, yet Edom wanted to destroy Judah. In spite of God's disappointment with Judah, He will not allow another nation to totally destroy them. This will be a constant theme as you begin reading through the prophets. God is constantly sending warnings to repent or face His judgment.

The other thing that is very clear through the whole Bible is God's desire for His people to care for the weak and poor. Those of us who have been blessed by God are to use that blessing to bless others.

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Week 27, Day 1 --- 2 Kings 1-4

Elijah and Elisha were great prophets. They lived apart from the people and their primary responsibility was to communicate messages from God to the people. They lived at a time when the kings were evil and were leading the people away from God. God had many different ways for prophets to show the people that what they said was from God. In the case of Elijah and Elisha they have great power to do miracles. Some of the miracles are really positive, like providing oil for a widow or providing a son. Some of the miracles seem really negative, like calling down fire on the soldiers or the bears on the youths. The important thing to remember through all these stories is that God is trying to win His people back. The nation of Israel is being led by its king to worship other gods. Worship of these gods or idols is so evil that a king will kill his own son in an attempt to win the god's favor. I'm very glad that our God was willing to give His son for us rather than asking me to give my son to Him.

Week 27, Day 2 --- 2 Kings 5-8

Elisha was a powerful man. He spoke for God and he saw what God was doing in ways that no one else could. I love the story of Naaman. It is a wonderful story that shows us how grace works. Naaman came to Elisha as a mighty man who was being defeated by a skin disease. I'm sure he expected that Elisha would tell him to do something really hard so that he could earn his healing. Instead, Elisha tells him to do something really simple. Naaman is fortunate to have wise servants. He decides to trust God, does what he has been told, and is healed.

This is a bad time for Israel. God is trying to communicate in all kinds of ways in an attempt to turn Israel toward Him. Israel refuses and its destruction as a nation will come.

Week 27, Day 3 --- 2 Kings 9-11

There is a huge difference between the two kingdoms. The northern kingdom, Israel, is full of violence and idolatry. The southern kingdom, Judah, does have some people who want to obey God. Jehu carries out God's judgment on Israel, but never really submits to God himself. Jehoida, the priest, puts service to God before his own position and brings a king to the throne who will worship God. Jehoida is one of the few positive spiritual leaders during the entire history of the kings. I'm always amazed that God shows us both stories. Jehu was a very violent man. He did what God asked him to, but the violence did not purify his own heart or the heart of Israel. They continued to worship Baal. In Judah, Athaliah the queen mother was killed, but the anger of the people was turned toward Baal. As we'll see in the next several chapters the result was very different.

Week 27, Day 4 --- 2 Kings 12-13 - 2 Chronicles 24

The story of Joash is a very sad story. His reign begins well, but he is only a little boy. It takes him almost half his reign to figure out that the people aren't doing what he asked them to do, donate for rebuilding the temple. He does finally address this and the temple is rebuilt. Jehoida's impact on the country is huge. He gets them to worship God even if he is not able to get them to stop worshipping idols, especially outside Jerusalem. His impact is made really clear when he dies. Almost as soon as he dies, both Joash and the people turn to evil. Things get so bad that God sends a prophet who is murdered by the people who then murder Joash. When the people obey God He blesses them and they prosper. When they disobey He sends prophets

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to warn and then oppressors to conquer. How do you think God feels about a people who constantly rebel against Him in spite of His faithfulness and generosity?

Week 27, Day 5 --- 2 Kings 14 - 2 Chronicles 25

This was a difficult time for Judah and Israel. It seems that no one except the prophets followed God with their whole heart. Amaziah is a typical example. He gathers the army of Judah and goes to war against Edom. God tells him that He will give the victory and Judah is victorious. However, instead of giving glory to God, Amaziah brings home the idols of Edom and sets them up and worships them. Why would anyone want to worship the gods of a people they have just defeated?

Week 27, Day 6 --- Jonah 1-4

I would suggest that you read the story first before you read my comments. What did you think of this story? Why does God choose Jonah as a prophet? It seems clear to me that Jonah does not want what God wants. The Assyrians were known for their extreme violence. Take the most extreme that Hollywood has to offer and go beyond that and you'll find the Assyrians. Their violence had been directed at Israel, where Jonah was from. I understand Jonah's reluctance to go and preach to these people. God knows something that Jonah doesn't. He knows the Assyrians will repent. God feels something that Jonah doesn't feel. He has affection for all His people, including the Assyrians, and wants to see them repent.

Week 27, Day 7 --- 2 Kings 15 - 2 Chronicles 26

We are reaching the end of the kingdom of Israel. The kings are serving for very short periods of time and the land is steadily being taken into captivity by the Assyrians. In these times when a country was conquered they would take all the strong and well educated people and make them slaves in the conquering country. They would leave the weak to care for the land and pay huge taxes. In Judah there will be a series of kings with very long reigns. Judah is also moving toward captivity, but the process will take longer and there will be some good kings along the way.

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Week 28, Day 1 --- Isaiah 1-4

We have entered the time in Israel and Judah's history where the prophets are featured. They recorded their sermons in writing so that we can hear what God had to say to the people during their time of rebellion. Their styles will vary, but the message will be consistent. The people are continuing to perform the required acts of worship, the sacrifices, but they do not love God or love the people around them. They are not caring for orphans and widows. Instead, they seek pleasure and worship idols. For this reason, Jerusalem will be destroyed. One day, the city will be restored, but first it must be destroyed and the people taken away.

Week 28, Day 2 --- Isaiah 5-8

God is angry. He has picked a people to bless and He has blessed them. In return they have rebelled against Him and mistreated each other. The northern kingdom of Israel will be dispersed among the nations and this will begin when they are conquered and led away into captivity by Assyria. The southern kingdom of Judah will survive, but they will also spend time in captivity. Isaiah 6 is an incredible chapter. God appears to Isaiah and commissions him with a very special message. How would you like to be called by God to preach doom and destruction when you know that no one is going to listen? What do you learn about God's heart as you read these words?

Week 28, Day 3 --- Amos 1-5

It is almost time for Israel to go into captivity and God sends multiple prophets to deliver a final warning message. Some of the prophets delivered a message that looked far into the future. Many delivered a message that was relevant the day they spoke it. The message God gave Amos was that kind of message. What he predicts will happen will happen very soon. His warnings and his pleas are for right now to the people who hear him. It is important for us to read his warning to see what is important to God. What does God desire? What makes God angry?

Week 28, Day 4 --- Amos 6-9

It is clear from the reaction of Amaziah that Amos' message is being heard. His message apparently affected people strongly enough that they would tell others of what they had heard and the message spread throughout the land. Today it would have been broken into sound bites and shown on the evening news. Then it had to be told by word of mouth from person to person. Israel is going to be destroyed as a nation. They have been strong and prosperous only because God has protected them. God is going to remove His protection and the Assyrians will come and take them captive. There will come a day when the people will be brought back. This could have been when Judah returns from captivity and Assyria has been defeated. It could have been even further in the future when on the day of Pentecost Jews come from all over the world and hear the good news of Jesus. We don't know for sure. We do know that God doesn't give up on His people.

Week 28, Day 5 --- Isaiah 9-12 - 2 Chronicles 27

The book of Isaiah is like a tapestry. Many different threads of thought are woven together to paint a picture of God. One of the threads is describing the coming of Jesus. Today's reading

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begins with a description of Jesus. Future passages will talk about his character and his life. Some passages will talk about His first coming and some about His second coming. Another thread is the judgment of Israel. I think Isaiah is using Israel as an example to warn Judah of their need to repent. Assyria threatens both Israel and Judah. Isaiah makes it clear that it is not Assyria that is in control. God is in control and Assyria will be destroyed. Through all of this is the consistent thread of praise to God. He is in control and from Him will come peace. His judgment is right and the result will be peace.

Week 28, Day 6 --- Micah 1-7

Micah's message is similar to the other prophets. Israel and Judah are continually doing evil and must be punished to be purified. As you read take note of the things that God finds offensive. Then think about the kind of society that God desires for all people. Micah 6:6-8 is one of the best summaries that there is of the message of the prophets. Verse 8 captures the essence of what God desires for us.

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8 (NIV)

God wants us to do what is right – act justly. In the context of this book that means caring for the poor and oppressed. God want us to love others – love mercy. Rather than seeking to get from others we are to think about how we can benefit others. Finally, God wants us to recognize who He is while being in close relationship with Him – walk humbly with your God. What God desires really isn't very complex. Watch for these three things as you read through the rest of the prophets. I think you'll see them expressed in slightly different ways over and over.

Week 28, Day 7 --- 2 Kings 16-17 - 2 Chronicles 28

Ahaz was not the worst of the kings of Judah, but he came close. Like other kings before him he was threatened by other nations. God allowed Judah to be threatened because it had been unfaithful in keeping the covenant. Ahaz now had a choice. He could repent and turn to God for help or he could turn to another king to rescue him from the kings who were oppressing him. He made the wrong choice. He took the wealth of the nation and gave it to the king of Assyria. When the king of Assyria rescued him he turned to Assyria's gods and away from God. In this section you see that God finally gave up on Israel, the northern kingdom, and let the go into captivity. Ahaz begins the downhill slide that will eventually lead to Judah going into captivity as well.

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Week 29, Day 1 --- Isaiah 13-17

Week 29, Day 2 --- Isaiah 18-22

Week 29, Day 3 --- Isaiah 23-27

Week 29, Day 4 --- 2 Kings 18:1-8 - 2 Chronicles 29-31 - Psalm 48

Week 29, Day 5 --- Hosea 1-7

Week 29, Day 6 --- Hosea 8-14

Week 29, Day 7 --- Isaiah 28-30

Week 29, Day 1 --- Isaiah 13-17

Isaiah is uncompromising in his prediction that Israel and Judah will be attacked and taken into captivity. However, there is a danger in being used by God to discipline His people. The countries that played the role of conqueror will one day be conquered. These chapters are messages of hope. The world order will not always be what it is today. There will come a day when God's people will rule. This is an illustration of what is called prophetic telescoping. Isaiah is certainly predicting the immediate future of the physical kingdoms of Assyria, Babylon, Philistia, and Moab. However, I think he is also looking forward to the spiritual kingdom that Jesus will bring and beyond that to the second coming when God's reign will be established with men and women forever. We may miss the message of hope because we live in the country that is on the top of current world order. This is not true for believers in many other places. They need to be continually reminded that there is hope and books like Isaiah are a comfort to them.

Week 29, Day 2 --- Isaiah 18-22

In the middle of this reading is one of the most unusual things in the whole Bible. All through the Bible we are instructed to dress modestly. It is a tremendous shame to have even your buttocks exposed in public. Yet Isaiah is instructed to walk around completely naked for 3 years. I'm glad that God has never called me to be that kind of public object lesson. I'm certain the people thought he was very strange, but I'm also certain that they heard his message. Unfortunately, they ignored it. Chapter 22 tells us that when the people of Jerusalem should have been turning to God and weeping they were throwing big parties. God was not pleased.

Week 29, Day 3 --- Isaiah 23-27

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.

Trust in the LORD forever,

for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock. Isaiah 26:3,4 (ESV)

In the midst of all the talk of doom and destruction there is this instruction. Trust in God and He will bring you peace. For the Israelites this does not mean that they will not be conquered and taken into captivity. They will. It does mean that eventually God's kingdom will come to earth and all His people will be brought home. In chapter 27 there also seems to be a message of hope for the faithful. The kingdom of Judah will be shaken, but the faithful will be separated out and sent into exile to become the remnant that will rebuild the nation.

Week 29, Day 4 --- 2 Kings 18:1-8 - 2 Chronicles 29-31 - Psalm 48

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In the middle of all the doom and gloom of the prophets there was a period of great joy in Judah. Hezekiah was a great and good king. He worshipped God with all His heart and he led the people to do the same. Unlike earlier good kings his impact extends throughout Judah and even extends into the remnant in Israel. It is distressing to hear how far astray the priests had gone. Even when they desired to return to God it took a long time for them to clean-up.

Week 29, Day 5 --- Hosea 1-7

God often calls the prophets to do something physically to illustrate their message. In Hosea's case God asks Hosea to go and find a prostitute and marry her. He is to love her and have children by her. God asks Hosea to do this even though He knows that Hosea's wife will be unfaithful to him. She will leave him for another lover just as Israel and Judah have left God for other gods. Israel and Judah have been blessed with great physical prosperity, yet they do not recognize or acknowledge the source of their blessing. They only acknowledge God as the source of their suffering. Hosea speaks of the wilderness as a place where the people will return to God. This is a principle all through the Bible. When we become too prosperous we often forget God. Because He loves us so much He takes us into the wilderness so that we can really understand how much He loves us. We can continue to rebel against Him, but there is greater opportunity in the wilderness to realize His love and call out to Him for rescue. The wilderness doesn't have to be physical. Certainly the time you are spending in jail is a wilderness experience.

Week 29, Day 6 --- Hosea 8-14

Chapter after chapter Hosea describes the sins of Israel. Ephraim was the tribe that led Israel, so the warnings are often directed to it. Ephraim was one of the sons of Joseph. Joseph was without doubt the best of Jacob's children. He loved God and served Him faithfully all his life. I find it strange that Ephraim is the tribe that leads the people of the northern tribes into sin. Ephraim is the example of why they are going into captivity, why they are being destroyed as a nation. Yet, with all the warnings and expressions of anger there is at the end a final plea to come back. God never wants to destroy. He always wants to restore, but His nature can not restore evil.

Week 29, Day 7 --- Isaiah 28-30

^{28:13} So then, the word of the LORD to them will become:
Do and do, do and do,
rule on rule, rule on rule;
a little here, a little there—
so that they will go and fall backward,
be injured and snared and captured.

This is a very important verse. It explains so much of why the Israelites abandoned God. They had reduced God's word to them to a series of rules. Rather than a love story the Bible became a law book and only a law book. The Bible certainly contains laws, but surrounding those laws is the story of a God who loves His people. When we treat the Bible as only a law book we quickly

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discover that we can't keep all the laws and we give up. Rather than being captured by God's love we are captured by guilt and turn away from God.

^{28:16} So this is what the Sovereign LORD says:
"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who trusts will never be dismayed.

God's answer to this is Jesus. Check out 1 Peter 2:1-10. The cornerstone is Jesus. Instead of sending more rules God sent His Son to show us how to live. When we build our lives on trust in Him we are building on something solid that will never fail.

While Hosea was addressing primarily the northern kingdom, Isaiah in these chapters is addressing the southern kingdom, Judah. Ariel in chapter 29 refers to Jerusalem. Judah will soon be tested by the same country that has taken Israel into captivity. The Assyrians will come and surround Jerusalem. The king and the people will look to God and chapter 30 predicts the defeat of the Assyrians by God.

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Week 30, Day 1 --- Isaiah 31-34

Week 30, Day 2 --- Isaiah 35-36

Week 30, Day 3 --- Isaiah 37-39 - Psalm 76

Week 30, Day 4 --- Isaiah 40-43

Week 30, Day 5 --- Isaiah 44-48

Week 30, Day 6 --- 2 Kings 18:9-19:37 - Psalm 46 - Psalm 80 - Psalm 135

Week 30, Day 7 --- Isaiah 49-53

Week 30, Day 1 --- Isaiah 31-34

There are righteous people who seek God in Judah. Isaiah is prophesying about a time that is very soon. God will rescue Jerusalem and then shortly after than Jerusalem will fall. The righteous will survive to become the remnant that will rebuild the nation. The evil people who don't care about God will be destroyed. As you read through this does God seem unreasonable to you in what He desires?

Week 30, Day 2 --- Isaiah 35-36

Here we are in the middle of the book and God provides an oasis. He reminds us through Isaiah that history is moving somewhere and that direction is toward God. God is in charge and He will bring His people to a place of security, safety, and prosperity. Then in the very next chapter Isaiah turns from prophecy to history and tells the story of Assyria's attack on Jerusalem. The Assyrians couldn't just march into the city. It was going to require a long siege to defeat Jerusalem. So, the king of Assyria sends negotiators to the king of Israel to see if there is anyway to avoid the cost of the siege. Try to put yourself in the position of the people of Jerusalem. How would you want the king to respond? How do you think the king will respond? How do you think God will respond to the challenge that is given to Him?

Week 30, Day 3 --- Isaiah 37-39 - Psalm 76

Hezekiah was a good king. If you simply looks at the record of the sins they committed you would say that Hezekiah was a much better person than David. In God's eyes there is no comparison. David committed adultery and murder, but he trusted completely in God and continually sought to know God better. Hezekiah never committed a sin as obvious as David's, but his trust was in God only when he was in trouble.

Here is a really important message from Hezekiah to Isaiah:

They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. ⁴ It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives." Isaiah 37:3,4

Rather than saying to Isaiah "the LORD my God", Hezekiah says, "the LORD your God". I don't want to make Hezekiah out to be a bad king. He was one of the best kings that Judah ever had,

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but he didn't seek God all the time and that was not only his downfall, but the downfall of the nation. What do you think was Hezekiah's greatest sin based on the end of chapter 39?

Week 30, Day 4 --- Isaiah 40-43

I don't know your taste in music. I love all kinds. I don't know if you've ever heard Handel's Messiah. It is an incredible choral piece and has been sung and recorded many times. I've even had the privilege to stand by my wife as she sang along. One of the great songs written by Handel was taken from Isaiah 40. In these four chapters Isaiah swings back and forth between the great hope of the Messiah and the tremendous disappointment God has in the people of Israel. After you've read through the whole portion for today go back and read chapter 40 again. There is great hope there.

²⁸ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:28-31 (NIV)

When life is not going well, these are verses to hang onto.

Week 30, Day 5 --- Isaiah 44-48

Who is God? When Isaiah writes these chapters the Jews in Jerusalem are being threatened with captivity by the Babylonians. The inhabitants of Jerusalem who are not killed will be made slaves and taken away to Babylon. There they will be encouraged to worship idols. God promises that the Babylonians will themselves be destroyed and then the Jews are to return to their own land. The people do not want to go into captivity, but they will become comfortable in Babylon and will not want to return.

These chapters contain some incredible comparisons between God and idols. If you have ever wondered why Christians are so convinced that Jesus is the only way to eternal life then look at this verse that is repeated over and over in these chapters.

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Isaiah 45:22 "Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.

What do you learn about God from these chapters? Write down as many of God's characteristics as you can.

Week 30, Day 6 --- 2 Kings 18:9-19:37 - Psalm 46 - Psalm 80 - Psalm 135

It might seem like there is a mistake and that you've read this before. You have read part of it before, but in the Chronicles version. I already commented there and won't repeat my comments. I do want to draw your attention to a verse in one of the psalms.

Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

As I write this morning I have many things going through my mind. I am thinking like everything depends on me when it doesn't. I need to be still and listen for God, knowing that He is God. He is in control and He alone is worthy of praise.

Week 30, Day 7 --- Isaiah 49-53

I am studying Daniel right now and it is interesting how this reading ties in with that study. The people of Judah would go into exile. While in exile they would be tempted to give up the law and become like the Babylonians. God is calling them through Isaiah to remain faithful because they are going to return.

Who did you think of as you read Isaiah 53? Remember that this was written over 500 years before Jesus' birth. I always wonder as I read this chapter how faithful Jews could have missed Jesus.

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Week 31, Day 1 --- Isaiah 54-58

Week 31, Day 2 --- Isaiah 59-63

Week 31, Day 3 --- Isaiah 64-66

Week 31, Day 4 --- 2 Kings 20-21

Week 31, Day 5 --- 2 Chronicles 32-33

Week 31, Day 6 --- Nahum 1-3

Week 31, Day 7 --- 2 Kings 22-23 - 2 Chronicles 34-35

Week 31, Day 1 --- Isaiah 54-58

Have you noticed the mood swings in Isaiah? One chapter is full of doom and gloom and the next is full of hope. The message is always consistent. God loves His people and desires for them to return to Him. Instead, most of them ignore God and make love to idols. Chapter 58 is a favorite chapter for missionaries. It is one of the clearest calls in the entire Bible to reach out and care for the poor. There seem to be two consistent messages that God is trying to communicate in Isaiah regarding our behavior. The first is to keep the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath is an acknowledgement that God is in control and able to provide. The second is to care for the poor. Again, this is an acknowledgement that it is God who has provided and who is able to provide even more.

Week 31, Day 2 --- Isaiah 59-63

A chapter of judgment, a chapter looking forward to heaven, a chapter about Jesus, a chapter of judgment, and a prayer for rescue. Today's reading is a good summary of what Isaiah has been all about. Some prophecies are easy to understand and easy to see if the fulfillment of the prophecy has already occurred. For example, Jesus quotes the following passage and claims that it refers to him in Luke 4:18 and Luke 7:22:

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners, ^[a]

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor

There are also prophecies that are difficult to understand. In these chapters God speaks of a time of great prosperity for Jerusalem. Many of these passages are repeated in the book of Revelation. Is God telling us that there will be a time when the physical Jerusalem as we know it will be incredibly prosperous, or is He describing the new Jerusalem that is heaven? I don't know and I don't think we will know until what God has prophesied has come to be. I do know that it is a good practice to pray the prayer that Isaiah records at the end of chapter 63. We must be continually calling for God to be present in our individual lives and the life of our world.

Week 31, Day 3 --- Isaiah 64-66

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God has a plan. There are two futures in this plan. For those who call on God there is a new future filled with blessing in a new heaven and new earth. For those who reject God there is only a future without God. There is nothing new in this future, but only more of the old suffering and struggle. Isaiah has lived to see his prophecy fulfilled as the Babylonians have come and the temple has been burned. There is no longer any chance that God will delay His judgment on the nation. Instead, Isaiah looks forward to the new heavens and the new earth. I think he also looks forward to the time of Jesus. He looks forward to the beginning of the church when God gathers His children from all over the earth to make a new beginning in Jerusalem. If you want a picture of what that looked like read Acts 2 in the New Testament.

Week 31, Day 4 --- 2 Kings 20-21

How does a good king produce such an evil son? I don't know. I do know that Manasseh was born during the final 15 years of Hezekiah's life. He wouldn't have been born if Hezekiah's life had not been extended. Manasseh committed just about every sin that one person could possibly commit. Even worse, he led the people to commit those sins with him. Tradition outside the Bible tells us that Isaiah was killed by Manasseh. There is no question that Manasseh's reign of evil was the final step in Judah's march toward destruction and captivity.

