

READING NOTES – AUGUST

The One Year Bible (ESV)

AUGUST 1

2 Chronicles 30-31

When you think back on the attempt of Jehoshaphat to unify Israel and the disaster that was, you look at these two chapters and see that God showed Hezekiah the right way to call Israel together.

I really don't have a lot to say about these chapters other than what is obvious. A godly king or leader leads his people in following God and worshiping God, and he oversees the organizing to make this possible. Ezra showed that this passion for organization began with David and was true of every godly king who had the heart of David.

Vs. 1-9 I'm sure that they consulted the Lord on changing the date to celebrate the Passover. Isaiah was a prophet and I'm sure they sought the Lord to get these concessions. God had already mentioned in Numbers 9:11 that if someone was unclean, they could celebrate the Passover in the second month.

Vs. 6-9 This message was very straightforward and truthful. Political correctness and tolerant persuasion were not given any credence. The offer was very simple and the reasons to respond would only have been felt and understood by the humble. Notice that it refers to there only being a remnant of the people left. It was during the reign of Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, when the northern kingdom had been taken into exile. The fact that God had allowed the Assyrians to take the northern kingdom into captivity should have had an impact on the Jews who had been left in the land.

Vs. 10-12 What is interesting about the couriers being laughed to scorn is that God's judgment had already hit the northern kingdom. Most of the people had been dragged away into captivity. These were the few people who were left. Talk about blindness and arrogance. But even at this late date, there were some who saw and understood and were humbled. God was still extending grace, but many people decided to ignore this offer. Still, some responded and came to Judah where the hand of the Lord was blessing. As disciples, we, like our heavenly Father, keep extending the offer.

Vs. 13-22 As the people came together to worship God, they noticed the monuments that had been standing for years, maybe generations, and understood that they were not just landmarks, they were idols or places of worship. Notice in v. 15 that the priests and Levites were ashamed. They never believed that so many people would show up. They hadn't bothered to consecrate themselves, so they would be ineligible to make the sacrifices.

V. 17 Again, God showed His flexibility by not judging the people from the northern kingdom who came to eat the Passover. What is even more amazing is that Hezekiah and the leaders knew those people were in trouble and they prayed for them.

V. 20 Hezekiah, though not a priest, interceded for the people and God "healed" them, by forgiving them.

Vs. 23-27 There was such a spiritual atmosphere and blessing from God that they decided to celebrate *for another seven days*. This second week seems to have surpassed the first week. The spirit of sharing and devotion to God was so great the entire congregation rejoiced in God, and God blessed them from *His holy habitation*.

God had made the feasts a requirement. Obeying Him and celebrating the feasts would have kept the country unified and focused on Him. Anyway, that had been the original plan. Notice that

nothing like this had happened since Solomon. What is in view is probably the dedication of the temple. It is very cool to see the people gathered together like this. At the same time it is kind of sad that this happened so seldom since God had made the provision for it to happen three times a year, not once every two hundred years.

2 Chronicles 31

This chapter shows the result of this great spiritual awakening. Hezekiah organized the worship of Israel. Ezra again is showing that political leaders do this because it is the mark of a truly spiritual leader.

V. 1 This is the response of the people as they made their way home. Cleansing had already been done, but I think the deeper the people went spiritually, the more they noticed the objects of pagan worship that had become invisible parts of their culture.

Vs. 2-10 Notice that Hezekiah made sure the tithes were brought in to feed the priests and the Levites. This was an important part of showing that the people understood the importance of the sacrifices, the worship and the presence of God among them. Later in Nehemiah, Nehemiah will set up all of this and convince the priests and Levites to come to Jerusalem. As soon as Nehemiah went back to Persia, the people stopped giving and the Levites left and went back to their farms. Tithing is not a matter of economics and return on investment (Why should I work and pay to have them sit on their hands?); it is a matter of spiritual perspective. God had commanded the people to support the priests and Levites so His work could be done, so His people would be cleansed and so that they would be unified in His love through the feasts. We have seen too that the Levites taught the people. Men and women of faith saw this and obeyed. Others didn't see the importance at all.

Vs. 11-19 Now that the people were willingly giving tithes, these resources had to be organized and stored. All of these names would have had meaning to the returned exiles. In a couple hundred years Nehemiah would be looking at these Scriptures and trying to do the very same thing in Jerusalem.

Vs. 20-21 This is a summary of Hezekiah's faithfulness, and the result was that people were seeking the Lord.

Romans 15:1-22

Paul is continuing his teaching about what to do when you have people in the congregation who are weak in conscience because of their past life in paganism or in legalism. The answer will be to imitate the love of Christ and to focus on why we are left here, that is, to proclaim together the glory of God to a lost world.

Vs. 1-3 Notice that Jesus is the example. We were (are) all weak and Christ bore with us. He is our example. So, who do you suppose reproaches sinful worthless humanity?

Vs. 4-7 Verse 4 sounds very much like 1 Corinthians 10:11, *Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the age has come.*

Notice that the focus of all of this is to have the unity to proclaim together the glory of God. Jesus again becomes the one we imitate. He didn't save us to be alike, but to give glory to God together. Regardless of our differences, we should all be able to welcome one another into the company of the redeemed and work together in the harvest. Right?

Vs. 8-13 How Paul and the Spirit state this is very interesting. The promise to Abe and to this nation is always being respected. Christ came one way, as a servant to the Jews (Jesus the deacon), for two purposes. First, He confirmed the promises to the Jews. He didn't fulfill them. He showed by His coming that they would one day be fulfilled. Second, in fulfillment to the

promise to Abraham and using the blessing to the Jews, Jesus started a fire under the Gentiles so that because of receiving God's mercy, the Gentiles would proclaim God's glory in all the earth. That's why we were left here, to proclaim God's glory. It is another way of expressing the Great Commission.

Notice how Paul goes to the OT to show that God's plan of redemption always included the Gentiles and how reaching the Gentiles was always the mission of the Messiah.

Vs. 14-16 This is a very clear expression of Paul's commission by God. Notice that one of Paul's criteria is that they not only knew the Word, but that they were able to teach one another. That would be important if disciple-making was functioning in that church. When Jesus called the disciples as apostles, there were three things that stood out: they were to be with Him, they were to preach and they were to have authority. All of these are seen in Paul. Here Paul expresses his "authority" as his service to the Lord and to other disciples in the harvest.

Vs. 17-21 I think this is our commission also as disciples working in the harvest. This portion is worth memorizing. When I read this I think of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 4:7 *For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

Paul understood the grace and commission given to him. It was all a gift and there was never room to boast in anything but Jesus. I'm sure Paul was amazed and humbled by what God had done through him. Paul and the Spirit said in 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul worked harder than any other apostle, but it was the grace of God. Only Jesus could have designed a guy like Paul, and it came at a price to Paul and to many other believers for Paul to be the grateful, driven man he was. Unknown to Paul, shortly after this writing, God was going to give him at least four years of R&R in jail, with some adventures in between.

V. 22, in my thinking, should have gone with tomorrow's reading.

Psalm 25:1-15

I get the feeling that David wrote this while he was still in distress, either before Ziklag or afterward in Hebron. It's interesting to me that when we are in distress, we also think back on our own sins. I guess we can't help thinking there might be a connection. Subconsciously we are always under the weight of our sin and our failures. Isn't it great to know that Christ has lifted that weight, and we are totally whole, loved and accepted in the Beloved?

The parts that speak to me are the desire to know the way of the Lord (4-5), the remembrance of, and pleading for, God's *steadfast love* (6-7), the confidence that when the Lord leads us we realize His *steadfast love* (10), and finally, David's desire for God's *friendship* (14).

Vs. 1-3 David knew he was being judged and ridiculed for waiting on the Lord. David also knew that God respected that kind of faith.

Vs. 4-5 In spite of all the criticism directed at David, David knew he was following the Lord. David wanted to know the Lord more and more. What a guy.

Vs. 6-10 This is something David learned from God. What a thing to learn. God gives love and that love is the basis for forgiveness.

Vs. 11-15 On the basis of all of this, David became a witness to the nations, glorifying the Lord for His love and greatness.

Proverbs 20:13-15

This seems like another random smattering of wisdom. I guess if I were putting them together to make sense of them, I would say that diligence (13) and craftiness (14) can get you what you need, because there is an abundance of gold and costly stones to be had (15); but lips of

knowledge (of the Lord) are rarer, more valuable, and you only get them one way. We have to seek the Lord and stay alert for His leading (13). The people in the ruined northern kingdom figured this out when they received Hezekiah's offer to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. They humbled themselves, saw the opportunity, sought the Lord and went to Jerusalem.

AUGUST 2

2 Chronicles 32:1-33:13

These are two chapters full of observations and lots to think about. Basically we'll see Hezekiah's greatest challenge and God's amazing deliverance. Hezekiah will be shaken and will stumble. Manasseh will royally ruin Judah; he will be humbled, repent and be restored. It is all quite an adventure and it all happens today.

2 Chronicles 32

Vs. 1-8 A couple of things are of note here that were not covered in 2 Kings 18. First, Hezekiah hid all the streams around Jerusalem and created a tunnel under the city, and was able to draw water from it during the siege. Hezekiah's tunnel was an engineering feat; because they began at opposite sides of the mountain on which Jerusalem is built, tunneling about 1700 feet through rock and met in the middle under the city. Second, vs. 7 and 8 show that Hezekiah gave a lot of leadership in preparation for the coming of the Assyrian army. He strengthened them and gave them confidence. Although they prepared, they knew their real hope was in the Lord.

Vs. 9-15 Some of this we've read; some is summary, and some is brand new. Hezekiah's spiritual leadership was really under fire in what was said. It is interesting that Sennacherib thought that Hezekiah had given the people confidence in his leadership and the preparations. Hezekiah had given them confidence in the Lord. Verse 15 was the height of arrogance. I'll bet he remembered these words.

Vs. 16-19 Although this is in summary form, Ezra is trying to show his readers that being scorned for following God was nothing new. The returnees were ridiculed and encouraged to abandon the rebuilding of the temple.

Vs. 20-23 What is interesting to me is that it mentions that Isaiah also prayed and cried out to God. We didn't see that in 2 Kings. Notice that both God and Hezekiah were honored by the surrounding nations.

Vs. 24-33 This is also in summary form, although some significant stuff is added by Ezra. You might want to read the account of this in 2 Kings 20 to compare.

V. 31 Notice that the envoy from Babylon came because of the sign, that is, the sun going back on the sundial. It is interesting that they knew where to come and inquire, and it is interesting that Hezekiah showed off the glory of Israel more than he did the glory of God.

It seems that Hezekiah was shaken by the prospect of an early death. He was only 39. He felt like he deserved more. After he was given the additional 15 years, he became proud about his reputation and flaunted all the Lord had given him, as if it were his doing. This pride was already in place when Hezekiah acted proud before the envoy from Babylon. Verse 31 is a very scary commentary on what happened here. I think the Lord does this to us too; and in my case, when it happens, it probably doesn't show the kind of stuff that is glorifying to God. It is hard to say when God rebuked Hezekiah. It might have been before the visitors from Babylon, but Kings and Chronicles both mention the envoy, so maybe this was when Isaiah spoke and told him that everything the envoy saw would someday become theirs.

When you see this all in the perspective of time and the drama on earth, you wonder if it was worth it. Hezekiah, even with 15 more years, only lived to be 54. And his last 15 years were a

disaster in his relationship with God. Do we really consider it "death" and the loss of everything good to go to be with God and get off this rotting rock? Even when Isaiah came with God's rebuke, Hezekiah's only thought was, "At least there will be peace during my life," as we read in 2 Kings 20. And with this thought and his newly found pride, Hezekiah decided to "slide for home," and the next generation of Israel was lost. The next godly king, Josiah, will hear the same message from God (judgment is coming, but you will have peace); and his response to that news will be used to save Israel.

2 Chronicles 33

Vs. 1-9 Manasseh was a piece of work. He was the child born in those extra 15 years that God gave Hezekiah. I assume that Hezekiah had other sons who could have reigned. This was the son then that Hezekiah selected to continue his legacy. Manasseh was the king who reigned the longest, 55 years, and he was the worst king either kingdom, north or south, had ever known. God vowed to bring punishment against Judah because of this guy.

Notice the references to David. The promise to David is now in conflict with the desecration of the temple and Jerusalem. Ezra will show that in spite of the great evil of this man, God would still hold true to the promise to Abraham, David and Israel.

V. 10 Not only did they pay no attention to those sent by God, but they killed them. What brought irrevocable judgment against Judah was that Manasseh filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. (2 Kings 21:16 and 24:4) Manasseh ruled for 55 years by killing the competition and silencing all the servants of the Lord. Tradition has it that Manasseh sawed Isaiah in two.

Vs. 11-13 I wish they hadn't ended this portion here, so read ahead to v. 20. This is completely new information given to us from Ezra and the Spirit. It is ironic that though captured by Assyria, Manasseh was led to and imprisoned in Babylon. Manasseh would be responsible for Judah being taken there in exile. Notice too that they captured him with hooks. The Assyrians had a brutal way of leading people captive. They would put a hook through the flesh of the chest (or in the nose) and connect it by a rope to a wagon or horse. This not only struck fear into the people who saw what Assyria did to those who opposed them, but it motivated the person who was "hooked" up, to keep up. Also, all the people of other lands would see these processions of prisoners and decide they didn't want that to happen to them.

If you know the story here, v. 13 has to be one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. Who says God doesn't show grace and love in the Old Testament? Who says there is no hope for those who have fallen the deepest? Ezra is showing that the returned nation can find grace and restoration. He is also showing that those who returned and fell into sin could turn to the Lord and find forgiveness.

For us in the harvest, we need to remember that we cannot "convince" people to come to Christ or follow Him in the harvest. Only God can humble a heart. It is enough for us to know that even the worst person can come to Christ and receive forgiveness, even in the 11th hour.

Romans 15:23-16:7

Romans 15:23-33

Vs. 22-23 So the reason that Paul never visited was that he was being urged on by the Spirit to complete his mission in Asia Minor.

V. 24 No one knows if Paul ever went to Spain.

V. 25 This is the collection mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16.

Vs. 26-27 Notice that Paul was very much focused on the interaction between God's plan for the Jews and His plan for the Gentiles. Salvation was from the Jews, and the Gentiles were allowed to become partakers.

Vs. 28-29 These were Paul's plans, but we'll see in v. 32 (also Rom. 1:10) that there was an "if God wills," attached to this.

Vs. 30-33 Paul appealed to them for their prayers, knowing that he was walking into danger. In fact, this prayer was answered with a "sort of." We've read Acts and know that Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and sat under house arrest for the next 4-5 years. God had another plan for Paul not envisioned in this prayer. However, Paul did make it to Rome and was there in peace with freedom to preach.

Romans 16:1-7

Vs. 1-2 The word *servant* is the word deaconess. Cenchreae was a port suburb of Corinth. Phoebe was probably on her way to Rome to do something for her church, maybe to extend some kind of aid to a relative of someone in the church in Corinth. It is suggested that when Paul found out she was heading to Rome, he "whipped off" this letter and sent it with her to save postage. ☺

Vs. 3-4 This couple was very close to Paul. They were not just friends and very devoted workers, but they were well known, sort of like heroes of the early church. If there were action figures for the people in Acts, there would be one for Prisca and one for Aquila. It is quite an honor for Paul to say that all the churches of the Gentiles were thankful for them. In Acts 18 we met P&A after all the Jews got kicked out of Rome. By divine appointment and displacement, they met Paul in Corinth and we see them again in Ephesus. Apparently they did some traveling with Paul. What is interesting here is that they were now back in Rome.

V. 5 Did you know this guy was the first convert in Asia?

V. 7 Apparently these guys were relatives of Paul who were believers before he was.

Tomorrow we get some more names, a great conclusion, and you will have finished Romans. When's the last time that happened?

Psalm 25:16-22

This is like a summary of the psalm. It is interesting to me that all of the sweat and fear and tears and hope and love and yearning are mixed together by God to help us know and understand Him.

Vs. 16-18 It is interesting that David couldn't calm his own heart. He knew that only the Lord could give him the peace and rest he sought. Part of this was giving David a sense of being forgiven for his fears and lying. Remember that when David first ran from Saul, he acted pretty badly. He lied to the priests, which resulted in the death of the priests and their families; and David went to Gath seeking refuge and had to act crazy to get out of it. These were not David's finest moments. His own efforts didn't bring him peace. David needed peace, knowing that God would continually rescue him.

Vs. 19-21 It is hard to depend on the Lord when the threat is very real and physical. God doesn't always seem physical and present. In danger, if it came down to relying on God's invisible presence or grabbing a baseball bat, most people would go for the Louisville Slugger. Yet David's hope was in the Lord, and he was willing to be looked upon as a fool.

V. 22 I think that David saw all of the events around him as not only pertaining to Israel, but as a part of Israel's troubles. But through the Son of David, all of David's shame will be put to rest and Israel will be established.

Proverbs 20:16-18

Vs. 16 and 17 are actions with regrets that did not come from v. 18, wise counsel.

AUGUST 3

2 Chronicles 33:14-34:33

2 Chronicles 33: 14-25

Vs. 14-17 How in the world did God arrange it that Manasseh repented, was released and returned to be king? This is a miracle all the way around. Not only that, but God had already begun bringing punishment against Judah that would not stop. So here comes Manasseh back to Israel, working against all hope to make up for some of the damage that he had done. Notice that he stopped idol worship in Judah. My theory is that he did more good than we realize or that is mentioned in the text. Ezra's message is, "Never, never, never give up."

Vs. 18-20 This is a somewhat bland summary on his horrible reign. In 2 Kings it says that he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. And regarding the prophets, tradition says that he killed Isaiah.

Vs. 21-25 It is interesting here that Amon was evil like his father, but Ezra mentions that he didn't humble himself as his father did. Apparently any "father-son" talks that took place didn't work. Both the Lord and Ezra are putting the focus on humility. Everyone sins, but sin without repentance and humility is fatal. The key element in repentance is humility both in heart and in action, submitting to God.

2 Chronicles 34

V. 1 Notice that Josiah was eight when he began to reign. That's kind of young. This would mean that when Josiah's father became king, and when Manasseh died, Josiah was six. My theory is that the repentant and humbled Manasseh couldn't change the heart of his son Amon, but he was able to influence the heart of his grandson Josiah. I'll bet there were a lot of grandfather-grandson talks that went on. Amon was busy taking the reigns of control, and Manasseh was basically retired. Manasseh would have had lots of time with Josiah during all of those young years. I've done a lot of work with kids and those first six years can be incredible. I think that the humbled and godly Manasseh made an impact on the boy who would become one of Israel's greatest kings. Never, never, never give up.

Vs. 1-2 Notice the comparison to David and seeking after God. This will be an amazing king with a hopeless task. Verse 2 is incredible. We will not find anything bad in Josiah. He served the Lord and Israel with a burning intensity until he died.

Vs. 3-7 We have a progression in Josiah's walk with the Lord. When he was 16 he began to seek the Lord. Actually, he sought the Lord according to the promise to David. This would also have held the redemptive promise of the Christ, the Son of David. He would have been trained by the priest and Levites, but he, himself, had a thirst and passion to seek God. We'll see that whatever was taught to Josiah was basically all oral tradition, history and the writings of David and Solomon. They didn't have the first five books of the Bible, the law.

When Josiah was 20 he began cleansing Jerusalem and Judah. This may have been in preparation to restore the worship in Jerusalem. Notice that Josiah took ownership for the entire country. The northern areas still had some Jews in them but were largely vacant or populated by a mixed race of people. Josiah went into all the land west of the Jordan and up to the Sea of Galilee. These were a very "religious" people back then. If you burned a man's bones on something you made it cursed. We don't have this sense of the spiritual at all. We'd just get our power washer and make

it “clean” again. These people may have been superstitious, but they held a pagan awe for the spiritual. For us, if we can’t see it, it doesn’t exist.

At this point, I think Josiah and his leaders thought they had done a great job and had honored the Lord. They had, but they only had their perspective on the matter. God’s perspective was about to come.

Vs. 8-13 We've seen this before. Josiah was now 26 years old. Remember, Hezekiah was 25 when he began to lead Israel spiritually. Josiah now led in restoring and organizing the worship of Israel. Ezra's point?

Apparently the temple was wrecked and needed tons of repair. It’s interesting that the song leaders were also overseers of the work. I wonder if they played during breaks.

Vs. 14-21 I am still awed by the fact that Josiah didn't have a copy of the OT until now. Manasseh must have had them all destroyed. I'm humbled by Josiah’s immediate understanding and emotion. They had done well in trying to restore Israel, but when they heard the law and the curses in Deuteronomy, they realized that God had planned for the entire removal of Israel from the land as a punishment. Josiah understood and was humbled.

You will notice that this account is not a summary of what happened in 2 Kings. That this entire story is retold here is like God underlining it ten times. What Josiah did is not only to be an example; it is a vital understanding and response to God’s truth. It was vital not only for the nation of Israel, but I think it is vital to us as disciples following in the harvest making disciples. The storm is approaching.

Vs. 22-25 God tells Josiah his task was "hopeless." Nothing is said here of the guilt from the innocent blood that Manasseh shed, but we find that mentioned in other places.

Vs. 26-27 I think these are some of the greatest discipleship verses in the Bible. I wonder what God heard from this man's heart. Notice the role of humility.

V. 28 While this seems to be God's response to Josiah’s sincerity, God will now accomplish something amazing through Josiah. The promise of peace during his time motivated Josiah. Instead of sliding for home like Hezekiah did, Josiah burst into action. In spite of certain punishment, he sought to see the people and country honor God.

Vs. 29-33 Not only was Josiah sincere and intense, but he also led and modeled. Hezekiah had the people make a covenant with God. Josiah, himself, read the law out loud to the people and made a covenant with God; and the people followed. What a heart and what a man of God. I’m willing to bet that Josiah made his own copy of the law and read from it daily, exactly as it says in Deuteronomy 17:19.

V. 33 You don't read this about any other king. The people totally followed him.

I wonder if those who survived the exile and if those who came out of it realized how much grace God showed them through this amazing king and his hopeless reform. It was God’s grace to save Manasseh, provide a godly king like Josiah and energize this incredible revival before the coming storm that would sweep Israel out of its land. We’ll see why it was grace and how it worked when we get to the book of Daniel.

It makes me think that if our hearts are focused on following our Lord in the harvest, our expectations and emotions do not have to be subject to the events of our times. Our goal is making disciples as a storm approaches. Within that coming storm God is working. Abiding in Christ means we confidently know He is leading and therefore we are always looking for His direction. In disasters He guides us into hand-crafted opportunities to share with the lost and make disciples. Sometimes disasters and disappointments get the adrenaline flowing and open up big “unopenable” doors.

Romans 16:8-27

Vs. 8-16 The only thing in particular that stands out to me here is that Paul had another relative mentioned. It should be noted that although Paul had never been to Rome, he sure knew a lot of people there.

Vs. 17-20 After everything that Paul wrote about unity in chapters 12, 14 and 15, he now issues a command to avoid those who destroy unity. And again, this is a command.

V. 20 Notice that if they obeyed God and avoided these people, the *God of peace* would *crush Satan* under their feet. There is a correlation between Satan's work and the absence of God's peace in a church. We need to deal with those who cause problems and divisions, although we seldom do.

Vs. 21-23 These were the people in Corinth with Paul. Paul had a great group of workers with him.

Vs. 25-27 There's a 3-point sermon in here somewhere. Look at where the harvest is present in this benediction. This would make a good message on being a disciple in the harvest.

V. 25 How does this strengthen you? What was Paul's gospel? Look at Romans 1.

V. 26 What impact does this verse have on you? What is *the obedience of faith*? You'll find this phrase also in chapter 1.

V. 27 Of all the things Paul could have said about God's irresistible sovereignty, he says that God is wise. When we read Job, the only thing God really says about Himself has to do with the infinite depth of His wisdom. He is righteous, and He is loving, and we can absolutely trust Him and His plan.

As a disciple, what do you think about Romans and how these last verses are meant to motivate you in the harvest?

Psalm 26

Vs. 1-3 It is interesting that the confidence David had in his integrity was that he had kept God's *steadfast love* before his eyes.

Vs. 4-5 This seems like a "no brainer," but we are actually surrounded by people like this, often in church. These are like the people Paul just warned the Romans about. They appear godly and are knowledgeable, but they bring unrest. They also keep the church from its work in the harvest.

Vs. 6-8 You almost wonder if David used to sneak into the tabernacle at night and pray there and walk around the altar and sing to God. I know people who do stuff like that.

Vs. 9-10 Apparently David was presently in the company of some of these people. Joab, the commander of his army, was a man like this. When David was married to Saul's daughter, before he had to run for his life, he was surrounded by people like this. Sometimes we can't get away from them. But we can live for the glory of God.

Vs. 11-12 Our obedience should never be an if-then proposition; that is, "if I obey, then you are obligated to bless me." Our obedience is the very least we can give. It is normal behavior, not something extraordinary. And knowing God's love, whether He blesses us with life or death on earth, still means we will live forever with Him, enjoying the kindness of Christ and the riches of His glory. We know that what's coming next is better than this, so we work in the harvest, leaving it all on the planet, because of who Christ is.

Proverbs 20:19

A lot of us fall into this one. This is interesting. You have a note that says, "simple in his lips." As in all the proverbs, we can be wise in 47 areas in our lives, but still be a fool and simpleton in a few areas. The point for us, from God's perspective, is that if He puts His finger on something we need to work on, we should take it to heart, humble ourselves and submit to His wisdom.

AUGUST 4

This is another "red letter," "go-out-and-get-yourself-a-Frappuccino" day. You are finishing 2 Chronicles and beginning 1 Corinthians.