Week 31, Day 5 --- 2 Chronicles 32-33

My wife wrote up this summary of the story of Manasseh. I think it provides some helpful background.

Manasseh became a king when he was 12 years old. Manasseh's father, Hezekiah, had been a good king that followed God. Manasseh's grandfather, Ahaz, was a king that did not follow God. What would Manasseh do?

Manasseh chose not to follow God. Instead, he made lots of idols for the people to worship. He even put idols in God's house, the temple. Manasseh worshipped every god he could think of, but not the one true God.

Most of the people were happy to follow Manasseh. Manasseh killed the people who tried to worship the one true God. Sometimes he even killed people thinking he was honoring the idols he made. A lot of very bad things were being done in honor of the idols.

God tried to get Manasseh and the people to stop doing evil things, but they wouldn't listen. So, God sent an army to capture them and make them slaves. Manasseh was put in chains, a hook was put in his nose, and he was taken to Babylon. There he was so miserable that he prayed to God. Manasseh was sorry for the life he had lived. God heard his prayer and made Manasseh king again.

Back in Jerusalem, Manasseh got rid of all the idols and told the people to worship only the one true God. God was pleased with who Manasseh had become, but the people had a hard time giving up the way they worshipped idols. When Manasseh's son, Amon, became king he forgot the one true God and again had the people worshipping idols and doing evil things. The story of Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18 & 2 Chronicles 33:1-20) is a bit like the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

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Week 31, Day 6 --- Nahum 1-3

This is a short little book with an interesting message. To me it sounds like ancient trash talking. God is saying to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, that she will not always be on the top. She too will be defeated. Judah can be encouraged that the power that threatens her will soon fall. It all happened. Assyria fell as Babylon rose.

Week 31, Day 7 --- 2 Kings 22-23 - 2 Chronicles 34-35

There were very few good kings in the history of Israel. Josiah was one of them. He does good during all of his reign and is zealous for the law of God. I wish his story had a happy ending, but it doesn't. While he pursued God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, at the same time he apparently was not able to lead either his family or the people to do the same thing. As soon as he dies the country goes back to its evil ways and will soon go into captivity. Even a king cannot change the minds of a people determined to do evil.

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Week 32, Day 1 --- Zephaniah 1-3

Week 32, Day 2 --- Jeremiah 1-3

Week 32, Day 3 --- Jeremiah 4-6

Week 32, Day 4 --- Jeremiah 7-9

Week 32, Day 5 --- Jeremiah 10-13

Week 32, Day 6 --- Jeremiah 14-17

Week 32, Day 7 --- Jeremiah 18-22

Week 32, Day 1 --- Zephaniah 1-3

God chose prophets from all walks of life. Zephaniah is a part of the royal family. He is the great, great, grandson of King Hezekiah. His royal blood does not change his message. He prophesies during King Josiah's reign, so a good king is leading the country. Zephaniah writes to warn the people that God is going to destroy not only their oppressors, but the evil people within Judah itself. The book does end on a high note. God will preserve and restore those who are faithful to Him. I love the following verse:

The LORD your God is with you,
he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing."
Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)

I think it really captures who God is, both His might and His love. In spite of all we've done, when we turn toward Him He delights in us.

Week 32, Day 2 --- Jeremiah 1-3

Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet. As you will see as he tells his story his life is filled with great and continual sadness. It appears that from a very young age God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet. His life is spent speaking and writing a message that it seems no one wants to hear. God is trying to win His people back. The word picture that God often uses compares God's relationship with Israel with the relationship between a man and his wife. God is the husband and Israel is the wife. When God says that Israel prostituted herself under every tree He doesn't necessarily mean that Israel sold herself sexually for money. Sex outside of marriage certainly occurred during idol worship, but God's bigger issue was the worship of idols themselves. Israel wanted benefits they thought God wouldn't provide, so they "sold" themselves to the idols that they thought would provide what they wanted. In this way they were unfaithful, just as a wife would be if she sold herself to a man who was not her husband. In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness I hope you can hear God's passionate love for His people coming through in chapter 3.

Week 32, Day 3 --- Jeremiah 4-6

It is hard to imagine the depth and breadth of the evil in Jerusalem. God challenges Jeremiah to find a single person who is faithful to God and knows that this person can't be found. I love to

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preach, but I have always preached to friendly and willing audiences. Jeremiah was called to preach and God told him that his preaching would be like fire. Jeremiah was to preach all the time to an audience that did not want to hear what he had to say. The only relationship that Jeremiah had to hang onto at this point was his relationship with God.

Week 32, Day 4 --- Jeremiah 7-9

But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward. Jeremiah 7:24 (NIV)

This is the verse that caught my attention. God wants the people of Israel to understand that their direction matters. He wants us to understand that direction matters. God had rescued Israel from Egypt and they had moved toward God until they conquered the land. From that time on they occasionally turn toward God and move toward Him, but mostly they turn back toward Egypt and move in that direction. The worship of idols moves them away from God. As the people become less like God they care less and less about the things that God cares about. The widows and the poor suffer as a result. God's actions may seem harsh. Let me see if I can paint a picture with words that will help. There is a road that goes through a desert. In one direction there is an image of an oasis. It isn't real, but the image is strong. However, before the oasis is a deep canyon and the cliff appears without warning. In the other direction the road goes on for what appears to be forever. It goes over hills and valleys, but there is no way to see the ultimate destination. God knows that the ultimate destination is a real oasis, life forever with Him. God doesn't want to see anyone fall over the cliff to destruction in the deep canyon. Since everyone seems determined to go that way He must find some way to turn people around. I think that the destruction is God's effort to turn some of the children of Israel around before it is too late, so that there will still be a people who are moving toward Him.

What happened in your life to turn you around? Where were you headed before that happened?

Week 32, Day 5 --- Jeremiah 10-13

I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own;
it is not for man to direct his steps.

Correct me, LORD, but only with justice—
not in your anger,
lest you reduce me to nothing. Jeremiah 10:23,24 (NIV)

This is a hard part of the Bible to read. It is kind of like a long dark tunnel. There is a great light, Jesus, at the end of the tunnel, but sometimes it is very hard to see. Jeremiah had a very healthy fear of God. I think that is the only reason he could keep proclaiming the message that God gave him. Today's chapters make clear that there were men who were try to kill Jeremiah to shut him up, but God protected him. Many are tempted today to worship many gods hoping that one of them will be real and give them what they want. God finds this very offensive. The Jews were continuing to make their daily sacrifices in the temple, but would immediately go out and offer up sacrifices to their idols. The whole purpose behind their eventual destruction and captivity was to rid them of these idols.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 32, Day 6 --- Jeremiah 14-17

Jeremiah has a very special relationship with God. He is a prophet, but he is also a priest. He has the task of delivering a very unpleasant message of judgment to the people. At the same time that he is preaching destruction he is praying for mercy. You will see later that Jeremiah suffers a great deal for the message he is delivering. He cannot be ignored because his love for God and his love for the people are obvious. As you are reading Jeremiah look for little nuggets of truth and blessing like the one below.

⁷ "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose confidence is in him.

⁸ He will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit." Jeremiah 17:7,8 (NIV)

Just like the weather life changes. One year there is an abundance of rain, maybe even floods. The next year there is too little rain and we ration water. One year our life is full of blessings and everything seems to be going well. The next year it seems that everything is a struggle and our lives are filled with pain and sadness. We cannot depend on circumstances. The only one we can depend on is God. He never fails and He will keep us standing regardless of the circumstances that life brings our way.

Week 32, Day 7 --- Jeremiah 18-22

Jeremiah makes a big switch in today's reading. Up to this point he has often pleaded for the people of Israel at the same time that he was prophesying their doom. When it becomes very clear that they will not listen and desire to kill him Jeremiah switches his prayer to God. He begins to pray that God's wrath will come on the people. The second big thing I noticed in this reading was the offer of mercy to the people. Siege was a terrible thing. A city was cutoff from all sources of food and water and slowly consumed all its supplies until it actually began to consume itself. Cannibalism is a fact of life during the last days of a siege. The only hope of rescue is from an outside force and the people were consistently being told that God would not rescue them this time. God says, "Trust me and put yourselves into the hands of the Babylonians and you will live." God has a good plan, but it requires that the people surrender. God has a plan for us and it also requires that we stop fighting for our independence and surrender to Him.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 33, Day 1 --- Jeremiah 23-25
Week 33, Day 2 --- Jeremiah 26-29
Week 33, Day 3 --- Jeremiah 30-31
Week 33, Day 4 --- Jeremiah 32-34
Week 33, Day 5 --- Jeremiah 35-37
Week 33, Day 6 --- Jeremiah 38-40 - Psalm 74 - Psalm 79
Week 33, Day 7 --- 2 Kings 24-25 - 2 Chronicles 36

Week 33, Day 1 --- Jeremiah 23-25

The Bible often uses the term shepherd to describe a spiritual leader of people. Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. Many desire to be leaders, but often don't think about the consequences. God holds leaders accountable for how they lead and where they lead. The shepherds of Israel were leading the people astray and needed to be destroyed.

God tells Jeremiah that the period of captivity will be 70 years long. I'm not sure why God chose 70 years. This long a time probably meant that it was the grandchildren of those who went into captivity who would return to Jerusalem. It would be people who had never seen Jerusalem who would build the new Israel. Once again the people were placed in slavery, so that they would value freedom when it was given to them.

Week 33, Day 2 --- Jeremiah 26-29

What were the people worshipping? Were idols of wood and gold their only sin? I think Jeremiah 26 points out something that may not have been obvious in the rest of the prophets we have read through. The people did continue to perform the rituals and sacrifices that were called out in the Law of Moses. However, instead of worshipping God they had begun to worship the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. They knew it, but didn't want anyone to tell them that. Even worse, they didn't want Jeremiah telling them that God was going to destroy what they worshipped.

Jeremiah 29 reveals God's purpose for the time of captivity. His plan was to rebuild what had been destroyed. He instructs the captives to work for the good of their captors. I will live and act differently if I know I'm going to be in a place for a very long time. I make it my home. This is very hard for a captive to do. A captive longs for the home he was taken away from. God tells the captives to recognize that their old home is gone. They must settle in and be at home in order to rebuild and be prepared to return to build a new home in their old land. All of those who hear this message will be dead by the time this comes true. The book of Isaiah offers hope for long in the future with the coming of Jesus. Jeremiah provides practical instruction on how to deal with the reality of today.

Week 33, Day 3 --- Jeremiah 30-31

Jeremiah prophecies that a new covenant is coming. The New Testament describes that new covenant that we live under. In the Old Testament God made a covenant with a group of people, the descendants of Jacob. We know them as the children of Israel or Jews. In the New Testament God makes a covenant with individuals. People who have entered into this covenant, or agreement, with God we know as Christians. The family or group of all those who have

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

entered into this new covenant is known as the church. It is important to see that God's new covenant is not with the church, but is instead with individuals. I do not want to diminish the importance of the church, but it is most important to see that God's new covenant is between God and an individual person. This is a really good thing because it means that I have direct access to God. His law is written directly on my heart.

Week 33, Day 4 --- Jeremiah 32-34

Many of the books of prophecy look far into the future. Prophecy is always delivering God's message and sometimes that message is for the immediate situation. That is the case with today's reading. Zedekiah has placed Jeremiah in prison to limit the number of people he can talk to. The result is a series of very personal messages for the king about what is going to happen very soon. Zedekiah is very fortunate that he will live. However, many will die because of their refusal to surrender to the Babylonians. The more serious issue is their unwillingness to surrender to God. This is shown by the disobedience to the law. It was not against the law to have an Israelite for you slave. I was against the law to keep them in slavery for all their life and that is what was happening.

Week 33, Day 5 --- Jeremiah 35-37

Jeremiah gives us a running account of the final destruction of Jerusalem at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. He begins with a very important story of a faithful family. It is easy to forget that there were people who remained faithful to God alone in Israel. There is so much focus on the rulers and those who are unfaithful that we forget that God has preserved a remnant who love Him. It is always easier to hear and pay attention to the loud and rebellious. Just as it is always easier to hear Satan than it is to hear God. Satan shouts and God whispers. I can't imagine the amount of work that the king burned up when he burned the scroll. Think how long it has taken us to read this far in Jeremiah. Imagine writing that all out twice!

Week 33, Day 6 --- Jeremiah 38-40 - Psalm 74 - Psalm 79

This section begins with Jeremiah being thrown into a cistern. A cistern is a big hole that has been dug in the ground where water is stored. Cisterns are still used in many parts of the world. In our country we don't dig holes in the ground. Instead we have very large tanks to store water. Water is collected during the rainy season for use when it is dry. The cistern Jeremiah was thrown into didn't contain any water, but was still muddy at the bottom. If he had been left there he would have died in a few days. Fortunately, he was rescued. The hero of this story is Gedaliah. He trusts in God and takes a stand against everyone to rescue Jeremiah. He is rewarded when Jerusalem falls.

Zedekiah the king is not a hero. He is the great example of a coward. He fears men and not God. The result is a long time of suffering for the city of Jerusalem and the death of all his family. Why do you think Zedekiah asked for Jeremiah's advice and then didn't follow it? What is God calling you to do that would require that you trust Him more than you fear men?

Week 33, Day 7 --- 2 Kings 24-25 - 2 Chronicles 36

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

The key to the reason for the captivity and the length of the captivity is found in the following verse:

The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.
2 Chronicles 36:21 (NIV)

The law that God gave the people through Moses said that the people were to farm the land, but that they were to let the land rest every seventh year. God promised them an abundant harvest in the sixth year that would provide for them through the seventh and eighth years. This was to be a reminder that it was God who provided for them and God who owned the land. As far as we know from the stories in the Bible the people never practiced this Sabbath rest for the land. They didn't keep the weekly Sabbath and they didn't allow the land to rest. So, the punishment of the Israelites included a time of recovery for the land.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 34, Day 1 --- Habakkuk 1-3

Week 34, Day 2 --- Jeremiah 41-45

Week 34, Day 3 --- Jeremiah 46-48

Week 34, Day 4 --- Jeremiah 49-50

Week 34, Day 5 --- Jeremiah 51-52

Week 34, Day 6 --- Lamentations 1:1-3:36

Week 34, Day 7 --- Lamentations 3:37-5:22

Week 34, Day 1 --- Habakkuk 1-3

Here is an example of prayer at its best. Habakkuk and God are having a conversation. How does Habakkuk's prayer begin? How does God respond? What do you learn about God from this prayer? What is Habakkuk's attitude by the end of the prayer?

Week 34, Day 2 --- Jeremiah 41-45

The land of Israel had been emptied of people and the best of the people had been carried into captivity. The open land attracted Jews who had been taken into other lands in earlier times. Unfortunately, they did not return to Israel because they desired to be faithful to God. I think they returned because they thought there was great opportunity in the empty land. The king of Babylon does not think they are a threat so he has left very little force to enforce his will. There is great evil and many die. Those who remain have a choice. God tells them very directly to stay in Judah and He will bless them. He also tells them that if they flee to Egypt they will die there. They decide to flee. We are often tempted to run. God says to us, "Trust me and stay put. I will take you through what you are facing." I am often tempted to run and many times have given into that temptation. I have no idea what my life would be like today if I had stayed rather than run. I am blessed that God continues to give me opportunity to learn and to stay.

Week 34, Day 3 --- Jeremiah 46-48

There isn't any good news in these chapters. The whole world order is beginning to change. For the next several centuries the world will be in turmoil. War will be almost constant and one kingdom after another will fall. In the middle of all this chaos the Israelites will come together as a nation again. God is preparing the world for the arrival of Jesus. He is bringing to an end the worship of idols.

Week 34, Day 4 --- Jeremiah 49-50

Who is really in charge? After several chapters describing how Babylon will destroy the nations we are also told what will happen to Babylon. God is always in control. Often it doesn't look like it or feel like it, but He is. He has a purpose and a plan to bring about that purpose. His purpose at this time was to restore Israel to Himself and He did that by taking them away from their land to spend time in a place where they would learn to cry out to Him for help. Now, through Jeremiah, God is telling the people that their exile is not permanent. The Babylonians will not rule forever and there will come a time when the people can return home. It will be many years, but it will happen.

Week 34, Day 5 --- Jeremiah 51-52

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Jeremiah ends his prophecy by predicting the future of Babylon. It was one of the most famous cities of its day, but until very recently has been in ruins. We know where it was located because of the ruins. It is south of Baghdad in modern Iraq. Saddam Hussein attempted to rebuild it, but did not complete the task before his kingdom fell. Later, when you read Daniel, you'll discover how accurate Jeremiah's predictions were. It always amazes me how many Jews there are today given the very small number who actually survived and went into captivity. Jerusalem still stands while Babylon is mostly still ruins. Israel still exists while the Babylonian empire disappeared centuries ago. God is still in control.

Week 34, Day 6 --- Lamentations 1:1-3:36

Today's reading may leave you a little depressed. This is partly because you have been reading a lament and you stopped reading in the middle. These two verses come toward the end of today's reading:

²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22,23 (NIV)

There is hope. There is always hope in God. I received a devotion in email the other day that explains the lament and gives a modern example. I hope you find it helpful.

DayBreaks for 08/02/10: A Modern Lament

If you've read the Psalms at all, you've encountered songs of lament. Lamentations is essentially a long lament. Michael Card has written a book recently titled *The Language of Lament*, and it shows that "lamenting" can be a very valuable, and indeed, Biblical, activity. At times I'm not sure where the dividing line between lamenting and complaining are, but there seem to be some very clear distinctives to me:

1. Audience: we complain to other people, David and Jeremiah lamented to God;
2. Purpose: in our complaining, often we simply want to just go on complaining, but in lamenting, one seems to be seeking understanding and wisdom;
3. Objective: complaining is generally done to elicit sympathy from people – lamenting's purpose is to plead one's case to God and seek relief.

I recently ran across what I thought was an excellent modern day lament, and wanted to share it with you.

On June 22, 2007, a hit-and-run incident left Daniel McConchie paralyzed from the waist down. Daniel says that since that traumatic day, "God has not healed my affliction, but he has taught me the power of lamenting to him about it." He adds: "To our detriment, one of the most

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overlooked portions of Scripture in modern-day America are the psalms of lament. However, David repeatedly demonstrated that laments make obvious our intense faith in God, that he can and will intervene in our time of need. They demonstrate just how deep our relationship with the Father really is. After all, we don't communicate our grief and mourning to strangers. We save that for those we truly know and love."

With these words in mind, here is a lament Daniel wrote nearly a year after the accident, on April 9, 2008:

Oh Lord, my God! Why do you wait to show up?
I cried out to you when trouble struck.
I asked for your restoration.
I know that you heard me. I know that you answered.

Yet nothing—nothing of meaning happens again today.
Infinitesimal changes dog my days.
I am hounded by the prayers of the fickle
Looking to me to prove their faith.

Wearily I drag on
Tiring of the waste, hating the horror,
The pain, the suffering, the never-ending trial.
The endless story drags on, and on, and on.

When will the clouds break?
When will the night cease?
When will the tunnel end?
When will you smile again?

What a two-edged sword your voice is!
You speak. And then wait?
You give hope. And then vanish into the mist?
Have you forgotten me? Have more important things arrested your attention?

Hope turns black. This evil I have seen.
Nightly my dreams show me restored,
And in the morning I am broken again
Cursed to relive the horror of suffering's first day.

Please slay me! Blot my name from the ranks of the living!
For in the grave can I finally rest.
My wife can have her dreams again;
My children a father who can provide as I should.

I wasted my youth. I dismissed the joys I should have embraced.
Now I am a mere spectator
Pretending to be consequential while others take my place.
A position I threw away one fateful day.

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How long? How long must I wait here in the middle?
Between healing and hell,
Between heaven and horror,
I am unable to move ... unable to see ... lost in eternal confusion.

My demons torment me
Batting me about like a toy, I spin and crash in endless cycle.
I no longer know which way is up,
Which way is right, which way to go.

Which way is the path to life?
Is it up an un-climbable mountain?
Or on a path tread by all but me
And the others who are broken like I?

Surely it is impossible for me alone to find
And impossible for me to transverse.
Alone I am finished,
Dust left for the broom.

Who am I that God should remember me?
My only salvation is that he should not forget his image,
Or let his word be broken.
He is faithful to us because he is faithful to himself.

There is nothing I can do,
In no way can I help.
I sit in the ruins and wait,
And take comfort in those who lie in the ashes with me.

But one day, by his promise, I will stand;
Restored as his message of hope is fulfilled.
The Lord will turn this horror into a fading dream,
And I will honor his name forever.

Previously, I've suggested you write your own Psalms to God. Perhaps today you need to write a lament.

PRAYER: Thank You that we can be honest with You and find comfort in Your Presence! Heal those who hurt this day, In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Week 34, Day 7 --- Lamentations 3:37-5:22

Jeremiah's final prayer is that God would restore the people of Israel to Himself. This God will do. Many people look at the side of God that is seen in Jeremiah and Lamentations and turn away.

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They believe God exists, but want nothing to do with Him. I admit that this side of God makes me uncomfortable. God doesn't always fit my picture of what God should be like. This tells me that I still have much growing to do. I hope that one of the things you've learned is that you can be honest with God. Neither David nor Jeremiah were punished for their laments. Let God know how you feel. He cares.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 35, Day 1 --- Ezekiel 1-4

Week 35, Day 2 --- Ezekiel 5-8

Week 35, Day 3 --- Ezekiel 9-12

Week 35, Day 4 --- Ezekiel 13-15

Week 35, Day 5 --- Ezekiel 16-17

Week 35, Day 6 --- Ezekiel 18-19

Week 35, Day 7 --- Ezekiel 20-21

Week 35, Day 1 --- Ezekiel 1-4

Today we begin the last long book of prophecy in the Old Testament. It is filled with hard words and strange visions. It is not God's final word before Jesus comes, but it is a message that is intended to turn the people of Israel in captivity back toward God. Ezekiel is a priest, but he is a priest in captivity. Try to imagine the scene that Ezekiel is caught up in in the first chapter. Our difficulty in picturing what he sees is due to the fact that what he sees is indescribable. We use awesome to describe many things, but the vision that Ezekiel saw was truly awesome. It was so awesome he fell face down on the ground. Just as with Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel will be told by God to do things that are physical in addition to his speaking and writing to communicate his message. His first task is to live laying down for a little more than a year. During this time he will eat just enough food and water to keep him alive. Ezekiel is totally obedient to God, but there is one thing he will not do. The Jews under siege in Jerusalem had long ago given up any thought of dietary restrictions and the ceremonial law. God wants Ezekiel to identify with the people under siege, but Ezekiel is unwilling to eat unclean food. God honors this desire and lets Ezekiel cook his bread over a fuel that is considered clean.