2 Chronicles 35-36

Believe it or not, Ezra is wrapping up 2 Chronicles. You look at the amount of space he is giving Josiah and how little he will give the kings after Josiah and realize that Ezra is trying to make an important point to the people reading this history. The revival under Josiah came by God's grace. As spectacular as it was, it only took one generation to reverse all of the positive influence that the Lord had brought in under Josiah. Hope is always found in following the Lord, not in following men.

2 Chronicles 35

Vs. 1-6 In putting the worship of Israel in order, notice that Josiah had given the Levites the task of teaching all of Israel, as God had meant them to do. All of the priests and Levites were ready to serve the people at the Passover. Josiah followed all that David and Solomon had set in order, and now he had Exodus through Deuteronomy to guide him in the preparation. Notice the reference to the ark of the covenant. This will be the last time we will hear of it. Apparently it had been moved out of the Holy of Holies. It was put back by the Levites, and they were told not to carry it in the procession that was part of the Passover feast. Sometime after this the ark was taken or destroyed.

Vs. 7-9 Josiah led by example and others willingly followed. Not only that, but Josiah gave of himself and his resources, not just to be an example, but to enable the people to come to the Lord in worship and devotion. Judah was in decline, and the chaos caused by the Assyrians brought enough instability and lawlessness, that the people began migrating to Jerusalem and no longer were supporting themselves from their lands. By this time most of the people would have been pretty poor. Josiah's generosity was infectious.

Vs. 10-14 The Book of Moses was Genesis-Deuteronomy. Josiah had this and they followed it. Notice the references to *the sons of Aaron*. They considered those books to be precious and they respected and obeyed what was written in them. We need to have that same wonder for the Word, and particularly for the Gospels and Acts, our first five books.

Vs. 15-19 Just as David had designed it, Josiah had the singers and gatekeepers participating in worship. The sincerity and power of this Passover is expressed here. Imagine this, no other king, not even David or Solomon or Hezekiah, had honored God this way.

Vs. 20-27 Ezra is skipping ahead now 13 years after this Passover to continue the story and get Josiah killed. Ezra's point in the book has now been made regarding leadership and regarding God's grace to this nation. Now it's time to end the story. This morning I was reading about John the Baptist, and it made me think the same thing about Josiah. God just wanted him out of the way so He could continue His plan.

V. 21 In a way this was unnecessary. Josiah was not a fighting king. As the Egyptian army went through his land they would have looted and pillaged the towns along the way. It must have been

that Josiah had seen God blessing so much of his work that he thought he would be blessed by God in fighting Egypt. I wonder if he asked God about this.

V. 22 How would Josiah have known Pharaoh's words were from God? I guess he should have asked a prophet. He had Jeremiah standing there and could have asked him. Also, it wasn't a good idea to imitate Ahab's trick, especially since it didn't work for Ahab. Actually, it was probably a common ploy among kings. But if God is with you, why bother?

V. 25 This was a huge loss and major event for Israel. We never hear of them singing of the loss of David or anyone else. Not only that, Jeremiah was inspired by the Spirit to write a lament and sing it. Not only that, *to this day* means it was sung all the way through the 70-year exile and up to the time Ezra was writing this, 100 years after the first return of the people. That is a great honor to Josiah.

Vs. 26-27 Josiah doesn't have anything said negatively about him. In reading this, I think his time was over. He had done what God put him on the earth to do, and now it was time for God to retire Josiah and bring judgment on Judah. As an act of grace, although the kings who follow Josiah are bad kings, during Josiah's revival of Israel, God was making a way to save Israel during their exile in Babylon. The national revival seems to have ended, but it just went underground and was deported. God would fan it to life again through the hearts of four teenage boys and a very unusual prophet named Ezekiel. And too, Jeremiah was also a product of Josiah's revival.

2 Chronicles 36

Vs. 1-4 We've seen this before in 2 Kings. To show that he was in charge, the Pharaoh removed the king appointed by the people and appointed Jehoiakim to be king.

Vs. 5-8 This began the Babylonian exile when Daniel and his friends were taken. This is the first deportation. Thankfully Jehoiakim was obedient to Neb for three years, giving the Lord time to establish Dan & Co. in Babylon. We get some new information here. Somehow Jehoiakim was captured, without Jerusalem being approached by the Babylonian army. Maybe he was on vacation. Jehoiakim was either released or escaped and returned to Jerusalem where he died and was given the burial of a donkey. Nebuchadnezzar was mad and came to Jerusalem again, but even Neb knew the fear of God by this time.

Vs. 9-10 This was the second deportation when Ezekiel was taken along with 12,000 skilled workers. Now there was no tech support in Israel. This left the country destitute. Neb also took more out of the temple. It could be that he took the ark. As we saw in Kings, Jehoiachin's surrender of the city was in obedience to Jeremiah's preaching. His obedience would be rewarded later.

Vs. 11-14 Zedekiah was the final king of Judah; and because of this rebellion, the city and temple were destroyed. He was not only ungodly, but he was also a coward. His nobles led the kingdom. Notice that in spite of all the bad things that were happening, Zedekiah would not humble himself before the Lord. In Jeremiah we will see the personal conversation that Jeremiah had with this wimpy king.

Vs. 15-16 This is Ezra's commentary. The returnees needed to watch their hearts too.

Vs. 17-21 This is a summary of Nebuchadnezzar's final visit to Jerusalem. The destruction was total and the violence done to the people was shocking. Yet God had warned them that this would happen. The fact that Neb found and released Jeremiah shows that he understood that God was using him to bring judgment to Israel. It is likely that Neb had Daniel advising him.

V. 21 Apparently no king of Israel ever gave the land its Sabbatical seventh year when there would be no sowing or reaping. The 70 years of the exile were designated by God for every

Sabbath year that was missed. This means that Israel had gone 490 years without giving the land its Sabbath. They had never obeyed God in this. That ought to be shocking and make us think about what we might be neglecting. It is probably something very simple, something we might think we're actually doing and something totally indispensable in our devotion to Jesus.

Vs. 22-23 Years before this, while Hezekiah was king, Isaiah had predicted that a king named Cyrus would send the people back to Israel out of exile. (Isaiah 45:1) This is great grace on God's part to preserve His people during their exile. Even in Deuteronomy, the Lord already knew the people would rebel; and He knew how He would save and preserve them in exile.

After 2 Chronicles the Hebrew Bible has the books that naturally follow the end of the exile: Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. All three of these people lived after the return of the people and during the Persian Empire. But what Ezra doesn't mention here is the event that happened just before Cyrus told the Jews they could go home. It's the purrrrrfect kid's story (Daniel 6) and it is much deeper than anyone realizes.

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Back in my first year of marriage with Beth, sometime before Easter, she came up with the idea to memorize 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, so that by Easter of 1979 we would have it memorized and could say it to each other. You do lots of crazy things your first year of marriage. During that time, I was driving from Waukegan to Kenosha every day for school, 45 minutes there and 45 minutes back. This was in the days before smart phones and texting. So I memorized. I really enjoyed those few verses, and so I set a goal to memorize all of 1 Corinthians 15 by Easter. And I did it. Now, I was becoming a memorizing junkie; and I still had that long drive every day, so by the time I graduated from Parkside in May 1981, I had memorized all of 1 Corinthians. What a blessing that has been in my ministry and personal life. That was over 30 years ago, and Beth has been with the Lord since 2002. Yet every couple of weeks when I go over 1 Corinthians, I think that this was all because of the suggestion and encouragement of the girl God gave me who was my dearest friend on earth. Thanks, Beth.

V. 1 Notice Sosthenes. Last time we saw him was in Acts 18:17 as an unbeliever getting beaten up. Now he is a brother, and it is important that Paul is mentioning his name here because he was a respected person and could validate the issues mentioned in this letter. Probably, when some of the Corinthians heard his name being mentioned by Paul in this letter, they said, "oh, oh."

V. 2 *All those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* is an important message and connection for this very "elite" church. Paul will use words like this to bring them back to earth several times. Paul will show them that "they" are out of step in their pride and arrogance. Behind their criticism of Paul might be the suspicion that he gave this church harder instructions than he had given other churches. This church certainly thought they were better than other churches because of the spiritual gifts they had received. Paul will address all of these things.

Vs. 4-9 This church burst into life with all sorts of manifestations of the Spirit. In chapters 12-14 Paul will "minister" to them to give the right perspective on these gifts, especially tongues. The main church in Corinth was directly next door to the synagogue, and I think this accounts for the outpouring of tongues and the other sign gifts.

Vs. 10-16 The problem Paul begins to address here will continue until the end of chapter 4.

V. 11 *Chloe's people* probably signifies a church that met at this person's house. Chloe's people were "snitches." Sosthenes might have been a part of that group or he was the messenger telling of issues in the church. He also brought with him a list of questions the leaders/people had for Paul.

Vs. 12-13 The Corinthians were focusing on names and purity of teaching. We'll see in 2 Corinthians that they had self-appointed "super-apostles," who were causing people to focus inward. We'll see that they had not only lost sight of the harvest, but some of their groups were a horrible testimony for Christ in Corinth.

Vs. 14-17 It is hard to read these verses and think, as some people do, that baptism is necessary for salvation. Paul didn't think it was. It is the preaching of the gospel that is vital for salvation. Baptism is a sign of devotion to Christ and is important, but not vital to salvation.

What we'll see from Paul is that our message and walk in the harvest always remain simple and focused, if we are following our Lord and living only for Him, doing His work and reaching out to the lost.

Psalm 27:1-6

Laura already had the last verse of Psalm 27 memorized, so she encouraged me to memorize the whole thing with her and we did. Surprisingly, this has been a major blessing and a help during a very crucial time of our lives. Once again, I've been blessed by the suggestion and encouragement of the girl God has given me to be my dearest friend on earth. Thanks, Laura.

If you're going to memorize this, look at a couple of different translations. We memorized it in the KJV; and I like the sense of the psalm better there, particularly the last verse, than in the ESV. It's too bad they split the psalm over today and tomorrow because David is driving toward the proclamation at the end...*Wait on the Lord*. I'd suggest reading the entire psalm today and tomorrow.

V. 1 This is the statement of what God had become to David in all of his years of trouble.

V. 2 This is something David had seen over and over again during these years of running.

V. 3 Imagine what it would be like to have this kind of strength of heart and confidence. This is peace that knowing and abiding in our Lord can give us.

V. 4 This became the great passion of David's heart. This is why David had to have the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem, why he wanted to build a temple for the Lord, and why even when he was told he couldn't build the temple, he still sought the Lord for the temple plans and amassed materials for its building.

V. 5 This is the first indication that David is still experiencing troubles. He knows the Lord will save him.

V. 6 Another passion of David was to give testimony to God's deliverance and mercy.

Proverbs 20:20-21

V. 20 I'm sure there are different ways to understand what *lamp* means, but if it is "understanding," then I think I get this. Jesus said, "*The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,* ²³*but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*" (Matt. 6:22-23) Jesus was talking about our ability to understand.

So many people are taught to blame and "curse" their parents, without ever noticing that we are on a dying planet where every one of us is diseased and dying. I recently had to go back through some photos of my grandparents and great grandparents and even beyond. It is all so sad. One lost generation behaved like lost people influencing the next lost generation. Someone who was dear to me in all of that mess began cursing those around her early in life, and you could say that her light went out a long time ago. Understanding God's Word and his compassion for a dying world gives us compassion and understanding and keeps our lamp seeing clearly.

V. 21 This is another one of those "understanding" kinds of proverbs. Just like those who curse their parents, these people don't have enough understanding to know that what comes to us too easily won't be appreciated.

AUGUST 5

We have now read 21 books of the Bible. For most people, that is a couple more than last year. What I'm really hoping is that after reading about so many people, you are beginning to see the stream of life we are a part of as we follow the Lord on this planet. But in Christ, our lives fit into the redemptive purpose of God, not just into the mass of humanity that has lived and died. I had a professor at DTS who told students who were really bummed out to begin reading the Bible in Genesis and keep reading until everything made sense again. I've done this and it really works. The reality is that our lives fit, but they only fit and make sense when we are close to the Lord, in His Word daily and somehow involved in what He is involved in: Redeeming lost people and making disciples, who make disciples until this harvest is over and He returns. Then we'll all celebrate, and real life begins. Does that make sense?

Ezra 1-2

These charts are from the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), and will help you see where Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther fit in. These are located at the end of the document.

“The Three Returns from Exile,” [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 652.

“Chronology of the Postexilic Period,” [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 654.

I'm going to be restating the historical connections between people and events several times. For many of you, myself included, you have never fully understood how all of this fits together. Briefly, when Babylon fell, Cyrus became the king in Persia; and Darius the Mede, Cyrus' general, became a co-ruler with him. Cyrus ruled from the capital of the empire in Susa, in modern-day Iran. The city of Babylon became Darius' home and he co-ruled the empire for some brief years. Babylon was where Daniel was; and through an amazing miracle, Daniel, the last ruler of the Babylonian Empire, became Darius' top governor. The book of Daniel is key to understanding what events led up to Cyrus allowing the Jews to return, but you'll have to wait until we read Daniel to put it all together. Daniel 6 is not only key to understanding Cyrus' decision, but to understanding why there is this emphasis on rebuilding the temple. Darius and Cyrus were awed by God and fearful of Him.

Cyrus sent about 50,000 people back to rebuild the temple in 538 B.C. Zerubbabel, in the line of David, was the governor. It took them 23 years to build the temple amid a lot of protest and opposition. In 520 B.C. Darius I, the king of Persia (named in honor of the Darius from the Book of Daniel), commanded the completion of the temple; but they couldn't touch the city to rebuild it. Anti-Jewish sentiment was strong. In the final years of King Xerxes (Ahasuerus, Esther's future husband), he installed his son, Artaxerxes, as co-regent to take care of local business while he tried to lift the sinking empire by starting a war with the Greeks. Xerxes held a huge party bringing in all of the clans, and wined and dined them for 180 days, getting them to sign on the line to fight against Greece. During that time he tried to bring in his wife to dance for the leaders, but she refused. They removed her as queen. While Xerxes was having this party, thinking the Greeks were just sitting around eating gyros (pronounced Gi-Row in Chicago), the Greeks were all organizing, especially a guy named Leonidas (Gerard Butler) who, with his 300 (digitally-enhanced) muscled friends, were doing one-arm push-ups just for fun and preparing for glory.

In the meantime, Artaxerxes got a letter on his desk regarding these pesky Jews in Jerusalem trying to rebuild the city; and he told them to stop the Jews from restoring the city, with force if necessary.

The Persians arrived in Greece with 2 million men, and the guys in skirts (the Greeks) sent them home with 5000 and Xerxes didn't feel like having a party. In fact, now that he didn't have a main queen, he was feeling kind of lonely. So his leaders decided to hold a contest called "Persia's got Babes" to find a wife for the king, and cheer him up. Esther was the winner and married Xerxes. During that time the anti-Jewish sentiment built to an explosion and God saved the day. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, became Xerxes' right-hand man and now all was well.

Artaxerxes became the sole king of Persia. It was now 57 years since the temple had been finished in Jerusalem, and now the Jews are once again a favored people in the Persian Empire. Artaxerxes sent Ezra back to Israel to show how much he liked the Jews and to garner the favor of God. Ezra went back and found a mess and worked hard for the next 14 years to get the people to read their one-year Bibles every day and to have quiet times (and other stuff). Finally Artaxerxes noticed one day, 14 years after sending Ezra away, that the chief of his butlers, the master of his palace and house security, was crying. Art loved and trusted Nehemiah so much that he sent him back to Israel to rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah got there and found the worship in order, but the city and politics were a mess. Together with Ezra, he got the worship in order and Nehemiah dealt with the corruption of the leaders.

Got that? Good!

Ezra 1

V. 1 This verse isn't as "mystical" as it seems, but it is totally miraculous. If you really want to know what happened that stirred Cyrus, you have to read Daniel 1-6. When we get there, this connection will be made very clear. The immediate event was Daniel, chapter 6. Notice that this command was sent out to the entire empire.

Vs. 2-4 This is a continuation of what we just read at the end of 2 Chronicles 36. Ezra was going back and is now telling us what happened about 70 years earlier. Notice what the focus of Cyrus' command was. This was not commanded out of respect for the Jews. It was done out of respect for Yahweh, the God of the Jews. The events of Daniel 1-6 will show us how God moved Cyrus to feel this way.

Vs. 5-11 Keep in mind that Ezra would follow about 80 years later, leading the second return of people to Jerusalem. Ezra was probably born after the first wave of Jews returned. As a young priest, understanding the challenges of the Jews reestablishing themselves in Judea, God put it on his heart to write a history for the returnees and to keep track of the genealogies and the historical records like these. Also, remember that the focus of the prophecy, the focus of the command of Cyrus, and the focus of the first people who returned was to rebuild the temple, not the city.

V. 8 There is some thought that this Sheshbazzar is the Babylonian name of Zerubbabel of 2:2.

Ezra 2

Vs. 1-2 We know by now that some names were very popular, and people were fond of naming their kids after great men or people in their own family. This Nehemiah is not *our* Nehemiah from the book of Nehemiah. This Mordecai is not Esther's uncle in the book of Esther. The chart at the end of this document might help you see when events occurred. Also, Jeshua is actually a different spelling for Joshua the priest who will be accused by Satan in the book of Zechariah.

Vs. 3-35 This is a listing of the people of the first wave of returnees, most of whom came from the area around the city of Babylon. These would have been people who would have been exposed to the influence of both Daniel and Ezekiel.

Vs. 36-58 Because the temple and the worship are the focus of Ezra, he is taking particular care regarding the genealogies of these people. Without being able to prove their lineage, no one could serve as a priest or as a Levite.

Vs. 59-63 You see how important the register was. This is why the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles were nothing but family registers. It was important that the priests and Levites could prove their origins.

V. 63 It is interesting that the governor, Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, became involved in the building of the temple, the establishment of the worship and the enforcing of this register. Remember in Chronicles that Ezra showed that a godly king and godly leaders involved themselves in ordering and leading the worship of Israel. It was interesting that even when there was no genealogy, they could use the *Urim and Thummim* to determine from the Lord who the legitimate priests and Levites were.

After the building of the temple and the mention of Zerubbabel in Zechariah, we won't hear much of him anymore. FYI, Zerubbabel is the son of Jehoiachin, the king that was taken into captivity after obeying God to surrender Jerusalem.

Vs. 64-66 In short, there weren't many people and they didn't concentrate in Jerusalem. Remember that in 1 & 2 Chronicles Ezra was trying to give the people a sense of the calling and glory of Israel in the redemptive plan of God. At the point of this return to Israel, Israel was a wasteland and the city of Jerusalem, a ruin. Why would you want to leave the glory of the city of Babylon and the richness of Persia to go to a land with no indoor plumbing, Walmart or McDonalds? Nationalism and reclaiming family property would only take you so far. The people needed a glimpse of God's glory and the calling/mission of Israel.

Vs. 67-69 They gave toward the rebuilding of the temple, but most of the people lived miles away.

V. 70 Until Nehemiah got there almost 100 years later, Jerusalem was really still a wrecked city. Most people went back to their family lands from before the exile. It would take the leaders from Zerubbabel, to Ezra, to Nehemiah, to convince the people to come to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and then the city.

One of the things that comes out of this history, plus the books of Haggai and Zechariah, is that if we lose the focus of our mission and try to live life ignoring why we are here, life itself begins to look pretty bland. These people were about to forget their mission, and the result would be increased work and decreased satisfaction in life. As disciples, our greatest satisfaction comes from following the Lord in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. That is why we have been left here. Heaven is in heaven, not on earth. Now is the time for work in the harvest. Doing what God commands now will give us more joy and satisfaction than any pile of earthly baloney ever could. But we still go for the earthly baloney. Why?

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

Well, this is just great stuff. If this doesn't get your gooses bumping, then your wood's wet or your goose is dead or something. Just take note of everything that stands out to you.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Notice how integrated the gospel and the harvest is in all of Paul's thinking. There is no difference in Paul's mind between doctrine, theology, the harvest, or the commission for Christ. It is all one thing.

Vs. 18-20 The gospel doesn't just look silly to the world because of its content, but because God planned it that way. It doesn't matter how smooth we get in our presentation or how politically correct we become, God wants unbelief to have an allergic reaction to His truth. That is why it is

foolish and disobedient to tamper with the message of the gospel to make it more acceptable to people. God doesn't want that. He wants the plain truth of heaven, hell and redemption to make people show who they truly are. We are not to be unloving and abusive, but neither are we to become so vague and mealy-mouthed that we speak and say nothing. The message will always be accepted by the seeking and rejected by the disobedient. God said so.

V. 21 This is God's wisdom. We are not wiser than God, so we don't need to adjust His truth. Jesus said something like this in Matthew 11:25 after His discourse on John the Baptist, *"I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."*

Vs. 22-24 Notice that v. 23 says that we are not to give unbelief what it desires. Our message seeks faith in the heart of the hearer. We can give answers to honest questions but we don't have to dwell there, trying to convince the unbelieving. Jesus didn't, Paul didn't, and none of the apostles did. They simply preached the gospel, and God used it to turn the Roman world upside down. We may be too wise for our own good. The message in the harvest is simple, simply following Jesus' example. And this message holds the amazing power of God.

V. 25 What a powerful statement of reality.

Vs. 26-29 Is this why I am the way I am??? If so, I'm cool with it. Look at the last verse of Isaiah 55. God transforms us to make a name for Himself and an everlasting sign pointing to His truth and glory that will never be removed. Amazing! You also hear Ephesians 2:8-9 in here.

Vs. 30-31 What great verses. You might want to find another version that reads smoother, like the RSV. Compare this to Romans 15:17-21. The boasting is not just in the Lord, but in what the Lord does in us in the harvest.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Vs. 1-2 Apparently Paul didn't do any market research, demographics or studies before he showed up. That is sort of "opposite" of today's church planting strategies and methods. Oh well, it must have been God who made it work for Paul.

Vs. 3-5 In 2 Corinthians we'll hear that Paul's opponents criticized him for his "weak" presence. God humbled Paul through his weakness, and the gospel exploded to life. The message and the Spirit were all he needed. For our work in the harvest, the message and the Spirit are all we need. We need to abide in Christ, looking for what He is doing around us in the harvest and be ready to give the very simple message of the gospel.

Psalm 27:7-14

It is interesting in memorizing this psalm how the thought of one verse flows into the next, just like when you are pouring out your heart to the Lord.

Vs. 7-10 David was told to seek the Lord and to cry out and he did. Yet in cultivating David's heart and his faith, God didn't quickly answer David's cries. I find v. 9 easier to feel in my heart than to comment on. It is how you feel when you have resolved to find hope in nothing or no one else. All you want as you wait is the Lord.

Vs. 11-12 Following the Lord with simple uprightness and sincerity of heart was David's desire. He knew this only came from being taught by the Lord and having the faith to follow rather than hide in fear, lies, or one's own resources. David's enemies were very wise and powerful. He knew only God could protect him.

Vs. 13-14 What a great testimony from a man who was still in the process of learning. These words are God speaking to us too, telling us not to doubt Him, but to wait on Him.

The ESV has a lot of things going for it, but the heart of the KJV wins here. ¹³*I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.* ¹⁴*Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.*

Proverbs 20:22-23

V. 22 is so much like a couple of verses out of Romans 12. Paul not only says not to repay evil for evil, but when it comes to "waiting" he raises the bar in Romans 12:19-21, ¹⁹*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* ²⁰*To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."* ²¹*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

V. 23 Injustice and being cheated are some reasons to feel like you don't want to wait and don't want to rely on the Lord. You want to sue and avenge yourself. Again, Jesus raised the bar on that one too.

Luke 6:27-30 But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.

Personally, I think this is only possible if you are a disciple, living only to follow Jesus in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. Every other "version" of Christianity lacks this power and perspective. It may look foolish in the eyes of the world, but we live before the eyes of Him who searches the earth to strongly uphold those whose hearts are fully His. (2 Chron. 16:9)

AUGUST 6

Ezra 3-4

One thing to keep in mind as we read Ezra is that Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther lived during the same time period. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book. Because of challenges of the Jews returning to Israel and reclaiming the land, much like what we see in Palestine today, there was conflict. The conflict spread over many years and over many Persian rulers. For reasons you can't see now, the Jews had been an honored people in the Babylonian Empire (and now in Persia), creating deep jealousy. Some of this new animosity was from the building of the temple, and much of it was anger at the Jews who were trying to make Jerusalem safe to live in. Particularly today in chapter 4, there will be an example of this anger shown by letters sent to Persia. When we get to chapter 4, you'll see that Ezra lumps all of the opposition together. Much of chapter 4 has to do with events that happened shortly before Ezra and Nehemiah entered the story. Most of the animosity was toward rebuilding the city, not the rebuilding of the temple and the reestablishment of the worship of Israel. Actually, not stated here, the command to rebuild the city is a major biblical event. That command begins the 70 weeks of Daniel, 69 weeks of which were completed when Jesus entered Jerusalem, sitting on a foal.

The following charts from the [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#) might be helpful. They are located at the end of this document:

“The Three Returns from Exile,” [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 652.

“Chronology of the Postexilic Period,” [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 654.

Ezra 3

Vs. 1-7 This is probably the seventh month of the Jewish calendar and time for the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths. The temple was still a ruin, but they got the altar up and working. We don't know how long they were in the land before they came together to worship, but it might have been pretty soon thereafter. The people who returned were in danger and were fearful. They may have faced some uncertainty in Babylon and Persia, but it had been comfortable and home to them. Israel was rustic, raw, and on the edge of these empires.

V. 7 This was a lot of preparation. Apparently the very foundation stones of the temple, cut in the mountains by Solomon, had been removed and taken away and used by others. They did this back then, because it was easier to take stones already cut, than to cut new ones.

Vs. 8-9 So now, a little over a year and a half had gone by, and they were ready to build the foundation. This was about 536 B.C., roughly 70 years after the first deportation. It would still be another 21 years before the temple was completed, in 515 B.C.

Vs. 10-13 In organizing the celebration, look at the song they sang in v. 11.

V. 12 Although the Jews had progressively been in exile for 70 years, some of these people were removed from Jerusalem only 50 years earlier and remembered what the temple had looked like. So you had crying for joy for those who had never seen the temple, and crying for sadness from those who had seen it before it was destroyed.

Ezra 4

In this chapter Ezra is showing the intensity of the opposition to the Jews. Some of this opposition stopped the building of the temple. The fiercest opposition stopped them from rebuilding the city walls and closing the gates, leaving the Jews defenseless in Jerusalem.

If you haven't looked at this chart yet (located at the end of this document), now would be a good time. "Chronology of the Postexilic Period," Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 654.

Vs. 1-5 Notice that this opposition is against the rebuilding of the temple. Notice, too, who the Persian kings are who are mentioned. This is what initially stopped the temple from being rebuilt. In Haggai and Zechariah we find out that once the Jews met this opposition, they gave up and focused on themselves. Led by these prophets and the courage of Zerubbabel and Joshua, they began working again under Darius 1, who checked and saw that the Jews were commanded by Cyrus to rebuild the temple.

Vs. 6-23 This is a parenthesis. Ezra is now including the violent opposition to working on the city. The anti-Jewish sentiment in the Persian Empire is visible to us in the book of Esther. This is the information that gives us some understanding as to why Nehemiah's mission was so important and why it was a miracle that he was able to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.

This is confusing for us; but for Ezra's readers, they understood the timing in all of this, because of the names of these kings. For those in the States, it would be the same as mentioning the names of the recent presidents. Reagan and Bush and Clinton not only signify different times, but also different events in world politics. And if you said, "Bush," you'd want to know if it was George Herbert Walker Bush, or "Dubbya" (W, from George W. Bush). So, have fun using the chart.

V. 6 Ahasuerus, is Xerxes, Esther's husband and the Persian king from "300," the movie. By the time this letter was sent, the temple was already finished.

V. 7 Artaxerxes was the guy who sent Ezra and who Nehemiah worked for. Art eventually sent Nehemiah, almost 70 years after the temple was finished. Apparently while his father Xerxes was losing to those skirted, gyro eaters and looking for a new queen, Artaxerxes was taking care

of affairs of state. When we read Esther we'll notice that Xerxes had no clue as to what was happening in his kingdom. His son, Artaxerxes was a more capable administrator. I would guess that during this time Artaxerxes stopped the building of Jerusalem, but when all the events of Esther played out, he changed his attitude regarding the Jews. When he became full king of the Persian Empire, he showed great kindness to both Ezra and Nehemiah. After all, the Queen Mother and his father's top advisor, Mordecai, were Jews and very good people to boot.

V. 24 NOW, we are back to Ezra's narrative about the temple. Verses 6-23 were a full description of the conflict the Jews faced trying to rebuild Jerusalem over the next 80-90 years. Verse 24 follows v. 5 in the story about the temple. The foundation was laid in 536, and for the next 15 years nothing would be done until Haggai and Zechariah prophesied and Darius I ordered the Jews to finish the temple.

How often have we seen this, that we think God just did one thing after another? There is a lot more "waiting on the Lord" in following God than we might have realized. This means that following Christ in the harvest and learning how to abide in Christ and grow in faith will mean waiting too. In Jesus' explanation of the seed sown on the fertile ground, He said those people bore fruit with *patience*.

1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4

Since the Corinthians apparently made an issue of "wisdom," Paul tells them of the wisdom we get from following the Spirit. The thing about the wisdom of the Spirit is that it isn't *obvious* wisdom that would be acknowledged by most of mankind.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Vs. 6-8 I take these rulers to be spiritual rulers of this present darkness.

V. 7 Just as in Ephesians 3, the spiritual powers are finally understanding God's plan of redemption which God kept *secret and hidden*. Imagine that this plan was kept secret but decreed for our glorification. Where we shine before the spiritual world and before the unbelieving world is when we are following Christ in the harvest.

The point here is that we can have this wisdom. Notice that it is not only from the Spirit, but that it has to do with God's plan of redemption. If we're not into God's plan in this world, in the harvest, then even as believers we won't be open to this wisdom. Why would we need it?

Vs. 9-13 This is a pretty big promise. I don't think we believers even scratch the surface of what is available to us. If you look at the way Jesus lived, following the Father and the Spirit, He was given wisdom in situations that developed in front of Him. Jesus explained this as abiding in the Father and observing what the Father was doing. I think that when we abide in Christ, the Spirit gives us that same wisdom and insight into the things happening around us. This wisdom is not for winning game show questions, but rather for working in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Vs. 14-16 Now, the question is who the *natural person* (unspiritual man, RSV) really is. The sad reality is given in chapter 3. The unspiritual man can also be a believer.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

Here is the deal, I think. The more we are involved with anything other than Jesus and the harvest, the less we see or understand the Spirit and spiritual wisdom. Jesus told all sorts of parables about seeking the kingdom, where our treasure should be, and what happens if you mix the Word and cares, desires and riches. It is like living in the city and trying to see the stars. You see a few bright ones, but the light of the city blinds you to what is really up there. You need to get away from the city to see the stars. In the same way, the more comforts and stuff and agendas

and expectations we gather around us, that are important to us, the less we are able to see spiritually.

Paul is just giving one illustration here of what was keeping the Corinthians infantile. Of course, we don't get into personality cults in modern day Christianity, do we? The list of things that keep us immature is larger than the diversions the Corinthians were experiencing, and we've all got some of these things in our lives. What is interesting is that this is the church with all the manifestations of the spiritual gifts, and it was one of the most sinful and childish churches. How ironic and tragic was that? Knowing Christ isn't a guarantee of spiritual growth. In a nutshell, what Paul is explaining here is why we are not all disciples or following Christ in the harvest. Sometimes we can make faith and church all about us and our needs and desires.

Psalm 28

You can sense the ebb of David's thoughts. In so much of what we've read in the OT and in Acts, you can guess that this kind of prayer was the model for many, many people. Here, David put it to music to teach Israel.

Vs. 1-2 David cried out. Notice David's mention of the *sanctuary*, just as in Psalm 27. David's heart sought this place because that is where God was said to dwell among Israel.

Vs. 3-5 David prayed for justice to fall on those who disregarded the Lord and lived as if there were no judge. While David was being chased by Saul, Saul was allowing the country to fall into decay and guilt. Saul had the priests killed. Judgment from God would come. David didn't want to be swept away in God's judgment on others, so he asked the Lord to judge each man individually. At this time, David was walking very closely to the Lord.

Vs. 6-7 David remembered what the Lord had done for him. David lived seeing small, constant deliverances. He knew that the Lord was with him. Notice that David dedicated himself to singing the praise of God for all to hear.

Vs. 8-9 David blessed the Lord for His faithfulness to His heritage as promised to Abraham. Based on God's faithfulness to His promise to Abraham, David knew he could ask for God's continued help.

Now that we have the wisdom of the Spirit and know what's going on in this life and on this planet, not only should we be crying out quicker, we know who we need to cry out to. We need to cry out to Jesus.

Proverbs 20:24-25

V. 24 I think Paul answered this for us.

V. 25 And that same spiritual wisdom makes us quick to hear and understand, and slow to speak.

AUGUST 7

Ezra 5-6

As you read today, look at the charts at the end of this document. Ezra doesn't enter the story "real-time" until chapter 7, almost 60 years after the temple was completed. Pretty interesting, huh? Ezra appears to be showing the Jews that in spite of the opposition, God has remained true to His promise through Abraham to preserve them.

Ezra 5

Vs. 1-2 According to the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#) (BKC-OT), p. 662, both Haggai and Zechariah began speaking to the leaders in 520 B.C. Although Ezra says that the reason the people stopped building the temple was the influence of the hostile neighbors, the prophets point

to the people settling into comfort. The droughts they were experiencing were because they were taking care of themselves and not completing the temple. One very interesting note is that the message of the prophet Zechariah was almost entirely prophetic, pointing to the end of the age. The book of Zechariah reads like the Revelation of the OT. Part of the Lord's motivation to these people was to lift their eyes to the close of the age and Israel fulfilling its redemptive mission for mankind. God used both of these prophets to give people the courage and vision they needed.

Besides the general resistance of sin to obeying God, remember that these people who returned had worshipped God in Babylon without a temple. The synagogue system came out of Babylon. A school of scribes and copies of the Bible came out of Babylon. God blessed them in Babylon. So, why did they need a temple, especially when the Persians didn't think it was a good idea?

When you think of this, remember how much emphasis Ezra put on David planning for the temple in 1 Chronicles. There was a method to Ezra's madness. He wanted the leaders and people to model David, the king of God's blessing, through whom would come the Messiah.

Vs. 3-17 This is the opposition to Zerubbabel and Joshua building the temple. Tattenai wrote this letter, and I wonder how they got the copy of it. Tattenai seems like a very conscientious administrator. Notice that he didn't make them stop, while he was waiting for an answer. The Lord was in this.

Vs. 11-12 In the Jews' self confession, they saw themselves as servants of God; and they understood that God had deported them because of their disobedience.

V. 14 That these vessels were there with them would have been a reason for Tattenai to go slowly and check out this claim. Also, since Tattenai didn't mention Zerubbabel, it appears that Sheshbazzar might be Zerubbabel's Babylonian name.

V. 17 It is interesting to me that Tattenai had a suggestion for a fair process in this dispute. The records from Cyrus would, and did, settle the matter.

Ezra 6

Vs. 1-5 Cyrus was in his summer palace when he wrote the decree and it is amazing that they found it. They didn't even have Google. Ecbatana in northwestern Iran was the capital of the Assyrian, Persian, Median nation after the destruction of Nineveh. Ecbatana was the summer palace, and Susa, near Babylon, was the winter palace.

V. 3 This is interesting. Cyrus also gave plans or instructions for rebuilding the temple. This is new information, and we also have to account for the reaction of Darius I when he received these records. I'm willing to bet it goes back to Daniel. The history of what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar would have been well known to both Darius the Mede and to Cyrus. Darius the Mede and Prince Cyrus would have been regular guests in Babylon. The history of what had taken place in Babylon the night that Darius took the city would have been known. The event with the lions led to an empire-wide law and command. There was a fear of Yahweh. I think Daniel was asked regarding the size and needs of a rebuilt temple. I think that Darius I probably knew of the reverence of his namesake, Darius the Mede, for Daniel and His God, Yahweh, and responded with that same sense of awe and fear.

Vs. 6-12 There is warning and threat in this command. If you want to see the warning of v. 11 spoken by another Darius, read Daniel 6.

Vs. 13-15 This again is a summary statement, not only to the completion of the temple, but also the completion of the city. Verse 14 mentions Artaxerxes who would become king twenty years after the death of Darius I. God was still in the business of causing Gentile kings to bless Israel. The Jews needed to see they could follow the Lord by faith.

V. 15 This is when the temple was finished.

Vs. 16-18 We have seen this before. Before they could dedicate the temple and hold the Passover, the priests and the Levites had to be organized and consecrated.

Vs. 19-22 They had been back in Jerusalem for 23 years when they dedicated the finished temple. According to the BKC-OT, p. 665, this Passover was 900 years after the first Passover in Egypt.

V. 22 shows that the people understood that God was working among them. Darius I was referred to as the King of Assyria since the Persian Empire was actually a result of a civil war gone wild. The Persians, Medes and Assyrians were all related; and when Cyrus and Darius the Mede revolted against Cyrus's grandfather, who reigned over the Medes and Persians from Assyria, they not only won the revolt, but decided to carry it further against the decaying Babylonian Empire.

The points that seem to be important for Ezra have to do with the faith and obedience of the people hearing and responding to the Word of God. God had shown that He would favor them before the Persians and that it would lead to the reestablishment of the temple worship of Israel. They only needed to obey.

Returning to the Word and following the Lord seems like a good idea for us too. As we work in the harvest, doing what the Lord has commanded and fitted us for, we find opportunities and conflicts too. And there will be occasions when the Lord opens doors of favor to give us unexpected fruit. But first, we have to follow Him and His Word. Then, as the prophet Zechariah reminded the returnees, we need to remember His coming and the plan being worked at now so that we will follow our Lord into the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

1 Corinthians 3:5-23

Vs. 5-9 So, here is a "spiritual" understanding of the workers in the harvest. Notice that God's goal is not the glorification of the servants, it is the building of the church. Notice too that there are two images here: a field and a building. One refers to the harvest and bearing fruit, and the other to God dwelling within us. And even in the building of the church there is the purpose of the harvest; that is, to reach the lost and bring them into the church as disciples, who make disciples. Paul's point here is that the exalting of God's servants shows that the Corinthians have missed the point of what is happening now on this planet.

Vs. 10-15 Here is a spiritual perspective on our work on this earth, on the foundation of Christ. This ministry of building upon the foundation applies to "anyone;" that is, everyone who knows Christ. It not only means how we personally build on what the Spirit has done in our lives, but it also applies to building into the lives of others. In this letter we will see that all things are to be done for the building up of one another. We saw this ministry to one another in Romans 12-15, and we'll see it again in Ephesians 4.

The word that is translated *suffer loss* is also familiar to Jesus' teaching on discipleship. Of the times this word is used besides here, it is found twice in Acts 27 for throwing the ship's cargo overboard and losing it. Once Paul uses it in 2 Corinthians saying that he had to grieve the church through his rebuke so they wouldn't suffer loss, but instead be fruitful. And then it is used in Matthew 16:26, Mark 8:36 and Luke 9:25 as Jesus taught His disciples saying, *For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?* Jesus directed this warning to His disciples. It clearly doesn't mean they would lose their salvation, but that they would suffer loss. Putting everything together, if we live for ourselves in Christ, we damage our souls/lives now; and we "suffer loss" when we enter His presence, seeing that our life's activity and what we built on Christ was worthless to Him.

Whatever that "burning up" looks like, it will not be trite. We think that this judgment won't matter or be important, because we will be saved eternally and be somewhat invulnerable spiritually. How bad could it be? Besides, we'll be in heaven. Jesus used very severe images when referring to followers who slept or supposed their master was delayed. Some of those images have made Bible teachers squirm and perform interpretive acrobatics, because the punishment sounds similar to what happens to those who reject Christ. We can't lose our salvation, but we can experience punishment. Even here in these verses, what does it mean to be *saved, but only as through fire*? I don't think that will be a "fire" experience we will "yawn" our way through.

Positively spoken, we need to remember who our master is. We are here to follow Him into the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples.

Vs. 16-17 Here is a spiritual perspective on who and what we really are, temples of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that the temple was a place for people to find forgiveness and fellowship with God. The temple was only valuable because of who lived in it. It wasn't a shrine. God lives in us, but He keeps us on this planet to work in the harvest so that others can find Him. In the next letter to these same people, Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 4:7 (RSV), "*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.*"

Vs. 18-23 Here is a spiritual perspective on where our focus in life should be, on Christ and the redemptive plan of God. Notice how v. 18 sounds a little like Jesus saying in Mark 8:35-36, *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* Again, this was said to the disciples.

Vs. 21-23 This is a tremendous statement, but only if we value these things. If our treasure is in heaven and we are here to serve Christ in the harvest, this is an amazing reality that opens doors of blessing and fulfillment. If our treasure is here and we are reserving heaven for when we can't enjoy this stuff anymore, what Paul has just said seems like being promised oatmeal, with nothing on it, three times a day.

Psalm 29

It is suggested that the occasion for this psalm was David sitting on a mountain, watching a thunderstorm sweep over the land. The view of God's power and majesty might have inspired these words.

Vs. 1-2 In the greatness of this storm, it seems like David caught a glimpse of God's spiritual command and holy power over all creation. Notice how vocal these verses are and that they end in worship.

Vs. 3-9 This section is easy to follow because of *The voice of the Lord*. You can sense the power of the storm in these images. Notice again how vocal this is. God still speaks to those who can hear Him.

Vs. 10-11 All of this gave David a sense of God's power and majesty. Even today, for all of the glory and splendor of humanity, it only takes one good tornado, hurricane, flood or earthquake to show us how puny we are and how needy we are of God's help and power.

Notice that verse 10 is a declaration of reality, spiritual and physical. Verse 11 is the prayer or petition of the psalm. Amen.

Proverbs 20:26-27

The common element in both verses is the searching and winnowing. I'm challenged by Paul and the Spirit's emphasis on being more tuned to the Spirit, winnowing through the events of life and the words and actions of others, searching to see what the Lord is doing around us in the harvest.

AUGUST 8

Ezra 7:1-8:20

Finally, Ezra enters his own story today. Just as an overview, let me remind us of a couple of things.

First, Ezra will be leading a second “return” of people to Jerusalem, but this is a full 80 years after the first return under Zerubbabel and 57 years after Zerubbabel finished building the temple. Everything Ezra has written up until now is review. Ezra will never meet Zerubbabel in Jerusalem or on earth.

Second, Artaxerxes is the son of Xerxes (Ahasuerus). Xerxes is the guy who married a young Jewish girl named Esther. Esther probably wasn't Artaxerxes' mother; but Artaxerxes knows her and Mordecai well, and he has lived during the time God saved the Jews through Esther. Xerxes, the father, issued a decree in all of Persia that the Jews would be a favored people. This might explain some of his upcoming actions.

Third, Ezra's king, Artaxerxes, had commanded that the work on the city be stopped. It was stopped by force. I've speculated that this might have been during the time that Xerxes, his father, was warring against the Greeks and Artaxerxes was in charge of domestic affairs. Artaxerxes now seems very favorable toward Ezra and allowing the Jews to worship in the temple, but not to rebuild the city. Still, he seems impressed by Ezra. In fourteen years, Artaxerxes will have a very dear and trusted cupbearer (probably like the head butler of his palace and household security). Because of his love and trust for Nehemiah, he will send him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Fourth, Ezra's main purpose for the book is about to begin. He has recapped the grace of God in rebuilding the temple, now he will tell of the grace of God in saving the people from corruption and enabling them to actually worship God at the temple. In every generation, even today with us, God raises up leaders to refocus His people on following Him in His purpose.

Remember to look at the charts.

Ezra 7

Vs. 1-6 This is Ezra's genealogy. Notice the phrase regarding the hand of God, and see how often you find it. Ezra was apparently a man of note. Notice that Ezra was from Babylon. This might be important since Daniel and his friends were key spiritual leaders in that area. Ezra would not have known Daniel, but he would have been raised in the schools that Daniel and his friends brought into being.

Vs. 7-10 This is a summary of the trip. You can tell by the tone of what is said, that the emphasis of this movement of people to Jerusalem would have very strong spiritual overtones.

It is hard to say when Artaxerxes actually stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem. It was certainly before this event with Ezra, since this was in his seventh year. Actually, he also seems strangely and amazingly “favorable” to Ezra and to the Jews and the spiritual emphasis of this mission. You wonder how Artaxerxes came to hear of Ezra.

I'm just speculating here. Usually a king co-reigned with his son, often for a decade or more. Since Xerxes (Ahasuerus), Artaxerxes' father, was busy holding parties and losing 2 million men to the Greeks, Artaxerxes was probably taking care of domestic matters. He could have issued the decree to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem during the Persian invasion of Greece and before all the problems of the book of Esther. Then, when the events of Esther took place, this would have been a major event in the entire Persian Empire that brought an end to Jewish animosity and also brought great national favor to the Jews. After Esther, the Jews became an honored people in Persia; and Mordecai, Esther's uncle, became a very important and trusted aide to

Xerxes in Susa. I would think this would account for the change in Artaxerxes's attitude. It was probably someone like Mordecai who brought Ezra to the king's attention. Later, Artaxerxes will be unusually kind to Nehemiah.

Vs. 11-26 This letter is a testimony to the grace of God. Once we read Daniel, a letter like this will make much more sense. Verse 11 seems like the king's estimation of Ezra. This entire letter was a binding, legal document in the Persian Empire and could not be altered.

Vs. 21-24 All of this provision would be necessary to accomplish what Ezra had to do. If the priests and Levites were to serve the people, they needed to be supported with food and money. Notice that there were no taxes levied against the priests or Levites. Their service and leadership in Israel was necessary, so they would not be burdened. We'll see in the book of Nehemiah that supporting these men was a major challenge.

Vs. 27-28 The question to ask is, "How did God put this into the heart of the king?" Again, reading Daniel will give us some perspective on how active God was in that mid-eastern world on behalf of His people. And too, the events of Esther had occurred just before this. Through all of this history, the spiritually perceptive saw the *steadfast love* of the Lord guiding them through this time. Notice here that Ezra is now writing himself into the narrative in the first person.

Ezra 8:1-20

Vs. 1-14 These are the people who went with Ezra. At this point, very few were Levites. There would be about 4-5 thousand people going with Ezra. Notice that Ezra was clearly the leader of this venture.

Vs. 15-20 Ezra had the company of travelers gather and camp north of Babylon. This way they could organize and see who would be going, even to the point of checking their genealogies. At this point, Ezra noted that there weren't many Levites. The Levites had no possession in Israel and their primary ministry revolved around the temple. They would be utterly dependent on the Lord and the generosity and spiritual focus of God's people. For the Levites, poverty was always around the corner. Following the Lord always takes faith.

For us as disciples reading this, we need to be alert to the fact that God is always working. In that ancient world, God was doing huge things behind the scenes. In our world, in our lives, where we live, God is still working and doing things we can't see; but we should be looking for these things and expecting His working as we follow Christ in the harvest. I think this is what abiding in Christ means.

1 Corinthians 4

This is a pretty cool chapter, especially when Paul "vents." (No pun intended)

Vs. 1-5 Notice that Paul was being criticized and judged. Do you see how Paul politely "fires back" at his critics? The critics were pointing out problems with Paul's service and poisoning the minds of the Corinthians.

Vs. 6-7 Apparently Paul and Apollos had already discussed these matters of comparisons. In chapter 16 Paul says that he tried to convince Apollos to visit Corinth, but Apollos wasn't for it. Both of them seem to have understood what the false apostles were trying to do by creating pride in the hearts of the church people.

What are the things that are written that we *go beyond*, that are meant to keep us from pride? Look at Romans 12:3. God assigns us our faith and our gifts. The church in Corinth had lots of pride because of the gifts, thinking they had superior insight. This pride affected all areas of the life of the church.

Vs. 7-13 These are fantastic verses where, I think, Paul gets a little emotional. If you want to try this, read the verses out loud several times and sort of act them out, like you were in a movie. After a few times you get into them and get some understanding for how Paul might have dictated them.

Apparently the Corinthians were being told they were complete and no longer needed someone like Paul. Paul wasn't ready to give up.

V. 9 The *spectacle* in view here is when Roman soldiers marched their victims through the streets of Rome and led them into the coliseum to their death for the entertainment of the spectators.

Vs. 11-13 This is a fantastic recruitment ad for becoming a disciple, following Christ in the harvest. This is very close to what Jesus said His disciples would need to live through. Although all of the eleven who were with Jesus are said to have suffered martyrs' deaths, Paul is the only one we see living the life of suffering in following Christ. Much of Jesus' teaching to His disciples became true and visible in Paul.

Vs. 14-21 You could read these verses out loud too.

V. 15 is sort of sarcastic. Paul had begun this church and led many to Christ. These other teachers put themselves forward as *guides*, who were improving on what they said Paul had ineptly begun. They had *countless guides in Christ*, but only one father. In a perfect world, no one cares for you like your father. Paul was their "father" as in the worker who God used to bring the church to life, not in the sense of being their priest. All believers were directed toward the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

V. 16 This is one of two places in the letter where Paul will tell the people to imitate him (11:1). As disciples, who make disciples, this should also be our charge to those we lead. Our responsibility is to be mature in Christ and become imitators of Christ.

V. 17 The critics apparently went after Timothy. Notice the words, *everywhere in every church*. Back in chapter 1 Paul says something like this, and there will be a few other mentions of churches everywhere. This must have had something to do with an accusation against Paul, that he was teaching them things he wasn't teaching elsewhere. The implication was that Paul was holding them back. This is what the serpent told Eve in the garden, that God was holding them back from being all that they could be.

Vs. 18-21 I wonder what that fight would have looked like. I'm sure writing this was no fun for Paul.

Unfortunately, what we are reading here is the "norm" for following our Lord in the harvest. Most of the resistance and hindrance that I have seen has come from within the church, not from outside. Part of being a proven disciple requires dealing with the resistant and immature in the church, working through the church to reach the lost and make disciples, who make disciples. Since the Lord doesn't give us the option of giving up on church, we need to allow our love for Christ and obedience in following Him, to take us through the conflicts. We need to come to the place where we find likeminded believers who we can work with to see people saved and see disciples made.

Psalm 30

A couple of things are interesting in this psalm. Notice that David alternates between crying out to God and his desire to praise the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 This was probably written by David at the end of his life to be sung at the dedication of the temple. David did a lot of preparation for the temple, so having his praise heard at that event meant writing this song of testimony. In his long years as king he had many remembrances of

God's deliverance during the long years of running and hiding. David had sinned and failed people around him, yet his heart's passion was to exalt and praise God publicly.

Vs. 4-5 This is the summary of David's life with the Lord, waiting for His deliverance and learning of His steadfast love.

Vs. 6-10 David did become comfortable. The last instance of this led him to number the people and bring judgment down on his people. Yet through all of his problems, God forgave and saved him.

V. 9 This "logic" is used several times in Psalms. It's like, "How can I praise your name among men when I'm dead. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you? So save me!"

Vs. 11-12 are the high point and v. 12 really should be at the heart of every disciple. Our glory is to sing His praise for His mercy, steadfast love and deliverance.

Proverbs 20:28-30

How would you put all three of these verses together?