As you are reading through this book for the first time, don't try to figure out what every symbol means. Instead, write down your overall impressions. What is God trying to say? How would you react if you saw what Ezekiel was doing and heard what he was saying?

Week 35, Day 2 --- Ezekiel 5-8

Have you ever been really hungry? I'm talking about being so hungry that you would eat anything that had even the least nutritional value. I certainly haven't. In fact, I've rarely missed a meal in my life. Israel was a prosperous nation and they enjoyed their wealth. Ezekiel was in Babylon and even though he was a slave he had a regular food. Jerusalem was under siege and people were literally eating each other in an attempt to survive. Israel had rejected God and God had withdrawn. This is probably the best picture of what happens when we reject God. It isn't that He comes and His presence brings destruction. Instead, He withdraws and the absence of His presence opens up our lives for the entrance of the evil that surrounds us.

Week 35, Day 3 --- Ezekiel 9-12

Short term thinking leads to rebellion. If this life is all there is, then I have no need for God. This is what the children of Israel had come to believe. They lived for themselves and cared nothing for others or God. God's response is very clear.

Week 35, Day 4 --- Ezekiel 13-15

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People who speak for God have an awesome responsibility. I must be very careful with these words I write. My desire is to clarify what God has said in the Bible. It is important for you to understand that the Bible is true and you can trust it. Anything else you read outside the Bible is the writing of an imperfect human being. I'm not saying that you can't benefit from reading. I am saying to be cautious. Test everything you read against the truth of the Bible. Seek God's truth with a desire to be as pure as God desired His people Israel to be.

Vines are really useless. We have a big grape vine that produces hundreds of feet of cane every year. It is good for nothing except to be chopped up and turned into compost. That is it is good for nothing when the season is over. The purpose of the vine is to carry water from the roots to produce grapes. Israel, the vine, was not producing grapes. Since it was not producing grapes it was worthless and had to be severely pruned. This picture of Israel as the vine will appear many times in the gospels.

Week 35, Day 5 --- Ezekiel 16-17

Ezekiel tells us a couple of stories. He uses vivid images that would have meant much to his audience to communicate God's deep disappointment and anger with the people of Israel. Who represents Israel in chapter 16? How does God feel? What do you think offends God the most? Remember that God desires and has provided for a deeper relationship with you than He had with Israel. You are loved with and incredibly deep love.

Week 35, Day 6 --- Ezekiel 18-19

What direction are you headed? Are you moving toward God or away from God? Chapter 18 describes the essential element of the new covenant that God is bringing to His people. In the old covenant introduced through Moses the people of Israel were treated as a people. They were evaluated as a community, rewarded as a community, and punished as a community. God is now saying that the time is come for each individual to decide. The message of hope is that it is never too late to turn toward God. Chapter 19 is another lament. The royal house of Israel was once very powerful. Now it is weak and useless.

Week 35, Day 7 --- Ezekiel 20-21

Judah did not go into captivity in Babylon as a single group. It took several years for all of Judah to be taken captive and for the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed. Ezekiel was taken captive in one of the earliest groups. Can you hear God's frustration in these chapters? In spite of several defeats and many people taken into captivity, the people who remain in Judah and even the captives continue to disobey God. God has decided what He is going to do and has made it very clear through multiple prophets what He desires for His people to do. God is not looking for conversation at this point. He is looking for action, specifically God is looking for His people to change their minds (repent) and return to Him.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 36, Day 1 --- Ezekiel 22-23

Week 36, Day 2 --- Ezekiel 24-27

Week 36, Day 3 --- Ezekiel 28-31

Week 36, Day 4 --- Ezekiel 32-34

Week 36, Day 5 --- Ezekiel 35-37

Week 36, Day 6 --- Ezekiel 38-39

Week 36, Day 7 --- Ezekiel 40-41

Week 36, Day 1 --- Ezekiel 22-23

Week 36, Day 2 --- Ezekiel 24-27

There are two pictures in today's reading. The people of Israel were supposed to love God more than they loved Jerusalem and the temple. They had gotten this reversed. They loved and worshipped the temple and the city where it was. At best they ignored God, and at worst they rebelled against Him by worshipping idols and doing all sorts of evil in the temple and the city. God is telling the exiles that if they mourn for the city and the temple they will be demonstrating that they also still love God less than they love their former city. I cannot imagine what I will feel like when my wife dies. This must have been very hard for Ezekiel and only His deep love for God brought him through.

Tyre was a very famous city. It was a trading city on the seacoast. There was a settlement on land and the castle for the king was built on an island a short distance from the shore. It was thought that the castle could not be defeated because of the water protecting it. When Nebuchadnezzar came to defeat the city he quickly wiped out the town on the shore and then he had his soldiers take the rocks on the shore and used them to build a walkway out to the island. The island was easily captured and the shoreline became a bare rock because everything on it had been stripped away to be used to build the walkway. God may have been angry with Jerusalem, but He was still protecting it.

Week 36, Day 3 --- Ezekiel 28-31

The history of Israel and the history of Egypt are intertwined. Today it is hard to imagine how powerful Egypt was at this time. The people of Egypt accomplished things, like the pyramids, that no other civilization could even imagine. Their downfall was that they never recognized the God of Israel as God. If you were the ruler of a nation, what would be the worst thing you could do in the eyes of God?

God is preparing this part of the world for a very special event. It is hard to see with all the prophecies of destruction, but God is actually building something. He is preparing the world for Jesus to come.

Week 36, Day 4 --- Ezekiel 32-34

There are two vivid images in today's reading. The first is of the watchman. In the days before electronics the only way to know an enemy was coming was for someone to keep watch from the highest point in the city. What would happen to the city if the watchman was distracted and not watching? Even worse, what would happen to the city if the watchman saw destruction

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

coming and did not tell anyone? I don't like this passage because I have been guilty too many times of not warning someone of coming destruction.

I like the second image better. It is the image of a shepherd. A shepherd cares for his sheep. The shepherd to come is called David in this passage, but who do think Ezekiel might be talking about?

Week 36, Day 5 --- Ezekiel 35-37

The first two chapters repeat a message that has been prophesied many times. The nations that have tormented Israel will be punished and Israel will be destroyed. You can probably identify more with how Israel feels than I can. The people are once again slaves in captivity and they feel like they are dead. They are powerless to return to their own land. I hope you have hope. They have no hope and Ezekiel's task is to bring them hope. God is able to bring the dead back to life. What would happen to you if you could not breathe? The most powerful way God communicates who He is, is through the concept of breath or wind. God is life and without Him we are dead.

One of the things you've probably noticed is the promise that Israel will one day be restored. There are many opinions on how to interpret this prophecy. Some think these prophecies, including the one in chapter 37, speak of the first coming of Jesus with the day of Pentecost being the time when all of Israel is brought together from throughout the nations of the world. Some think the prophecies speak of a future time when Jesus will return to earth and reign on earth in a restored Israel for 1000 years. Finally, some think that these prophecies speak of heaven. One day we'll know for certain and there will be no more questions. For now I'm glad that we have hope in Jesus for an eternal future with God.

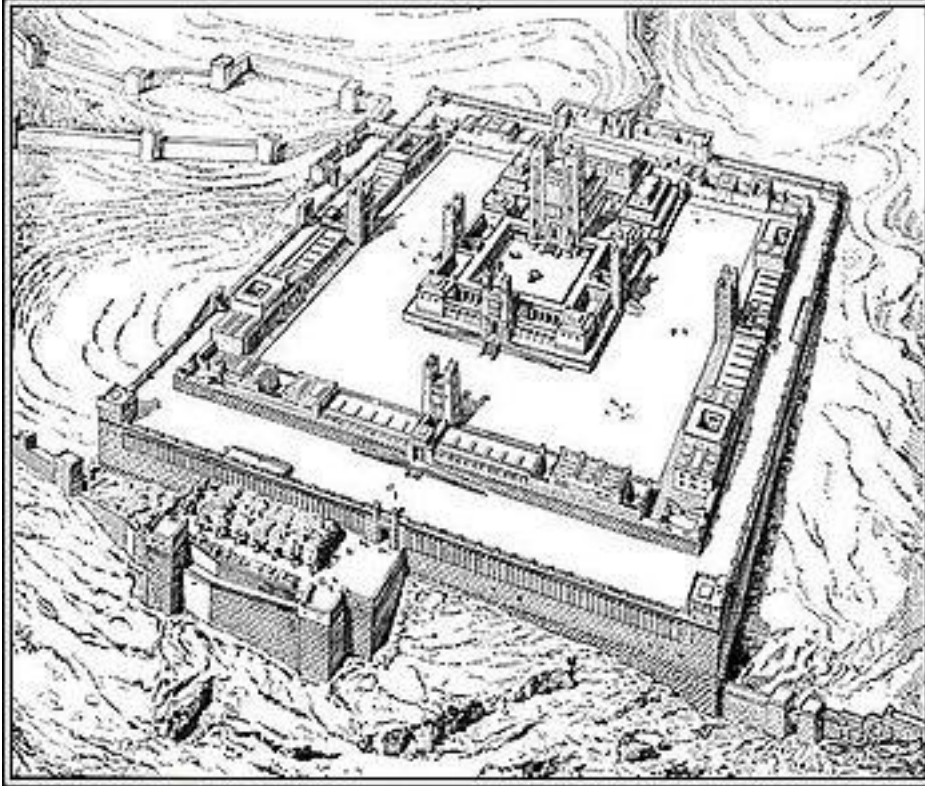
Week 36, Day 6 --- Ezekiel 38-39

The peoples and battle spoken of in these chapters is repeated in the book of Revelation 20:7-9. Since this event has not yet occurred, and it would be hard to miss in history, it is yet to come. God continually tells us through the prophets that there will come a time when everyone will recognize that God exists and that He is as mighty and holy as He has been described by His people. God also promises that He will raise up His people and that they will no longer be defeated. This is a great message of hope for a people in captivity who have been beaten down by many different enemies over centuries.

Week 36, Day 7 --- Ezekiel 40-41

Today begins one of the most mysterious portions of the Old Testament. Ezekiel sees a vision of a new temple. As far as anyone knows this temple has never yet been built. For this reason it is impossible to know whether or not God is showing Ezekiel a real physical temple or an image that represents something else. The description is very complex. A cubit is between 18 and 24 inches. It was the distance between the King's extended finger tips and his elbow. Many people have attempted to build models of this temple. Here is one picture.

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Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 37, Day 1 --- Ezekiel 42-43

Week 37, Day 2 --- Ezekiel 44-45

Week 37, Day 3 --- Ezekiel 46-48

Week 37, Day 4 --- Ezekiel 46-48

Week 37, Day 5 --- Joel 1-3

Week 37, Day 6 --- Daniel 1-3

Week 37, Day 7 --- Daniel 4-6

Week 37, Day 1 --- Ezekiel 42-43

The outer measurement of the temple that Ezekiel describes is 500 cubits square. This is about 300 yards on each side. The size of the temple would be a little larger than one of the new football stadiums. This was supposed to be a big building. The precise measurements and symmetry in the building were all to illustrate the holiness of God. The basic meaning of the word holy is separate or distinct. It also includes the concept of purity. God is different from us and still this passage tells us that God desires to live with us. The problem is that His holiness cannot come in contact with sin. The sacrifices of animals work to temporarily cover the sin of the people so that God can live with them.

There is much speculation about the temple that Ezekiel describes. I wonder if God was giving Ezekiel plans just as He gave Moses plans for the tabernacle. What we know for sure is that this wasn't the temple that the Israelites rebuilt when they returned to Jerusalem. I wonder what would have happened had they been determined enough to build this temple.

Week 37, Day 2 --- Ezekiel 44-45

God doesn't go into as much detail as He does in the first 5 books of the Bible, but much of the ceremonial law from Leviticus and Deuteronomy is repeated here. It may not sound like it, but this is a message of hope. God is saying that the temple will be rebuilt and that priests and Levites will again serve Him in the temple. Unfortunately, there was only one family of priests who had remained faithful to God. They would be the priests who would be allowed to make the sacrifices and enter the most holy place in the temple.

Week 37, Day 3 --- Ezekiel 46-47

Week 37, Day 4 --- Ezekiel 48

"The LORD is there." This is the really important point that God is trying to communicate through Ezekiel to all Israel. God desires to be with His people. There are differences, but the instructions in this chapter remind me of Moses' speech in Deuteronomy as he prepares the people to enter the Promised Land the first time. Now God is preparing the people to return to the Promised Land. There are many parts of these instructions that seem like they are for the immediate future. There are others, like the stream of water flowing out of the temple, which seem like they must be for some future time. The big message is that God is returning to Jerusalem and He wants His people to return as well.

Week 37, Day 5 --- Joel 1-3

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

The prophet Joel repeats in much shorter form the same story that you have heard many times in the prophets. God is bringing destruction on Israel for its disobedience. The people are called to repent. God promises to bring the people back from captivity and to restore Israel. Many prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament. Some are a little difficult to connect, but some are very clear. Take a look at the passages below. Compare Joel and Acts. What does this tell you about the timing of God's commitment to bring Israel back together?

The Day of the LORD

²⁸ "And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.

²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Joel 2:28,29 (NIV)

¹⁷" In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

Acts 2: 17,18 (NIV)

Week 37, Day 6 --- Daniel 1-3

Daniel is one of my favorite books of the Bible. It provides us with great examples of how to live in a culture that does not follow God. Each chapter of Daniel contains a different story. In the law God provided very clear instructions on what to eat and what not to eat. It is clear that Daniel and his friends would have been sinning against God if they ate the food that the king provided for them. What did they risk by not being willing to eat the food? How did they convince their guards to let them eat the food that was acceptable to God?

The second story is about Daniel and the king's dream. What kind of person is the king? Why does he make such extreme decisions? The dream itself is going to be a consistent theme in Daniel and the last half of the book will expand on the predictions that come out of this dream. We know now looking back that what Daniel predicted is true. The Babylonians were followed by the Median/Persian Empire which then fell to the Greeks which then fell to the Romans. During the time of the Romans Jesus came and established His kingdom that eventually crushed all the others.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

The third story is about a fiery furnace. Have you ever been faced with a life or death decision where doing the right thing would lead to death? That is what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were faced with. They knew that God was powerful enough to save them, but there was no guarantee. They still chose to do the right thing.

Week 37, Day 7 --- Daniel 4-6

There are three more stories today. At the center of each story is the issue of pride. In the first story Nebuchadnezzar is a great and powerful king. He has conquered many other countries and everything seems to be going well. In fact, things are going so well that he thinks he can take credit for everything that has happened. God sends him a dream to let him know that this is a dangerous thing to do since it is really God who has made his success possible. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't listen to the dream or its interpretation. He gets to spend 7 years living just like a cow. The amazing thing is that after this time God restores his kingdom. One of the things that God is doing is providing a stable environment for the people of Israel who are in captivity.

In the second story Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar has become the king. He didn't learn anything from his father. He throws a big party and decides to use the holy things captured from the temple at a very unholy party. God sends him a message in a very spectacular and frightening way. It turns out that when he receives the message that the army that will kill him is already inside the city. God once again demonstrates that He is in charge. Once again a king's pride leads to his downfall.

The last story is one of my favorite stories in the entire Bible. The king is a good king and is tricked by his administrators into creating a very bad law. He is tricked through an appeal to his pride. Daniel knows exactly what is going on, but it doesn't change Daniel's habits at all. He knows that God is in charge. Just like his unwillingness to eat the unclean food, Daniel will not stop praying as God has commanded. So, Daniel is thrown into a den of hungry lions. Daniel survives and it is the jealous administrators who die.

This ends the story of Daniel's life. The rest of the book will focus on the future of Israel as Daniel tells of some incredible visions he saw during his life.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 38, Day 1 --- Daniel 7-9

Week 38, Day 2 --- Daniel 10-12

Week 38, Day 3 --- Ezra 1-3

Week 38, Day 4 --- Ezra 4-6 - Psalm 137

Week 38, Day 5 --- Haggai 1-2

Week 38, Day 6 --- Zechariah 1-7

Week 38, Day 7 --- Zechariah 8-14

Week 38, Day 1 --- Daniel 7-9

The prophecies in Daniel are unusual. First, they are mostly predictions of the future while most of the Old Testament prophecy is God's judgment on the people. Second, most of the predictions are full of imagery, but are also interpreted for us. At least they are partially interpreted. These predictions, even with their interpretation, have been argued about since the time they were written. Some people think that the predictions cover the period of time between Daniel and the first coming of Jesus. Another group of people think that the predictions cover the time between Daniel and the second coming of Jesus.

I think the big idea behind all these predictions is that God reigns supreme. All the kingdoms of the earth are temporary. It is God's kingdom and only God's kingdom that will last. I am in the group of people who believe that these prediction look toward the first coming of Jesus. The Roman Empire will be a great kingdom. Its greatness will lead to the crucifixion of Jesus, but also provided the means for the rapid spread of the gospel, the good news of Jesus resurrection.

I recently taught a Sunday School lesson on Daniel 9. Here are some principles that came out of that study. Powerful prayer requires serious preparation. Confession, agreeing with God about our sin, precedes intercession, making requests of God. We pray as part of a community, the body of Christ. Given these principles, here are some questions for you to think about. What has God promised that we should be requesting of Him? What does God desire? What do we need to confess to God? Spend some special time in prayer today. Here are some additional Bible readings to help you think about the concept of prayer:

John 17; Acts 4:24-31; Romans 8:26-30; Romans 15: 30-33; Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-23

Week 38, Day 2 --- Daniel 10-12

There is more going on than we can see. We see the physical and experience the passing of times. We live in 4 dimensions, but there is at least one more and that is a spiritual dimension. The Bible speaks of both angels and demons. They are powerful creatures and they are constantly battling. The results of their battles do have an impact on us. It also seems clear from Daniel's experience that prayer guides them. So, we must pray. Our prayers may be answered and we may be unaware that they have been answered. Daniel's prayer was answered immediately, but he didn't see the answer for 3 weeks.

The rest of the book is a prediction of future events. I believe that all these events have already occurred and culminated in the first coming of Jesus. Many others believe that these events are

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still in the future and that they end with the second coming of Jesus. Only time will tell which view is correct, if either are correct. Again, the main point is that God is in control.

Week 38, Day 3 --- Ezra 1-3

Now we return to the story. The people of Israel have been in captivity for 70 years. Most of the people who went into captivity have died. About 40,000 people decide to take the opportunity to return. However, many decide to stay in Babylon and the other cities where they have been in captivity, so only a remnant, a small portion, decides to return. Their task is to rebuild the temple. The end of chapter 3 is interesting. We might think that everyone would rejoice when the foundation of the new temple is laid. Apparently it was different from the old temple and some weep instead of rejoicing. Why do you think they wept? Why are we so reluctant to see things change? How do you think the weeping group will affect the rebuilding of the temple?

Week 38, Day 4 --- Ezra 4-6 - Psalm 137

The Jews who had returned from Babylon had been given a job to do. They were to rebuild the temple. The people who had been living in the land did not want this to happen. Some were worshiping God, but they were worshiping in Samaria. The restoration of the temple would move the center of worship from Samaria to Jerusalem and they did not want that. The process of sending letters back and forth was very slow, but very effective.

This section is important because it established the beginning of the feud between the Samaritans and the Jews. The Samaritans were the people who lived in Israel during the time that the Jewish people were in captivity in Babylon. The Samaritans were a mixed race people. They had Jewish blood, but they had intermarried and also had the blood of other races. They worshipped God, but also worshipped other gods. The hatred between Jews and Samaritans was extreme by the time that Jesus came. It all began here with the battle over the rebuilding of the temple.

Week 38, Day 5 --- Haggai 1-2

This is a prophecy to encourage and it is also a prophecy about priorities. What are the people putting first in chapter 1? What is the result? God asks the people to change and then He makes them a promise. Does God keep His promises?

The Jews who have returned from captivity do not have a king, but they do have a local governor. His very specific task is to rebuild the temple. God encourages him and tells him that he will be blessed and the people will be blessed if they will put this work first.

Week 38, Day 6 --- Zechariah 1-7

Today's reading is full of images. Most of the images are interpreted in the text. This book is one of the keys for interpreting the book of Revelation at the end of your Bible because many of the images are repeated there. Mixed in with the visions of the future are very specific instructions for the people who have returned from exile. They need direction to complete the task of rebuilding the temple and God provides it through Zechariah. Why do you think God mixes very practical and timely instruction with fantastic visions of the future?

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Week 38, Day 7 --- Zechariah 8-14

Zechariah writes after the people have returned from captivity to Jerusalem. This means that the restoration of Jerusalem that he is writing about is sometime in the future. There are many references to the events in Jesus' life in this section of Zechariah. How many did you see as you read this? As I read this section I got a better understanding of why the Jews of Jesus' day were expecting another warrior king like David. It seems clear that when Messiah comes Judah and Jerusalem will reign supreme and conquer the nations. This hasn't happened yet and so we are still waiting for the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 39, Day 1 --- Esther 1-5

Week 39, Day 2 --- Esther 6-10

Week 39, Day 3 --- Ezra 7-10

Week 39, Day 4 --- Nehemiah 1-5

Week 39, Day 5 --- Nehemiah 6-7

Week 39, Day 6 --- Nehemiah 8-10

Week 39, Day 7 --- Nehemiah 11-13 - Psalm 126

Week 39, Day 1 --- Esther 1-5

There are a few heroines in the Bible and this is the story of one of them. The story probably takes place after many of the Jews have returned to Jerusalem. However, many of the Jews decided to stay in the lands where they had been taken when captured. They had established good lives there and did not want to go home. Unfortunately, they Jews as a people were not well liked. They lived by a very different standard. They ate different food and worshiped a different God. Throughout all history people have been trying to destroy the Jews.