I see *steadfast love* as something that is proven to us by God over all the years of our crying out and learning to wait on Him. That comes with experience, time, and maturity, and hopefully with age. Young men can glory in their strength and endurance, but maturity with Christ brings a different kind of strength and endurance. We learn to appreciate the rebuke and allow it to tame our rebellious hearts and the body of death so that we can follow Christ better.

AUGUST 9

Ezra 8:21-9:15

Ezra 8:21-36

This section is pretty straightforward. What things do you see here? There was real danger traveling in those times, but then it wasn't the James gang, it was more like Ali Baba. The worry was heightened by the value of what they were carrying. They literally had tons of stuff.

Vs. 21-23 Notice that the fasting wasn't just for the trip. It also had to do with the heightened sense of danger and putting God on the line to protect them. Fasting is very specific to what a person is seeking from God, and it involves humbling oneself. Being proud in fasting sort of cancels itself out. Isn't it interesting what Ezra told Artaxerxes in v. 22? That message of accountability before God is a part of the gospel. Ezra wanted to fully trust the Lord as a testimony to Artaxerxes. When Nehemiah came, albeit on a different kind of mission, he took soldiers. He knew he would need the muscle and Persian presence in Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. Ezra's mission was about honoring God and showing He was sufficient.

Vs. 24-30 This would have been a huge caravan with big wagons carrying tons of stuff. It is interesting that Ezra divided the gold and vessels among the 12 families of priests. They counted it out before they left, and they counted it again when they arrived. I guess Ezra's motto was, "In God we trust, all others get counted twice."

Vs. 31-34 According to Ezra 7:9, the trip took four months. You couldn't travel straight west because of the desert, so you had to follow what they called the "fertile crescent;" that is, you went north and west along the rivers and then headed south into Israel. It is interesting that they rested for three days before getting down to business. I imagine that those who walked were tired, but in great shape.

Vs. 35-36 This had to have been a very special and solemn experience for many of the returnees. It was the first time in their lives they were in Israel. This would have been true of Ezra. Their sacrifice mirrors their devotion and thanks to the Lord.

V. 36 Then they handed over the official papers to the Persian governors. These papers would have contained the letter from Artaxerxes with the commands that provided materials, money and food. Also, Ezra was given a lot of power.

Ezra 9

Vs. 1-2 It sort of makes you wonder why, if the officials knew there was a problem, they didn't take care of it themselves. The message of 1 and 2 Chronicles showed that godly leaders organized and led the people in worship. After Zerubbabel and Joshua were gone, the next generation hadn't continued to focus on remaining devoted to God. But now Ezra came on the scene. Not only did he have the authority of God and the willingness to go to the wall over this issue, but he also had the authority of the Persian king behind him. If the chief men had not agreed, Ezra could have appealed to the king and forced the Jewish leaders to comply.

Regarding this intermarriage, it is good to note that Israelite men could marry outside of Israel; but those women had to give themselves to worship Yahweh only, like Ruth did. When you see all the foreign women who "ruled" Solomon, you realize that they only *added* Yahweh to their list of "gods to worship." They continued to worship pagan gods. Verse 1 indicates that these women were still worshipping the gods of their countries. It doesn't say that the men had worshipped with them, but the next generation certainly would have been lost.

Vs. 3-5 You have to go back to Moses and Aaron to understand this reaction. Sin isn't just personal; it affects the entire group. For Ezra, this was like watching a child walk out in front of a car. His reaction to this sin wasn't extreme; it was a proper reaction to this breach of faith, particularly knowing that the people had just returned from exile because of these kinds of sins. In a way, in our cultures our reaction to sin might be extreme in its indifference and tolerance. Sin is very serious. Anyway, Ezra might look like a nut-case, but I think he had a good estimation of the problem and its consequences.

Vs. 6-15 What a great talk with the Lord. What speaks to you in this prayer? This was a totally legitimate use of "OMG." Verses 8-9 show that Ezra had a humble, honest understanding of their situation.

V. 15 What is amazing is that this admission wasn't just Ezra's heart, but many of the people were sensing the same thing. That was a miracle.

The book of Ezra concludes tomorrow and this situation seems to be the main event in Ezra's life. God used him for this crisis in the life of Israel. We always think that success in ministry is a constantly rising peak before us. What if God's "use" for us is just one event? This idea seems to be at odds with the expectations we and others put on us, but whose expectations are we to live by? The Lord is the one we follow. If we are pleasing Him every day in the harvest, who cares what we or others think? You notice in Acts that we never hear anymore of most of the other apostles Jesus chose, like Thomas, Matthew, Phillip, Andrew, Simon the Zealot, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus who was apparently the son of James the son of Alphaeus. How come we don't hear of these guys? Is it because they were failures? Not at all. God makes His choice in how we are used based on His purpose, not ours. We won't hear much more about Ezra. He is in the book of Nehemiah, and he was probably the guy God used to prepare the people to follow Nehemiah, but there are no more big events. Living for Christ, striving to reach the lost and make disciples, has to be our only expectation in the harvest; and really, our expectations have to be so simple and complete that they are only about Jesus.

1 Corinthians 5

This is another of those great chapters. Sometimes you hear some great truth or point of Scripture mixed into a message and years later you try to remember where it was. You know it's in the Bible, but you don't know where to start looking. As you read these chapters in 1

Corinthians, you will find a lot of these truths hidden within the pages in their original context. Here, we not only have teaching on church discipline, but some great teaching and understanding about the Lord.

In chapter 5 you need to think of the dynamics involved here. This church was largely Jewish, meaning that most of the people had lived under the laws and traditions of Judaism and Pharisaism. When they came to Christ, many of them discarded this cultural background in an extreme way. This church was also very open to different cultures. They were located in a large cosmopolitan city. The temptation would be that without the restraints of Judaism, they would flow into the freedom of their surrounding culture. Finally, as in any group of people, it is hard to stand firm in the middle of differing opinions. Like Ezra, Paul was a trusted authority who could say a strong word on these issues.

Vs. 1-2 The “infraction” was that a man was having a sexual relationship with his stepmother. Notice it doesn’t say “his father’s widow.” Apparently the father was alive and still married to her. What was amazing here is that the church not only didn’t know how to deal with the situation, they were proud of their inaction and apparently they were proud, actually boastful, of their high-minded reasoning for their indecision. Paul wasn’t so tolerant. This kind of relationship was forbidden in the law. They were free from the law because of Christ, but their moral reasoning was definitely getting messed up. And remember, these were believers.

Vs. 3-5 This is Paul’s clearest explanation of “delivering” someone to Satan. The best way to understand the destruction of the flesh and the spirit being saved is an example like the prodigal son. His “flesh was destroyed,” in that he suffered as a result of his sin and being away from his father’s influence and protection. Suffering like this brought him to his right mind and he was saved. As we’ve seen before, the word “saved” has a broad range of meaning. This isn’t saved as in salvation, but saved in terms of seeing truth and escaping the influence of Satan and the damage from sin.

Vs. 6-8 Since these people were Jews, Paul used the illustration of leaven, which was a big deal for them, especially around the time of the Passover. Notice that the reason to cleanse out the sin is because Christ has died for our sins and we’ve been saved. Paul says that every day ought to be a festival of joy and gratitude. There isn’t a good reason to tolerate sin if your heart is full of gratefulness to God for His salvation.

Vs. 9-13 So, if the point wasn’t clear enough, Paul explained something he wrote to them in that lost Corinthian letter. What do you think of this? The list in v. 10 seems very easy to understand, except that we don’t seem to see idolatry, greed or robbing anymore. Paul is saying that if these things are part of a person’s lifestyle, they are not believing. Jesus has to make a change or He is not there. As believers, we shouldn’t play around with things that identify those whom God will judge.

We cannot leave the world, but we can strongly encourage people to walk with Christ. We don’t need to be pharisaical in the church, but obvious sin needs to be dealt with. John also mentioned something like this in 2 John 1:7-11. It isn’t the sin outside the church that is of greatest danger to us; it is what we tolerate in the church in the name of brotherhood and tolerance that can hurt us.

This might not be the “fun” stuff of discipleship, and I’m sure this wasn’t the high point of ministry for Paul either. However, if we are going to glorify the Father by bearing much fruit in the harvest and so proving to be disciples of Jesus, we have to address sin, whether it is actions or attitudes, in the church. Isn’t it interesting that we would have this chapter in Corinthians and the reading in Ezra on the same day?

Psalm 31:1-8

There was an old Blood, Sweat and Tears song that had this line, “I’ve been down so long, the bottom looks like up.” David had a lot of days like that. Imagine being on the run like “The Fugitive” (a TV show in the States) for 10 years, except Israel was much smaller. David did a lot of crying out, and over and over again the Lord assured him with small “salvations” and reminders that He was watching and helping. The “big” deliverance didn’t come for a while, but in v. 7 David slowly gained total confidence. And did you notice the line that Jesus quotes when He’s on the cross? It was the last thing He said.

Vs. 1-2 This desperateness was what God used to train David. Some people would have just become bitter. I notice too that this sounds a bit like Paul. In the first chapter of Philippians, Paul talks about his assurance that God would not let him be put to shame.

Vs. 3-5 David was still in danger, but the Lord had become David's only hope and salvation. Note v. 5. Did you ever think that Jesus' final words were a quotation of Scripture? I never did.

V. 6 This seems like a verse that transitions between both parts of the psalm. How could anyone put their hope in a thing, when there was a living God who heard, who made promises, and who could be trusted?

Vs. 7-8 Here again is what David learned as God allowed his heart to be tested. David learned God's steadfast, loyal love. David perceived that God was hearing his heart as evidenced by the number of times, and by the unique ways, God had rescued him.

Proverbs 21:1-2

I usually understand “king” as “the spiritual person in Christ.” These verses seem to be saying that even in our decisions, God is sovereignly directing us. The spiritual follower of Christ would welcome that. Thankfully, even though we think we are right, God weighs our hearts. The Spirit intercedes for us and He directs us.

AUGUST 10

Ezra 10

V. 1 It seems strange that Ezra made confession of his own sins, since he himself didn’t do anything. We will see the ultimate example of this in the book of Daniel. There is a formula for prayer given by Moses, and reemphasized in the dedication prayer of Solomon, that says that those seeking God’s grace for the nation need to confess their own sins and the sins of their fathers. It isn't just a formula for prayer, but if a person cannot sense his own need for forgiveness and doesn't understand that we are all wrecked creatures, there is pride. And pride makes prayer powerless.

Vs. 2-5 This is a miracle in itself. The people were weeping and were totally in agreement and they were repentant. When does that happen? Notice that the people were willing to submit to even the harshest remedy. Somehow their hearts were humbled before the Lord and they only needed good, godly leadership. These people encouraged Ezra to stand in the gap.

According to the law, if these women renounced their other religions and became worshipers of Yahweh, the men could marry them. The problem, of course, is that worshiping Yahweh really hadn't been important to the husbands, as evidenced by disobeying the law and marrying women who worshiped foreign gods. There was no model of what it meant to be a follower of God. There was no positive reason for the women to change. There was no example of why worshiping the Lord was important. In a case like this, the best the leaders might hope for was compliance. You can't make people believe by threatening them.

Vs. 6-8 This section brings up an interesting point. All the people were to gather on the third day, or they would be banned from the congregation of the exiles. As was always true in Israel, if the people didn't like God or the law, all they had to do was move. A little to the south was Egypt. A little to the north was Syria. Or they could have just stayed in, or gone back to, Babylon or Persia. There was no need to do any of this unless someone really wanted to repent and to honor God.

Vs. 9-15 So, they left from Babylon in the first month, arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month and now this is the ninth month. This was a major assembly of the people and it was pouring heavy, cold November rain. The people were freezing, adding to the distress of the matter, but moving them to a quick decision. Every case would be examined. This would give couples and families time to talk and make decisions. Ruth left everything to go with Naomi. I'll bet Ruth's name was mentioned more than once in those days.

V. 15 Notice that there were four leading men who opposed this. I wonder why. Jonathan and Jahzeiah were against taking action and then there were two men who supported Jonathan and Jahzeiah; one of whom was Meshullam. It might be that there was some politicking here since according to v. 29, Meshullam was guilty of marrying a foreign woman, and by extension, opening himself to being tolerant of other gods and other worship.

Vs. 16-17 Again, we have a time frame for all of this. It took them ten days after the assembly to select the men to do this. They began in their tenth month and were finished three months later.

Vs. 18-24 For the priest and Levites, because they served the Lord in the temple, they had to marry Israelite women. Now if they didn't want to be priests, all they had to do was pack their bags and move with their wives and kids. Notice at the end of v. 18, some of the sons of Jeshua and his brothers married foreign wives. This is the Jeshua (Joshua) who was high priest and a leader with Zerubbabel.

Vs. 25-44 When you read this list, it doesn't seem like so many people, so what was the problem? First, as Paul said yesterday, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump*. Second, these people were leaders and people in the leading clans, meaning that their action had a deeper impact on the entire population. Third, if these were the leaders, this probably isn't an exhaustive list for all the people.

What is even more interesting is that many of these people came back to Israel from captivity for the glory of God. Most of the people who returned with Zerubbabel were men of faith on a mission. After 80 years, the mission got mired in the stuff of life. The focus on the work of God on earth and the plan of redemption became blurry and was lost. The faith of following Yahweh couldn't compete with the wild women of Baal worship and "Why shouldn't you be able to enjoy a good pork chop with your neighbor?" Faith looks funny removed from the redemptive purpose of God on earth. That kind of faith can't compete with a life lived for having a good time on earth. There is no shopping or comparison here where we get to choose the best, most enjoyable and fulfilling life on earth. Truth is truth. This is a dying planet. We are on a sinking ship. Faith is meant to save us so we can know God and help others before they stand before God. And this faith shows us the love of the Father and of the Son who reached out to save us when we didn't care and were His enemies.

The generation that returned with Zerubbabel returned in faith. Eighty years later, they realized they had become lost on earth. Ezra was the man God sent to redirect them to honor God with their lives and to follow Him. The message for us is that our faith always has to be focused on following the Lord in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. If Christianity is removed from its commission, it becomes merely an alternative among many lifestyles, and the sea of humanity is free to flow unhindered to judgment and to hell. We love

and follow Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for humanity, who came to seek and to save that which is lost. And so we follow, as our Lord led and still leads.

1 Corinthians 6

This is a very interesting chapter, full of theology. It goes to show that all of our actions involve some very important theology, or the misunderstanding of that very important theology.

Vs. 1-8 Just think of all the underlying teaching that is in this section. The overt message is that Christians shouldn't sue Christians, and if there are disagreements, they should go before the elders/spiritual men. Underlying all of this is the sovereignty of God and our situation on this earth.

Vs. 2-3 WOW! If that's the case, how can we afford to follow in the sin of the world and the influence of its rulers? Not only that, it certainly means that the end of this tragic affair on earth is judgment of the lost and of those who rebel against God.

V. 7 How many of us, for the sake of Christ and His testimony, for the salvation of others, would be willing to suffer this kind of abuse? But notice, it is really a command from Jesus to anyone who is a disciple.

Luke 6:27-36 *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

³²*"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

For the sake of the Lord and His gospel, it also applies to when we are being abused by other Christians. Our recourse is Matthew 18.

Vs. 9-11 So, what is the point Paul is making here? He isn't saying this to degrade the competence of unbelievers, but he is saying that they are lost and are subject to all of these things we have been freed from. By God's grace, we see more of life and reality than they do. We have the wisdom of the Spirit, and we understand the power of sin and the judgment coming against this planet. We know the love of God in Christ, and we can show them how to be saved.

Vs. 12-20 This is a separate problem in the church, but somehow related to the past problem.

Note here that when Paul quotes an opponent or false teaching, he immediately answers in a very clear way. There is some confusion in chapter 14 about women being silent in certain settings in the church. Certain people dismiss that teaching, saying that Paul was quoting an opponent; but it isn't apparent that he was quoting anyone. This example is typical of other instances we'll see where Paul quotes his opponents. Chapter 14 doesn't fit into this at all.

V. 12 Notice how the Jews had over reacted to "freedom" in Christ. Somehow they equated knowing Christ to being free from the restraints of the law and morality, as if the spiritual didn't connect to the physical.

Vs. 13-14 Someone was teaching that liberty in Christ meant liberty to be immorally sexually active. That is nothing new, but it was disturbing that Christians were accepting that. In Germany

I met this mindset among Christians too. The idea is that the act of sex is simply human, and besides, God forgives. I met German leaders, who when challenged to prove that sex before marriage was wrong, were speechless.

Back to the argument here: The Lord owns our bodies. If He is Lord, we need to obey and go with Him.

Vs. 15-16 Apparently some of the believing men were getting dates with prostitutes, thinking they were immune to moral requirements. Paul shows the spiritual stupidity in that view. Corinth was a very immoral city. To call someone's mother a "Corinthian Woman," was to call her a prostitute. Just like the men in Ezra's day who walked away from faith to marry foreign women, there was a sexual component here also. It was this sexual attraction that led them to disobey Christ, cleverly veneered with some spiritual reasoning. Now of course, someone would say that it was in fact immoral to do this with prostitutes, but not with someone you were planning to marry. But Paul will address that in chapter 7 and give a motto that has appeared on many wedding invitations, "It is better to marry, than to burn with passion," or the short version, "That we might not burn."

We have found a lot of ways to define *one flesh*, but the Spirit makes it pretty clear that "joining your members" is how it happens. And God is not tricked by "how far" or by definitions of words. Jesus said that if a man looks lustfully at a woman (even a computer image) other than his wife, he has already committed adultery.

V. 17 This has always been a challenge for me. Our relationship and growth in Christ aren't automatic. As we obey and follow closer, we get more of Him. Being united with the Lord is also abiding in Christ from John 15.

V. 18 When I read this I think of Joseph leaving his robe in Potiphar's wife's hands when she went for him. Many men and women are being ruined by their sexual passions, not because they have passions, but because they don't discipline themselves and keep them in check.

Vs. 19-20 What an amazing statement. The Holy Spirit is within us, and we are to live to glorify God. And this has everything to do with how we look at sexuality on this planet.

Just as an aside, notice that Paul doesn't go totally nuclear about their immorality. The Spirit doesn't write off anyone as unusable or irredeemable - not that this issue isn't important. Paul and the Spirit are saying it is, but with repentance and forgiveness, lives can get back on track. God understands our need and our weakness sexually far better than we do. As important as our sexuality is and how it permeates all of our songs and jokes and media, we are still pretty ignorant when it comes to this stuff. Chapter 7 will set some things straight for the disciples at Corinth.

Psalm 31:9-18

There are many parallels of David's experience of suffering to Jesus' suffering, Psalm 22 for example. Of course, David was a sinner and Jesus wasn't and some of David's troubles were caused by his own failing. Those parallels can't be made with Jesus, yet the Spirit has chosen to use David as an example to illustrate some of what Jesus felt on the cross. Last time we read this I mentioned imagining this as what Jesus felt as He went through His journey to the cross. If you want a good parallel to this, read Isaiah 53. For example, notice the parallel between v. 11 here, and Isaiah 53:3.

Vs. 9-10 David suffered for many years running from Saul. It was not only unfair and unjust, but David had been anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel when he was about twelve years old. Now David was in his twenties, possibly close to thirty, and this promise looked hard to believe. Was the waiting because of his own sins? It probably seemed like it at times. But we have the

benefit of knowing that God did deliver David and that these years of waiting were years where God was engineering David's heart. He does the same with us.

Vs. 11-13 David was a hunted man. There was no better way to win Saul's favor than to say you didn't like David or to tell Saul where he was hiding. David lived under that kind of disdain and pressure. And to think, this is what Jesus endured for us.

Vs. 14-18 Look at everything David learned. This is also why God allows us to wait and to suffer as we follow Him in the harvest. I don't know what speaks to you, but v. 16 is what I want more and more. And as God teaches us, people in the harvest see more of Him in us.

Proverbs 21:3

Amen, and instead of *sacrifice* you could add, "or going to cool worship services." I see righteousness and justice as linked to the harvest and our work in it.

Matthew 12:18-21 "*Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹and in his name the Gentiles will hope.*"

AUGUST 11

Nehemiah 1:1-3:14

Who were the three *shortest men in the Bible*? A: Knee-high My yah, Bildad the shoe-height (Shuhite), and the man who fell asleep "on his watch."

So, in Ezra, we read about the building of the temple and the intervention that kept the people from making themselves unable to worship God. Now we look at the building of the city and organizing of the government. Ezra will appear there too, when the wall is dedicated.

The rebuilding of the city is very important for biblical prophecy. The book of Daniel had already been written, and in it Gabriel says that the 70 weeks that lead to God fulfilling His plan with the Jews will begin with the decree to rebuild the city, not the temple. That is a small, but huge, point. What Nehemiah is about to do will start the clock ticking. The decree was issued on March 5, 444 B.C.

Don't forget the charts, "The Three Returns from Exile," and "Chronology of the Postexilic Period."

Nehemiah 1

The most striking thing in this chapter is Nehemiah's prayer. It shows that he was well read, devout and knew both the warnings at the end of Deuteronomy and Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple. During the time in Babylon, the synagogue system and a tradition of teaching and copying the OT came into being. Nehemiah apparently was a very serious follower of God.

Vs. 1-3 This happened about 14 years after Ezra. The people had been back in Jerusalem about 96 years. It is hard to know what God had been doing in Nehemiah's heart, but this news certainly was a disappointment.

Hanani was apparently Nehemiah's brother, as in they had the same mother. We'll see him again in 7:2.

Vs. 4-11 Notice that in vs. 4-7, Nehemiah confessed his sins and the sins of his fathers. The men who interceded for Israel identified with their sin and their need. The example of someone who

actually prayed this prayer was Daniel, 100 years earlier. Today as we pray for the lost, we need to have that sense of pleading to God for them as one of them. We still have that sickness within us, but we have received grace and God's life and Spirit.

Vs. 8-11 Here Nehemiah is appealing to God's mercy on the basis of His promises. It appears that he knew Deuteronomy pretty well.

The cupbearer might have been like the chief butler/organizer of the palace. He might have been responsible for all palace staff and particularly for the kitchen and all the food and drink. When we see what Nehemiah does, it is apparent that he has skills.

Nehemiah 2

Vs. 1-8 Since Nehemiah's prayer, four months have gone by. At this point in time, Artaxerxes had a favorable view of the Jews. He had sent Ezra to Jerusalem 14 years earlier. The prohibition to rebuilding the city had been well before that. The Persian Empire was still living in the afterglow of the book of Esther. Now, his very trusted and respected officer was asking to rebuild Jerusalem. Why all this came to a head now is only known by the Lord. In His plan, the time was right.

V. 6 It is apparently an important point that the queen was there. She would not have been invited to a public event. This might have just been the two of them eating, before they spent the rest of the night watching TV.

Vs. 7-8 Nehemiah had thought this through for four months. Since there was opposition, he would need the king's authority and provision to show the local leaders that this was sanctioned and commanded by the king.

At this point the command is made to rebuild the city. Daniel's 70 weeks begin.

Vs. 9-10 Nehemiah's first stop was to the government offices, which were apparently in Samaria. When you see all the opposition that came out of Samaria, both to the building of the temple and the rebuilding of the city, it is easy to see why the Jews had this irrational feud with the Samaritans. There is evidence that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. There was already opposition to rebuilding the wall. They might have been impressed with the command of Artaxerxes, but I'll bet knowing Nehemiah was a cupbearer didn't impress them.

Vs. 11-16 So, this opposition is one of the reasons Nehemiah went out at night. Notice that Nehemiah waited three days before getting to work. That's the same thing Ezra did.

Vs. 17-20 Nehemiah didn't just present a vision, he presented a plan. He also showed how the hand of God was working. Gene Getz does Nehemiah in the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 678, and he has a list of what Nehemiah did right in presenting this challenge to the leaders.

V. 18 Notice that here and in v. 8, Nehemiah mentions the *hand of my God*. Both Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) and Nehemiah were aware that their success was a result of the Lord's prompting and working. It explains why both men were very humble and why we have no negatives recorded against them. As disciples, it is good for us to remember too, that even the promptings of heart we receive are no credit to us. They are from the Lord and we are only His servants following Him in the harvest.

Vs. 19-20 And, as normal, there was opposition from the local government in Samaria. Notice that Nehemiah seems to have addressed these men personally.

Nehemiah 3:1-14

Notice that not everyone repaired opposite his own house. What was brilliant was that the work was divided so quickly and the people dove in. It was a miracle. If we knew the city, it would probably be apparent to us that these sections are being given in some linear order, counter-

clockwise. The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT has a map on p. 679, “Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah.” It’s also located at the end of this document.

V. 1 It is interesting that the high priest began the building, and that the gate was the sheep gate. This is where they brought in the sheep from the surrounding hills for sacrifice at the temple.

V. 12 This guy and his daughters worked.

V. 14 God promised that the Rechabites (Jer. 35:19) would always have a believing man who would stand before Him.

For us as disciples motivating others in the harvest, there is a good lesson here. Vision is great. Vision with a plan is better. Sometimes people don’t get involved because they don’t know where to start or how their work makes a contribution to the whole.

1 Corinthians 7:1-24

Now for the questions the Corinthians had for Paul.

V. 1 This is a very unfortunate translation. *Sexual relations* shouldn’t be there. It is not in the Greek text and isn’t necessarily implied in the text. The translator was trying to fill in the sense of the meaning, but the word is “touch.” The word has a few meanings and one of them is “ignite,” in the active voice, but this is the middle voice (It’s Greek to me too.) and so “touch” is the better rendering. Growing up in Milwaukee, it was common knowledge that girls had cooties and if you touched them you’d get cooties too. Paul’s intent may be that a guy shouldn’t start anything that would begin arousing feelings.

Also, the translator makes it seem as if Paul is quoting someone. In the entire context of chapter 7, we’ll see that Paul is being led to say what he says because of the distress the Corinthian church was facing.