Esther's opportunity to become a heroine comes because of her great beauty. She becomes queen and has the opportunity to influence the king. The risk is that she might die in her attempt to save the Jews. Think about a time when you were in the position to do something good, but doing the good could have resulted in harm coming to you? What might have happened in this story if Esther had been overcome with fear rather than filled with courage?

Week 39, Day 2 --- Esther 6-10

Today's story really centers around two powerful men. One served the king and his people. The other served himself. The ending is predictable. Mordecai served the king and the result was that he was able to save his people. Haman served himself. He desired wealth and power and was driven by hatred of the Jews. He ended up dead and his wealth went to Mordecai.

Week 39, Day 3 --- Ezra 7-10

The book of Ezra ends with a very sad story. The people had returned from captivity and some of them had immediately taken as wives women who were not Israelites. They knew they were not supposed to do this. This had been one of the main reasons that they had gone into captivity. Men had married foreign wives and then began worshipping their gods. The solution seems drastic. God hates divorce. Even more He hates unfaithfulness in His people. The people desired to make a fresh start, so the men who had married foreign women sent the women and their children away.

Week 39, Day 4 --- Nehemiah 1-5

At first glance it appears that Nehemiah is a low level servant. He is the cupbearer to the king. This means that he tastes the king's wine to ensure it isn't poisoned and then brings it to the king. He was a slave, but he was also a very capable leader who might have had royal blood. He impressed the king and was appointed governor over Jerusalem. Ezra worked to restore the temple and Nehemiah worked to restore the walls of the city. They were in Jerusalem at the

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same time. While Ezra dealt with the problem of intermarriage, Nehemiah dealt with the problem of Jews taking advantage of each other financially.

Nehemiah may also have been a soldier. He is a great manager and has a military mind. This is a book that combines great faith in God with incredibly practical action. The following verse really summarizes this.

4:9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

The people's prayer to God was real and they did trust in God, but they also took a responsible action. They did not depend on miraculous intervention. They took responsibility for what they could be responsible for. The combination worked and they were able to continue working on the wall.

Week 39, Day 5 --- Nehemiah 6-7

Nehemiah was focused and his focus saved his life. His enemies' intent went beyond just attempting to distract him. They wanted to kill him. It was clear to everyone that Nehemiah's leadership was the key to the wall getting rebuilt. This passage gives us an understanding of why the listing of names was so important. The priests could not serve in the temple unless they could prove that they were descended from Aaron. When they couldn't prove this the Urim and Thummim were used to determine whether or not they were priests. Basically, the Urim and Thummim were two identical rocks that the priest put in a pocket in his robe. He would put his hand in the pocket and draw out one stone. One stone was "yes" and the other was "no". God determined which stone was picked and answered the priest's questions in this way. How many people entered the land of Israel the first time? You might need to go back and look at Numbers to find the answer. Why are so few left?

Week 39, Day 6 --- Nehemiah 8-10

The Israelites not only rebuilt the temple and the city of Jerusalem, they also worked hard to rebuild their relationship with God. I don't know if they read everything from Genesis through Deuteronomy or just Deuteronomy, but they read enough to know that they had not been obeying what God had commanded. They were saddened by their disobedience, but Nehemiah in his wisdom tells them to celebrate the goodness of God. It was a great beginning and led to a great commitment at the end of today's reading. Chapter 9 is a very complete review of Israel's history to this time. I had probably been at least 1500 years since God called Abraham. What would a 1500 year summary of your people's relationship with God look like? Why is it valuable to know our history?

Week 39, Day 7 --- Nehemiah 11-13 - Psalm 126

You may want to skip over all the names in this section, but do read the rest. Nehemiah has a difficult task. The temple and wall are completed and there is a time of great rejoicing. I can only imagine what it must have sounded like to have everyone in the city singing together. However, now that the focus on rebuilding is completed the people drift back into their normal day to day lives. They lose their focus on God and quickly begin working on the Sabbath and marrying foreign women. Nehemiah makes one last desperate effort to purify the city, but as

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you will see as you keep reading his efforts do not last. The song of Psalm 126 is a great song and I'm certain it was sung on that day of celebration, but it was also quickly forgotten. This is one of the main reasons that believers gather together each week. It is important to remember, so that we do not forget what God has done for us.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 40, Day 1 --- Malachi 1-4

Week 40, Day 2 --- Luke 1 - John 1:1-14

Week 40, Day 3 --- Matthew 1 - Luke 2:1-38

Week 40, Day 4 --- Matthew 2 - Luke 2:39-52

Week 40, Day 5 --- Mark 1 - Luke 3 - Matthew 3

Week 40, Day 6 --- John 1:15-51 - Matthew 4 - Luke 4-5

Week 40, Day 7 --- John 2-4

Week 40, Day 1 --- Malachi 1-4

I think I've said before that last words are important. In this book we have the last words of God before 450 years of silence that are followed by the coming of Jesus. The themes are the same as most of the other prophetic books. The people were not honoring God. The fact that they were not bringing their tithes, 10 percent of their income, to feed the Levites and care for the temple was a concrete example that they didn't trust God. Men were divorcing their wives and the family was breaking down. I find the final word of the book challenging and encouraging.

Malachi 4:5,6 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Jesus is coming and one of the ways He will impact people is through families. Specifically, He will restore the relationship that God desires to see between fathers and their children. How many men do you know who had a positive and loving relationship with their earthly father? For those who didn't, how would their lives have been changed if they had really had a father who loved them?

Week 40, Day 2 --- Luke 1 - John 1:1-14

Luke 1:16 "Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The New Testament begins with the births of two very special men. The first is John who be known as the Baptist. Notice that John the Baptist comes to fulfill the prophecy made back in Malachi. John will prepare the people for Jesus. Jesus is God come to earth to dwell in a human body. His coming will change the world. What do you think it would have been like for these families to have these very special sons?

Week 40, Day 3 --- Matthew 1 - Luke 2:1-38

As you've probably discovered, names are important in the Bible. It was really important to know what family you belonged to. Matthew begins his history of Jesus' life by telling us what family He belongs to. Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah and from the line of kings. It was very important to show that Jesus was a descendant of David.

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However, Joseph was really only Jesus' adopted father. Jesus' real father was God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph and Mary did not have sex until after Jesus had been born and Mary had been purified from the birth. You'll find out later that Jesus did have brothers and sisters. Jesus was the greatest king ever born, but He was born in a stable in a small town. His birth was announced to the lowest class of people living at that time. Why do you think Jesus wasn't born in a palace? Why was His birth announced to shepherds instead of to kings?

Week 40, Day 4 --- Matthew 2 - Luke 2:39-52

Herod was an evil king. He was also a powerful king who had brought a certain level of peace to the region because of his political skill. He had managed to develop a very good relationship with the Romans and this is what kept Judea at peace and him in power. When he heard that a King of the Jews had been born he was very disturbed. The Jews always had someone striving for power. It was Herod's job to eliminate all of these men. Herod killed many of his own sons. He did not hesitate to kill the babies of Bethlehem in the hope that he had killed the future king of the Jews.

It is clear to me from the passage in Luke that Jesus knew who He was from a very early age. I'm certain He was the best son a parent ever had, but it is also clear that He was God's Son first and that must have been a challenge for Mary and Joseph.

Week 40, Day 5 --- Mark 1 - Luke 3 - Matthew 3

There are four books that describe Jesus' life and ministry on the earth: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The first three are called the synoptic gospels. Synoptic means that they work together to tell the whole story. Gospel simply means good news. Reading one of them will tell you the story of Jesus. Reading all three of them will give you the story from three different perspectives. It is a little like an accident scene. The police talk to the witnesses and every witness saw the same accident, but in a little different way. The big event they describe is the same, but each will differ in the details they remember and communicate. Matthew will focus on the concept of the kingdom. Luke will focus on Jesus including everyone. Mark will focus on action and the spiritual war that Jesus is fighting. John focuses on both the humanity and divine nature of Jesus.

In today's passage you see one of the prophecies from the Old Testament fulfilled. This will happen over and over again through Jesus' life. The Pharisees are a group of men who are very wealthy and very religious. They are attempting to purify the nation by keeping the law so that the Messiah will come and rescue them from the Romans. They are looking for an earthly king and most do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah they are looking for. The scribes are the men who copy the Law onto scrolls so that it can be preserved. They have begun to worship the Law more than they worship God. These groups will appear over and over through the story of Jesus.

Week 40, Day 6 --- John 1:15-51 - Matthew 4 - Luke 4-5

Come and see. That has been my invitation to you all along. As you read through these four stories of Jesus' life I hope you will see how unique He is. Who does Jesus pick to be His special followers? What kind of people would you have picked if you were hoping to save the world?

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Jesus call to the men who would be called disciples was a very simple one. Disciple means learner and these men would learn by following Jesus wherever He went. In some ways they had it easy because they had a physical person to follow. In other ways it was incredibly difficult because He asked them to leave everything behind and He took them places they never would have gone on their own. Jesus makes the same invitation to everyone. As you read listen to His words and think about what it would mean to you to follow Jesus every day.

Week 40, Day 7 --- John 2-4

This is a chapter full of contrasts, but in those contrasts we really learn much about Jesus. The first story is about a man who has been paralyzed most of his life. He lives beside a pool of water that is supposed to have miraculous healing powers, yet there is nothing in the story to indicate that anyone in recent memory has actually been healed. Jesus does have the power to heal and He does heal this man. One of the big questions is why He doesn't just heal everyone who is beside the pool. There are no easy answers to that question. The big issue all through Jesus ministry was the Sabbath. The Sabbath was Saturday and was a day God intended to be a day of rest for people. The religious leaders had so distorted God's intent that people had to work very hard on that day to keep all the traditions that had been added to God's desire.

- Jesus asks the man by the pool, "Do you want to become well?" How does the man answer? Does this make sense? How would you respond if Jesus asked you, "Would you like to be released from prison?"
- Why do you think Jesus physically heals only this man at this time?
- Where does eternal life come from according to Jesus?
- Who do you think Jesus is? What does that mean to you?

John 3 – Nicodemus

This coming week I hope that you'll read the 3rd chapter of John. In this chapter Jesus meets with a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a very religious man who thinks that the way to be saved, meaning have eternal life, is by obeying the letter of God's law as given in the Old Testament. What Jesus tells him is totally new to him. Jesus tells him that he can only have eternal life if he is born again. Jesus is talking about a spiritual birth. This happens when God's Spirit comes to live inside a person and this happens when a person places their trust completely in God.

The second part of the chapter talks about an argument between the followers of Jesus and the followers of John. This is a different John than the one who wrote the book. This is John the Baptist and he is the cousin of Jesus. His job was to tell everyone that Jesus was coming.

Here are some questions to think about as you read:

- How confident can you be that God loves you?
- Why did Jesus come to earth?
- What has God promised to everyone who believes in Jesus?

John 4 – The Samaritan Woman and the Royal Official

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Jesus encounters two very different people in this chapter, but they have several important things in common. The first thing that they have in common is that they are not Jews. That is certain in the case of the Samaritan woman and very likely in the case of the royal official. At the time of Jesus the only royalty was Roman. They both have a need and they both demonstrate great faith. I find it interesting that John follows the story of Jesus' encounter with a Jewish religious leader with a story of a Samaritan woman who is living with a man. The Jewish religious leader is a good person, but doesn't seem to understand Jesus at all, at least not yet. The Samaritan woman would be despised by the Jews, first for her race, and second for her immoral lifestyle.

- Which one of these people do you identify with most: Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the royal official, or the disciples? Why?
- How would you respond if Jesus sat down with you and began to tell you everything that you had ever done wrong?
- What do you think Jesus means when He says this? John 4:23 "But a time is coming – and now is here – when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers."
- Why do you think the Jews, Jesus' own people, found it so difficult to believe and the Gentiles, people who weren't Jews, seemed to have such great faith?
- Most importantly, who does Jesus say He is in this chapter?

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Week 41, Day 1 --- Mark 2

Week 41, Day 2 --- John 5

Week 41, Day 3 --- Mark 3 - Luke 6 - Matthew 12:1-21

Week 41, Day 4 --- Matthew 5-7

Week 41, Day 5 --- Luke 7 - Matthew 8:1-13

Week 41, Day 6 --- Matthew 11

Week 41, Day 7 --- Luke 11 - Matthew 12:22-50

Week 41, Day 1 --- Mark 2

This chapter begins with one of my favorite Jesus stories. It must have taken incredible guts and determination to rip up the roof on a neighbor's house in order to get their friend in front of Jesus. These men had incredible faith and their friend had an incredible need. Actually, their friend had two needs. He needed both physical and spiritual healing. Jesus easily deals with both needs.

Jesus was not popular with the religious people of His day. These were good people and would have been viewed as the people to imitate until Jesus came along. The religious people of Jesus' day followed the law to the letter, but looked down on other people. Jesus kept both the letter and the spirit of the law and built people up. Who would you follow?

Week 41, Day 2 --- John 5

This is a chapter full of contrasts, but in those contrasts we really learn much about Jesus. The first story is about a man who has been paralyzed most of his life. He lives beside a pool of water that is supposed to have miraculous healing powers, yet there is nothing in the story to indicate that anyone in recent memory has actually been healed. Jesus does have the power to heal and He does heal this man. One of the big questions is why He doesn't just heal everyone who is beside the pool. There are no easy answers to that question. The big issue all through Jesus ministry was the Sabbath. The Sabbath was Saturday and was a day God intended to be a day of rest for people. The religious leaders had so distorted God's intent that people had to work very hard on that day to keep all the traditions that had been added to God's desire.

- Jesus asks the man by the pool, "Do you want to become well?" How does the man answer? Does this make sense? How would you respond if Jesus asked you, "Would you like to be released from prison?"
- Why do you think Jesus physically heals only this man at this time?
- Where does eternal life come from according to Jesus?
- Who do you think Jesus is? What does that mean to you?

Week 41, Day 3 --- Mark 3 - Luke 6 - Matthew 12:1-21

When we have finished reading through the entire Bible we'll come back and go through the gospels much more slowly. There is so much here. The content of Luke 6 will be expanded in tomorrow's reading. This is the core of what Jesus taught. Every time I read these verses I'm

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convicted of how I pick and choose the things I'm willing to do to follow Jesus. It is easy to follow Jesus when I'm surrounded by friends and family, because they are easy to love. Jesus asks me to treat my enemies, the people who seek to do me harm, in the same way that I treat those who care the most about me. This is very hard. What would the world be like if there were a group of people who really did what Jesus asks in this passage? What would change in your life, in your world, if you were willing to do exactly what Jesus says?

Week 41, Day 4 --- Matthew 5-7

It doesn't take very long to read this sermon. It takes a lifetime to even begin to apply everything that Jesus says. Jesus speaks to every area of life and He turns upside down everything that we expect from the world around us. Which of Jesus' teachings do you find the most difficult to understand? Which of these teachings do you find the easiest to understand, but difficult to do?

Week 41, Day 5 --- Luke 7 - Matthew 8:1-13

I love the story of Jesus at Simon's house. We really don't know Simon's motives. We can only guess based on the poor treatment he gives Jesus as his guest. It probably seems strange that this woman would have been able to come into contact with Jesus. Most houses, even for the wealthy, were not very large in these times. Most of the time the weather allowed for people to eat outside. When the wealthy ate there were probably always poor people gathered around hoping for some scraps from the table. This woman senses something good about Jesus before He has even done anything for her. Everyone in the town has condemned her and she probably lives very alone. Jesus forgives her and it wouldn't be surprising to find out that she follows Jesus from this time on. Simon is not perfect, but he thinks he is. For that reason he thinks that he has nothing to be forgiven for. Until he recognizes his sin he will never recognize or appreciate Jesus.

Have you recognized your sin? How much has Jesus forgiven you for?

Week 41, Day 6 --- Matthew 11

How do you think God would act if He became a human being and came to earth? How your answer will tell you a lot about what you think God is like. Many people who saw Jesus didn't recognize Him as God because He didn't fit their picture of God. Even when He performed miracles and they observed them first hand they didn't believe. They were absolutely convinced that He couldn't be God because they couldn't imagine God associating with sinners or having fun at a party.

The yoke that Jesus talks about at the end of the chapter has two meanings and they are related. The first meaning for yoke comes from farming. When a farmer plows a field he needs a way to tie the plow to the ox that is pulling it. In Jesus' day they had a wooden device that rested on the ox's shoulder and tied around his neck that was called a yoke. If two oxen were used the yoke tied the two oxen together. For people the yoke was a way of life that was taught by a rabbi (teacher). The things that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount would be considered Jesus' yoke. The Pharisees taught keeping the Law. This was their yoke. It was heavy and

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impossible. Jesus taught loving God and others. Jesus says that this yoke is easy and light. Why do we find it so heavy?

Week 41, Day 7 --- Luke 11 - Matthew 12:22-50

Jesus tells us that we are more than flesh and blood. Our physical bodies would be just like animals except that our physical bodies also contain a spirit. When we become followers of Jesus then God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, comes into us and lives with our spirit. The Holy Spirit provides us with protection and guidance. Without the Holy Spirit our bodies are open to be dwelling places for evil spirits. The evil spirits will seek to destroy us. They will also seek to guide us, but they will seek to guide us away from God. Jesus was warning the people that sending one evil spirit away without inviting the Holy Spirit in was a foolish and dangerous thing to do.

Some of what Jesus says in this passage is very difficult to understand. This verse is very simple:

Luke 11:28 He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

This is what is most important. Jesus asks us over and over to follow Him, to obey what He says. What have you heard Him ask you to do that you are finding difficult to obey?

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Week 42, Day 1 --- Luke 8 - Matthew 13

Week 42, Day 2 --- Mark 4-5 - Matthew 8:14-34

Week 42, Day 3 --- Matthew 9-10

Week 42, Day 4 --- Mark 6 - Luke 9:1-17 - Matthew 14

Week 42, Day 5 --- John 6

Week 42, Day 6 --- Mark 7 - Matthew 15

Week 42, Day 7 --- Mark 8 - Luke 9:18-27 - Matthew 16

Week 42, Day 1 --- Luke 8 - Matthew 13

These two chapters cover a similar time period, but really show the difference in emphasis between Luke and Matthew. Luke is interested in people and how they respond to Jesus. Luke wants us to see the humanity of Jesus and His love for the people who hear His message. Matthew is interested in the bigger story, the story of the kingdom. He wants us to see the Jesus is the ultimate King and wants us to understand how important it is to be a part of His kingdom. Each story is complete, but the story is much richer when we look at all the different perspectives.

Did Jesus come from a small family or a large family? How can you tell? What do you think it would have been like to have Jesus as your older brother?

Week 42, Day 2 --- Mark 4-5 - Matthew 8:14-34

Yesterday and today you're really getting a good example of how the gospels work. There are many stories from Jesus ministry that are included in 3 of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There are a very few stories that are included in all 4 gospels.

Jesus taught in parables. A parable has been defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. When Jesus told a parable He was intending to speak to the heart or the emotions of the listener. He used objects and situations that were very familiar to His audience to communicate spiritual truths.

Jesus continually invites people to follow Him? Are you willing to follow Him?

Week 42, Day 3 --- Matthew 9-10

Chapter 10 contains many very hard saying of Jesus. It is a chapter that many would prefer to ignore. Jesus makes it very clear that life is found by following Him, but that following Him may lead to physical death. Jesus knows that not everyone will accept His message and choose to follow Him.

It is hard for most of us in this country to understand these words. Until recently our culture generally accept the concept of following Jesus, but this is not true in other places in the world. Many who choose to follow Christ are sent away from their families. In some countries today there are men and women killed every day because they have chosen Jesus. Following Jesus is hard when we don't completely trust Him and we are trying to preserve our lives in this world. However, it is easy to follow Jesus when we trust Him completely and replace our desire for this life with a desire for eternal life with God.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 42, Day 4 --- Mark 6 - Luke 9:1-17 - Matthew 14

Two of the stories in today's reading are repeated in all 4 gospels. This doesn't mean that the one that isn't is insignificant. Think about it. How many real friends do you think Jesus had? John the Baptist was probably the only person on earth who really understood who Jesus was, why He had come, and what He was going through. We're never told that John and Jesus got together to talk, but I suspect that they knew each other really well since they grew up as cousins. I think that when John was executed Jesus both lost a friend and was confronted with His purpose in coming to earth. How can you tell that John's death has an emotional impact on Jesus? Have you ever lost someone really close to you to death? What did you feel?

The following story talks about the incident in the very beginning of Mark 6. When have you experienced what the author is talking about? Why do you think the people of Jesus' hometown rejected Him?

TITLE: Challenging Circles

AUTHOR: Jill Carattini

DATE: 6/17/05

ILLUSTRATION:

The hometown of Jesus was a small village tucked between the hills of the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, located away from the main centers of the population. The Gospel of Mark describes the first time Jesus visited his hometown after he had become a public figure (Mark 6:1-6). His public ministry had, up until then, been based largely in Capernaum.

The townspeople had undoubtedly heard stories. Whispers of miracles and strange events were being reported from neighboring cities. His teaching was different, authoritative. I imagine the people of his hometown took a proud interest in all of the murmuring, anxious to see why everyone was talking about Jesus, anxious to claim him as their own. Now he was coming back home and they were excited about it. Invitations to teach in the synagogue were usually extended to distinguished visitors; he was, no doubt, in many eyes the local boy done good, and now they would see for themselves.

According to Mark they were not disappointed. In fact, he reports, "they were astounded" (6:2). Making reference to the wisdom they heard and power they beheld, they clearly took notice that he was a man out of the ordinary. And yet, they couldn't take the man at face value, for it was not just any man; it was Jesus. They could not get past the fact that this seeming authority in front of them was Mary's son, the carpenter, the boy next door. And Mark notes, they "took offense" at him, stumbling over the commonality of the extraordinary one before them (6:3).