One of the stylistic things that Paul does is seen clearly in this chapter. Often in one sentence or clause, Paul will refer to men and then women; and in the next clause begin with women and then men and so again, men and women, beginning with the person he referred to last. He did this referring to Apollos and himself earlier and he does it in 1 Timothy 2-3, when he talks about men and women again. That’s just trivia for now.

Vs. 2-5 There is some interesting teaching in this passage. Notice that the answer to sexual passion was a spouse, not a partner. Marriage is God’s plan. Also, there is no room here for homosexuality. Like every other sexual sin, homosexuality is a violation of God’s plan, design and will.

Vs. 3-4 Since the context is talking about the sexual relationship, God appears to be saying that husbands and wives need to care for each other’s sexual needs. Verse 4 adds the sense of not withholding sexual fulfillment from one another, and it adds a sense of respecting the other person. This verse has led to some funny marital conversations.

V. 5 The way to understand this is that married couples should be having regular sexual relationships. God made this for couples to experience one flesh and completion. It is built into us. To deny it or to neglect this need is to ask for trouble. If God’s view of being one flesh were understood, pornography and other sexual dysfunctions in Christian marriages wouldn’t be the problem they are today. Since God is addressing this issue, married people need to treat sexuality with the respect and caution it deserves.

Vs. 6-9 At this point in his life, Paul was single. Some people speculate that he might have been married as a younger man, but lost his wife. To understand Paul’s feeling toward marriage here, skip ahead to v. 26. The Roman world was beginning to go to seed. And, particularly regarding the Jews, a massive storm of judgment was on the horizon for the generation that crucified Jesus.

In 70 A.D. Jerusalem would be destroyed along with the temple, and there would be a massive persecution of the Jews. Just before that, Nero would lose his mind, and many Christians would be promoted to permanent residence in heaven. Paul and the Spirit could see this on the horizon, and perhaps there was something very specific happening in Corinth. Paul knew that if the people were married, it might create fear and dividedness in their hearts bearing up under the persecution. Tomorrow in v. 36 Paul will suggest waiting to marry, but then say that if you can't wait, get married.

Vs. 10-11 This means that Paul had a copy of Mark, or other words of Jesus where Jesus talked about marriage and divorce. Paul is referring to Jesus' command not to divorce. This command refers to marriages between believers.

Vs. 12-16 What Paul is saying here is a command of the Lord, but it is not something Jesus said that was recorded in one of the Gospels. While the Corinthians were going through some kind of distress which affected the context of these words, the application was broader. In a marriage where one spouse comes to faith and the other remains unbelieving and wants out, the divorce should be allowed. Under Nero and the Roman persecutions, Christians were targeted. Association with a Christian might have meant death too. If the unbelieving spouse desired to get out of the relationship, the brother or sister was not bound to deny the divorce.

Vs. 17-24 Again, this is best understood in view of v. 26. Paul is telling everyone, married or unmarried, to put on their helmets and batten down the hatches. This would have been advice not only in the area of marriage, but job, moving, or making any other change in one's life.

V. 17 Notice that Paul reminded the Corinthians that he is not singling them out and giving them a tougher command than he would give any other church. This is what Paul taught in all the churches.

Psalm 31:19-24

This is the final installment of Psalm 31. It is all about the praise David learned to give, not for the quick, massive deliverance he and all of us would want, but for the daily blessings and the little escapes. The Lord keeps us on our knees because we need to learn of Him.

Vs. 19-20 Notice David's characteristic mentions of *refuge*, being covered and hidden in God's *presence*, and being in God's *shelter*. This was where David found peace in his thinking. It is also the reason why he wanted the ark and the temple close to him.

Vs. 21-22 This is David's hallmark, the *steadfast love* of the Lord. Notice that v. 22 tells us how David learned of God's *steadfast love*.

Vs. 23-24 These verses feed my heart.

Proverbs 21:4

I guess *the lamp* is the view of *the wicked* or the things that guide the wicked as they think and make decisions. I'm glad that by God's grace we have a better lamp.

AUGUST 12

Nehemiah 3:15-5:13

Nehemiah 3:15-32

One major miracle here is how the people worked together. Who cares about moving mountains? This kind of unity makes it apparent that God is at work. This chapter is a summary of how the work was organized and where different groups worked. The next chapter will tell of the challenges the people faced as they worked.

The description of this chapter flows counter-clockwise. Nehemiah began at the sheep gate and ended at the sheep gate. If you look at the map of Jerusalem at the end of this document, you can follow this. The "City of David" was below the valley gate and the water gate. During David's early years that was all that was walled. The land above this city was lived in, but it wasn't part of the city. Solomon built the northern part of Jerusalem and walled it in when he built the temple.

Nehemiah 4

This chapter has to do with the threat from outside. Notice how engaged Nehemiah was in praying and encouraging the people. You have the sense that he was working right among them.

Vs. 1-3 This wasn't just jeering. They had some military power. It was a good thing that Nehemiah showed up with loyal Persian soldiers.

Vs. 4-5 Nehemiah appealed to the Lord for help. The opposition was also opposition to God and God would take care of it. Nehemiah could have gotten mired in political fighting, and maybe even won, but that wasn't his mission.

V. 6 The entire project took about eight weeks, so maybe this was four weeks into the building. These problems occurred when the people were well into the work and weary. Now it was about to get worse.

Vs. 7-14 This was the main threat. Ultimately, the way Nehemiah addressed the problem was through prayer.

Vs. 10-12 Word was spreading outside of Jerusalem into Judah that the people were weary. So the enemies thought this was a good time to attack, but the people in Judah got wind of this and warned Nehemiah & Co. 10 times.

V. 12 reads better in the RSV or NKJV. *When the Jews who lived by them came they said to us ten times, "From all the places where they live they will come up against us."*

Vs. 13-14 Nehemiah didn't just pray. His hope was in God to save them, and he encouraged the people by making some strategic show of force and by speaking to the people to encourage them.

Vs. 15-18 This made the work go slower, but it showed the opposition that the Jews knew of their plans to attack. Verse 18 shows that Nehemiah was right there with the people.

Vs. 19-20 This was their alarm system and warning plan.

Vs. 21-23 This summary shows that Nehemiah was right there leading and sweating with the people. They even slept in their clothes. That reminds me of going to camp when I was a kid.

I'm impressed by Nehemiah's journal of this. He was very close to the people, encouraging them, working with them, constant in prayer, working long days, sacrificing with the people. He is a great example of a disciple, who makes disciples in the harvest.

Nehemiah 5:1-13

This chapter has to do with the threat from within. Some of this will spill into tomorrow because Nehemiah continues with a description of his mercy to the people and his work to strengthen Israel.

Vs. 1-5 The situation was that the wealthy and leaders were taking advantage of the people in these hard times and during this building. If the people were working in Jerusalem non-stop for two months, it meant they were neglecting their livelihoods and farms. Instead of the wealthy and leaders opening up their barns and freely giving to these people for the good of Israel and the nation of God, they were shrewdly ruining the people. The people had to borrow money to buy

food. When they couldn't pay, they were being forced to sell their children into slavery. Now the people were really losing heart.

Vs. 6-13 Nehemiah was mad. In 13:25 we'll see that he had a bit of a temper. When you look at v. 10 and then the rest of chapter 5 that we'll read tomorrow, Nehemiah and those immediately under him were sacrificing to help the people and the nation.

Vs. 6-7 I think Nehemiah gave himself some time to cool down.

According to the law, the Jews were not allowed to exact interest from one another. Worse than this was the disregard of these people for the health and unity of the nation.

The miracle is in vs. 12 and 13. The leaders obeyed and Nehemiah made them commit to a covenant. Nehemiah also added some drama to this event.

Ezra showed in 1 & 2 Chronicles that a godly leader led the people both in organizing and in worship, both socially and spiritually. Nehemiah was that godly leader and an example of a passionate disciple.

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Vs. 25-28 The distressful context of these verses helps you understand what Paul is saying. The main idea is to live with your treasure in heaven, not on earth, and to live with your full devotion on Christ and not on anything else.

V. 25 People who were engaged is the special group that is being addressed here. That is clear from the context, although the ESV says *betrothed*; it is interesting that the actual word Paul and the Spirit used was the word for "virgin." It was assumed that there would be no sex before marriage.

Vs. 29-31 Here, Paul changed the tone to address everyone in the church. Notice that for Paul, the *appointed time* was drawing close, and in v. 31, the *form of this world is passing away*. He was not referring to the coming of Christ, but to the judgment on that generation of Jews. The Roman Empire was caving in; Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, and Christians were about to be tested.

Vs. 32-35 Again, keep this in context. Paul is addressing all of the unmarried, including the engaged, saying that if they are anxious in caring for one another as married couples, they might have a hard time taking risks and following Christ during that time of distress.

Vs. 36-38 This again is addressed to the engaged and fits perfectly to the context. If the passions were strong, they should marry. I often quote v. 36 and leave out "let them marry." Then I wait for a second and look at all the wide-open eyes and then correct myself. The group is usually relieved to see that marriage, not sex, is the solution to passion. So actually, this is saying that the proper context for sexuality is marriage, right?

Vs. 39-40 In Richard Wurmbrand's book, Tortured for Christ, he tells of a Christian woman who was targeted by the Romanian police. They waited for her wedding day, crashed the wedding just as they were pronounced man and wife and arrested her. This is sort of what Paul had in mind here. Waiting until the storm of persecution passed over was what he and the Spirit were advising.

As disciples in the harvest, all of us are asked to lay some things aside for the good of the kingdom and for the harvest. In the crisis Paul was referring to, it would have been better to wait and see what would happen. Most of us will never face such life and death situations, but the Spirit still nudges us to do without, for the sake of what is happening now. One of the first principles Jesus taught about following Him was denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily and following Him.

Psalm 32

It is hard to say when this psalm was written, but it is supposed David penned this after he was confronted by Nathan for his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba.

Vs. 1-2 I wonder how Paul felt when he read this psalm after what he had been doing to Christians and then knew that he had been wrong. Paul quotes these two verses in Romans chapter 4, showing that God forgives sin by grace, not by works. I'll bet these verses helped Paul.

Vs. 3-4 This suggests that David went a long time without confessing. Actually, David "hid" his sin for over a year and only confessed when confronted.

V. 5 If this is the situation after David was confronted by Nathan, this acknowledgement was less noble than this verse implies. On the other hand, we have seen other kings who sinned, like Solomon and Asa and never acknowledged their sin regardless who confronted them.

Vs. 6-7 These are very interesting verses. The time to repent and call on God is when the heart is soft. God can always be found, but in the flood we often do not have the presence of mind. When God touches us, we need to respond.

Vs. 8-9 David is sharing his experience and advice. When it comes to repentance and humbling ourselves before God, we shouldn't be donkeys about it.

Vs. 10-11 David's hallmark was his understanding of the *steadfast love* of the Lord. The reason David could rejoice and why the *wicked* remain in their *sorrows* is simple - humility and repentance. David fell and faced great consequences, yet he still repented and humbled himself. The Lord restored him and David lived to rejoice in the Lord. We all fall, but we need to take the advice of David and the Spirit to return to the Lord, acknowledge our sin and begin honoring Him in our lives.

Proverbs 21:5-7

It seems that vs. 6 and 7 are examples of trying to get what you want with haste. The two favorite modes, it seems, are *lying* and *violence*.

More and more I see that following Christ in the harvest is bearing fruit with patience and diligence. Following God means being observant of what He is doing, and following at His pace, which is seldom a quick one. This is what makes for a fruitful walk with Christ in the harvest, and I think it is what is meant by abiding in Christ.

AUGUST 13

Nehemiah 5:14-7:60

The three charts at the end of this document might be helpful as you read today's entry.

Nehemiah 5:14-19

We had not been told this previously, but sometime during this year, Artaxerxes made Nehemiah the governor of Judah, and he remained in this capacity for 12 years. In a way, it was probably because of the threat of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, and his friends Tobiah and Geshem. Nehemiah was not only a trusted Persian official, but he had true-blue Persians with him. The hi-jinks we'll hear about in the next chapter took place within the first two months Nehemiah was in Jerusalem. When word got back to Artaxerxes that the surrounding governors were nuts, he must have installed Nehemiah as governor to bring stability into the area.

As we have seen in so many situations, when the Lord allows opposition, He is often setting things up for His glory and for the progress of His plans.

Tomorrow when you read chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, think of what Paul says there, and compare it to what Nehemiah did here. It could be that Paul was inspired by the selflessness of Nehemiah's leadership. In any case, this kind of maturity and sacrifice seems to run in God's family of followers.

V. 19 In this description and summary of Nehemiah's sacrifice and service to the Lord and to the nation, notice the mentions of God and how this love for God made him so sacrificial and generous. Nehemiah was a human like all of us are human. I'm sure he had his moments of rage and distress. But in all of it, before the Lord, all he wanted was the fellowship and comfort of God.

Nehemiah 6

Vs. 1-14 These are the traps that the rats set for Nehemiah. The wording is kind of ironic, isn't it? Since the wall took 52 days to build, and since there was violence threatened when they were halfway through the building, all of these three attempts must have come toward the very end, just as they were preparing to set up the gates.

Vs. 1-4 The old "Let's get you away from Jerusalem and kill you" trap. Notice that they never offered to meet in Jerusalem. Gene Getz, in the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 685, points out that Nehemiah never confronted the obvious motives of these men. By keeping things politically correct and peaceful, they revealed their hate and intent. This would have been obvious to the Persians who were with Nehemiah, and it would have been reported back to the king.

Vs. 5-9 The old "You're really trying to take over" ploy. The people were united around Nehemiah and knew this couldn't be true. Nehemiah's trust in God for all that had happened wasn't about to be shaken. Again, the Persians who were with Nehemiah would only have reported the irrationality of the governor of Samaria and the instability he brought into that region.

V. 9 Apparently all of this history was taken from Nehemiah's journal. It gives you an idea of how closely Nehemiah lived with God every day.

Vs. 10-14 The old "You think you can violate God's law and order" trick. This one was a little more subtle, because Shemaiah was someone Nehemiah apparently trusted. Shemaiah was apparently confined to his house saying that God had given him a prophetic vision. When Nehemiah went to visit him and heard the message, he knew it was not from God. Tobias had men on the inside. Obviously we've seen Uzziah and others violate God's order. A godly man didn't go where he wasn't supposed to go, even if he was the king or governor. This was supposed to create disunity between Nehemiah and Ezra and the priests and Levites. Remember, Ezra was a main leader and the priests and Levites were heavily involved in the work on the wall.

Vs. 15-19 Doing this in 52 days was a miracle of unity and God's favor. Now we see how deep Tobias's influence in Jerusalem was. This is sort of a last desperate measure to show Nehemiah who is really in control.

Even in this exchange of letters and lobbying for influence, the messengers who reported this would only have underscored for Artaxerxes how unstable the region was. Art needed a good governor to look out for the interests of Persia.

Nehemiah 7:1-60

Vs. 1-4 The threats only made Nehemiah more determined to make Jerusalem secure.

V. 2 This is literally Nehemiah's brother. We met him in chapter 1. He was a lover of God and someone Nehemiah could trust.

Vs. 5-60 At this point very few people lived in the city. Nehemiah was now going to "stock" the city with true-blue Jews. That's why the genealogy, basically Ezra's list, is given here.

There are some differences here between Ezra's list and Nehemiah's list; but thankfully for us the scholars have "duked it out" regarding these, and there are good explanations. If you're interested, the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, pp. 687-688, gives some short, sufficient answers.

Having the Jews themselves occupy Jerusalem would be one of Nehemiah's final steps in making Jerusalem secure. The final step would be the uniting of the people in following God.

1 Corinthians 8

Paul has already raised several issues that he will revisit in this letter. He will bring some of these things together in chapter 10. This discussion in chapter 8 will be illustrated in chapter 9 and will really be addressed and concluded in chapter 10. Just as background for this chapter it is good to know that much of the meat sold in the markets had been offered in sacrifice to pagan gods. If you knew that these gods really didn't exist, why would it be wrong to eat this meat? Paul will eventually say that it is OK to eat that meat, but there are actually two issues that will be addressed in this discussion. First, there is a need for control and compassion for the weak believers, and second, there is great danger and self deception in being arrogant.

Vs. 1-3 This *knowledge*/logic is what Paul is aiming at. The Corinthians had found freedom in the knowledge that knowing Christ brought and some of them were flaunting that knowledge. But there is a difference between being "knowledge" driven and "knowing Christ" driven. The issue here is this proud knowledge that was resistant to being considerate of those who were still young in faith or weak in this area.

V. 3 is a very challenging verse for me. Paul is already anticipating 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter on love. Notice that this doesn't say one is known by love, but by what God does through us as a result of loving Him. I think the idea here is that it isn't knowledge that makes us known or gives us status, it is loving God. If we love God, He, working in us, makes us known by showing Himself to others through us. In a few verses Paul will use the phrase, *you who have knowledge*. In the OT because of his devotion to (love for) God, Elijah was known as a "man of God." That's the difference. Many people want to be known by what they know. God wants us to be known by loving Him and Him allowing Himself to be known through us. This may seem like a small thing, but for a disciple our lives have to be about following and reflecting Jesus, and not about showing everyone how much we know and what we think about the government or the topics of the day.

Vs. 4-6 This is all good and true theology, but when Paul gets to chapter 10, he will put a very dark twist to this line of reasoning the Corinthians were using. Satan was using this arrogance to trick them into something foolish.

Notice in v. 6 how the Spirit details our relationship to the Father and to Jesus. This is great stuff. The Father gave the command and the Son carried it out. There is a lot to think about here.

Vs. 7-13 This portion is pretty straightforward. The question is: What does it mean to destroy another Christian? How does wounding their conscience when they are weak destroy them? Paul uses many of these same words in Romans 14. This would be worth discussing in your groups.

One reminder here, when we get to chapter 10, is that it is obvious that this liberty was being used publicly and with arrogance toward the weak.

Working in the harvest we have this fine line. The Pharisees among us judge and take away our liberty. Paul speaks against these all the time. Yet, there are some who have no freedom in certain areas because of their past life. If they walked into a theater or drank a beer, it would be a

total violation of their faith and it would teach them to ignore their conscience. That might take them weeks or months to recover from. (Think of what would happen to your walk and testimony if you fell into adultery. This is the same for a weak person walking into a movie. It is devastating.) We need to speak against the Pharisee, but we need to support and strengthen (not convince) the weak. Sometimes the issues of both of these groups will be the same thing. The focus however is following Christ in the harvest. When Paul was helpless and unable to alter the thinking of groups who were acting out of wrong motives, he said, *Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.* (Philippians 1:18) 1 Corinthians 9:19 is the measure of a disciple following Christ in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Now, chapter 9 will take an interesting turn. Paul had to treat many of these “knowledgeable” people in Corinth as weaker believers and we'll see why.

Psalm 33:1-11

In the ESV Bible someone wrote, “The Steadfast Love of the Lord,” as the heading for this psalm. That is mentioned a couple of times in Psalm 33, once today and in the second half tomorrow. But for me, what stands out in this portion is *the Word of the Lord*, and *For he spoke, and it came to be*. To me, it is interesting that David understood that all that was made came by the Word and command of God, from nothing.

Vs. 1-3 This is the call to worship and to be totally enthralled with the Lord. The next verses will tell why.

Vs. 4-5 The two things highlighted here are *the Word of the Lord* that produced His faithful works. Then there is the *love of the Lord*.

Vs. 6-7 This is the Word of God in creation. His power and wisdom in creation are beyond anything we can imagine.

Vs. 8-11 The response to His Word should be respect and awe. But even when God's Word is met with indifference or rebellion, His Word is still sovereign over mankind, directing the progress of the plan of redemption.

Proverbs 21:8-10

I think the message is that *the guilty*, *the quarrelsome*, and *the wicked* are consistent in their crookedness, quarreling and selfishness. The pure person is someone whose heart is unburdened by unconfessed sin, who is not quarrelsome and who desires what is best for his neighbor.

AUGUST 14

Nehemiah 7:61-9:21

Nehemiah 7:61-73

This concludes Nehemiah's research on who was true-blue. The last part of v. 73 is the intro into chapter 8.

Nehemiah 8

Ezra's teaching ministry to the people had been suspended during the two months of building the walls. I don't know if this was planned by anyone other than God, but now came the Feast of Trumpets and then the Day of Atonement and the Feast of the Tabernacles. With the walls being finished, this would all be an amazing way to focus this generation on their calling as the people of God in the world. Keep in mind that the dedication of the wall doesn't happen until chapter 12.

Vs. 1-10 Notice that the people gathered in unity. Notice, too, that there were leaders on the platform with Ezra, giving visual testimony to their unity with Ezra and the Word. Also, note that the "sermon" was longer than 45 minutes!

Vs. 7-8 So then, after all of this, there were these guys who apparently were given different sections to expound upon and apply. It could be that these all day events were broken into sections where, after the reading of the Book of the Law, people sat in groups in different parts of the city and had the Levites actually expound in depth on Scripture portions.

When I read this I'm not only amazed that the people willingly stood to hear all of this for hours upon hours, but I wonder if they had port-a-potties or something.

Vs. 9-12 At this point in the gathering Nehemiah and Ezra are standing side by side. There must have been power in this event and the people must have been very sensitive and open spiritually. As they heard the law, seeing all of God's favor and knowing how far they had fallen as a nation, they wept. They had to be encouraged and commanded to rejoice and be generous, in spite of being surrounded by enemies and not being an independent nation. Also, think of what it meant for these people to leave their farms and homes for this event and the week-long event that was to follow. What we are witnessing here is a miracle of restoration and spiritual renewal. It wouldn't last forever, but this was certainly a gift for this group of people.

All through Scripture, back then and today, the truth is the same for those who understand the Word: *The joy of the Lord is our strength*. We follow Christ in the harvest, working for Him, hoping in Him, but we never forget that we live in a lost world on a dying planet. We sense this death in our bodies and in the nature within us that still strains to dishonor our Lord. Yet with this full understanding, we can rejoice truly and greatly. Paul said it like this in Romans 15:13, *May the God of hope fill you with **all joy and peace in believing**, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope*. Our strength and testimony spring from our joy in being saved and belonging to Christ.

Vs. 13-18 What blows me away here is the comment in v. 17. If I understand this correctly, this feast with people living near the tabernacle/temple in little home-made huts had not been held. It could be that the part of the feast that wasn't followed was that everyone lived outdoors in booths made from branches. These feast weeks in themselves were a challenge because all the men had to attend and they would have gone with their families, meaning their houses and property were unprotected. It would have taken a lot of faith. Finally here, the reason God had given this feast in the first place was experienced. The people rejoiced in God.

V. 18 Notice that Ezra taught all seven days. From the earlier verses we know how they did this. Ezra read and others were appointed to explain and apply the truth of various sections of Scripture.

Nehemiah 9

And now the final day. You can tell this was a special event orchestrated by God. What a way to give a generation a shot of spiritual vitality, hoping they would determine in their hearts to follow God.

Vs. 1-5 With the confession and fasting and prayer, this looks like a revival. By virtue of all we have read about the people weeping when Ezra read the Law, this was a time of unparalleled humility and brokenness in Israel. This is just amazing.

V. 5 It would appear that the guys mentioned here all led a part of the prayer of testimony and confession that follows.

Since I know how Nehemiah ends, it impresses me how important the leaders are to the walk of the people. The entire congregation is like a living thing. If one part dies or becomes corrupt, the entire body suffers. This would be true, too, of the NT teaching on the church.

Vs. 6-21 As you read this prayer, what stands out to you as a disciple? Isn't it amazing how important their history was to them in inspiring them to remember, to repent and to follow? God's love and forgiveness is woven through it all. As an exercise in Bible study, underline or mark all the occurrences of *you* and *they*. It tells you the story that is still going on today as God works through us to reach our fellow wrecks on this planet.

As disciples, our own personal history is important in that same way. Think of what the Lord has done, what He has forgiven and the times when He has restored; and remember that His love and forgiveness are woven through all of it. Our strength and joy are not in us, but in Him and in what He has done in us. Add to that, the fact that we are standing at the end of all of this redemptive history that we are reading about, having been saved to follow Christ in this time of harvest.

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

This is another one of those portions where Paul gets emotional. Read this portion out loud about three times, putting a little emotion into it and you'll understand what Paul was feeling when he wrote it. The climax comes in vs. 19-23, with 24-27 being a call to imitate Paul in following the Lord.

Vs. 1-2 In chapters 6 and 8 Paul addressed the Corinthians' exercise and misuse of freedom. This chapter will have an ironic twist to it. In chapter 8 the weak were those who were not able to eat meat, for fear that it had been offered in sacrifice. In this chapter Paul shows that the weak and spiritually immature are really many of those "strong" people in the Corinthian church who complained about Paul. Here, Paul is defending his position as an apostle of the Lord.

Vs. 3-7 It is evident here, and we'll see this again in 2 Corinthians 11, that Paul was spoken against as trying to take advantage of this church's resources. Apparently familiarity bred contempt. Paul, the founder of the church in Corinth, and his buddy Barnabas were looked upon suspiciously; but all the other heroes of the faith were fawned upon and given special privilege.

V. 7 These are all pictures of Paul's work among them as a servant. That goes for us also, as disciples.

Vs. 8-12 Notice how Paul used the law to prove his point. These people knew the law and would respect the evidence. Paul is not only showing scriptural authority; look at vs. 11 and 12. Paul had labored to plant this church, but many of these people had been led to distrust and disrespect him.

V. 12 This is where Paul illustrates what he mentioned to them in chapter 8. The stronger believer sacrifices, until the weaker believer is mature enough to understand and not violate their conscience. By now the Corinthians should have been supporting Paul in his ministry, like the Philippians were doing. But we know from chapter 3, that this "gifted" church was in protracted infancy. So then, Paul had to keep treating them as weak and not offend them so he could nurture them to maturity.