During his tenure as a professor at Magdalen College in Oxford, C.S. Lewis delivered a memorial oration to the students of King's College, the University of London. It was titled, "The Inner Ring." Addressing his young audience as "the middle-aged moralist," Lewis warned: "Of all passions, the passion for the Inner Ring is most skillful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things."(1)

Lewis speaks of the natural desire to find ourselves a part of the inner circles that exist endlessly and tauntingly throughout life. He cautions about the consuming ambition to be an insider, and

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not an outsider, though the lines we chase are invisible, and the circle is never as charming from within as it looks from without. Like the taunting mirage the weary traveler chases through the desert, the quest for the Inner Ring will break your heart unless you break it. For "it is the mark of a very perverse desire that seeks what can not be had."⁽²⁾

Yet it is a desire that touches us all. The longing to belong is an intense motivator of human behavior. Still, one only has to watch a group of kids to see how easily our desire to belong is corrupted by our need to exclude. The inner circle is not inner if there are no outsiders. The invisible line would be futile if the majority was not on the wrong side. Notably, it seems an examination of playground behavior is one of the strongest proofs for the depravity of man.

The kinfolk of Jesus chose to belittle the depth of his teaching, the compassion of his hands, and the significance of his power because they could not see past the circles they were certain he was excluded from. Mark gives witness to the close ties between faith and healing, expectation and eyesight. They could not see Jesus for who he was because they were blinded by lines that told them what he could not be. "Isn't this Mary's son?" they scoffed in fear and disgust (6:3). Excluding mention of Joseph, their words were intended to belittle Jesus and his origins, to put him on the wrong side of the line with one who was sexually suspect.

And yet ironically, in pointing to Mary, they point to the miracle of the virgin birth, when God spoke life into a womb that broke the lines of separation and offered the world forever an invitation into his presence.

1. The Weight of Glory (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1980), 154.

2. Ibid., 154.

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Week 42, Day 5 --- John 6

There is so much in this chapter. It includes two amazing miracles, but also includes some of the most difficult words that Jesus ever says. His words were so difficult to understand and accept that many people who had been following Him decided to leave. The people were attracted to Jesus because of His ability to create food for them. However, when He tells them that He is food, they totally misunderstand Him. Verses 52-58 would have been very difficult for the Jews to accept. They were forbidden to eat blood in any form. Their butchering methods made sure that all the blood was removed from an animal before any meat was cooked or eaten. What they didn't realize was that Jesus was going to be a sacrifice for them just like the animal sacrifices they were used to, but much better. When we accept Jesus' sacrifice for us and celebrate this each week by sharing in the communion meal, then in a way we are eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

- Which miracle is more amazing to you: feeding the 5000 or walking on the water? Why?

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- Why did Jesus walk away when the people wanted to make Him a king?
- How would you have felt if you were in a boat at night and you saw someone walking to the boat on the water?
- Why did the people ask for another miracle when Jesus had just fed them?
- Why does Jesus say things that are so hard to understand? Which of the things that Jesus says in this chapter is the hardest for you to understand?

Week 42, Day 6 --- Mark 7 - Matthew 15

The Pharisees were obsessed with cleanliness. They kept the letter of the law and went beyond that to create thousands of traditions that were designed to prevent them from breaking the law. They attacked Jesus for allowing His followers to break their hand washing tradition. We know now that it is healthier to wash before eating or preparing food to prevent the spread of germs. The Pharisees didn't know that. They weren't concerned about hygiene, but about whether or not a person was ceremonially clean. To be ceremonially clean was to be able to worship in the temple or to be allowed into the presence of God. What they didn't realize was that God was standing right in front of them.

When Jesus tells us what makes us unclean He is telling us what separates us from Him. He is very clear that it is not the food we eat or our level of hygiene. We pay attention to these things to be healthy rather than as an attempt to get close to Jesus. What separates us from Jesus is the evil in our hearts, the things we say and do that do not show love to either God or others. Jesus gives a great example. I'll try to put it in modern terms. My parents are rapidly reaching the point where they will need outside care. I could take all my financial resources and tie them up in trust to support church ministries and then tell my parents that I couldn't help them because my money was all dedicated to God. This would be wrong. My first responsibility is to care for my parents.

What is making you unclean?

Week 42, Day 7 --- Mark 8 - Luke 9:18-27 - Matthew 16

We have reached the middle of the story of Jesus. This point is marked in 3 of the gospels by Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. Up until this time Jesus' ministry has been focused on spreading the good news of His coming to the people. He has been telling people how to live through words while He has been demonstrating how to live through His actions. Now He has turned His focus toward the cross. It isn't that this has ever been out of Jesus' mind, but now He lets His disciples know that this is where He is going. He also clarifies that this is what it means to follow Him. His invitation hasn't changed. Following Jesus does mean giving up many of the things that we consider to be valuable. Anything that I want to hang on to that would keep me from following Jesus fits in this category. Jesus asks us to decide if we want to focus on this life or the life to come. Which one have you chosen?

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Week 43, Day 1 --- Mark 9 - Luke 9:28-62 - Matthew 17

Week 43, Day 2 --- Matthew 18

Week 43, Day 3 --- John 7-8

Week 43, Day 4 --- John 9:1-10:21

Week 43, Day 5 --- John 10:22-42 - Luke 10-11

Week 43, Day 6 --- Luke 12-13

Week 43, Day 7 --- Luke 14-15

Week 43, Day 1 --- Mark 9 - Luke 9:28-62 - Matthew 17

Which version of these stories did you most enjoy reading? The transfiguration is an interesting story. It is clear that Jesus is looking toward His death on the cross. One explanation for the transfiguration is that Jesus was in need of reassurance that He was doing the right thing. The other explanation is that Moses and Elijah are witnesses to the divine nature of Jesus and that they come to reassure the disciples and us. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets from the Old Testament.

One of my favorite verses is at the end of this dialogue from Mark 9.

²¹Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. ²²"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." ²³"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." ²⁴Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*"

I think this boy's father is just like us. We want God to do things for us. Sometimes our unbelief comes from our doubts about whether or not God is willing to do something. At other times our unbelief comes from our doubts about whether or not God is able to do something. Regardless of the reason for our doubt we are often crying out to God with both confidence and doubt. I do not believe that our faith will ever be perfect in this life. We will always doubt because we will never fully understand God. Fortunately, Jesus is not limited by our lack of faith. He sees the boy's need and He heals him.

TITLE: How To Translate "believe"

AUTHOR: Rev. Robert L. Moss; First Church Of God; St. Joseph, Michigan

DATE: 4/7/96

ILLUSTRATION:

When missionary John Paton went to live in a remote corner of Africa, he taught the native villagers the Christian faith. John Paton was the first person to teach the villagers about Jesus Christ. As his work progressed, he baptized some new converts and started a church. Then he began the difficult, exhausting task of translating the Bible into their own language. With the Bible translated into their own language the people could read and study the Bible.

As John Paton carefully and painstakingly translated the Bible, he realized that they had no word in their language for the word "believe." This presented quite a problem. "Believe" is an

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important word in our Bibles, appearing more than 200 times in the New Testament alone. Paton was stuck. How could he translate the Bible for the people without the word “believe?”

One day, as he was grappling with this dilemma, one of the villagers came in for a visit. The native villager was exhausted from a hard day's work in the hot sun. He sat down and leaned back in the chair. In his native language the villager said how wonderful it is when you are tired to “lean your whole weight on something.” It was as if lightning had struck. That was the image Paton was searching for. “Lean your whole weight on something” was what it meant to believe. Now he could continue his work translating the Bible.

(James W. Moore, When All Else Fails Read the Instructions. Dimensions for Living: 1993, p. 25.)

Week 43, Day 2 --- Matthew 18

Forgiveness is one of the core values of those who follow Jesus, at least it should be. The money amounts in the parable of the unforgiving servant may not make sense in your translation. The servant owed the equivalent of \$100,000. He owed more than a year's wages for a wealthy man. The man who owed him money owed him \$10. What should the servant have done when he realized that he had been forgiven his incredibly large debt? Do you think anyone in your life still owes you something? What should you do with that debt?

Week 43, Day 3 --- John 7-8

John 7 – Jesus Visit Jerusalem

It is true that the entire gospel of John is intended to reveal who Jesus is. This chapter begins a series of stories through which Jesus reveals Himself in a variety of ways. His words can be confusing at times, especially since we are not Jews with a deep understanding of the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Feasts were major events in Jewish life. The Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration of the time that the Jews spent in the wilderness living in tents. This is the period of time described in Exodus to Deuteronomy. To celebrate God's provision for them during this time many of the Jewish people would go to Jerusalem and everyone there would live outside in tents during a week long party. There would be special sacrifices in the temple and much eating and drinking. I think Jesus waited because at this time He had a very large following. The only thing that would draw them away would be a feast in Jerusalem. So, after the crowd leaves Him and heads for Jerusalem He also goes to Jerusalem, but is able to arrive without the fanfare that would normally result.

However, when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem He doesn't hide out or join in the partying. Instead, He immediately goes to where most of the people gather and begins teaching in the temple courts. The rest of the chapter describes the continuous argument between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the religious police of their day. They ensured that everyone kept not only the law, but also the tradition associated with their religion. It is interesting that there is a group just like this within Islam in Saudi Arabia and they have the power to sentence people to death for violating Islamic law. The key accusation that the Pharisees had against Jesus was that He worked on the Sabbath. In this encounter Jesus points out that even the Pharisees

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would work on the Sabbath to circumcise a male child if the eighth day came on the Sabbath. The Pharisees send soldiers to arrest Jesus, but they and the people are so amazed at His teaching that the soldiers return empty handed.

- What do you find most amazing about Jesus' teaching in this chapter?
- Where was Jesus born? Why is this so important?
- The Jews were celebrating and remembering their 40 years of wandering in the desert. Water is very hard to find in the desert and over and over God provided water for His people as they wandered. What does Jesus tell us He can provide?
- What would you have done if you had been one of the soldiers with orders to arrest Jesus?
- Is the picture of Jesus in your mind becoming clearer or fuzzier after reading this chapter?

John 8 – The Light of the World

Most of this chapter records a conversation between Jesus and various Jews in the temple courts, but it begins with a story that tells us much about Jesus. The Pharisees were the religious police of their day and they wanted more than anything to find something against Jesus so that they could have Him arrested. In this story they attempt to catch Him by presenting with a situation that has no acceptable resolution. They bring to Jesus a woman who has been caught in the act of adultery. How they caught her is an interesting question, as is why they didn't bring the man. They are right when they say that the Law says that she should be stoned to death. However, the Romans won't allow the Jews to do that. They have reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves. So, if Jesus tells them to stone her He will be guilty of breaking Roman law and the Romans can arrest Him, but if He lets her go, then He will be breaking God's Law and the Pharisees can arrest Him. Read the story and see how Jesus easily escapes this trap.

Jesus says that He is the Light of the world. This may not mean much to us, but it meant a lot to Jesus' Jewish audience. Light for them was a symbol for God and when Jesus makes this claim He is claiming to be God. That is why when Jesus describes His relationship with His Father the Pharisees know exactly who He is talking about and it makes them very angry. It is very common for Jesus to have these kinds of conversations with the Pharisees and you can see in verse 30 that many people believe in Him as a result. The Pharisees were not popular with the people, so this is understandable.

In the rest of the chapter Jesus does something that is hard to understand. Our expectation is that He would say easy things that would attract many people to believe in Him and follow Him, but again He says some things that seem to chase people away. The Jews are a very proud people and they will not acknowledge that they are in bondage to the Romans. When Jesus tells them that the truth will set them free they immediately respond that they have never been slaves as a people, and this is a lie. They were slaves in Egypt (see Exodus 1). What follows is a typical conversation with Jesus. He is speaking about spiritual things and the people are all

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

thinking about physical things. They are Jews and this means that they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are the people that were promised to Abraham back in Genesis (read Genesis chapters 12-15 for background on God's promise to Abraham). However, Jesus tells them that spiritually they are sons of the devil and He gives us a really good description of who the devil is.

In John 8:58 Jesus makes a statement that doesn't seem like it should stir up such strong emotions. When He says these two words the Jews who once wanted to follow Him immediately pick up rocks and want to stone Him to death. He says, "I AM". To them this was as clear as if Jesus had said, "I am God" (see Exodus 3 for the background on why this was so important).

Here are a few questions to think about as you read through this chapter.

- How would you feel if you were the woman caught in adultery?
- Where is Jesus going and why is that so important?
- What is the truth that Jesus wants you to know that will set you free?

Week 43, Day 4 --- John 9:1-10:21

John 9 – The Man Born Blind

This is one of my favorite stories in the gospel of John. The cast of characters includes most of the types of people in the religious world.

- Blind Man – This man was born blind and even today we know that someone born blind cannot ever see. Even if the physical problem in the eyes is fixed the brain will not have developed the ability to respond to the signals from the optic nerve. However, it is not this man's blindness, but his simple faith and courage that make him one of my favorite characters in the Bible.
- Disciples – These are followers of Jesus. They believe He is the Son of God and have given up everything to follow Him, but they don't understand what He is teaching. They are still struggling make what Jesus says fit with what they were taught by the religious leaders of their day.
- Jesus – God's Son who is fully God and fully man. He is all of God's goodness and love in human form so that we can see who God is and what God does.
- Neighbors – These are just ordinary people and their response to the miracle is typical of what we see in our world today. They all knew the man and saw that he could see again. Some believed and some were so convinced that a miracle couldn't happen that they convinced themselves that it was a different man.

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- Pharisees – These are the religious leaders. They are so concerned that their tradition has been violated that they are ready to punish the blind man. They are convinced that Jesus is evil because He uses His power to heal on the Sabbath, the day when no work is to be done.
- Parents – They love their son and are glad he has been healed. Unfortunately, they are more afraid they will lose their position in the community than they are glad for their son.

Read through this story several times. Try to put yourself in the place of each of these characters and ask yourself these questions.

- What do they see and hear?
- What do they do based on what they have seen and heard?
- Why do they respond this way?
- Who do you most identify with in this story?

John 10 – The Good Shepherd

In John 10 Jesus introduces Himself as the good shepherd. Sheep are incredibly dumb animals and their primary characteristic is that they are followers. They must be led or contained. If they aren't they will get into dangerous situations and where one of the sheep leads the others will follow. They are also very useful animals. They produce wool which is useful for clothing and they also provide meat. Sheep are also dirty and smelly, so the job of a shepherd was not one of the higher positions in Jewish society in spite of sheep being so valuable. Most shepherds did not own the sheep they watched. Someone else owned the flock and the shepherds just watched. Whenever a predator came, whether human or animal, the shepherd would run away to save his own life.

- Why does Jesus compare us to sheep?
- What makes Jesus a good shepherd?

Week 43, Day 5 --- John 10:22-42 - Luke 10-11

Luke 10:27 He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

This is called the great commandment and it is the most important part of today's reading. This is what should guide every follower of Jesus every moment of every day. I think it is important to understand what the word love means in this verse if you are to understand what Jesus is acknowledging. This word love does not involve feeling. Love is a decision of the will that is made to take action in the best interest of someone else. Let me try to paraphrase.

The man answered, "Every decision of your will that comes from your heart, every expression of your unique personality, every action you take with your body, and every thought you have should be in God's best interest and should benefit Him. And, just as you always look out for your own best interest you should look out for the best interest of everyone around you."

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This is an excellent verse to memorize. This is not a new commandment. God first gave it to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:5. What did Jesus add? Why do you think He added what He did?

Week 43, Day 6 --- Luke 12-13

If you wanted to be really popular what would you tell people? Jesus was popular, but that wasn't His focus or desire. His desire was for people to turn toward God. His message is hard to hear. You may have experienced the division that Jesus talks about. Some people hear the message and turn toward God. Others, like the Pharisees, hear the message and turn away from God. What do you hear Jesus saying in these chapters? What does Jesus say that doesn't make sense to you?

Week 43, Day 7 --- Luke 14-15

Today's reading includes one of the best chapters in the New Testament. It also includes one of the most difficult to understand.

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

Luke 15:31 " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. "But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

Look at these two verses. The first one sounds like Jesus is trying to scare people away. The second one clearly communicates that God desires everyone to be with Him. How do we make sense of this? In the parable of the prodigal son Jesus clearly communicates God's love for those who have rejected God. They have experienced hardship and rejection. They feel totally hopeless and lost. When they come to God He is ready and willing to welcome them.

When Jesus talks about the cost of following Him He exaggerates to make a point. Many people want to follow Jesus and continue to live the same life they lived before. Jesus makes it very clear that this is not possible. Following Him means going a different direction and being willing to cut all attachment with your previous life. This is actually what the prodigal son demonstrates.

Think about it. How hard would it have been to turn to following Jesus when your life was going well? What would it have cost you to begin following Jesus before you were arrested? At the same time, how grateful are you that God is ready to welcome you as a son?

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Week 44, Day 1 --- Luke 16:1-17:10

Week 44, Day 2 --- John 11

Week 44, Day 3 --- Luke 17:11-18:14

Week 44, Day 4 --- Mark 10 - Matthew 19

Week 44, Day 5 --- Matthew 20-21

Week 44, Day 6 --- Luke 18:15-19:48

Week 44, Day 7 --- Mark 11 - John 12

Week 44, Day 1 --- Luke 16:1-17:10

There are two difficult to understand parables in today's reading. The first parable is about our relationship with money. The second parable is really not all that different. It is about our desire for good things in this life.

The difficulty in the first parable is that in most parables God is the principle figure. In this case He would be the rich man, but there is no reason to think that. Jesus is contrasting the way the world deals with money with the way followers of Jesus should deal with money. The wise people of the world use money as a tool. They use it to get what they want. If we believe in Jesus we should use money in a similar way. It should not be our master or the first thing we desire. Instead, we should use the money we have been given to manage to store up treasures in heaven. There are two really important principles here. The first is that everything we have or see belongs to God. We are given material things to manage, but they do not belong to us. The second principle is really the important one. Jesus says that the way we manage God's money here in this life will determine how much we are given to have as our own in the next life. He is instructing us to be generous and to care for the poor. This should be a very familiar message after reading through the Old Testament.

The second parable speaks to how powerful our desire is to be comfortable in this life. The Lazarus in the parable was a beggar all his life. The rich man knew he existed, but did nothing to help him. I'm certain the rich man could have made a significant improvement in Lazarus' life with a small percentage of his own wealth. He didn't. His selfishness resulted in his going to hell. Jesus makes it very clear that those who are selfish will not believe even the most incredible evidence. He was predicting his death and resurrection. Many people would know for certain that Jesus came back to life and still would not believe. We should not be surprised today that there are many people who know in their hearts that God exists, but who continue to reject Him.

Week 44, Day 2 --- John 11

John 11 – The Raising of Lazarus

In each of the gospels there is a point where the story shifts. The focus shifts from following Jesus through His three years of ministry to anticipation and preparation for the crucifixion. This miracle is the tipping point that leads to His arrest and crucifixion. It takes place just a few miles from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish power and the seat of the Roman government in Israel. There are many witnesses and the crowd is polarized as a result of what Jesus does. Many believe, but many also realize that the power of Jesus could result in the loss of power for them.

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In addition to the cast of characters that we looked at in John 9, there are a few additional new characters.

Martha – She is the sister of Lazarus and a very good friend of Jesus. She is a doer. Tasks are more important to her than relationships. She is very direct in her speech. She also has a deep faith and a very good understanding of who Jesus is and what He is capable of.

Mary – She is also a sister of Lazarus. Beyond being a friend of Jesus it would probably be accurate to say that she is in love with Jesus. This is not a sexual love. She would just rather spend time being close to Jesus than doing anything else. People and relationships are much more important to her than tasks. (see Luke 10:38-42 for a story that will confirm this)

Lazarus – We really don't know much about Lazarus except that he was a very good friend of Jesus.

This chapter contains the shortest verse in the Bible, but one that has generated a great deal speculation and comment. John 11:35 says "Jesus wept." Why did He weep? There are many reasons given, but the one that I think fits the story best is this. Lazarus had died and was on his way to spend eternity with God. He was headed to and might have already experienced the joy of heaven. To force the issue of who was going to rule in Israel, Jesus had to bring Lazarus back. When Jesus did this He knew that eventually Lazarus and his family would have to go through this all over again. Also, Lazarus would have to come back to earth and deal again with the life he had just escaped.

- Who are you most like in this story?
- Which group would you be in if you saw Jesus raise a man from the dead: the group who believed or the group that reported the event to those who wanted to kill Him?
- What were the Jewish leaders afraid of?

Week 44, Day 3 --- Luke 17:11-18:14

Yesterday the gospel lesson for our worship service was the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. When I think that something I am doing will justify me, make me right before God, I do not understand either God or myself. All I can ever do is to trust in God's grace and mercy. This parable is a definite warning to those of us who visit men in the jail. Satan would tempt us to believe that we are in some way superior to those we visit, but the truth is that we are all the same. We all need God's grace and stand condemned without the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

Week 44, Day 4 --- Mark 10 - Matthew 19

The story of the rich young ruler is not difficult to understand. It is just very difficult to apply. There are very few people in America who are not rich by the standards of Jesus' day. If Jesus

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

were physically still here then it would be easy to figure out what it means to follow Him. Following Jesus certainly means putting Him first in everything. This story is another illustration of the fact that God owns everything. The rich young ruler thinks his stuff belongs to him and he wants to keep it. He would rather have his stuff than have eternal life. I would rather have Jesus and eternal life than all my stuff, but it is still hard to keep stuff from getting in the way of my relationship with Jesus. What would Jesus ask you to give up if you asked Him the same question the rich young ruler did?

Week 44, Day 5 --- Matthew 20-21

We are now entering the last week before the crucifixion. There are many things that happen during this final week. If we were given this much detail about the entire 3 years of Jesus' ministry the Bible would be a much thicker book. The last parable in today's reading is a summary of God's plan. Israel is the vineyard that was expected to produce a crop of blessing for God and for the nations. Israel's leaders refused to follow God and they killed multiple prophets who came to deliver God's message. Jesus is the son who has come to make the request one last time. In this parable He predicts His own death again.

How would you react if someone told you very plainly that you were planning on killing him? How would you treat people that you knew were going to kill you? What is Jesus capable of doing to the Pharisees? How does He treat them?