Vs. 13-15 More proof, straight from the OT and then Jesus, that supporting the work of the Lord was not only supported by Scripture; but it was also a sign of maturity.

Vs. 16-18 Can you sense the irony in Paul's words here? Since Paul is inspired by the Spirit, it has to be coming from God too. You might have to read these a few times to get Paul's meaning. Paul never thought he'd be rewarded for preaching the gospel, because preaching the gospel was his obligation. That reminds me of Jesus' teaching on faith to His disciples in Luke 17:10, "So

you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" Disciples understand this.

Read the rest of the chapter and you'll get the punch of where Paul is going with this. Paul was free, but made himself a slave to Christ and to "the weak" in order to work in the harvest for Christ. The Corinthians should have been humbled, but judging by 2 Corinthians 11, I don't think they had the type of humility that the people in Nehemiah's day had.

A leader sacrifices for his master. Nehemiah sacrificed his personal comfort out of love for God, serving the people of God. A disciple sacrifices for the sake of his Lord to reach others with this message and to bring them to maturity as disciples. These are words from the heart of an amazing disciple.

Psalm 33:12-22

V. 12 Here David is declaring that it is a privilege to be that nation that has given itself to the Lord.

Vs. 13-17 I find it interesting that David mentions God's watchfulness and interest as being global, and not limited to Israel. God watches all nations and all men, and the affairs of men are ultimately in His hands as He works His plan of redemption. Did David understand some of God's redemptive purpose in Israel? The Spirit certainly did.

Vs. 18-22 is the crescendo of this psalm. Notice how God's watchful care, steadfast love, and deliverance are on all those who fear Him and wait on Him. It is common in all followers of the Lord to hope and trust and wait on Him.

Proverbs 21:11-12

Verse 11 is similar to a proverb we had before, and here the meaning is clear. The scoffer doesn't learn from his punishment, but the simple learn when the scoffer is rebuked. So, it is worth it to rebuke the scoffer. The wise don't need to be punished; they are shown and they learn.

The last clause of v. 12 is interpreted differently in different translations. If it is put together with v. 11, it might mean that the wise person observes and learns from the wicked, and what they learn is that God brings the wicked to ruin. So, it isn't worth it to imitate or envy the wicked.

AUGUST 15

Nehemiah 9:22-10:39

This is the conclusion of the feasts we read about yesterday. I find it interesting that God made sure they dedicated themselves to Him and to following Him, before they dedicated the walls. I wonder how many congregations dedicate themselves to the Lord like this, with prayer and confession and tears and renewal, before they dedicate a new building. What's the sense of filling a new building with believers who have lost their focus on why they are here?

One thing to keep in mind as you read this is that this was the beginning of Nehemiah's twelve-year tenure as governor of Judea. In a couple of chapters we'll be reading how things went south, but we've seen that between a couple of verses, years can pass. Since the beginning of Nehemiah, only a few months have gone by. All of the dedication and organization we are seeing will set the tone for twelve years of God's grace on these people. They will receive strong godly leadership.

Nehemiah 9:22-38

I have to admit, I have never enjoyed reading this prayer like I have this time. I hope reading the story of God's plan and working with Israel has given you an exciting understanding of how

important it is for Him to save us and how privileged we are to have Him do so. This prayer is full of things that will feed your heart. Remember to keep highlighting *you* and *they*.

Vs. 22-25 This was God fulfilling the promise to Abraham to give Israel the land. It was a great blessing which will now be contrasted with their continued rebellion.

Vs. 26-31 Notice how v. 26 is stated. No national literature paints its people in such a stark and distasteful light. What we have here is a portrait of mankind painted for all mankind to see. This catalogue of Israel's rebellion, leading to their exile, is a description of all mankind. Israel was used by God to show us what all of us are like. In the future, Israel will fulfill their destiny and be rewarded for their service to us.

V. 30 Notice that they understood that the prophets were led by the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 32-37 Still, the *steadfast love* of the Lord had not left or failed them. This entire prayer is steeped in truth and confession and sounds like something all of mankind could declare.

V. 36 They admitted that they were slaves. That's reality and humility. This humility and truthfulness was missing when Jesus faced the Jews in John 8:31-33, *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*³³ *They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"*

V. 38 This is a transition verse between these two events.

Nehemiah 10

Vs. 1-27 Notice that Nehemiah was the first signer of the covenant. Although Ezra's name doesn't appear, his forefather's name is there (v. 2 Seraiah), suggesting that he signed for the house of his family.

Vs. 28-31 Doesn't this remind you of Deuteronomy? It was a promise of the people to keep themselves separated for God, to be His servants on earth. Remember, they could marry those of other lands who were converts and worshipers of Yahweh. Keeping the Sabbath was their way of honoring God and showing they were living in the promise to Abraham. Both of these things showed their understanding of God's purpose in the world, His purpose in Israel and their faith in the promise to Abraham.

V. 31 The children of Israel had never kept the Sabbatical year for the land. The reason this is mentioned now is that those missed Sabbatical years (490 years divided by 7) were the basis of their 70-year exile, to give the land its rest. Oddly enough that number, 490 or 7 x 70, also figures into God's fulfillment of Israel's destiny. Sixty-nine weeks of years have already been accomplished, from the command to rebuild Jerusalem to the entrance of the Messiah, as Messiah, into Jerusalem. There is only one more week (7 years) left to be fulfilled.

Vs. 32-39 The tithes were the only way the priests and Levites could serve. The tithes not only showed the gratefulness of the people for God's provision, but they revealed their spiritual devotion and insight. It showed that they understood the need for the teaching and ministry of the Levites so that they could be forgiven and draw near to God. Without the Levites, there could be no sacrifices, no Passover, no Day of Atonement, no feast weeks and no morning and evening sacrifices. This obedience revealed that the people knew their need and were seeking God. Without the teaching of the Levites, and everyone doing their part by giving, there would be no continued generational following of God toward the fulfilling of the promise of redemption through Abraham and through Israel.

The German translation emphasizes the things they agreed to do by the paragraph layout. The ESV is not so gracious. As you read, block out or draw lines to show each thing they were agreeing to do.

This renewal of the people and the covenant is one of the greatest in the OT. The only times Israel seemed this repentant and close to God were at the end of Deuteronomy and in the revival by Josiah. The things that are said and taught and prayed in this event are like a summary of mankind's rebellion and God's amazing grace and love in trying to reach out and save us. I know that this inspires me and I hope it moves you too, to be renewed in working side by side with our Lord in the harvest, reaching out and making disciples. For whatever reason, He has saved us, called us by His name and sent us to tell the news of His love and coming.

1 Corinthians 9:19-10:13

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

I love these verses. They made so much sense to me as a missionary in Germany, and they've gotten me in so much trouble here in the States. All of our talk about music or Bible translations is so silly. If we were in China working underground, we'd never worry about the KJV or any other version. They don't speak English and we'd be happy just to have a copy of the Bible. If we were working in the mountains of Colta, Ecuador, we wouldn't worry about hymns vs. contemporary, because those songs don't even work there. What works there might numb your mind, but you'd learn to love it for the sake of Christ and reaching those people. Our tastes and "necessities" in the church reveal our lack of love for our Lord and the shallow state of our discipleship. Disciples take their cues from the harvest field in which they are following Jesus. They adapt themselves to the people they are strengthening to become disciples in the harvest. How have we missed this? Disciples are His slaves and become all things to all men to reach the lost and make disciples.

Vs. 19-23 You could read this portion out loud with the rest of chapter 9. There is emotion here too. Notice that Paul is connecting v. 1, "*Am I not free?*" with v. 19, "*For though I am free from all...*" Freedom means the ability to let go of our rights for the sake of Christ, and the harvest, and this tragedy on earth. To hang on to our tastes means we are held by the earth and living by the passions of our body of death. That is a tragedy too and something that disqualifies us as disciples.

Vs. 24-27 Reread Romans 7:14-25 to understand why Paul took this so seriously. This is something I'm still trying to get into my head and heart. The sin within us is not our friend, but we go on thinking it makes us cool and quirky characters for Christ. Notice that the issue here was being disqualified to be an example to others. This will only matter to people who really care about following our Lord and having an impact in the harvest.

1 Corinthians 10

Chapter 10 is one complete argument, and in it we will find the conclusion of some discussions going all the way back to chapter 6. You can see this by the repetition of words that Paul has used earlier. If you read the entire chapter you'll notice these. This is a great chapter of the Bible.

V. 1 Remember in Romans how Paul would say he was talking to those who knew the law, or was talking to the Gentiles in that congregation. Look at this verse. Clearly, Paul is talking to Jews without asking for any particular group. If you look at this group in Acts 18, you see that it was a very strongly Jewish church. Paul can assume that they all know what he is saying because they are all (98%) Jews.

Vs. 1-5 We have read this in the OT and were amazed that these people did not believe. Actually, we just read something like this in the confessional prayer in Nehemiah. How could people see such signs and deliverance and still rebel against God? What is amazing here is that Paul is applying this same truth to Christians.

Vs. 6-11 Notice how vs. 6 and 11 are parallel, but v. 11 goes beyond v. 6 to a stellar reality we all need to grasp.

V. 7 Do you know which chapter in 1 Corinthians Paul is looking back to? It is chapter 8 and you will see this clearly tomorrow.

V. 8 Here Paul is referring back to chapters 5 and 6 in 1 Corinthians. In using this OT illustration, Paul is getting them to think about the immorality that they had been involved in.

If we knew the OT as well as Paul did, we could use it for illustrations for modern-day situations. In using the OT for illustrations, you're actually teaching people on several different levels, making the Bible more alive to them.

What is sobering here is that even among believers, all of the sins of this chapter can be alive and well. That is incredible if you think about the greatness of our salvation in Jesus. Notice too that in this list, two of the sins are overtly wrong, and the last two are more subtle. Putting the Lord to the test and grumbling are more dangerous to us and to our work in the harvest than we think. Philippians 2:14 says, *Do all things without grumbling or disputing*. The *all things* is referring to all things, but we think sinning like this makes us quirky and cool. What follows that verse is our work as disciples in the harvest.

Vs. 12-13 If you understand these verses correctly, they are an accusation. The Corinthians had already been overtaken in their pride and sin. Tomorrow will blow your mind. Paul is appealing to them to escape.

Psalm 34:1-10

I've got a subtitle note that says this psalm was written after David escaped from Abimelech after faking he was crazy. Since we've read about that, what stands out to me is that this event is when David's 10 years of running from Saul began. David was terrified and losing it emotionally. After escaping from Gath he slowly regained composure and began trusting the Lord. It was in these years that he learned of the steadfast love of the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 As a result of God's deliverance, David made it a point where he could share his testimony with all men. David was apparently not only in his right mind, but in reflecting on his terror, he knew that he should have depended on the Lord.

Vs. 4-7 This is what David learned every day and every way over years of running and hiding.

Vs. 8-10 Not only was there deliverance, but the Lord somehow set the table even when they had no homes and no security. This isn't the only time that seeking the Lord first was said to provide what we need. *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Matthew 6:33)

This psalm and David's praise continue tomorrow.

This psalm has the line, *taste and see that the Lord is good*, but the main focus is on God's deliverance. David would see 10 years of little, constant deliverances and evidences to God's ongoing, daily goodness and steadfast love. Tasting is a dare. You don't know if the Lord is really good. Jesus promises a lot of things to those who follow in the harvest, but you have to follow to "taste" them. In your following will be hardship that teaches endurance, builds character and faith which leads to abundant hope and joy and a very special fellowship with Jesus and the Father. Here it says you have to "taste." When you read Jesus, He says it's more like a "dive" coming to Him, taking his yoke, lifting up a cross and putting it over your shoulder and walking to your death. That's a funny way to experience His promises and unity with Him, but that's what He says. And it all begins with a taste.

Proverbs 21:13

God leaves the poor before us to reveal our hearts. We are all debtors to God. It's interesting to me that Jesus commanded His disciples to give to everyone who begged from them. Of course there was that one time when Peter and John were out of money, but they figured something out.

AUGUST 16

Nehemiah 11:1-12:26

(Don't forget the charts.)

Nehemiah 11

There are a couple of things happening in this chapter. First, there is the selection of people to live in Jerusalem. Second, we are given the location of people who lived in the surrounding towns. The real issue here was the establishment of worship at the temple and security of God's nation. Everything that was strong in Israel was to emanate from the personal devotion of its people to the Lord. The cultivating of that kind of personal devotion came through the regular sacrifices and in the feasts three times a year. The center of that worship was the temple. Nationalism wasn't a concern on the minds of men like Ezra and Nehemiah. They were concerned about the people following God.

Vs. 1-2 When we think of a city, we think of life and vitality. Jerusalem, up to now, was more like a ghost town, dangerous and sparsely populated. Also, the way most common people lived was from what they grew. It was a sacrifice to move into Jerusalem, especially knowing that so much animosity and violence had been aimed at rebuilding the walls. What we need to remember is that Nehemiah would be the governor of Judah for twelve years. This was within his first year. Since Nehemiah governed out of Jerusalem, it would have been a very good place to live.

Vs. 3-6 These are the chief rulers and the head men of the tribe of Judah, the leading tribe.

Vs. 7-9 Benjamin also has a place of honor, not only because they were the tribe of the first king and they represented Joseph; but also because when the kingdom divided, they remained with Judah.

Vs. 10-14 Now we have the real focus here. In order for the worship to grow and nurture the people, the priests and the Levites had to be near the temple and be provided for. These are the priests.

Vs. 15-18 The Levites taught and assisted the priests in their sacrificial duties, serving the people and the Lord.

Vs. 19-21 We have already seen that the gatekeepers were important and may have had a function in organizing the people who came to Jerusalem to worship. Notice that those who didn't live in the city lived in the surrounding towns.

Vs. 22-24 Notice that the singers were given a special provision. Because these Levites worked full time in the temple leading worship, they were given a special provision. I'm not sure how often there was music played, but they practiced, performed and trained other musicians. Apparently, music accompanied the sacrifices every day.

Vs. 25-36 This is the disbursement of the people in the surrounding towns. Most of these were less than a day's journey.

Nehemiah 12:1-26

This is another accounting of the priests and Levites. This is a lot of detail, but if you understand the heart of it, in terms of the nation's health and survival, the organization of worship around the

temple was critical. There was to be a constant cultivation of the hearts of Israel's people. And too, since they had come out of exile they wanted to get all of the written records compiled and sorted out. In Samaria anyone could be a priest or serve at their temples. In Israel that was not the case.

Vs. 1-7 Of note here is Jeshua. Everything will be measured from him. Apparently he was the first high priest after the exile. Notice too, Iddo. He had a famous son.

Vs. 8-11 Here we have some singers, but more importantly we have Jeshua's son, Joiakim, who apparently fathered the line of high priests.

Vs. 12-21 These are the days of Joiakim. Notice that Iddo's son is Zechariah. Zechariah is one of the two prophets used to inspire the rebuilding of the temple, and Zechariah wrote the book of Zechariah. When we read his book at the end of the year, parts of it will sound just like Revelation.

Vs. 22-26 These are the days of Eliashib the son of Joiakim. Jeshua was already gone when Ezra arrived, but Eliashib and Joiakim were probably both alive when Ezra and Nehemiah were in Jerusalem.

For us as disciples, our lineage only has to go back to our Lord. Our qualification for service begins with our salvation, the Great Commission and Acts 1:8. If those are actively being honored, the church becomes a community in the harvest. Disciples are harvesting and coming together weekly for encouragement, strengthening, and refocusing on the love of Christ. Their devotion and love for Christ is nurtured, and they are being blessed for their work in the harvest. This is all that a house church in China has, but it is essential church. These churches have to make disciples and they reach out under threatening circumstances. This is all our Savior is asking of His followers. If this isn't essential church to His disciples, then, like Israel, it is easy to quickly lose focus.

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:2

1 Corinthians 10:14-33

Vs. 14-22 This is revisiting chapter 8. In their "knowledge" and "freedom," some of the believers were participating in pagan gatherings thinking they were immune to the worship going on because these weren't "really" gods. Paul is saying that there are still spiritual entities behind pagan worship. These believers were actually participating in idolatry, worshiping demons. Later, Paul will say to these people, *Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.* In chapter 8, Paul mentioned them eating in pagan temples. Here, Paul showed them that their knowledge had led them into a snare.

Our challenge is to walk alertly through this life and avoid things that put us under spiritual influence. Most of us are "smart" enough to stay away from tarot cards, palm readers, Ouija boards, TM, yoga and the like; but there are other things that can bring us under spiritual domination if we let them.

Notice that in this section there is a lot of positive teaching, too, regarding the Lord's Supper.

Vs. 23-24 Paul is repeating their words from chapter 6. In Romans 14 Paul answers the question as to what is "right" to do regarding a weaker brother. He says, *It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.* Romans 15 and the words here both point to our responsibility as disciples to strengthen and edify others. That prepares and assists others in growing in Christ. Flaunting our knowledge and preferences says more about us than we'd like. It shows immaturity and a lack of understanding of our work following Christ in the harvest on this dying planet.

Vs. 25-30 Some meat that was offered in sacrifice to idols was sold in the meat market. Obviously, when they were following Judaism they only bought kosher. Now as believers, they could buy everywhere, but how could they know if the meat came from a sacrificed animal. Paul is giving them advice, and really, he is saying that the meat is OK. Their conscience would be the only factor.

In the case of the dinner situation, it seems like a weaker believer was sitting with them and had found out that the meat came from a sacrifice, in which case, for that weaker brother, they should decline to eat.

Vs. 29-30 are a rationale for eating without questioning. Again, it is usually the weaker, ardent in their beliefs, who pass judgment on those who have liberty in a spiritual way. We saw this in Romans 14. Paul is saying that out of concern for the weak, he would abstain in a particular situation. But as a general rule he would not allow his liberty to be determined by the weak consciences of the judgmental. A passage to look at in this connection is:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

Vs. 31-33 These verses should be understandable in terms of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Our job is not to show how smart we are. It is to make disciples across the board, following our Lord through any and all cultural challenges He leads us through.

1 Corinthians 11:1-2

This is sort of an unfortunate choice of verses. Verse 1 goes with today and tomorrow, but v. 2 only belongs to tomorrow and the traditions mentioned in chapter 11.

Yet, v. 1 is a command to them and to us. One interesting thing about Jesus' call to us as disciples is that we are to make disciples. We are to lead and model what it means to be imitators of Christ. Each of us needs to be spiritually comfortable as makers of disciples to say what Paul says here. This confidence comes naturally with following Christ in the harvest over many years. Experienced soldiers naturally help and teach younger soldiers. Experienced harvesters naturally help and teach younger harvesters. Experienced disciples naturally help and teach younger disciples. It's natural. Paul's authority came from deep humility, many persecutions, years of service, and all of this from having followed Christ in the harvest.

Psalm 34:11-22

This is continued from yesterday.

V. 11 is David teaching from his long, grueling experience in trusting and following the Lord. In a way, David is saying that those listening should follow his example. As I read these verses I can sense some of his loneliness, brokenheartedness, longing, waiting and crying out. But what I also feel is the love of the Lord for those who seek Him and follow. Look at all the deliverance mentioned in these verses. Look at what David says the Lord does beginning in v. 15. That is quite a list. But as we've seen before, you can't know the deliverances without knowing the trials in the harvest.

Vs. 12-14 The answer to v. 12 is seen by the behaviors of vs. 13-14.

Vs. 15-18 Notice the emphasis on the Lord watching and being near. These are the things we forget when we get in a jam or an emotional panic. It should steady us to know this truth.

Vs. 19-22 This is a promise. There will be affliction. There will be deliverance. The wicked will experience the same things and be judged and condemned. The Lord will redeem and will not condemn.

V. 20 is prophetic having to do with Jesus.

So what would you say a disciple is to do in all of this? A phrase in v. 12 grabbed me as I read over it, *desires life*. What do we learn to seek and desire in life?

Proverbs 21:14-16

V. 14 can't be an encouragement to giving bribes, so it must just state a fact. It almost sounds like Jesus telling His disciples to make peace quickly with an offended brother. Since the issue here is *anger* and *wrath* and not averting *justice*, this might be closer to the meaning of this proverb.

However, v. 14 could also be in contrast to the next two verses on justice. Where a bribe might give the look of justice or relief, only true justice brings joy; and those who wander from good sense and try to live by bribes and circumventing justice eventually find themselves in a (the?) bad place. God loves justice and has built it into mankind. Even the worst person loves justice for himself, which actually is a judgment to his own injustice toward others. So anyway, if people really don't enjoy justice, they're not going to like God. So, the bad place would really be better for them. Right?

AUGUST 17

Nehemiah 12:27-13:31

This is our final day in Nehemiah. Actually, the end of Nehemiah is basically the end of the Old Testament. Some people think that Malachi wrote while Nehemiah was trying to clean things up in Jerusalem. That could be, although there is no mention of Malachi in Nehemiah; and Nehemiah was good about referring to other leaders. My opinion is that Malachi wrote sometime after this final reform of Nehemiah, when Nehemiah was no longer governor. This makes Nehemiah the final historical book of the OT, and Malachi is the final prophetic book in the Old Testament. At the end of Malachi the coming of the Messiah is foretold and the people themselves make a covenant with God. In Malachi God promised the forerunner of the Messiah, and then came 400 years of silence until an angel appeared to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

Nehemiah 12:27-47

Vs. 27-30 This is the general preparation for dedicating the wall. What seems notable here is that the different branches of the priests and Levites took the initiative and prepared themselves and the people. The singers found places to live close to Jerusalem, and everyone purified themselves and then made sure the people were purified.

Vs. 31-43 This must have been a great sight. The two choirs began at the same place and went in opposite directions on top of the wall and met at the temple. The choirs were followed by the leaders. It is interesting that the dedication probably began at the valley gate (Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 693). This was the same gate where Nehemiah began his midnight review of the walls when he first arrived in Jerusalem.

Vs. 31-37 Even though this is the group that Ezra led, notice that it was Nehemiah who brought up the leaders and appointed two choirs. Again, a leader doesn't just lead organizationally, but also spiritually. This was Ezra's point in 1 & 2 Chronicles, and both Ezra and Nehemiah were examples of this leadership.

Vs. 38-43 It is interesting here that the priests and Levites led the second choir. Nehemiah and the leaders hung back. Nehemiah didn't assume he had the right to lead where only the priest and Levites could function.

I can't exactly visualize this, but both groups met at the temple; and then the celebration and dedication took place with sacrifices, thanks, and a lot of joy.

Vs. 44-47 Again, for the priests and Levites to lead the people, the leaders needed to insure the tithes were given and collected.

Notice the interesting remark of v. 47. During the days of Zerubbabel and during the days Nehemiah was governor, everything was being obeyed. This shows the devotion and courage of these men. It also shows how rare these men were. Immediately after both of these men disappeared, everything began to decay. No one knows all of what Nehemiah did in those twelve years he was governor. The wall only took 52 days. There was a lot involved in making the nation healthy and spiritually viable. These must have been good years. For God to have supplied a man like Nehemiah was a sign of His grace and blessing on His people.

Nehemiah 13

Nehemiah had left Jerusalem, and we have no clue of how long that was. *On that day*, refers to a day after Nehemiah's return, on which he began to correct what had gone wrong. During the time of his absence, maybe 2-5 years (who knows), Ezra must have died. When we see what happened, it could only have happened if Ezra wasn't there. This portion in Nehemiah is a reminder of the importance of raising up leaders, not just position holders. Beyond leadership, it is important to find people with a burning passion for God.

V. 1 Nehemiah must have returned for a period of time as governor. To me, it looks like he already knew before he arrived that there were problems. Verse 4 shows you that the time reference, *On that day*, occurred after his return. Notice that Nehemiah began with the reading of the Word, just getting the Word out to the people. This is also a sign that Ezra wasn't there. In 1 Timothy, as Timothy was sent back to Ephesus to repair what had happened there, Paul told him in 1 Timothy 4:13, *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching*. Getting the people in the Word is the beginning of drawing close to the Lord and restoring order and peace.

Vs. 1-3 They apparently had let "tolerance" go too far. The Word brought them back. As we'll see in a few verses, there is a reason that Ammonites and Moabites are mentioned.

Vs. 4-9 It's hard to understand how this could have happened. You can imagine that Nehemiah was entering one area of conflict after the next. The chambers were built onto the temple and held the food and resources for worship. They were also used to store the money and food used to pay the priests and Levites.

Vs. 10-13 The Levites had scattered because they could no longer be fed. This meant, too, that the temple worship had diminished. Notice that Nehemiah held the political leaders accountable for letting this fall. If devotion to God is not in the heart of the leadership, it will not be followed by the people.

V. 14 This sounds like a man under stress, working desperately.

Vs. 15-22 So, what was the purpose of the Sabbath? It was to remember the covenant God had made with Israel. It was to rest knowing that God would take care of them. The people lost this focus. It is amazing how we let our physical needs control us. That seems silly to say, because if we don't meet our physical needs, we die. But even though Jesus didn't tell His disciples to keep the Sabbath, He did tell them not to be anxious about their lives and to seek His kingdom first.

Dependence on God is foreign to the body of death. Preoccupation with our needs destroys spiritual perception. These people were what Paul called, "men of the flesh."

Notice that Nehemiah had to resort to force to make this work. The reason for the force was that he feared God, knowing that if the people disregarded the Sabbath, God would again remove them from their land.

V. 22 Another cry to the Lord.

Vs. 23-27 This again. You wonder what happened that this intermarrying with pagan women wasn't stopped by the leaders. It's interesting to see what Nehemiah says about Solomon. As with Solomon, these women didn't give up their gods, they just added Yahweh to their list of gods to worship. They were still worshipping idols.

V. 28 This is what destroyed the influence of the priests and infected the people.

V. 29 Nehemiah was probably praying at all times, as he walked, while he knelt, and as he was on his face crying out to God for his people.

Vs. 30-31 Every generation needs leaders who are passionate in their love for God as they follow Christ in this lost world. Spiritual truth is just as real as gravity or the circulation of blood in the body. Violation of spiritual truth is just as deadly as jumping off a building or cutting an artery. There are many abilities and skills that can be taught and transferred; but passionate discipleship, loving Christ, risking all for His mission, perceiving life spiritually, is caught, not taught. This is why we are in the Word, in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. Nehemiah is a great example of a disciple. Our job now with our amazing advantages (the Word and the Spirit) is to make disciples, who will passionately make disciples, who make disciples.

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

Welcome to some great theology and murky waters. This part of chapter 11 is one of those dark little closets in the letter (and Bible) that people prefer to keep closed. You may as well read the first two verses along with these.

First, some introduction into this particular issue. This was a very Jewish church. The women had never participated in synagogue worship. It had been a man's club. The church was something different; and women suddenly had a lot of liberty and privilege, in spite of what their husbands might have preferred. But you know, if God gives your wife a prophet's gift (like Philip's daughters in Acts 21:9), what are you going to do? Just like we've seen in some of the other issues in Corinth, when certain people came to the liberty of knowing Christ, they took it way too far. That will be the case here and also at the end of chapter 14 regarding the role of women in the church. Both of the issues raised in this chapter were things done in public worship. In fact, public worship will be the stage for most of chapters 11-14.

V. 3 These roles are solid biblical teaching. Paul says this also in Ephesians 5:22-23.

Vs. 4-5 Notice that the use of prophecy identifies this as being public. Paul talks about how prophets were supposed to take part in the public service in chapter 14.

What you can say definitely here is that a man was not to pray publicly or prophesy with his head covered, and a married woman was not to pray or prophesy publicly with her head uncovered. Even though the Greek word for "woman" is used here, she is a wife because she would be dishonoring "her head" or husband. This means positively, that women were allowed to participate in the public service, as prophets, and it didn't violate what Paul taught elsewhere about women not teaching or having authority over men.

V. 6 This shame would not only have been on the wife, but also on the husband, perhaps suggesting she had been punished for some crime like adultery. Spiritually speaking, Paul is saying she's doing the same thing by not wearing a veil; she is shaming her husband.

Vs. 7-10 So, we have some pretty great and mind-blowing teaching here and it is not oriented to culture, but to God's created order. Whatever Paul and the Spirit are saying here, it is still in force. We're just not sure what it all means in terms of how it plays out visually in every culture, yet the truth of this teaching is unshakable.

Apparently some Corinthian women who participated in worship over-reacted to their freedom by showing a lack of respect and submission to their husbands. Put another way, they finally had the opportunity to show their stuff and that their husbands were not at their level. In a sense, that is probably what Eve felt between the time her eyes were opened and Adam sinned. She was superior to him and that is reflected in God's curse on her. Anyway, whatever the cause, what the women were doing in Corinth was obvious and it was wrong. The thinking is that in that culture, a married woman wore a head covering to show she was under the authority of her husband. When they became Christians, some of these women burned their head coverings. The Spirit is saying that when women participate in worship in praying and prophesying, they still need to show that they are under the authority of their husbands. It could be that the veil was a symbol of submission in that culture and in another culture there might be another symbol. That is stretching it a little. The problem is that a man was not to cover his head at all while praying publicly and that seems universal.

Vs. 11-12 These verses do not "neutralize" what is going on here. They are saying that there is an equality and interdependence before God for both men and women. So, there is no arrogance to be shown by men or disrespect from women. The order of v. 3 still stands.

Vs. 13-15 Getting murkier. This is not an argument away from a veil or saying that long hair takes the place of a veil. This illustration actually intensifies the idea of a woman wearing a head covering. This is simply an example from nature that God knew would probably get certain people mad. Did you realize that God thinks that if men have long hair it is degrading to them? Was that just cultural for that time? I don't know. I do know that all the pictures we have of Jesus show Him with long hair, and Paul probably had seen Jesus and wouldn't have said this if Jesus really had long hair. And then, what about women with short hair? O Weh!

V. 16 This is not an escape clause. Paul meant that what he taught here is what he taught everywhere.

Right now, some people reading this probably need the spiritual version of the Heimlich maneuver.

So, if you're discussing this as a group, try to get some things in order. First, write down everything that is clear from this passage. Then write down your questions. It is worth thinking about what the Spirit says about men and women. There is very good theology and teaching in this section. Men should concentrate on what it says about men. Women should focus on what it says about women. All of this should be kept in the context that we have been saved to be disciples on earth during this time, to live for Christ and to follow Him in the harvest. This life is not about us having rights or treasure on earth.

These verses and the simple meaning of them have led some theologians to ask their wives to wear a head covering during worship services. Yet, if a wife cannot participate publicly (and in most churches, for worship, only a few people do anything public) this is a moot point. Most worship services in the western world do not allow this kind of participation anyway. Ironically, the churches in which women wear veils do not allow them to speak at all, taking away the need for a veil.

It could be that this would be necessary in a home group, but even there, there is nothing in most home Bible studies that looks like what Paul outlines in chapter 14. So really, culturally for us, it might be a total non-issue. For some people who choose to ignore thinking about these verses, knowing that most churches in the world do not have their women wear veils (and everything appears fine), seems to get them off the hook. One thing still challenges me on these verses. The children of Israel never kept the Sabbatical year and from Joshua to Nehemiah, they never kept the Feast of Booths, making people live in little houses made of branches. Why? Was it because these things were so impractical? I mean, what would the neighbors think? And besides, everything was fine. Right? Wrong.

Psalm 35:1-16

When we read of David running from Saul all of those years, we don't have any sense for the lies and rumors that were spread throughout Israel about David. If we look at our media today we can get an idea. For ten years Saul and his government had to justify their hatred for the boy whom Samuel had anointed king and who had delivered Israel by killing Goliath.

As you read this, notice all the uses of *let*. Also, since there is a parallel between David's experience and the suffering of Jesus, you can see some of what Jesus must have felt in these verses. And you think of Paul too, *that I may... share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death*. Paul was despised even by people in churches that he planted, like the church in Corinth.

Vs. 1-3 This is David's cry for the Lord to come to his rescue. David needed comfort and assurance.

Vs. 4-6 David didn't just want justice; he wanted it to be apparent to all that *the angel of the Lord* was contending for him.

Vs. 7-8 Notice that David is asking for them to be judged as they had planned and sought to harm David.

Vs. 9-10 David already knew this to be true, but there is something about seeing it happen that brings relief and confidence and resolution. Notice the impact of v. 9. Is that "Christian?"

Vs. 11-14 When David lived in Saul's palace, married to his daughter, David knew many people and thought they were his friends. Once Saul planned to kill David, to stay in Saul's favor - you had to betray David.

Vs. 15-16 This is the depth of the betrayal David felt. We'll see tomorrow as we finish this psalm, that Jesus felt that same kind of betrayal. These two verses would have been true of Jesus as He hung on the cross.

Proverbs 21:17-18

V. 17 seems clear enough. For us as disciples, the challenge is to look at ourselves in terms of culture and what we expect as "normal" to our lives. I'm still challenged by what Jesus told His disciples about the seed cast among thorns. Luke 8:14 - *And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.*

V. 18 A suggestion here is that the wicked and the traitor afflict the righteous and the upright, but when justice is finally passed on them, the righteous are set free or vindicated by that judgment. Notice the "release" of v. 9 in Psalm 35 above. When the wicked are punished, the righteous feel the freedom.

AUGUST 18

You are beginning another book of the Bible. Time to celebrate! Esther is the second of two books that highlights the events in the lives of a godly woman whom the Lord used in His plan of redemption.

Esther 1-3

Chronologically, the events of Esther happen between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. There is a 57-year gap between the finishing of the temple and the coming of Ezra. In the world, a Persian king named Darius I (not Darius the Mede of Daniel) allowed the Jews to finish the temple and then went off to try to become a part of the European Union by conquering Greece. The Greeks killed Darius I at Marathon near Athens, and Persia made his son Xerxes (Ahasuerus) king. Xerxes wanted revenge, so he wine and dined all of Persia to sign up to fight against those "handkerchief dancers." That is where we begin Esther. Tradition says Xerxes went to Greece with 2 million men and returned with about 5,000. Apparently, the Greeks were in a generous mood. The famous battle with the 300 Spartans is part of that history. That war took place between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Esther.

Regarding the book of Esther: I recommend taking it at face value. Some people read in disobedience on the part of the Jews, since they hadn't returned to Jerusalem; but it should be noted that Ezra hadn't returned yet, and I don't want to call him disobedient. Also, some people see grave immorality in Xerxes' request to have Vashti show her beauty. I don't see that. Actually her behavior might have had more to do with her repulsion of Xerxes' drunkenness and lack of character. Just read the book for yourself and get your own opinions.

The book of Esther is very unusual in that it is the only book of the Bible where God is not mentioned. In that sense, it is a test of the faith of the people to understand the unseen hand of God working on their behalf. In education there is a thing called a "close test" to test the reading comprehension of students. A page of text is given and certain ____ are left out. A student should be ____ to figure out what those ____ are from the context. The same is true in Esther. Since Esther is in the Bible, the people apparently saw God in the events.

One more thing: the events of Esther and the hatred toward the Jews is easier to understand if you know the first six chapters of Daniel. The Jews had favored people status in the Babylonian Empire. This protected them racially and religiously. That made a lot of people jealous of the Jews. When Persia inherited the Jews by conquering Babylon, it happened again; and, boom, the Jews were suddenly a favored people with rights that no other peoples in Persia had. Now in Esther, it will happen again. Particularly now, it was crucial that God did at this time, what He had done over the last hundred years to protect His people. The decrees at the end of Esther enabled the Jews to survive and continue that very special status, worshiping their God only. It is because of these events that Ezra was commissioned to teach the returned remnant the law, and Nehemiah was able to come to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem.

“The Three Returns from Exile” and “Chronology of the Postexilic Period” will also be helpful as you read Esther.

Esther 1

Vs. 1-12 Notice that the time reference says this took place in the third year of Ahasuerus' (Xerxes') reign. Since the book of Esther is not about world history, it doesn't say what the party was for. The point isn't even to tell us why Vashti refused, but now we know why the king was mad. Given the event, it is Xerxes' pride that was hurt. He appears to have been a petty, childish hedonist. He lost face before all of his leaders and kingdom and now this would be news. Xerxes already had plenty of wives, with more to follow. Vashti was only national "bling" for the king.

Notice that the seven-day feast was after the 180 days of showing the royal glory. It was on the final day of the feast when the fiasco with Vashti occurred. The drunkenness surrounding this event is probably what the women were mad about.

Vs. 13-22 This judgment and edict would have taken place before Xerxes went out to face the Greeks. It was the height of his pride. He wouldn't return so proud.

Vs. 19-20 Notice that Vashti remained a wife, but was never to see the king again. It is thought that Vashti was the mother of Artaxerxes, the next king.

V. 22 Thankfully, the respect of men in the Persian Empire was saved!

Esther 2

Vs. 1-4 Xerxes came back a defeated man. He had wives, but no queen. There was no special relationship between him and his queen, as we'll see later; but for ceremony and national appearance, Persia needed one. Persia was now shamed in the face of all nations because of those skirted gyro-chompers.

This was more than a contest to be queen. Each of the girls selected would become his wife. I don't know if there was anything official before the wedding night, but the wedding night sealed the deal. In this sense, all of the girls "won." They became a wife of Xerxes, king of Persia and whatever privileges and benefits that entailed for them and their families. It would have meant money for the family giving up the daughter. It wasn't "losing" not to be queen. And since this was marriage, becoming a part of the king's harem wasn't "immorality" as we understand it, except maybe in its sheer magnitude and excess.

Vs. 5-11 This is where the plot thickens and you begin seeing (or not seeing) the working of the Lord. Again, some of this looks familiar, if you know Daniel (which took place in captivity about 100 years earlier).

V. 5 Mordecai has a Babylonian name, suggesting, in spite of his brief genealogy, he was born in Babylon.

V. 8 Esther was *gathered* up with the other young women, meaning it was not Mordecai's doing.

V. 9 Hmmm. Sounds like Daniel chapter 1 (or the story of Joseph, if you can remember back that far). Receiving favor from others was one of the ways the Lord put Joseph and Daniel in key positions.

V. 10 I think this was because of the animosity toward the Jews.

Vs. 12-18 I'm sure you're seeing God's hand in all of this.

Vs. 12-14 This was the preparation. I can't imagine that this took a year, but then I hate having to do more than brush my hair before I go out the door. What would six months of oil of myrrh treatment look like?

Vs. 15-18 Esther won! What a surprise.

V. 16 Did you notice the hidden time reference here? Esther became queen in the 10th month of Xerxes' 7th year. Since Esther had a year of preparation, it would mean that the search for a queen probably occurred in his 6th year. So now, four years have gone by since chapter 1.

Vs. 19-23 This is now after Esther was queen. I don't know why Xerxes did this again, but I don't know much about maintaining a respectable and well-ordered harem. Esther obeyed Mordecai and didn't say she was a Jew.

What a coincidence that Mordecai saved the king's life. It is equally as important that God had them overlook giving Mordecai any reward. These are good things for us to observe and keep in

mind as we see the Lord working. Sometimes He allows us to be forgotten too, but all for good reason.

Esther 3

Vs. 1-6 *After these things* gives us the idea of a passage of time. Notice again that Mordecai was *at the king's gate*. Some suggest that this means Mordecai had some minor post in government.

So, why didn't Mordecai bow? You get the idea that he was just a grumpy, nasty, hook-nosed little guy. Part of the clue here is that when asked why he didn't bow, he said *he was a Jew*. And they let him go, as if that explanation did the trick. So? I'm part Greek and part German. What does that have to do with anything? Now I'm going to crawl out on a limb here and suggest what might have been happening.

God's work in the book of Daniel gave the Jews the right to worship only their God. It became law. All other peoples in Babylon had to worship all the gods, including Nebuchadnezzar himself...but not the Jews. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that if anyone forced them to worship any God but their own, that person would be killed. Boy, did that save the Jews, but that was Babylon. This was Persia. So then, read Daniel chapter 6. A law was made compelling everyone to worship and pray to Darius the Mede. As a result of Daniel 6 another command was issued protecting the Jews which became a law of the Medes and the Persians *which cannot be revoked*. This became binding for the entire Persian Empire, protecting Jews from having to worship or pay homage to any god, or representative thereof, other than their own, under penalty of death to anyone who forced them.

So if showing homage to a person, king or otherwise, was actually thought of as paying homage to a god, and that person was a representative of that god, it would explain things. If this was the case, Mordecai's response totally answered their question. He was a Jew, and therefore, he was exempt. This would also explain why Haman couldn't just get off his horse and make Mordecai bow to him. According to Persian law, if my theory is right, it would have made Haman's act punishable by death.

Vs. 7-15 Here is another time reference. It is now the twelfth year of Xerxes. Four and a half years have gone by between the selection of Esther and this event. Notice how lucky it was that the lot was cast and gave the Jews a year to get ready.

V. 8 Haman mentioned that the Jews did not keep the king's laws. This was because of edicts issued by Darius the Mede and by Cyrus. See Daniel 6.

V. 9 Haman must have been extremely wealthy. This might be why King Ahasuerus was so taken up with him. A talent weighed 75 pounds. That was tons of silver. It is interesting to think that a man of this wealth and position was shaken, because one little guy wouldn't recognize him.

V. 15 After planning to kill the Jews and then having to send word throughout the entire empire, I'll bet they were beat. There is nothing like being able to kick back after a hard day's work. So what do you gather about the character of this king?

We have seen before, and it will be true of the first six chapters of Daniel, that disaster often precedes blessing. By now we should understand that this is also true of us in the harvest. The Father prunes vines that bear fruit. God often uses problems to bring us to our knees and do things that we never would have imagined possible.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Vs. 17-19 These are the divisions Paul mentioned in chapter 1. Basically, chapters 11-14 have something to do with their public meetings.

Vs. 20-34 Apparently, this church celebrated communion as a part of a larger meal, sort of like what took place at the Passover where Jesus introduced communion. Jesus *took the cup, after supper*. So, they apparently had supper first, and then celebrated communion. What was happening in Corinth was a mess.

V. 23 Paul received these instructions personally from Jesus Himself. Communion must be an important remembrance, if Jesus made sure He passed it on to Paul personally.

Vs. 27-32 Notice that this warning is aimed at believers, not unbelievers. The sin is a serious sin for someone who knows better and desecrates the body and blood of the Lord anyway. Many, if not most, of the people in the world who take communion on any given Sunday are probably unbelievers, doing it out of sheer ignorance. I think the prohibition and the penalty is for those who know better and are partaking in sin. Of course, anyone who intentionally would think to mock communion, even in ignorance, would be in danger too.

V. 30 I'm glad God doesn't do this today, or does He?

V. 31 A person is called to self-examination before the Lord, before they participate.

V. 32 This is God chastening His children. According to Romans 8, we cannot be condemned. God keeps His children from imitating the world in their utter disdain for Him by keeping us humble, in affliction if necessary.

Vs. 33-34 The abuse of the Lord's Supper was one of the issues that they wrote to Paul about to gain some clarity. Paul addressed key issues, but apparently there were other, less important, questions that he would choose to address later.

Psalm 35:17-28

In one sense, when you read all of what David asks for, he is only asking God to be true to His character and to do what He has spoken in the Word. In a video/song I found for Psalm 25, there is a line that has stuck with me: "It is your reputation that makes me outrageously brave." I think this is what David means here. David knows that God will show justice and save him, and I guess he's asking God to do it sooner than later.

Vs. 17-18 I don't think David was bargaining with God, but he definitely wanted some help quickly. Praising God publicly was one of David's constant refrains.

Vs. 19-21 These are all the things David feared would come upon him if God didn't help. David's enemies didn't think God would help David. And David feared he would be shamed for having waited on the Lord.

Vs. 22-25 God had seen all of this and David knew it. David cried for vindication. I don't think it was vindication of his righteousness or innocence, as much as it was vindication of his faith in the Lord. Verse 25 seems to emphasize their arrogance and their confidence in putting David to shame.

V. 26 This is another way of saying, "Let what they have planned for me happen to them."

Vs. 27-28 David knew, in faith, that God would come through. David knew he would be telling of God's *righteousness* and praising His name. Through David, others would have the courage to wait for the Lord. We need that same kind of faith and assurance as we wait on the Lord, following Him in the harvest.

Proverbs 21:19-20

It seems like both of these verses have to do with "control" issues. Or really, maybe both of them have to do with fully appreciating the blessing and love of God.

AUGUST 19

Esther 4-7

In thinking about the purpose of the book of Esther, there is not only the obvious message of God sovereignly saving His people, but there is the hidden message. The hidden message is represented in the fact that the words, "God" and "pray," and other indications of God's presence are not mentioned. Can God be present when He is not seen? Can a book telling of God's working exclude the mention of Him? Those who are seeking God will find Him. The book of Esther is a spiritual eye test.

Matthew 13:13-15 *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.* ¹⁴*Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.'* ¹⁵*For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'*

Esther 4

Vs. 1-3 The response of the Jews was immediate. Mordecai risked his life by coming as a mourner to the king's gate. Notice that there was fasting and weeping and sackcloth and ashes, but nowhere in Esther does it *say* that anyone prayed. Obviously they prayed.

Vs. 4-9 Apparently Esther and others didn't know what had happened. Mordecai refused to be comforted and suggested what Esther should do. It is interesting that Mordecai came with documentation to prove his claim.

Vs. 10-11 We imagine that a king and queen would be close. Xerxes had an enormous harem of attractive and exciting women. Now that he had a queen that any kingdom would be proud of, he could go back to business as usual. Of course, he would see Esther more often than the other wives because of official events. The fact that he hadn't seen Esther for a month signifies a very official and superficial relationship. If I didn't see my wife for a month, I'd be a wreck.

Esther's sense of security was shaken by Xerxes' character and behavior, and now there was an emergency. She was afraid, and it probably wasn't a common occurrence for a woman to approach the throne. I wonder if she thought he had found out she was a Jew?

Vs. 12-14 If you needed key verses for Esther, these might do. If you agree, why do you think these are good verses? What do you see in these verses that speak to you in your life and circumstances?

As disciples we are taught to live in the harvest, following and abiding in Christ. We never know where the Lord is leading us, or for what He might be preparing us. It is our perspective of living with Him daily and following Him that gives us the courage and presence of mind to understand how to respond to the situations He brings before us. Esther was shocked, but we'll see that she understood and recovered her calm.

Vs. 15-17 This shows that Esther and the other Jews were spiritually minded. By fasting they were appealing to God for help.

Esther 5

Vs. 1-3 I have to admit that when I read this, I really think the entire description shows the king was immensely caught up in his own ego and was a man of low character.

Vs. 4-8 Esther might have known that the king couldn't resist being honored. That Esther didn't give her request at the first feast might have been to show that she was sincere. This might have

been a Persian custom we don't have insight into. It certainly was a "God thing" that things happened this way.

Vs. 9-14 In the whole scheme of God's working, this just looks like something we've seen a million times before. Pride comes before a fall, although in this case, possibly, before a *shish-kabob*. We've heard about the fall of the wicked in both Psalms and Proverbs. Now we get to see it.

V. 14 You'll see there is a note that "gallows" could also be "stake." It could be either. Once you begin reading Daniel, you'll see that this threat must have been a popular punishment in both the Babylonian and Persian Empires. *Also I make a decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill.* (Ezra 6:11)

Just like Nebuchadnezzar heated up the oven seven times hotter than normal to make an example of anyone who defied him, Haman must have had a tree brought out of the forest to use as a gallows or impaling beam to make the point that no one dare oppose him. Just as a note: In Germany for their May fest, the industrious Germans bring a 70+ foot tree out of the forest, trimming off all the branches but the very top. I've seen a group of men raise it and put it in place without a crane, although they did have one standing by. Not that everyone can do what the Germans do, but the Germans could have had the tree cut and in place in a day if necessary.

Esther 6

Vs. 1-3 What I've learned from this verse is that if I can't sleep, the Lord must want me up to pray. What can you say? What a funny "coincidence" that this should happen on this very night.

One thing to note here is while we all love it when God does stuff like this, He is equally at work and present when He doesn't let stuff like this happen. Maturity in following in the harvest accepts God's presence both when the sun shines and when the storms rage.

Vs. 4-9 Now it's morning and what funny timing. God's judgment on the prideful and arrogant is not only just, but it shows that He has a sense of humor.

Vs. 10-11 Notice that the king knew that Mordecai was a Jew. Did the king not realize that the people he would be letting Haman exterminate were Jews? Re-read chapter 3. It looks like the king could have been oblivious to who the people were since he never proofread the final edict. Haman wrote it and sealed it for the king.

God has an ironic sense of judgment. Imagine what this must have felt like for Haman. Imagine the shock for Mordecai. Imagine the shock of all of those lower governmental workers who were expecting Haman to lower the boom on Mordecai.

Vs. 12-13 How comforting to have your wife and friends, who just suggested you punish Mordecai by hanging, tell you that he is about to be your downfall.

V. 14 And before Haman could collect his thoughts, he himself was collected.

Esther 7:1-10

Vs. 1-2 It must have been after all the food was served and the wine was being drunk, that the servants cleared out and there was time for conversation.

Vs. 3-4 It is interesting that Esther framed her request like this. Her urgent need came from the fact that total destruction was planned. I wonder if Haman was getting a bad feeling as Esther was explaining this.

Vs. 5-6 Dumb, da da dumb...in more ways than one. What a time for the king and Haman to discover that Esther was a Jew.

Vs. 7-8 The king went out to cool off and to think through all that Haman had suggested and planned. Esther was not in danger. There were some servants and guards present. One of them just happened to have a "head bag" in his pocket.

V. 9 Again, this is ironic justice. What we don't know is if Haman was hung like a "hanging," or hung like "on a spit." It is interesting in The Psalms to see David ask the Lord to punish his foes with the kind of destruction they were trying to bring on David. Here, we see it.

1 Corinthians 12:1-26

There is great teaching in chapters 12 and 13. Keep in mind that Paul is teaching this to correct a problem in the church, and he will begin to apply all of this teaching in chapter 14. These chapters are leading up to, and laying a foundation for, correcting the Corinthians' misuse of the gifts in their public services.

Vs. 1-3 So what do you have here? How can you curse Jesus without knowing it, thinking you were led by the Spirit? This is my take on what Paul seems to be saying.

When the Corinthians were unbelieving, regardless of the sincerity or piety of their emotions, regardless of their Jewishness, they were led by those emotions to worship idols (Rom. 2:22). They lived in a very pagan place and even on their best days, their "god feelings" still led them to mix with the ungodly culture. Emotion does not equal accurate worship. Apparently then, some of these believers under the influence of emotion were speaking in tongues; and others who knew the language were hearing them curse Jesus. In the same way, it is only by the Spirit that a person can speak in tongues and praise God. Emotion does not equal worship, even in the church. Apparently the gift of tongues was going to seed in this church, and Paul will correct this overemphasis on tongues. This will become very, very clear in chapter 14.

Vs. 4-6 What point do you think Paul is making in this section? Notice the progression in these verses and what is attributed to each member of the Trinity. Think about these because they are different. Gifts are under the authority of the Spirit. Service is under the authority of the Lord. And working, as in making things happen, is under the authority of the Father. For an interesting look at this, read John 5. The Son served as He saw the Father working. There is diversity, but it is all unified in the Trinity and under the Father.

Vs. 7-11 The gifts are all unified under the same Spirit and they are given, not as we desire, but as He wills.