Week 44, Day 6 --- Luke 18:15-19:48

The story of Zacchaeus is a favorite children's story in Sunday School. There is a fun song that goes with the story and I have been singing it since I was a child. It may make a fun story for children, but the lessons in this story are for everyone. The first lesson is that there is hope for everyone. In Jewish society there was no one lower than the tax collector. This was especially true if the person claimed to be a Jew. The tax collectors worked for the Romans. They worked on commission. Many tax collectors charged more than was right and pocketed the difference. This made them wealthy and hated. Jesus doesn't care. Zacchaeus wants to see him, so He want to see Zacchaeus. The second lesson is that faith makes the right response. Zacchaeus believed in Jesus. He believed that Jesus was the source of life. He didn't ask Jesus what he needed to do. He didn't assume he was good. Instead, he responded with generosity in giving half his wealth to the poor. Paying back 4 times was not generous. This was the proper restitution for theft under Jewish law. In this case he was simply doing what was required.

Week 44, Day 7 --- Mark 11 - John 12

John 12 – Anointed, Triumph, Death, and Unbelief

In this chapter John puts together a number of stories that show us a wide variety of reactions to Jesus. It is very clear that Jesus knows He is soon going to die. Everything is moving in that direction. I think that Jesus could have left the Jerusalem area and extended His teaching career on earth. However, while His teaching was important, the reason he came to earth was to die for our sins and He is very focused on that.

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If someone had brought your brother back to life, how would you say thank you? How would you say thank you if you knew that the person who had done such a great thing was soon going to die? We often wait to honor a person until after he dies. Mary decides to honor Jesus before His death.

The next day the people of Jerusalem and all the visitors who are there for the Passover also get to honor Jesus. This entry into Jerusalem was predicted in the Old Testament, hundreds of years before (Zechariah 9:9). Notice that at the end of each of these stories John records the reaction of the Jewish leaders. They are becoming more and more determined to get rid of Jesus.

Some people have questioned whether or not Jesus really knew who He was and why He had come to earth. I think that Jesus response to the Greeks that are brought to Him by Philip makes it very clear that He did. He had performed many miracles and now He was going to die and rise again.

Even after all of this, the Jewish leaders did not accept Jesus as the Son of God. The Pharisees were so powerful that the people were very afraid of them. The situation is not so different in our time. Powerful people do not accept Jesus as God and see Him as a threat to their power. They cannot directly harm Jesus, but they can threaten and harm His followers. Physical harm is not very common in the U.S., but there are many followers of Jesus who lose their lives every day in other parts of the world.

Jesus wants you to have eternal life. Through the rest of the book of John you are going to see how much He wants you to have eternal life. There are many questions that I could ask about the chapter, but there is only one that is really important. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and are you willing to follow Him?

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Week 45, Day 1 --- Mark 12 - Matthew 22

Week 45, Day 2 --- Luke 20-21 - Matthew 23

Week 45, Day 3 --- Mark 13

Week 45, Day 4 --- Matthew 24

Week 45, Day 5 --- Matthew 25

Week 45, Day 6 --- Mark 14 - Matthew 26

Week 45, Day 7 --- John 13 - Luke 22

Week 45, Day 1 --- Mark 12 - Matthew 22

The parable of the wedding banquet is very sad to me. The Jewish leaders are the ones who were invited to the banquet, but refused to attend. Then Jesus broadens the invitation to the poor and people the leaders would have classified as sinners. It seems unjust that the king would throw out a man not properly dressed. It seems unjust, but it wasn't. At this time it was typical for the king to provide special clothes for those he invited to a special function. The man had refused to put on the clothes that the king had provided. How incredibly sad. He could have enjoyed a wonderful party and better food than he had ever eaten if he had simply been willing to put on the wedding clothes of the king.

Jesus is talking to everyone at the end of this parable. God has invited us to an incredible party that we call heaven. We are dressed in sin and don't have clothes that are good enough to go to the party. Fortunately, God has provided new clothes for us. He has provided white robes for us to wear if we are willing to put them on. These robes are incredibly expensive. They cost Jesus His life. It makes me sad to realize that I know many people who think they will get into the party wearing their own clothes. All they have to do is put their trust in Jesus and they can put on a white robe. Why do you think so many people refuse God's invitation and God's wedding clothes?

Week 45, Day 2 --- Luke 20-21 - Matthew 23

There is almost too much to think about in today's reading. Fortunately, much of it is repeated so there are multiple opportunities to comment. I'm going to leave my comments on Jesus' discussion of end times until you get to Matthew 24.

Matthew 23 explains why Jesus has been so opposed to the Pharisees during his ministry. His words are harsh, but they are true. We must pay attention because it is tempting to repeat their mistakes. There is no question that the Pharisees looked good. They kept the ceremonial law very well. Unfortunately, their hearts were evil.

Luke 20:47 "They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

Luke actually gives us a perfect example of what Jesus is describing. These men would never think of violating the law, but at the same time they had no mercy on a widow who could not pay for her lodging. They would throw the widow out in the street to beg or worse. The bottom line is that they did not love.

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It is important to understand that Jesus is love and that He loved these men with these words. Love is not soft. Love does not avoid confrontation. Love can be hard and it can be confrontational. If these men did not repent they were going to die and go to hell. Jesus did not want that for them. He wanted them to understand and to repent. In a very few days He was going to die for them.

What did Jesus have to do to get your attention? How would you respond if Jesus said these things to you?

Week 45, Day 3 --- Mark 13

Tomorrow's reading will have more detail, but Mark captures the core of this important conversation Jesus has with some of the disciples. The key to understanding this is that they ask Jesus two questions and the answers to the questions are woven together. The first question is when will the temple be destroyed. The second question is when will Jesus come again, basically when will the world as we know it come to an end. Jesus provides some specific warning signs for each. In the case of the temple the abomination of desolation is an idol that will be setup in the Holy Place of the temple. Titus, a Roman general, does this in 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple immediately follows. It is a terrible time for the Jews.

The second series of event have not all happened yet. Here's the really important verse.

Mark 13:32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert!³⁴ You do not know when that time will come.

We don't know when Jesus is going to come again. It could be today or it could be in a thousand years. People have been trying to figure this out since Jesus spoke these words, and book after book has been written with the answer. At least so far every one of those books has been wrong as the earth is still here. I believe that there will be no doubt when the end is near. We'll look at this more when we reach the last book in the New Testament. For now, the important thing is to be alert. Focus each day on walking with Jesus and His coming will not take you by surprise. You'll be ready.

Week 45, Day 4 --- Matthew 24

The Boy Scouts motto is "be prepared". That is the message I don't want you to miss from this chapter. I think that is Jesus reason for providing this information to us through His disciples. He wanted them to be prepared for the destruction of Jerusalem. They were and the church survived that horrible event. Jesus wants all of us to be prepared for His return. We won't miss it, but we could be unprepared for it. Most of the world today is not prepared. It saddens me that I'm not a better witness for the hope that is in Jesus and the disaster that is prepared for those who don't know Him.

Take some time and go through the chapter. Write next to each paragraph whether you think it answers question 1 (When will the temple be destroyed?) or question 2 (When will this world end?).

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Week 45, Day 5 --- Matthew 25

This chapter makes it very clear that there are two paths. Three parables make three different points about the choices we make to determine our path. The first parable is about being prepared. In a Jewish wedding celebration the people who escorted the bridegroom were required to have lamps that were burning. This required oil. I think the oil represents God's Spirit. Those people who keep the light of God shining by allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through them will be prepared to shine when Jesus returns. Some will not have the Holy Spirit and they will not be ready to shine.

The second parable explains the significance of how we handle the resources that God has provided us to manage. Remember, God owns everything. The gold is His and He simply gives it to the men to manage. We generally apply this parable to talents or abilities. Every ability you have came from God and God expects you to use your abilities. God has blessed many people with financial resources. He expects us to invest those in His kingdom to produce a return. Not using a God given ability or hoarding financial resources will not lead to God's kingdom and eternal life.

The third parable explains the reason behind jail ministry. We don't come just to be rewarded, but we do come because we love Jesus and we see Jesus in the men and women we visit. Jesus is really just repeating the great commandment. The people who really love Jesus will demonstrate by loving other people as well, regardless of who they are.

So the choice is eternal life or eternal punishment. Which will you choose?

Week 45, Day 6 --- Mark 14 - Matthew 26

The story that begins in these chapters is called the passion of the Christ. It begins with a very special meal that Jesus makes even simpler, but even more important. Every year the Jews celebrated the Passover to celebrate God bringing them out of Egypt. Every item included in the meal and the order in which it is eaten has great meaning. Jesus took two of the things from that meal and gave them new meaning. He took the bread that was made without yeast, and used it to represent His body. When we eat the bread we are reminded that God became like us and took on a real physical body. He then took wine and used it to represent His blood. The wine is a specific reminder of the fact that Jesus died by pouring out His blood. He did not die a natural death. He died a horrible painful death. These two things have become two of the most important symbols to those who believe in Jesus. Where I worship we have a time in each service where we eat bread and drink grape juice to remind us of the sacrifice that Jesus made.

What could you use in your situation to remind yourself of the sacrifice that Jesus made for you?

Week 45, Day 7 --- John 13 - Luke 22

John 13 – Washing Feet

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This chapter begins the story of the crucifixion and resurrection. It is probably Thursday evening. Jesus and the disciples are preparing to eat the traditional Passover meal. Jesus clearly knows what is coming, but the disciples are clueless.

How would you define a leader? Most of us have experienced leaders and celebrities as people who are to be served. They demand things and they get what they demand. This is what makes them powerful and famous. Jesus is different. He knows He is the most powerful human being ever to walk the face of the earth and He still kneels down and does the worst job a servant could be asked to do. To understand this you need to know that there wasn't any sewage system and the disciples probably wore open sandals. Their feet would have been covered with dust and sewage. It was important that they be washed, but it was a messy smelly job that generally went to the lowest servant in the house. Jesus could have commanded that His disciples wash His feet, but He didn't.

John 13:35 is one of the most important verses in all the New Testament. It tells us how people will know that we are followers of Jesus. People will be able to identify Jesus' followers because they demonstrate in very visible ways their love for one another. Sadly, many people who say they are Christians do not demonstrate love toward one another.

As you read this chapter notice how much Jesus cares for those who follow Him. He knows that He is going to be betrayed, but still He doesn't lash out in anger or violence. Judas will betray Him and Peter will deny that he knows Jesus. Peter will be forgiven and I have no doubt that Judas could have been forgiven also if he hadn't taken his own life.

As you think through the decision to become a follower of Jesus please focus on Jesus and not on any of us who claim to be His follower. We're trying to be like Jesus, but we will always fall short. Jesus will never fall short and never disappoint.

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Week 46, Day 1 --- John 14-17

Week 46, Day 2 --- Mark 15 - Matthew 27

Week 46, Day 3 --- John 18-19 - Luke 23

Week 46, Day 4 --- Mark 16 - Matthew 28

Week 46, Day 5 --- John 20-21 - Luke 24

Week 46, Day 6 --- Acts 1-3

Week 46, Day 7 --- Acts 4-6

Week 46, Day 1 --- John 14-17

John 14 – Jesus the Way to the Father

John 14:6 is one of the most important verses in the Bible. It is the verse that explains why Christians are so determined to share the good news of Jesus with others. Many people believe that anyone who lives a good life will find their way to eternal life. Jesus is very clear that this isn't the way life works. He claims to be the only way. This leaves everyone who hears of Jesus with a choice to either believe Him and accept Him or to not believe Him and reject Him.

This chapter also introduces the concept of the trinity. Jesus speaks of Himself as being the same as or one with the Father. He also speaks of the "Spirit of truth" who is spoken of in other places as the Holy Spirit. All three of these together are God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Here are some questions to consider:

- If you had given up everything to follow Jesus for 3 years and all of a sudden He told you He was going away, how would you feel?
- Which of the things that Jesus tells His disciples do you find the most comforting?

John 15 – The Vine and the Branches

We often say that a person's last words are their most important. This is because when a person knows they are going to die we are certain that what they want to communicate really matters to them. I think this is true. As you read the next few chapters of John you will be reading Jesus' last words to His disciples. This chapter contains a great promise and a great warning.

The great promise is that if we remain in Jesus that we will produce fruit. There has been much argument over what the fruit are. I think the best description of the fruit is provided in Galatians 5:22,23. God desires a relationship with us. Jesus wants us to be as connected to Him as a branch is to a vine. I have a grape vine that covers my deck. Each year I have to prune the vine. The vine that I cut off looks just like the vine that remains during the winter. When spring comes the difference is clear. The branches that look dead burst forth with new green leaves. The branches that were cut off just rot and produce nothing. Prayer and Bible reading are the simplest and most obvious ways to stay connected to Jesus.

The great warning is that when we follow Jesus we will be treated the same way Jesus was treated. I think that most of us have this unreasonable expectation that if we are kind as Jesus was kind that everyone will like us and treat us well. Jesus says that we should expect just the

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opposite. The more we are like Him, the more likely it is that we will be persecuted. The disciples who were listening as Jesus said these things certainly experienced this. As far as we know all of them except John died as martyrs.

- Why does Jesus use the grape vine to describe our relationship with Him?
- What does Jesus say is most important?
- What pulls you away from remaining in Jesus?

John 16 – Jesus is Going Away

There is so much in this chapter. It is a very person chapter. There are certainly promises in Jesus' words that apply to us, but it is important to first focus on what He is saying to His disciples.

Jesus knows that He is going to be crucified, rise from the dead, and then ascend back into heaven. He knows that His crucifixion will crush the disciples. How would you feel if you had given away everything you owned, left your family and friends, and followed a man you thought was going to be King? How would you feel when that man is hanging on a cross and you are hiding out to save your life?

Jesus knows that His followers are going to experience a wide range of emotions and that most of them are not going to be positive. He is trying to prepare them for what is coming. He makes two promises. The first is that He is not going to leave them alone. He will send someone to be with them. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a counselor. The Greek word that is translated counselor literally means "one who comes alongside". We know from other descriptions of the Holy Spirit that He lives inside of us. What we learn from this is that He is sent to help us, to walk beside us whatever we go through.

Jesus second promise is that His followers will see Him again. I don't know if they remembered this while they were grieving since they seem totally surprised to see Jesus alive. Jesus makes the promise anyway and He always keeps His promises. The joy that comes from Jesus resurrection will not come without pain. How much pain did you have to go through before beginning to experience the joy that comes from believing in the resurrection?

There is one more promise in this chapter and it is a promise that we like to forget. Jesus promises us peace in the midst of struggle. To me, peace is the absence of worry. It is the ability to relax in the understanding that God is in control. There are many things that we cannot overcome on our own. We are promised that we will have trouble. Praise God that Jesus has overcome the world. He did rise from the dead and because of His resurrection we can also overcome death and experience peace and joy.

- How does it feel to follow someone who lets you down?
- What are the character qualities you look for in a friend?
- What trouble in your life do you need Jesus to overcome?

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John 17 – The Prayer of Jesus

In Matthew 6 Jesus give His disciples a model prayer when they ask how they should pray. This prayer is not necessarily a model for us to follow, but does show us what was on Jesus' heart and mind as He faced death on the cross. Over and over Jesus mentions the fact that He and God the Father are one. They are in complete unity. It is Jesus' prayer, His desire, that those who follow Him be unified in the same way.

It is very obvious that this prayer has not been answered with a "yes" by God. I have no question in my mind that the unity of believers is God's desire. The only thing that could be keeping this from happening is God's even greater desire that we love Him as He loves us. That cannot happen if God forces us to love Him and to love one another. So, God chooses to limit Himself and doesn't force us to do what He very much wants us to do. Instead, Jesus shows us what this kind of love and unity look like by willingly going to die on the cross.

- How would the world be different if Jesus' prayer was answered with a big "YES"?
- Why do Christians fight and kill one another?
- What is Jesus asking of you in His prayer?

Week 46, Day 2 --- Mark 15 - Matthew 27

Crucifixion is one of the most painful means of execution ever devised. The person being crucified dies from suffocation when they can no longer stand the pain required to hold themselves up to breathe. It generally took more than a day to die. The amazing thing about this story is that Jesus was willing to endure all this pain. The leaders in the crowd taunted Him to come down from the cross. They and we are very fortunate that He didn't, because He could have. God's response seen through the darkness and the earthquake makes it clear that this was a painful time for God as Father as well. Jesus and God the Father are so intimately connected that God must have experience the pain as well. More painful than the nails and the scars were all the sins that were placed on Jesus on the cross. The more you get to know Jesus the more you'll come to appreciate the pain He went through for your benefit. Jesus paid the price for us to spend all of eternity with God. I'm glad He did, but reading about it is painful.

Week 46, Day 3 --- John 18-19 - Luke 23

John 18 – Betrayal and Denial

There is so much in this chapter that it is hard to know where to begin. One of the most important things to remember is how much power Jesus has. There are people who have a high tolerance for pain that they have developed because they are weak. There are a few who have great self-control and can withstand a great deal of suffering even though they are strong. Jesus is the most incredible example of this. He quietly and calmly endured one insult and attack after another without retaliation when a single word would have destroyed everyone and everything around Him.

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We want to be like Jesus, but we are more often like Peter. In the emotion of the moment in the garden Peter is brave. In the face of trained soldiers he draws his sword and attacks. He should have been killed, but Jesus saves him and one of the other gospels tells us that Jesus even heals the man Peter attacked. However, once the emotion of the moment is gone and Jesus allows Himself to be arrested Peter becomes a coward. When asked if he knows Jesus he lies and claims to never have known Him.

There is a part of this story that would be humorous if it wasn't so sad. The religious leaders must take Jesus to the Roman authorities for trial because they have no right to execute anyone. In their minds Jesus must die even though He is guilty of nothing. They want to murder Him to preserve their political positions. The list of Jewish laws they are breaking in what they are doing to Jesus goes on and on, but they do not enter Pilate's house so that they will not be unclean and can eat the Passover. Never put religious practice or tradition before doing what is right.

This story is full of cowards. Pilate knows that there is no reason to crucify Jesus. However, he values his position far more than he values any human life. Killing an innocent man doesn't really bother him. He doesn't lead. Instead, he polls the crowd and gives them what they want. Does this sound familiar?

- What do you learn about Jesus from this story?

John 19 – The Crucifixion

Fear is a dangerous thing. When we let it take control of us we are very likely to do the wrong thing. There are two people who are afraid in this chapter. One gives in to his fears and Jesus is crucified as a result. The other overcomes his fears and Jesus receives a proper burial.

Pilate was the ruler of Palestine, the home of Jesus. The Jews were no longer allowed to rule themselves, so they had no king. However, the Jews were a very rebellious people and Pilate was afraid that the leaders who were requesting that Jesus be killed would bring an end to his career if he didn't give in to their wishes. John makes it very clear that Pilate knew that Jesus was not guilty and that he was being used to do something the Jews were not allowed to do. The Romans had taken away from the Jews the authority to inflict capital punishment. If the Jews could have killed Jesus he would have been stoned to death. Instead, he died by crucifixion which was a uniquely Roman style of execution.

Crucifixion is probably still the cruelest way to execute anyone. The nails through the hands and feet were intensely painful, but the real torture came in the slowness of death. Most people who were crucified died slowly of suffocation as they were no longer able to push their bodies up in order to breath. The Romans invented this form of execution because they ruled through fear. Crucifixion was a form of public torture that would breed fear in anyone.

However, Jesus didn't die of suffocation. In addition to the physical torture of the cross Jesus was taking on the sins of the entire world and enduring a brief period of separation from His Father. All of this combined was sufficient to break His heart. John tells us that when Jesus side was pierced with the spear blood and water flowed out together. Medical experts tell us that this is what happens when the heart bursts or breaks.

The person who saw all this and overcame fear as a result was Joseph. He had a very high position in society and took a real chance when he went to Pilate and asked for the body. Most

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people who were crucified were simply dumped in a garbage heap. If Jesus would have been thrown on a garbage heap there would have been no empty tomb and evidence for the resurrection. Instead, Jesus received a proper burial including 75 pounds of spices being wrapped onto His body.

One of the most important things we learn in this chapter is that Jesus really died. I don't know if Jesus was ever afraid. I do know that if He was ever afraid that He never gave in to His fears. He always did the right thing.

- What are you afraid of?
- What has happened in your life when you've made decisions based on fear?

Week 46, Day 4 --- Mark 16 - Matthew 28

First I want to make a comment on a note you will see in your NIV Bible. In Mark 16 it says this:

[The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have verses 9–20.]

We don't have the original copies of what the authors of the New Testament wrote. Instead, we have very early copies. When people are doing translations they compare all these copies to determine what the original said. In the case of these verses the newer copies all include these verses, but the oldest copies don't. This probably means that these verses were added by someone later. As you read through the rest of the gospels you'll see that many of these verses are supported. However, it is best to not build a practice, such as snake handling, on these verses because they are questionable.

The important point of today's chapters is that Jesus is alive. He did not stay dead, but instead came to life again. This is great news because it means that we don't have to stay dead. We are going to live forever. Now our responsibility is the same as the one that Jesus gave to His disciples. As we are going about our daily lives we are to seek to get other people to follow Jesus just as we are following Jesus. This is what it means to make disciples.

Week 46, Day 5 --- John 20-21 - Luke 24

He is risen. He is risen indeed. This was the primary greeting in the early church. The event that gave everyone hope was the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus being alive says that life rules rather than death, good has ultimately defeated evil, and we have life and hope as a result.

Jesus was different after His resurrection. He could still be touched and He could eat, but He could also go through locked doors without opening them. While His physical appearance may have been different, His love for people had not changed. Peter had denied Jesus three times and felt a terrible sense of shame. Jesus takes the time to allow Peter to confess His loyalty and love for Jesus three times. Peter is restored and goes on to be a great leader in the church.

Week 46, Day 6 --- Acts 1-3

The full title for this book is The Acts of the Apostles. Just as the four gospels are the story of Jesus' life on earth, the book of Acts is the story of the apostles and the beginning of the church. The story begins in Jerusalem and will eventually end up in Rome. It begins with Peter and the other apostles and will end focusing on Paul who is not even a part of the original twelve, but that will come later. For three years Jesus had been with the disciples. A disciple is a student or a

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follower. Now that Jesus had gone back to heaven these same men are called apostles. An apostle is one who is sent. These men were being sent on a mission. They were still disciples, followers of Jesus, but they were also being sent out to make other disciples and so they were called apostles. They were not sent out alone. Jesus had promised before He died that they would have a comforter, companion, and guide. They wait in Jerusalem for this comforter and one day they are immersed in and filled with the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts could also be titled the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 is the first gospel sermon ever preached. What are Peter's main points? How do the people respond?

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

There was an immediate response and then the people went back to their daily lives. They were changed and their daily activities changed. They spent as much time as possible learning more about Jesus, spending time together doing life together which included sharing their financial resources, eating together which included celebrating the special meal that Jesus gave them before He died, and praying. This is what the church is supposed to be about. If we're not doing this then we're missing something.

Week 46, Day 7 --- Acts 4-6

Highs and lows are what you'll find in today's reading. This was an incredible time. A small group of less than 100 very frightened people had suddenly become a group of over 3000 very courageous and outspoken witnesses for the resurrected Jesus. They loved Jesus and their new life so much that everyone's physical needs were met. Chapter 4 is a picture of the church and the world as God intended it, but it doesn't last long.

In chapter 5, pride and the desire for human recognition threaten the church. Read very carefully. Ananias does not die because he decided to keep some of the money from the sale of his land. Instead, he dies because he tells the apostles that the money he brought was everything he received for the land. He was telling a lie while using money to try to gain position in the church.

In chapter 6 we begin to see the unity of the church falling apart. Remember back to the Old Testament when the Jews went into captivity. Some Jews returned to Israel, but others stayed in other countries. These foreign Jews are called Hellenistic Jews. Hellenistic is another term for someone who has adopted the Greek culture and language. These widows were still Jews, but they were considered lower than the Jews from the land of Israel. The problem was addressed in a very practical way and we see structure begin to emerge in the church.

What is most important in these chapters is the interaction that the apostles have with the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was like the Senate for Israel. It was a group of seventy men who made the laws for the land of Israel under the authority of the Romans. Unlike our country, both church and state were combined. These men made both civil and religious laws. They were clearly opposed to the message that Jesus had risen and wanted the apostles to stop. The apostles would not stop and the message of Jesus continued to spread.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 47, Day 1 --- Acts 7-8

Week 47, Day 2 --- Acts 9-10

Week 47, Day 3 --- Acts 11-12

Week 47, Day 4 --- Acts 13-14

Week 47, Day 5 --- James 1-5

Week 47, Day 6 --- Acts 15-16

Week 47, Day 7 --- Galatians 1-3

Week 47, Day 1 --- Acts 7-8

Stephen has been arrested and he is not given an attorney. Instead, as Jesus had promised, he is filled with the Holy Spirit and makes an incredible defense speech. Even though the result is very painful for Stephen I chuckled as I read it this morning. It is very easy to see where Stephen is going in his speech. Is Stephen defending himself or is he convicting those who have arrested him? In this chapter you will read the summary version of the entire Old Testament. Notice how often the believers in the New Testament refer back to the Old Testament. The end result of Stephen's speech is that he is stoned to death and we are introduced to a new character, Saul who will later become Paul.

When persecution comes to a church in a place the believers in that church have three options. The first option is to stay and risk arrest or death. The second option is to go away to a new place. The third option is to quit believing. We don't hear about people choosing option 3. We do hear about people choosing option 2 and moving away. This was a very good thing. The church was stuck in Jerusalem and God's intention was for it to spread out to the nations. It is the people who left Jerusalem and took the gospel with them who began the spread of the church to the entire world. Saul didn't realize it at the time, but God was already using him to spread the good news. Where have you been sent? How are you spreading the good news?

Week 47, Day 2 --- Acts 9-10

The church had spread out from Jerusalem, but the good news was still being preached only to those who were Jews. In these two chapters God's strategy for reaching those who were not Jews is revealed. Anyone who was not a Jew was called a Gentile. The first part of the strategy is to pick someone to go and preach to the Gentiles. God chose Saul. Saul was one of the best Jews who had ever lived and he was aggressively persecuting the church. He was doing everything he could to kill it. It is easy to understand why Ananias was afraid to go to him when God tells him to. How would you describe Saul based on what you learn of him here? Why didn't Saul immediately go back to Jerusalem?

The second part of the strategy was to break down the prejudice that existed among the apostles. Unlike Saul, the apostles were not perfect Jews. However, they had learned not to associate with Gentiles, especially Romans. God tells Peter to go to the house of a Roman soldier and preach the good news. When Peter does this the people believe and the Holy Spirit anoints them in a very visible way. It takes this kind of act by God to convince Peter and his traveling companions that these people are acceptable to God. The first thing they do is baptize them so that they are now identified as followers of Jesus.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Acts 9 and 10 are very important chapters to anyone who desires to follow Jesus and who is not a Jew. Without God's intervention it is very likely that Christianity would never have spread beyond the Jewish race.

Week 47, Day 3 --- Acts 11-12

The church that was begun in Antioch eventually became the new center for the church. Believers in Jesus had typically been called followers of the way until the unbelievers in Antioch began to call them Christians, or followers of Christ. The term was intended to be an insult. We use it all the time now, but it was only used 3 times in all the New Testament. Antioch was the first church where Jewish and Gentile believers met together.

Persecution continues in Jerusalem and James the brother of John is killed. Herod intends to kill Peter as well, but God rescues Peter. All of the Herods were incredibly evil men. I am certain that no one grieved very long for the death of Herod. The Roman world is changing and Christianity is going to play a significant role in the change.

Week 47, Day 4 --- Acts 13-14

These two chapters tell the story of the first missionary journey. Saul has been renamed Paul and he and Barnabus set out to take the good news of Jesus to places that have never heard it. Their basic approach is to go to the local synagogue, the place where the Jews worship, and proclaim the message there. Paul had studied under a very famous rabbi and he would have been an honored guest at first. It would be very unusual to have this happen today in any of our churches, but it was common to ask the guest to speak in those days. What they didn't realize is that Paul was going to speak a message that would turn their world upside down. The reaction is consistent from town to town. Both Jews and Gentiles are split. Some believe and some don't. Those who don't believe attack Paul and Barnabus in some way. A new church begins and Paul and Barnabus move on to the next town.

What did Paul and Barnabus risk preaching the good news? What risks do we take when we preach the good news?

Week 47, Day 5 --- James 1-5

James was the brother of Jesus. As far as we know he did not become a believer until after the resurrection. Once he became a believer he also became a leader in the early church. This letter to the church is probably one of the first that was written. It is a very practical letter. The royal law that James is talking about can be found in Matthew 22:34-40. The book of James at times sound very much like one of the Old Testament prophets. I think his main thought is that our faith should result in different behavior. If it doesn't we probably don't really believe. How has your faith changed your behavior?

Week 47, Day 6 --- Acts 15-16

Chapter 15 is full of disagreements. The church is growing and with the growth come new people and different ideas. In this case the ideas are old ideas. The Jews have lived under the strict system of the law for all their lives. They find it difficult to understand that God would

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

create a new kind of relationship with man that doesn't require keeping the law, but that is what God did. You'll explore that concept some more in the reading for the next two days. The important thing to see is that when the church had an internal disagreement they got together and talked about it. They listened to each other and the Holy Spirit with the result that Paul and Barnabus were able to continue their ministry to the Gentiles. I don't understand why Paul and Barnabus weren't able to work out their disagreement in a similar way. This passage shows us that while they were both full of the Holy Spirit they were still people with feelings and opinions. The good news is that this is not the end of their relationship. We know for certain that Paul asks for John Mark later in his ministry.

In chapter 16 Paul and Silas go to jail. One of the important aspects of this story is the fact that both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. In the United States everyone has the same basic rights regardless of citizenship. This was not true in the Roman Empire. Citizens had a very different status and special privileges that non-citizens did not have. Many people paid large sums of money to become citizens, but Paul and Silas were citizens by birth. They should not have been arrested and held in jail without trial and there is no way they should have been beaten. What does the jailer do when he hears the good news that has put Paul and Silas in his jail?

Week 47, Day 7 --- Galatians 1-3

Often when we think of God we ask the wrong questions and naturally get the wrong answers. We assume things about God that aren't true and the results are disastrous for us. The Jews saw God as only law-giver and judge. With this view of God they asked how they could earn eternal life. The answer they came up with was that they needed to keep the entire law all their life. They knew this was impossible from history and personal experience, but they couldn't see another way. Since this was all they understood they taught this to anyone they could.

Paul saw God as love and life. This is how God is portrayed to us throughout the Bible. God's greatest desire is to love and be loved by His children and that is us. With this view we ask how we can be in right relationship with God. God's answer is that we put our trust in Him and in the sacrifice that He made for us in Jesus.

Paul is absolutely convinced that this is critical to our relationship to God both now and for eternity. He is angry that people who understood this message have been deceived and are now trying to earn their way to heaven. This is an impossible task and puts the emphasis on us rather than on God. Whenever we do that we're making a mistake.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 48, Day 1 --- Galatians 4-6

Week 48, Day 2 --- Acts 17:1-18:18

Week 48, Day 3 --- 1 Thessalonians 1-5 - 2 Thessalonians 1-3

Week 48, Day 4 --- Acts 18:19-19:41

Week 48, Day 5 --- 1 Corinthians 1-4

Week 48, Day 6 --- 1 Corinthians 5-8

Week 48, Day 7 --- 1 Corinthians 9-11

Week 48, Day 1 --- Galatians 4-6

What is Paul's greatest fear expressed in this letter to the Galatians? If God is only lawgiver and judge, then what is described in the Bible is a religion. A religion is a group of things to do to please a superior being or achieve some eternal goal. Following Jesus is not a religion. It is a relationship that is designed to bring us freedom and blessing so that we can spread freedom and blessing to others.

Paul describes two directions in chapter 5. These sentences are very close to each other in the text, but describe totally different directions

Galatians 5:4 - You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Galatians 5:6b - The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

The first direction is the direction of the slave. We try to be made right by keeping the law and we continually fail. We view God as master and we get farther and farther away from Him. The second direction is the direction of the son. We view God as Father and because we trust Him we desire to share His love for us in acts of love toward others. The slave is led by his body and the son is led by the Spirit.

Paul contrasts the two at the end of chapter 5. I would encourage you to memorize Galatians 5:22, 23. How much is your life an expression of these things? The more you see these things in your life the more you know the Spirit is at work in you.

Week 48, Day 2 --- Acts 17:1-18:18

Paul is now in Greece and as he travels from town to town he talks to everyone he can about the resurrection of Jesus. He always starts by finding the local synagogue, the place that the Jews worship, and speaking there. He is almost always thrown out of the synagogue. Sometimes this happens quickly, and sometimes it takes weeks, but it almost always happens. Once he is thrown out of the synagogue Paul find other places where people gather and begins speaking directly to the Gentiles.

The Jews who reject Jesus generally reject Him because the message of grace means freedom from the law and it is keeping the law that makes the Jews special in their own eyes. The Gentiles who reject Jesus generally reject Him because a relationship with Jesus means leaving behind a lifestyle of lust and greed. At this time it was not popular to become a follower of Jesus.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Christians were persecuted and the persecution gets worse as the years go by. Why do you think people decided to follow Jesus anyway?

Week 48, Day 3 --- 1 Thessalonians 1-5 - 2 Thessalonians 1-3

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

There is an urgency in Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica unlike some of his other letters. He had started the church on his way from Philippi to Athens. Paul developed deep relationships quickly, especially with those who eagerly responded to the good news he was preaching. He considered each new church he started to be like his children and he worried about them.

At this time believers were being persecuted. They may not have been being killed, but they were being kept from buying and selling. In some cases they were being arrested and kept in prison. They were certainly being ridiculed. Unfortunately, their response was to begin to argue with each other. Someone began a rumor that Jesus had already returned and they had missed Him. If that was the case, then why continue to believe. Their hope was in eternal life and if they had missed that then there was no reason to continue following Jesus. Paul wants them to know that Jesus had not yet returned so that they would continue to hope.

Paul makes this very clear in his second letter. Apparently, this false teaching about Jesus' return is causing many to lose hope and give up. Do not lose hope. Do not give up. God keeps His promises and Jesus is going to return to take us home to be with Him forever.

Week 48, Day 4 --- Acts 18:19-19:41

Today's passage provides background on the times and places behind the letters that Paul wrote that make up most of the New Testament. Ephesus was on the sea coast in what is now Turkey. It was a large commercial city and many people traveled through it. Some people as they traveled through heard the gospel and became followers of Jesus. They took their belief with them when they returned to their home towns. The early opposition to Christianity was Judaism, but as Christianity became more popular Christianity experienced opposition from the pagan religions as well. Eventually, Christianity would become so popular that it would experience political opposition and that is when the greatest persecution began. Paul stayed at Ephesus for a long time and it is generally agreed that he wrote several of his letters while he was there.

Week 48, Day 5 --- 1 Corinthians 1-4

The city of Corinth was an evil city. It was known for widespread sexual immorality. In spite of that the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection was well received and a large growing church began after Paul's visit there. This church quickly developed problems. Several teachers had come through Corinth and each had impacted the church. Unfortunately, people in their pride were seeking a way to be superior and they tried to do this by aligning themselves with one of the teachers. Some even saw through this and aligned themselves with Jesus, but Paul doesn't commend them for this as their attitude seems to be as bad as everyone else's is.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Apparently Paul had received a letter from the church that was filled with information about what was going on and included a series of questions. These first few chapters are Paul's answer to the situation and in the next chapters he will begin answering their questions.

God's desire is that we be unified as His children. The only way this can happen is when we are filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Week 48, Day 6 --- 1 Corinthians 5-8

In this section Paul deals with two very practical matters that are troubling the church in Corinth, sex and food. It is hard to imagine that there would be society where it would be easier to have sex outside of marriage. In Corinth, as in Ephesus, all a person had to do was to go to the local temple. Women, married and single, would go there to have sex with whoever came as they served their goddess as temple prostitutes. Men would go to have sex with those prostitutes and there were both male and female prostitutes. It was incredibly easy to have sex. The concept of being faithful to a husband or wife for a lifetime was a new concept.

In chapter 5 Paul is concerned that the standards of the community are seeping into the church. Everyone sins, so Paul isn't talking about breaking up the church. The issue is that this man who is having sex with his step mother is boasting about it and the community within the church is acting like this is okay. If something isn't done the community will be destroyed.

In chapter 6 Paul explains the significance of sexual sin. Sex is good. In fact, from God's perspective sex is very good. He created it and designed it to be an incredibly pleasurable and meaningful part of the marriage relationship. Through sex a couple becomes one body. The problem comes when I use sex for my own personal pleasure and have no commitment to the person I'm having sex with. The word this is translated sexual immorality is the same root word that is defined as pornography. The basic idea of sexual immorality is that I am using another person for my pleasure. This can happen in marriage, but is the basis for almost all sexual relationships outside of marriage.

In chapter 7 Paul talks about marriage. It seems that the church was confused. They knew they were having struggles with how to deal with sex. It would seem that some people were over-reacting and saying that all sex was bad. Paul wants them to understand that sex is good. He also wants them to understand that sex is not a necessity. There have been many people through history who have given themselves completely to God and remained single for their entire lives. However, recent events within the church have made it very clear that not everyone should be single. In my opinion, the recent sexual abuse scandals are the result of misapplying this passage of scripture and forcing singleness on men who want to serve God, but who do not have the gift of sexual abstinence.

Finally, in chapter 8 Paul talks about food. The Jews made a big deal about food and had rules for everything. They would rarely leave their home to eat because they couldn't be certain about how the food was prepared. They certainly wouldn't consider eating food that had been sacrificed to an idol. In Corinth the temples were both brothels and restaurants or butcher shops. People brought animals to the temple and they were slaughtered and butchered there. If you wanted fresh meat for dinner this was the most likely place you would go to buy it. Unfortunately, for someone who had just become a follower of Christ after having served an idol

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

for all his life this meat had special meaning. Eating this meat was an act of worship to the idol. Paul is saying that the person who feels this way shouldn't eat this meat. Beyond that he is saying that any believer should give up meat if it will get in the way of someone else's relationship with God.

Week 48, Day 7 --- 1 Corinthians 9-11

Paul continues talking about how to decide what to eat. He describes a principle that really applies to all our choices in life. Every choice I make ought to be made with the salvation of those around me in mind. How I talk, what I eat, what I watch, and where I go all impact what others think about Jesus. It is probably better to say that people are watching how I do all of these things more than what I am doing. The test case that Paul presents is interesting and gets repeated over and over in our own time. A believer is going to dinner. The host believes that meat sacrificed to an idol is significant and believes that a follower of Jesus should not eat it. He makes certain that the believer knows that the meat was sacrificed to an idol. He is testing to see if the believer will violate the rules – not God's rules, but the world's understanding of God's rules. The believer should become a vegetarian for the evening.

In the middle of this section there is a great verse to memorize:

1 Corinthians 10:3 -- No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

We will be tempted, but God is protecting us and providing for us. There is always a way out. There is always a choice.

A central part of the gatherings of early Christians was what we now call Communion or the Lord's Supper. They called it the love feast. It was the time they shared bread and wine together and remembered Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Unfortunately, what Jesus had designed to be very simple had become a huge meal and people were either acting selfishly and taking more than their share of food, or they were getting drunk. Neither of these behaviors are appropriate when the focus is supposed to be on Jesus and what He did for us. Paul gives the church some very practical instruction to guide their observance of the Lord's Supper.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 49, Day 1 --- 1 Corinthians 12-14

Week 49, Day 2 --- 1 Corinthians 15-16

Week 49, Day 3 --- 2 Corinthians 1-4

Week 49, Day 4 --- 2 Corinthians 5-9

Week 49, Day 5 --- 2 Corinthians 10-13

Week 49, Day 6 --- Romans 1-3 - Acts 20:1-3

Week 49, Day 7 --- Romans 4-8

Week 49, Day 1 --- 1 Corinthians 12-14

We know from the introduction to this letter that the Corinthians struggled with pride. Everyone wanted to be the most important. This pride expressed itself in many ways. They even developed a hierarchy of spiritual gifts with speaking in tongues at the top of the list. Speaking in tongues in this passage appears to be the ability to communicate human spirit to Holy Spirit in words that people cannot understand. It is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Unfortunately, Satan can mimic this ability.

The real sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is love. Most of the time when you read the word love in the New Testament this is the kind of love that is being mentioned. It is selfless love or God's love. When you read the word love always think of the cross.

When the Corinthian believers gathered together it was chaos. In a typical gathering of the church at this time everyone would participate. This is a good thing that we have lost and need to restore. The bad thing was that people were shouting over each other. It seems that everyone was saying, "Look at me." What should be happening when Christians gather is that everyone should be saying through their words and actions, "Look at Jesus."

Week 49, Day 2 --- 1 Corinthians 15-16

The gospel or good news is very simple. Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. This is probably over simplified, but any attempt to define the gospel without these elements is not the gospel. Jesus is God and He became a human being, so that He could die. He died on a cross and was buried. The burial is important because it confirms that Jesus died. Finally, Jesus rose from the dead. This is our hope that we will also rise from the dead and that we will have a new heavenly body just like the one that Jesus has now.

There is more to life than this life on earth. If there isn't then there is no reason to believe, but there is so we have hope and our lives on this earth are different because of the hope that we have.

Week 49, Day 3 --- 2 Corinthians 1-4

Paul writes again to the church in Corinth. Most scholars think that he actually wrote at least 3 letters to Corinth and that this is the third letter. One of the important things to note is that the goal of church discipline is always reconciliation. In his first letter Paul had instructed the church to put out of the church the man who was sleeping with his step-mother. In this letter it is clear that the man has repented, but that the church is hesitant to bring him back. Paul gives them

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

permission to forgive him and to bring him back. This is good news for all of us since everyone continues to sin even after believing in Jesus.

In Paul's day it was typical for some men to make their living as orators or speakers. They would go from town to town and charge people for giving speeches. Some men discovered that they could do this with the gospel message. They sounded good, but began leading the churches away from truth. Paul wrote to guide the church back to truth. He introduces his letter with his qualifications and one of those is that he never charged the church for the message he delivered to them.

Paul is dealing with a great deal of physical suffering in his life. His faithfulness through this suffering should be an encouragement to us. The most important thing to remember is that everything that you can see is temporary. The things that you can't see, God and heaven, are the things that are permanent.

Week 49, Day 4 --- 2 Corinthians 5-9

As I write this today I'm thinking about a co-worker who died yesterday. Her death was sudden and unexpected. Unfortunately, I don't think that she went home to be with Jesus. That makes me very sad. Paul's desire was to be with Jesus and for everyone else to be there as well. This entire letter is filled with intense emotion. One of the primary reasons we remain on earth after coming to know Jesus is so that we can play a part in reconciling others to God.

Paul talks about being unequally yoked. The yoke went around the neck of an ox or a horse so that they could pull a plow. Two oxen yoked together could pull together and get much work done. The same with two horses. However, an ox and a horse yoked together would not accomplish anything in spite of their individual strength. When believers form deep partnerships with unbelievers they are going to be pulling in different directions. This is true in marriage, but it can also be true in business. Remember what happened to Solomon. Paul wants these believers to continue pursuing God with all their hearts.

Giving is a vital part of the Christian life. You'll notice that there is no set amount that Paul instructs the Corinthians to give. We are to give because we trust God and recognize that all we have belongs to Him.

Week 49, Day 5 --- 2 Corinthians 10-13

Imposters entered the church almost as soon as it began. There were two basic categories of imposters. The first category was Jews who taught that the Gentiles must become Jews in order to be followers of Jesus. This was a lie and Paul wrote to the Galatians to counter this lie. The second category was the Gnostics. They taught that what you did in the body did not matter as long as your spirit had special knowledge. Of course, these super-apostles had the special knowledge. The fruit of their teaching was discord and immorality.

Imposters still exist today. Not everyone who comes into the jail to teach is teaching the truth. It is very important for you to study God's Word so that you can discern what is true and what is false.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 49, Day 6 --- Romans 1-3 - Acts 20:1-3

Paul has not yet been to Rome, but he has heard that there are believers there and he greatly desires to go there. He writes them a letter that is probably much like his teaching wherever he went. He wants them to understand the basics of Christianity. This letter is organized much like a legal case. In these first three chapters Paul is working as a prosecutor to convict.

Who has a problem? What is the problem? What has proven to be insufficient to resolve the problem? What is sufficient to solve the problem?

Think through these questions. Write me with your answers. Keep reading. These first three chapters can be discouraging, but good news is coming soon.

Week 49, Day 7 --- Romans 4-8

There is a great battle going on. It is between our flesh and spirit. The NIV translates flesh as sinful nature. The idea is that it is our physical nature and desires that lead us to sin. We are focused on here and now, on survival and this motivates us to do evil. There are three pieces to the solution that Paul mentions in this section. He will get to the fourth and final piece in the next section. The first piece of the solution is faith. When we trust in Jesus' death and resurrection for eternal life rather than in our own ability to do good we are on the right path. The second piece of the solution is Jesus. His death and resurrection are essential for our salvation. The third piece of the solution is baptism. Through immersion into water we act out the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That is what happens physically. What happens spiritually is that we are brought into contact with the blood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us. We can recognize that our flesh or sinful nature is dead so that we can begin to live by the Spirit.

In chapter 7 Paul wants to make the point once again that living by the flesh will not work. As long as our trust is in the law and our focus is on life in the flesh we will do evil. We may not want to, but we will not be able to help it. The whole point of chapter 7 is that we cannot become good on our own.

Chapter 8 is one of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible. It is filled with hope and describes the fundamental principle necessary for the Christian life. We must be guided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit clearly communicates to us through the written word, the Bible, which you are reading. The Spirit also communicates directly. What the Spirit communicates directly will never contradict what is communicated in the Bible. What promises do you find in this chapter? If you fully trusted in those promises what would you do differently today?

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 50, Day 1 --- Romans 9-11

Week 50, Day 2 --- Romans 12-13

Week 50, Day 3 --- Romans 14-16

Week 50, Day 4 --- Acts 20:4-23:35

Week 50, Day 5 --- Acts 24-26

Week 50, Day 6 --- Acts 27-28

Week 50, Day 7 --- Philemon 1 - Colossians 1-4

Week 50, Day 1 --- Romans 9-11

Paul interrupts his discussion of the Christian walk to talk about his own people. This is a very emotional and personal part of the book. Paul is writing to Gentiles and he wants them to know how important the Jews are and have been. I'm thinking that the Gentiles are beginning to look down on the Jews, especially since some of the Jews are probably persecuting them. Paul wants to stop this and he expresses in the strongest word possible his desire for the Jews to come to know and accept Jesus.

There are principles in these 3 chapters that have been debated by Christian scholars for years. Many books have been written just on these 3 chapters and what they mean. What do you learn about God from these 3 chapters?

Week 50, Day 2 --- Romans 12-13

One of the things that you should have picked up from the previous 3 chapters is that God is merciful. To be specific, as you are reading this God has been merciful to us. So, Paul is appealing to us on the basis of God's mercy to be different. We become different by changing how we think.

KERUX ILLUSTRATION DATABASE ID Number: 66273

David Holwick Collection

SOURCE: BreakPoint Commentary

TITLE: Habits of the Mind: a Mind For God

AUTHOR: Charles Colson

DATE: 7/31/06

ILLUSTRATION:

A few years ago, a professor at Pasadena City College led a class discussion on the famous story "The Lottery." In the story, a seemingly normal village carries out a bizarre ritual involving human sacrifice. The professor, Kay Haugaard, had taught the story many times over the years and was anticipating the usual shocked reactions from her students.

Instead, she found that she was teaching a room full of moral relativists who thought that the ritual might be all right "if it's a part of a person's culture ... and if it has worked for them." To Haugaard's horror, she realized that "no one in the whole class of twenty ostensibly intelligent individuals would go out on a limb and take a stand [even] against human sacrifice." The very mentality that Jackson's story warns us about — "the dangers of being totally accepting followers, too cowardly to rebel against obvious cruelties and injustices" — had become the mentality of this group of intelligent college students.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Haugaard writes, "It was a warm night when I walked out to my car after class that evening, but I felt shivery, chilled to the bone." James Emery White tells this story in his excellent new book *A MIND FOR GOD*. White, the new president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, wants us to understand just how dangerous it can be to live life without a worldview that teaches that "each person has value, and there is meaning and purpose to every life."

To have such a worldview, White explains, we must believe that "there is Someone above and outside of our existence who stands over us as our authority." Without that belief, our sense of morality can be based only on shifting values in the culture around us. And any sense of morality with such a weak foundation is doomed to erode — and create the kind of minds that are blasé about human sacrifice.

Even those of us who do believe in God can be endangered by a relativistic culture like the one we live in. White tells us of an encounter with a woman, who identified herself as a Christian, who informed him that Jesus "lived a long, full life, got married and had kids." (And people said that *THE DA VINCI CODE* would not have any effect on anyone's religious beliefs?)

How do we shore up our faith against a corrosive culture and develop a true "mind for God"? White's book is designed to answer that question. He urges us to read, to study, to reflect on our faith and our culture, and he suggests books, websites, and other resources to help us get started. He encourages Christians to create what he calls "a rule for the mind" — a set of disciplines like those once followed by Christian monastics — to help us develop a pattern of Christian thinking that applies to all of life.

"Our minds are deeply spiritual," White writes, "and so developing our minds must be a spiritual discipline." I agree, and I can't think of a better place to start than in this book. Jim White is a gifted Christian thinker, but what I like best is that he writes for laymen at an accessible level. All of us need to learn the disciplines of thinking Christianly about all of life.

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Week 50, Day 3 --- Romans 14-16

As Jews and Gentiles came together as followers of Christ they began to worship and fellowship with each other. This was a real challenge because they came from completely different cultures. They had to sort out what issues were simply cultural and which were evil and needed to be left behind. This was especially difficult in the area of diet. The Jews had strict dietary regulations that had been made even stricter by almost 1500 years of tradition. The Gentiles had no dietary restrictions.

For example, Jews are not supposed to eat pork. Paul is saying that it would demonstrate a complete lack of love to invite a brand new Jewish believer who still felt called of God to follow the dietary restrictions of the Old Testament and then serve pork for dinner. In our time the equivalent might be serving wine at a dinner attended by a number of alcoholics.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Paul always warns against division. It is difficult to keep a group of people together. Our pride causes us to emphasize our differences when our faith in Jesus and our love for one another should bring us together.

Week 50, Day 4 --- Acts 20:4-23:35

Paul has one more journey to make and it is going to begin in Jerusalem. On the way he stops near Ephesus and calls the elders of the church there to come and see him. What does Paul warn them of? What does he pray for them?

Paul is warned about going to Jerusalem, but he goes anyway. The church had a long struggle between those who wanted to combine the gospel of the resurrected Jesus with the Law of the Old Testament. That struggle would end in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Paul is headed to Rome and he will have the opportunity to tell his story and preach the gospel many more times before he gets there.

Week 50, Day 5 --- Acts 24-26

Paul was in prison for several years. He was not guilty, but in spite of this he used the time well. While in prison he was protected from the Jews. He had limited freedom, but could be cared for by his friends. He used the time to write many of the letters that we read in the New Testament. Finally, he was able to testify about Jesus to the highest rulers in the land. Eventually, he would be able to testify before Caesar.

If you were on trial because of your faith what would your story be?

Week 50, Day 6 --- Acts 27-28

It is hard to imagine travel in the time of Paul. Most people traveled on foot and the trip from Jerusalem to Rome would take months. The wealthy and adventurous would travel by ship. Under normal circumstances this journey would take a few weeks, but Paul did not travel under normal circumstances. God wanted to speed Paul on his way, so a winter storm came and pushed Paul's ship toward Rome like modern speedboat. This must have been a large ship for this time because of the number of passengers. After a great adventure Paul arrives safely in Rome. While he is facing death he has a freedom to preach that he has rarely experienced. In one of his letters he tells us that many of his guards came to believe.

We don't know for sure how Paul died. As far as the New Testament is concerned this is the end of the story. We are fairly certain from other sources that Paul was killed by Caesar. We do not know if it was after this imprisonment or another.

Week 50, Day 7 --- Philemon 1 - Colossians 1-4

Paul writes several letters from his imprisonment in Rome. These two letters are very special. We would not have them if Onesimus, the slave, had not trusted God and returned to his master in Colossae. Onesimus was an escaped slave. If caught and returned to his master he was subject to any penalty the master wanted to carry out including death. He had become a believer sometime during his escape and was now freely providing some valuable service to Paul.

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Paul would have liked to keep him, but the right thing to do was for him to return to his master. Paul's desire, expressed in his letter to Philemon, is that Onesimus would be freed and returned to him.

There was no postal service, so Onesimus must carry these letters that Paul wrote back to Colossae. If he chooses to run away, then the letters would have been lost. That would have been a tragedy. The letter to the Colossians is one of the simplest and clearest letters that Paul writes. The church has few problems so Paul is able to challenge them and encourage them in a very positive way. Like most of us today they are struggling to know how to become more like Jesus. They are beginning to replace a relationship with Jesus with religion, the practice of rituals.

Chapter 2:9-14 is one of the best explanations of what happens in baptism. Is baptism something that you do or something that is done to you? What happens in baptism? Who is working when a person is baptized into Christ?

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Week 51, Day 1 --- Ephesians 1-6

Week 51, Day 2 --- Philippians 1-4

Week 51, Day 3 --- 1 Timothy 1-6

Week 51, Day 4 --- Titus 1-3

Week 51, Day 5 --- 1 Peter 1-5

Week 51, Day 6 --- Hebrews 1-6

Week 51, Day 7 --- Hebrews 7-10

Week 51, Day 1 --- Ephesians 1-6

Paul spent several years in Ephesus and knew the church well. He has a great affection for them. There doesn't appear to be any specific problem in the church that Paul addresses. Instead, this letter is a great one for understanding what it looks like to mature in our relationship with Jesus and with each other as believers.

Chapter 1 is full of promises. Take some time after you have read through the entire book and underline or circle every promise that you have as a believer in Jesus. When you've finished read the book again with those things in mind.

Week 51, Day 2 --- Philippians 1-4

The believers in Philippi were discouraged. They knew Paul was in prison and they were worried that he was going to be executed. Paul writes this letter to thank them and encourage them. He tells them over and over again to rejoice, to be filled with joy. Whenever you are feeling discouraged this is a great book to read.

This book also contains Paul's summary of the life of Jesus. It was probably an early hymn. Philippians 2:6-11 are some of the most beautiful words in the New Testament. They are as meaningful as they are beautiful. In a few short verses Paul shows us that Jesus was 100% human and 100% God. We may never understand how this was possible. What we do now is that God came to us so that we could be with Him.

Week 51, Day 3 --- 1 Timothy 1-6

Timothy was a young man who Paul met on one of his early missionary journeys. It was typical in those days for young men to go with a teacher and learn from him. This is what Timothy did. He traveled with Paul and learned from Paul. When Paul is put in prison Timothy becomes Paul's agent in continuing to carry on the work they have started. As Paul writes this letter Timothy is in Ephesus and teaching the church there. Timothy becomes kind of a church trouble shooter. He goes from church to church addressing whatever issues have come up.

As you read through Timothy what issues do you think the church in Ephesus is struggling with? What is Paul's solution to these issues?

If you want to be a godly man Paul provides an excellent description in 1 Timothy 3. The responsibility of the overseer or elder was to guide and protect the congregation. The closest comparison I've been able to come up with is to think of the church as a family and the

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overseers as the fathers of the family. The deacons are the servants. They must have spiritual maturity, but their role is to ensure that the practical matters in the family get taken care of.

You are a young man. How would you feel if you received this letter from your mentor?

Week 51, Day 4 --- Titus 1-3

This is a similar letter written to a different young man in a different place, but with a similar purpose. Paul realizes that he can no longer go from church to church teaching and correcting. It is time for the churches to grow up. The church will need leaders in every congregation and those leaders will need to bring up the next generation of leaders. Paul is modeling for us how to do that. After reading several of Paul's letters what is most important to Paul? What concerns Paul the most?

Week 51, Day 5 --- 1 Peter 1-5

Most of Paul's letters were written to a specific church to deal with specific issues. They were distributed beyond that church, but the original destination was clear. Peter's letter is to all the churches of an entire region. It was probably carried to one church, read and copied there, and then carried on to the next church. The theme of the book is clear. Peter is in Rome where he will die on a cross. The church is being persecuted and people are suffering. It is not easy being a Christian at this time. Peter writes to encourage everyone to remain faithful through their suffering.

What do you find most encouraging in what Peter writes? What do you find most difficult or challenging in what Peter writes?

Week 51, Day 6 --- Hebrews 1-6

Over the next couple of days you will understand why you read all the way through the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers and assumes a very strong understanding of the Old Testament. The author often quotes from the Old Testament, but this isn't a book that is primarily about looking back. The intent of this book is to get us to understand and look at Jesus.

You might want to go back and read Genesis 14. One of the comparisons that is made in these chapters is a comparison of Jesus and Melchizedek. In most of the Old Testament there were priests and kings. Priests came from the tribe of Levite and spoke to God on behalf of the people. Kings came from the tribe of Judah and spoke to the people on behalf of God. There are two exceptions to this in the Bible: Jesus and Melchizedek. They are both priests and in fact they are high priests. At the same time they are kings. Melchizedek is a purely human priest and king, but Jesus is the ultimate priest and king.

We don't know who the author of Hebrews was. Some argue that it was Paul, but others that it might have been Apollos. It really doesn't matter. In the book you'll find great encouragement to focus on Jesus and endure to the end that inevitably comes to the follower of Jesus in this life.

Week 51, Day 7 --- Hebrews 7-10

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I hope you took the time to read Genesis 14. Today's reading goes into great detail to establish Jesus as the new high priest. It may not be true of everything, but it was certainly true that the tabernacle and all the rituals associated with it were symbols of something greater to come in the future. Things like the arrangement of the rooms in the tabernacle are a shadow of what heaven will look like. We see this especially if we look at the holy of holies. If you go back to the Old Testament and read the description you'll find that the holy of holies was a room in the shape of a cube. It was the place where the high priest came into the presence of God. When you get to Revelation you'll find that the New Jerusalem is also in the shape of a cube and is filled with the presence of God. God wants us to be able to understand things that are infinitely wonderful and He uses physical things to give us at least a shadowy view of the future.

The author of Hebrews wants us to understand the present reality. Believers are suffering and he encourages us to be persistent in our faith. Our persistence should come from the realization that we can already dwell in God's presence. We no longer need a priest to go into the presence of God for us. Jesus has made it possible by His sacrifice for us to go to God anytime we want to.

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

Week 52, Day 1 --- Hebrews 11-13

Week 52, Day 2 --- 2 Timothy 1-4

Week 52, Day 3 --- Jude 1 - 2 Peter 1-3

Week 52, Day 4 --- 1 John 1-5

Week 52, Day 5 --- 2 John 1 - 3 John 1

Week 52, Day 6 --- Revelation 1-5

Week 52, Day 7 --- Revelation 6-11

Week 52, Day 1 --- Hebrews 11-13

Hebrews 11 is one of the most famous chapters in the whole Bible. It is called the faith chapter. In it you will find a review of the great stories of faith from the Old Testament. It also contains the following verse that I consider to be one of the most important in the entire Bible.

° And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Most people who claim to be Christians live by one of two motives: pleasing God or trusting God. How would you answer this question? Is it better to please God or to trust God? This may seem like a trick question, but it isn't. If my motivation and desire is to please God then I will focus on what I am doing. My tendency will be to focus on my works and the result will be pride. It is unlikely that I will actually develop the character that God desires and I probably won't please Him no matter how hard I try.

On the other hand if my motivation and desire is to trust God then my tendency will be to focus on what God is doing. Who is God? Where is He leading? What can I learn from Him? As I grow in trust for God and learn to walk following Him. Notice that the verse says I need to believe two things. First I must genuinely believe that God exists. Every move I make should be based on the reality that there is a God who created me and everything around me. Second I must genuinely believe that God is good. Not only is God good, but God desires to share His goodness with me. With these two beliefs I can follow God with confidence.

What is the connection between this understanding and the chapter on discipline that follows?

Week 52, Day 2 --- 2 Timothy 1-4

This is Paul's final letter that we have kept for us in the New Testament. It is an intensely personal letter. Paul knows that his time on earth is coming to an end and he is passing on his ministry to Timothy. It seems clear from Acts that Paul could have avoided prison by not going to Jerusalem. However, he probably wouldn't have gotten to Rome any other way. Some believers felt that Paul had made the wrong choice. As he reaches the end Paul is feeling very alone and he wants to see both Timothy and Mark one last time.

I love books and one of the special notes in this letter is Paul's request for his scrolls. They probably would have been portions of the Old Testament. They also would have been incredibly valuable.

What does Paul encourage Timothy not to do? What does Paul encourage Timothy to do?

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Week 52, Day 3 --- Jude 1 - 2 Peter 1-3

These two short letters have similar themes. The church has survived a period of persecution from the outside and is now threatened by forces inside. The church grew rapidly during periods of persecution. Any rapidly growing movement attracts men and women with gifts of leadership who hope to develop a following for their own benefit. In this case these false teachers were preaching a message that told people that they could be saved and continue to do all the evil they had done before. This message was a lie and still is a lie.

Think about it. The greatest promise of the New Testament is the presence of the Holy Spirit, God Himself, in us. If the Holy Spirit is in us guiding and encouraging us, then are we going to become more like God or more like Satan? 2 Peter 1:5 and 6 tells us what we should expect.

Week 52, Day 4 --- 1 John 1-5

I encourage you to read through this book several times. It really cannot be understood in small chunks. It is not written like an American book with a beginning, middle, and end. Instead, it flows back and forth. I think the message of the book is a very simple one. If I am in Christ I will be becoming more like Jesus every day. If I am in Christ I am alive. If I am in Christ I will love as Jesus loved.

Week 52, Day 5 --- 2 John 1 - 3 John 1

These two letters are written to specific people toward the end of John's life. They are indicators of what had begun to happen in the church. In 2 John the issue is an idea that was beginning to creep into the church. The idea was called Gnosticism. In Gnosticism spirit and matter were totally separate with spirit being good and matter being evil. The first implication was that Jesus body was evil and that God's Spirit entered it just briefly before His death on the cross. The practical implication of this was that as long as the spirit of a person was connected with God it did not matter what the body did. People who believed this attempted to lead the church into sexual immorality. This teaching needed to be stopped and John writes to warn the church. Unfortunately, the teaching did not end and forms of this teaching still exist today.

In 3 John the issue is a person. It would seem from what John writes that this person believes that the church belongs to them and not to Jesus. This has created division in the church. Unfortunately, divisions of all sorts that began before John died have continued to this day. This is totally contrary to Jesus' prayer in John 17 and has seriously reduced the spread of the gospel.

What would you have done if you were the church leader who had received one of these letters?

Week 52, Day 6 --- Revelation 1-5

Late in the Apostle John's life he was exiled to the island of Patmos. It is amazing that he was not killed. As far as we know he was the only one of the apostles who was not killed and who died of natural causes. He was an old man and the only apostle remaining alive. His letter is the last one written that is included in the Bible. It can be confusing because John addresses two things in the book. He writes to encourage the church in the persecutions it is currently enduring. He also writes to describe the future hope that we have in heaven. These messages

Bible Reading Plan -- the Bible Chronologically

are interwoven in the book. Even more confusing is the fact that he writes in a language that is much like code. The style is very much like the style of Daniel and Ezekiel in the Old Testament. It is the language of images and symbols. John is painting fantastic pictures for our imagination with his words.

This letter was written during a time when the church was dealing with great persecution. The emperor was probably Domitian and he was an evil man. He demanded that his subjects worship him as a god. For example, we take the expression "Jesus is Lord" very lightly. Domitian demanded that his subjects say, "Domitian is Lord" and for Christians to refuse to say that and instead to say "Jesus is Lord" was sufficient to demand the death penalty.

Also woven through Revelation are a number of songs. Revelation is the hymnbook of the early church. The ultimate focus of the book is on Jesus and believers are encouraged to worship Him with song. At the end of chapter 1 there is a wonderful description of Jesus. How does this description compare with the image of Jesus you have from the gospels?

The letters in chapters 2 and 3 are real letters to real churches in real cities. They are also letters of warning to churches today. When you think about the church which of these letters best fits the picture of today's church that exists in your mind? I hope you are encouraged as you read through this book. There are difficult times ahead, but God wins the ultimate victory and He has prepared a special place for us to go to and be with Him.

Week 52, Day 7 --- Revelation 6-11

I saw a video on YouTube yesterday that was amazing. A choir had gone to a food court in a mall and joined in eating with all the customers at the mall. All of a sudden music comes over the PA and the choir begins to sing the Hallelujah Chorus. The song builds and builds until the last phrase is repeated over and over – and He shall reign forever and ever. There are two main themes through this long middle section of Revelation. The first and primary one is that Jesus will reign forever. He desires everyone to be a part of His eternal kingdom, but many refuse. God's kindness, patience, and grace have not brought people to repentance. Now we see God's wrath and still people will not repent. This is the second theme. God will separate His children from the children of the devil. Only those who are wearing white robes will be allowed into God's presence.

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Week 53, Day 1 --- Revelation 12-18

These chapters are filled with fantastic images and creatures. Bible students have debated their meaning since the early days after this letter was written. It is easy to get distracted and miss the main point of what John writes. The church was being persecuted and the source of the persecution was Rome. The Roman Empire was very powerful and many believers died at the hands of Rome. Imagine that you are a believer living in a Roman city. What message do you hear in these chapters? What is Jesus warning you about? What is Jesus calling you to do? What will last forever? What will be destroyed?

Week 53, Day 2 --- Revelation 19-22

I don't know if you've ever seen The Lord of the Rings. In each of the 3 movies that tell this story there is a great battle. The plot builds until the battle comes and then the battle itself is much of the movie. We expect the same thing in Revelation, but the battle never happens or at least it is over so quickly that there is no drama associated with it. Jesus has won the victory and there is no great struggle. When Jesus enters the battle it is done.

This is the important thing for you to remember. Jesus is coming again and when He comes He will take everyone cleansed with His blood to be with Him forever. I'm looking forward to that day and I hope you are too.