Vs. 12-13 The *for* in v. 12 is the application of what Paul has just said. You can imagine that as divided as the Corinthians were around their "heroes" like Paul, and Apollos, and Peter, the gifts must have given them fits. Especially since they didn't have any choice which gifts God gave to them.

Vs. 14-20 Notice in this first example of division over gifts, pride is not the primary issue, but self pity. What do you do if you're a successful CEO, but you didn't get a gift of teaching or spiritual administration and you thought you should have? What do you do if you're good looking and think you should be a hand, but you're a toe? What if you have great opinions, but God didn't choose you to be a prophet? Since Paul addresses this first, it might have been the primary problem.

V. 18 So it wasn't evolution after all. God put all the organs where He chose. Actually I think it's pretty cool that we don't sit on our brains.

Vs. 21-26 Now we have the example of pride. Without the heart, the mouth stops and the hand falls. Actually, the heart is pretty useless without veins. And mess up a couple of those DNA couplings and you've got major vein problems. Who is to say what gifts are unnecessary? It's interesting that in God's blessing to Nehemiah, everyone was "working properly."

Vs. 24-26 This is true of the body and of the church. We noticed in Nehemiah how important it was to have a leader, but it was just as important for everyone to work together and do their part. Both were miracles and both were provided by the Lord.

Up to now we all agree with this analogy that the Spirit and Paul have given us. But here's the question. Why are the gifts given and what is the body supposed to do? People do stuff and that makes the working of the body parts important. If the body just sits there, watching TV, who cares? What is important for us is that the body of Christ is meant to be working in the harvest. Without His purpose and passion working in us as disciples in the harvest, this teaching on gifts is all theoretical and academic, and it totally eludes us.

Psalm 36

So, vs. 1-4 seem to stand together, and vs. 5-10 stand together, with vs. 11 and 12 being a plea for deliverance and justice. How would you title 1-4, and how do you think they relate or move into 5-10? What is the difference between these two men, if you want to see it like that?

Vs. 1-4 Notice that the wicked are encouraged in their evil because God appears invisible and silent. Their mindset is irrational, but by God not acting immediately and being unseen, the wicked show their hearts and validate the judgment that will come against them.

Vs. 5-6 Notice how David equated God's love, faithfulness and righteousness with the visible creation. God is never truly invisible and David also knew the character of the Lord.

Vs. 7-9 Again David mentions God's *steadfast love*. God's loyal love is what gave David *refuge*, fed him in the wilderness and revived his soul in all those long years of doubt and running.

Vs. 10-12 So David appealed to God to *continue* showing His *steadfast love* to those who knew God. Although there are other requests here, the simple prayer and confidence we have is simply the steadfast love of the Lord.

In a way it sort of reminds me of the flow of Psalm 119: I'm surrounded by troubles and enemies and rats, but I set my mind to meditate upon Your word and find my joy in You.

Proverbs 21:21-22

When I saw these two proverbs together, it made me think that wisdom and righteousness are true strength. So what about *the city of the mighty* and *the stronghold*? How do the wise in Christ do this?

Notice in v. 21 that *righteousness* is internal character and that *kindness* is external, an action. Oh, and did I mention that the word translated *kindness* here is the same word translated in Psalm 36 as *steadfast love*.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45)

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21)

I guess you would call that, "The Art of War," in the harvest.

AUGUST 20

Esther 8-10

Whoa, this is our last day in Esther. If Daniel had been considered an historical book because of the history of the first six chapters, it would have come immediately after 2 Chronicles. The history of those chapters in Daniel would have prepared you to have a better understanding and appreciation for the events here in Esther, and you'd have a better context for Ezra and Nehemiah in general. Reading your Bible through every year eventually gives this to you, because after two or three years, you'll be surprised by what you remember from the entire Bible when you begin reading a certain book. It takes a few years for the Spirit to get your saturation level to a certain place and to set up all the connections between the different books and events. At that point, your love and appreciation for the Lord begins to go deeper too.

Also, keep in mind as you read this, that what is recorded here explains why the next king, Artaxerxes, will show such favor to the Jews, in general, and to Ezra and Nehemiah, in particular. In God's hands, disasters lead to good things.

Just for fun, notice how often it says, *Mordecai the Jew*.

Esther 8

Vs. 1-2 This sudden turn of events looks surprising here, but if you know the first six chapters of Daniel, you've seen this before and you just smile.

Vs. 3-8 A law or command of the Persians could not be revoked, even by the king who issued it. This "rule" was thrown in the face of Darius in Daniel 6, when he realized he had been tricked into putting Daniel in danger. The king's suggestion here was to write another law that would help the Jews.

Vs. 9-14 The genius in how this worked out was that the enemies of Jews had had two months to be arrogant and make their intentions known, bragging about what they were going to do to the Jews. Now the Jews knew who they were. There were still nine months before the event, so everyone had time to prepare.

Vs. 15-17 Mordecai was now greatly honored. And he was a much different man than Haman. Notice the result of this edict in comparison to the last edict that left Susa and the entire empire in confusion. Many of the non-Jews in the Persian Empire even began speaking Yiddish, acting Jewish and eating bagels.

Most nations in exile became absorbed in their surrounding culture and ceased to exist. Here and in Daniel, you can see how God saved Israel as a nation and showed them tremendous love and grace. When God makes a promise, it is as good as, as well, it's as good as God Himself.

Esther 9

Vs. 1-10 Notice that in all of this, the Jews only defended themselves against their enemies. They didn't take property or stuff.

Vs. 3-4 Apparently word about Mordecai spread throughout the entire government, and the government officials in all of the empire decided to help the Jews. How many times now has God let us know that Mordecai was becoming a great and important man? And we're not done.

Vs. 11-15 Since Susa was the political capital of the empire, it is interesting that this day of retribution was extended an extra day "on Capitol Hill," or in "Parliament," so to speak. The fact that Haman's sons were killed (v. 10), and their bodies spiked on the pole by Haman's house, made a great demonstration of power and inspired fear in anyone who dared to speak against the Jews.

Vs. 16-19 This is a summary of the entire event throughout the entire Persian Empire.

Vs. 20-32 This is the official decree to make Purim a national Jewish holiday. This holiday is never mentioned in Ezra or Nehemiah. The focus of both of those books is the reestablishment of the worship of God in Jerusalem, and that, according to the law of Moses.

Esther 10

Vs. 1-3 Note that it says that although Mordecai was second only to King Ahasuerus, his greatness was primarily among the Jews. This is actually the third time in biblical history that God put one of His people in high rank in a foreign power. Joseph had a similar position in Egypt, with the king's ring. But Daniel tops them all. While it is probable that Daniel held the Babylonian government together during Nebuchadnezzar's seven years of grazing, on the night when Babylon fell, Daniel was the only surviving ruler of the Babylonian Empire. You would think that Iran (Persia) and Iraq (Babylon) would be respectful of the blessing God brought to both empires through these men and the Jews in general.

So, what do you take away from God's message in Esther? Think about this.

Here are two things that I see.

First, God is always working for good, whether I hear His name or see His hand. While I might rejoice in the "random, chance events" that work for my good, saying they come from God, I also need to accept the same kinds of "events" when they appear to be against me. They are still from God, as we'll see in Job.

Second, disaster isn't a bad thing. Often it makes people show their true feelings and loyalties. God can work these events to "good," according to my expectations, in a flash. If He chooses not to work them for good according to my expectations (note the words of S, M, & A in Daniel 3), I still serve Him and trust Him. His goodness and purpose do not need to meet any of my human expectations. He is always God, and is always good. Though it sure is nice when the story turns out this cool. (If you liked this, you'll love Daniel.)

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

V. 27 It is good to be reminded that the church belongs to God, not us.

V. 28 I'm sure these words rang loud in the division in Corinth: *God has appointed*. God does this, not us.

V. 31 There was a great desire for gifts in Corinth. We'll see this in chapter 14.

1 Corinthians 13

It is interesting that this chapter is really corrective to an ongoing conflict. No wonder it is used at so many weddings. ☺

Vs. 1-3 These verses are hyperbole and exaggeration. People who build a doctrine from v. 1, that the gift of tongues is "angelic language," go too far. Every place in the NT where tongues are used, including chapter 14, they are a known human language, though, unknown to the speaker. Even if this wasn't exaggeration, it still wouldn't mean that the gift of tongues was angelic; since in Acts 2, tongues were in understandable human languages.

In the same tone of exaggeration, Paul refers to the other gifts. Who has prophetic powers and understands all mysteries and all knowledge and has all faith so as to move mountains? No one, except Jesus, has had all of these. Paul is exaggerating.

Vs. 4-7 The ESV follows the RSV in *irritable and resentful*. The newer One Year Bible has a note for the literal translation. Apparently *resentful* is the emotional result of counting up wrongdoing. In a way it's helpful to know what happens if you keep count. Stored up resentments are the hardest things to work through with couples who have been married a long time.

Vs. 8-10 I'm just saying this so you know what's happening, but Paul is preparing his argument against the misuse of "tongues" in chapter 14. Notice that the gifts of prophecy and knowledge are linked with *pass away*, and then these two gifts are repeated in the next sentence. The gift of tongues, on the other hand, is said to cease, and then it is not repeated again in the chapter. Chapter 14 will make this clearer.

V. 11 This is an interesting progression the way Paul states it: Speaking, thinking, reasoning. Just trivia.

V. 12 This is a great verse.

V. 13 This is a great verse for weddings, and church.

Now, having warmed our hearts with love and having read the wonderful analogy of gifts and the body and the church, you have to wonder why we need the gifts. What's the body supposed to do? What is the function of the church? Once you understand what the church is supposed to do and how it is supposed to do it, you can make sense of the gifts. If you get the function of the church wrong, or if you don't understand how the church is supposed to do what it's supposed to do, the gifts will be defined into meaninglessness and theoretical importance. In other words, if we don't know what we're doing here on earth, we won't really need the gifts and they won't really matter to us whether we use them or not. The church is meant to be working in the harvest. If the church does anything else or if any other function becomes its focus, like music and worship, then the gifts and the functioning of the members together lose their meaning.

Psalm 37:1-11

This psalm is similar to Psalm 119 in that each stanza begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Psalm 119 it's the same pattern, except that all the sentences within the stanza begin with that same letter.

The more I read these psalms, the more impressed I am with how well Jesus and Paul knew them. As I'm reading over this portion for today, I'm constantly being jogged to think of something Paul said in Romans or something Jesus said. In fact, Jesus' teaching to His disciples sounds like so much of this.

Vs. 1-2 Not that any of us fret over these things, but we do. And frankly, when we do, they don't fade fast enough. I guess David and the Spirit are telling us to be patient and wait on the Lord.

Vs. 3-4 Notice the contrast here to the past two verses. It is almost as if to say, "Don't think about them. *Trust in the Lord.*" But it goes beyond trusting the Lord. We are to delight in the Lord. Only in delighting in the Lord can the Lord nurture our hearts so that our desires revolve around Him. He gives us our desires, in that He teaches us to desire what is really satisfying.

Vs. 3-5 are good verses to memorize.

Vs. 5-6 Committing our way to the Lord is the next command. We don't need to defend our honor. The Lord will do that.

Vs. 7-9 Waiting on the Lord is a command too, and this one is tough. It says twice that we are to wait. Notice too that it mentions twice that we shouldn't fret or let our minds be consumed by these people. If you are interested, read Romans 12 and notice that there are three references in that chapter to not retaliating against abuse. I think Paul knew this psalm.

Vs. 10-11 This is what God promises if we set our hearts on Him and wait. I think Jesus might have known this psalm too.

When you see what God did in Esther, how would you put the message of this psalm together with what you read in Esther?

Proverbs 21:23-24

V. 23 Amen!

V. 24 This scoffing is at wisdom apparently. And his mouth probably got him in a lot of trouble, too.

AUGUST 21

If you haven't celebrated yet, you need to. You are beginning your 18th book in the Old Testament, not to mention you are nearing the end of your 7th book in the New Testament. The benefit of reading The One Year Bible will be evident soon enough. In books like Job where there is little action and a lot of talking, it is hard to stay interested (or awake). The New Testament will help, but alas, it too is more declarative. Still, the variation will help. And also, the Reading Notes are meant to help us do this together and keep our eyes on loving the Lord, following Him and staying focused on making disciples in the harvest.

So find something that gets your endorphins going and let's go.

Job 1-3

If you've never read Job (the "o" is long), this will be fun and work rolled into one. In Job, we gain insight into some behind-the-scenes spiritual reality, and some deep teaching about God.

Here are some things about Job that might help as we read.

First, Job seems to have been written after the flood and before the time of Abraham. One of the ways to get this is Job's age at death. Job lives 140 years after all of this happens. Looking at his life at the beginning of the book, it seems that to acquire this much wealth and stature as a wise man, Job might have been in his 60s-80s. From the flood to Abraham, the ages of people continually declined. If Job was 210-250 when he died, this would put him around the time of Serug (Genesis 11:23), Abraham's great-grandfather. Also, it describes the Chaldeans as a nomadic attacking band. By Abraham's time the Chaldeans were building cities and settling down to become the Babylonians.

Second, we are given an incredible glimpse into the problem that Job doesn't see. We get to see God's interaction with an angelic order that patrols the earth and is responsible for reporting to Him. Remember the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:19 and the angelic gathering? Satan appears among these angels, possibly as the leader, given the responsibility to serve or oversee the dominion of man. That God speaks to him suggests his leadership. In the NT we know that Satan is the leader, but God's interaction with Satan also shows a conflict and contest between them. God's righteousness in working with humanity and bringing us to forgiveness and salvation is being deeply scrutinized. Ironically, Satan (literally, accuser) shows the sin of men to God and demands justice. God is showing Satan something about puny wrecked humans that will eventually fully justify Satan being cast into the lake of fire.

And just to say, this conflict is still ongoing and very real in our world today. The final strike in this conflict will be in the Tribulation where it says in Revelation 12:11, *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* In Job we see that what becomes loved more than life, is God Himself. That love, in the final analysis, is the only reason Job hung on.

Third, who wrote Job? Who knows, but it seems that the writer was pretty close to the events. A good guess would be Job himself in those 140 years he lived after this. Another good guess is Moses as he sat in the wilderness for 38 years watching people die. In the final analysis, God wrote it.

Finally, to understand Job, you need to understand at the beginning that Job was right, and his friends were wrong. At the end of the book, we read, *After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."* (Job 42:7) These guys will say stuff that sounds good, but it is wrong because of their insistence that Job was being punished for sin. Job had not sinned. He never curses God, but he does step out of bounds later in his misunderstanding of God. God corrects Job, but is mad at the other guys.

Job 1

Vs. 1-5 Job was very rich, righteous and blessed. His adult kids even liked each other. He wasn't just a legend among men, but he had a very serious love for God. Interestingly, since Noah died near the time when Abraham was born, Noah and his son Shem would also would have been alive during the lifetime of Job. What this shows is that there was still a living testimony of the words and works of God on the earth.

Vs. 6-12 Think about this stuff.

V. 6 *Sons of God* refers to angels. If you want some stretching, look at the references in Genesis 6:2-4 and Deuteronomy 32:8. I think the ESV, RSV and the Septuagint have the correct rendering of Deuteronomy 32:8, and it makes sense with the rest of the Word. Deuteronomy 32:8 is also referring, I think, to Satan's angelic principalities.

V. 8 Just for trivia, there are four times God says *my servant Job*. Also, for future reference, look at what God says about Job, that there is no one *like him on the earth*. This will help us understand a couple of verses in Ezekiel. Why is God pointing out Job to Satan?

So, what would you say Satan is saying to God? It looks like, "Job worships You because You bless him." The test would be to see if Job still worships God when everything is taken away. How many people do you know who stop going to church and stop reading their Bibles when things go bad? I know of pastors who have done this.

God raised Job up for this event. Job had been especially prepared. Satan points to God's blessing on Job, but God had also built deeply into Job. In a way, Job is the same, yet the opposite of Pharaoh. Look at what Paul says in Romans 9:17, *For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."* God had raised Job up for this hour, as a lesson to us and to the principalities and powers. Yet, unlike Pharaoh who resisted God, Job will fight for what he knows to be true of God and then humble his heart.

Notice that God had to give Satan permission. That is a very deep and important point.

Notice that God is allowing this to happen to show something to Satan. *So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.* (Ephesians 3:10) By the way, those *rulers and authorities* in Ephesians are also the bad guys.

So, God has given us a view behind the scenes of what is to become a tragic earthly drama. As we enter into this, it is good to remember that God has more than one or two things going on in His created order. On the angelic side of things, there is a drama being played out. God challenged Satan and Satan made an accusation. God had no hesitation bringing this disaster on Job because it worked for good. In the end, we'll see that this was also for Job's good. The point

is to trust in God. Job will ask a great question in a few verses, "Why doesn't He kill me?" Whether it's suicide, "mercy killings," or any other question about life, the answer is the same: Trust that God is good and wait on His will. God works all things for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. God has the right and the freedom to use us for many things in His purpose, even to be, as Paul said, *a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake.*

Not all can wrap their heads around this, but disciples must be able to submit to God using us for His purpose. Our love for Christ and our following of Him in the harvest can't be dependent on His earthly blessing to us. We love because He loved us, and He opened our eyes as sons and daughters to see the spiritual reality around us. Paul said, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* Our treasure is in heaven. This is where we work. But God remains the same loving Father.

Vs. 13-19 The worst day ever. Notice the alternation of causes, human and natural (actually, supernatural). What effect do you think this had on Job emotionally? What did it show? Notice all the people who had to die for this drama to be played out. Remember, dying is how we are ushered into God's presence. God's presence is the place of ultimate blessing. His presence is only a bad place to be if you're not ready to be there.

Vs. 20-22 Job passed the test; he worshiped. Notice that Job says *the Lord has taken away.* That's good theology, and we see how deep it is because we know what's happening behind the scenes.

V. 22 What an amazing verse.

Job 2

Vs. 1-3 What incredible verses. God again directs Satan's attention to Job, and He even says that He was incited against Job without a cause. Among other things, God claims responsibility for Job's calamities. It is not just that God isn't done with Job; it is more like He isn't done with Satan. And of course, humiliating, mutilating and destroying humanity is right up Satan's alley.

Vs. 4-6 Think of this challenge in terms of Revelation 12:11 cited above.

Vs. 7-8 And of course, the real challenge here is that Job didn't die. He lingered on and suffered, and the good times and the hardest challenge from Satan were yet to come.

Vs. 9-10 Isn't it funny (scary) that Satan's words to God that Job would curse Him (1:11 & 2:5) would come out of his wife's mouth in the form of a suggestion to Job? Job's friends will also become messengers for Satan. We surely need to be careful with our mouths.

Note again that Job saw the "evil" as coming from God. Thankfully, we understand something deeper, but Job didn't have the benefit of reading what we just read.

Job passed again, but the worst was yet to come. A person can bear a lot of weight and stress and despair, and sometimes you can even throw more on top with little effect; but if the right people come and begin to "kick him in the shins" (emotionally or otherwise), he often can't bear that.

Now, from this point on, there is no further mention of Satan, except that we know he's at work behind the scenes. It appears that the point has been made to Satan, and now God will be correcting Job, his friends and us.

Vs. 11-13 Enter the friends. You won't see the impact of these guys until tomorrow and then it will make your jaw drop.

Eliphaz seems to be the oldest and the leader, not only because he is named first and makes the first answer in every round, but when God gets mad, He gets mad at Eliphaz.

Seven days of mourning must have meant that Job looked pretty bad to them, like death warmed over.

Job 3

From now to the very end of Job, this is all written as poetry.

Vs. 1-10 Notice the uses of the word *let*. It seems that Job might be cursing the day of his birth and the night of his conception.

Vs. 11-26 Guess what word organizes Job's thoughts here. What interrogative does Job keep using in this section? I think there is a progression from wondering why he didn't die in the womb to why he was still alive suffering. Living in suffering is apparently what Job feared would happen.

Many people live in suffering in all sorts of different circumstances. Sometimes you might see the good of it, but often you don't. A person suffering with a terminal illness or in a nursing home, day after day, year after year, doesn't see much purpose or hope in their suffering. Why not just end it? This is why the book of Job is so important. God will not point to His love in correcting Job. He will overwhelm Job with His wisdom. What Job will learn is that the wisdom of God is true, mighty, and loving; and therefore, it shouldn't be criticized or doubted. That kind of absolute trust has to be our foundation too, and yet we have so much more than Job did. We know Christ; we have the Spirit and we have the Word.

1 Corinthians 14:1-17

So now Paul is finally getting to what he has been building toward in chapters 12 and 13. Chapter 14 is the only chapter in the NT that is expressly written about the purpose and organization of a "worship service." But notice in the entire chapter the word "worship" is only used one time and it will surprise you who worships.

Vs. 1-5 It should be obvious that the gift of tongues was being misused and Paul was trying to correct not only this use, but their understanding of gifts in their public meetings. In Acts when tongues was used, there were unbelieving Jews present who understood that God was being praised in human languages they understood, but that should have been impossible for the speakers to have known. Those who spoke in tongues in Acts, where the gift was being used for its intended purpose, were speaking to God, praising Him. In those situations in Acts, God used the gift to show the stubborn that He was doing something new and going to the Gentiles with the gospel. Now in Corinth, people were speaking in tongues and no one understood them at all.

Notice the expression *builds up*, which is one word in Greek. In other translations it is the word *edify*. That will be a key word, expression and concept in this chapter.

Vs. 6-12 Verse 12 is the point. This is an interesting way to think of the service and defining what it means to build up or to edify. It is building up the people in the church.

Vs. 13-17 And read vs. 18-25 to get Paul's conclusion of this portion and to get another view of the service and the range of meaning for building up. Tomorrow Paul will show the purpose of the gift of tongues from the Old Testament.

As we work in the harvest making disciples, one of the important things we do in serving Christ is serving one another to build each other up for the work in the harvest. Working in the harvest is never easy. If we don't hold up and encourage one another, who will? Sometimes we come out of the fields broken and beaten. Sometimes we walk into the clearing on Sunday, tired, discouraged and feeling hopeless. Sometimes we gather together, but we are getting lost or feeling like giving up. We are given to each other as the church in the harvest to edify or build up one another, to cheer, to encourage, to strengthen, and to motivate one another, and to remember and sing about the love that saved us.

Psalm 37:12-29

Just for fun, underline the word *wicked* when you find it. Underline other words that repeat or stand out to you. It is probably best to think of this as the ultimate victory of justice and God's ultimate vindication of *the righteous*. In Esther, we got to see the good guys win, and Haman and the bad guys lose. God's victory and promises are not dependent on us seeing them fulfilled. God is Himself, His promise.

Vs. 12-13 This is the plotting of the evil. God already knows their thoughts and knows how He will punish them.

Vs. 14-15 This is the action of the wicked. We saw this in Esther. What the wicked planned fell back on them.

Vs. 16-17 It is better to live contentedly with what the Lord gives us, with our hope set on Him. This reminds me of 1 Timothy 6.

Vs. 18-20 We know, of course, that this heritage may be future and our *abundance* may be what the Spirit creates in our hearts as we suffer for Christ, but God doesn't fail. I was reading this morning, *Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'* (Matt. 25:34) That is absolutely unshakable, but everything on earth is very shakable.

Vs. 21-22 Jesus also said that because wickedness would multiply, most men's love will grow cold. Who is it who can afford to be generous and secure as the world is going to hell? Only those who know the love of Christ and serve Him in the harvest. Verse 22 sounds like Matthew 25:34-46.

Vs. 23-24 What an amazing promise, but notice there is a condition. Many believers fall and stay hurt. Jesus said, *the one who endures to the end will be saved*. I think the salvation mentioned is salvation from the damage that comes from giving up and straying from the Lord.

Vs. 25-26 While this is a general promise, we are seeing Job go through a season where this doesn't seem to apply to him. There are also exceptions now on the earth as we speak. There are believers suffering who, like Job, do not know why, but there is a reason in God's wisdom why this must be. God is still true to His Word.

Vs. 27-29 This is David's conclusion and word of edification to those he was giving testimony to.

V. 29 I'll bet Jesus knew this verse and this psalm.

Proverbs 21:25-26

It's interesting that the sluggard *craves*, but doesn't work. Yet, while it doesn't say the righteous are rich and are working from the crack of dawn until midnight, they are content and able to give to those in need. Do you get the difference? It is more about the true desires of the heart and where a person finds completeness. Completeness in God makes a person whole and gives them what they need to share with others in the harvest. See Psalm 37:21 above. Isn't it interesting that we are reading both of these passages on the same day? You just gotta love The One Year Bible!

AUGUST 22

The length today is a little long since we are still getting grounded in Job, and because 1 Corinthians 14 is a little complex. When you're finished with the notes on 1 Corinthians 14, you might need a friend to give you the Heimlich maneuver.

Job 4-7

Up until now it looks like Job has passed this terrible test and it's over. Not so. Although Satan is not mentioned again in the book, his influence against Job continues in the form of his friends misrepresenting God. Many things Job's friends say are good; but in terms of really understanding God or understanding Job's situation, they are completely off base. Because of their misapplication of the truth, God will tell them that they are wrong and that Job is right. They all get an education into the depth of God's wisdom. And we are led to understand that what is going on in reality is larger than just us and our peril here on this planet. The answer in all of this is to have absolute and fearless trust in God. He Himself, His love and wisdom, has to be enough.

Job 4

Vs. 1-6 We'll see this over and over. Job was known for his ability to help and to strengthen others. This guy is accusing Job of not being able to take his own advice and be calm while suffering. His friends, though acknowledging that Job strengthened others, do the opposite in their dealing with Job. Do you notice the subtle rebukes in Eliphaz's words to Job? Would you dare do this to someone who had suffered such losses?

Vs. 7-11 This statement is actually both their problem and Job's. All of them believed that disaster was punishment. They were all wrong. Job will contend that he didn't sin, and rightly so. His friends will contend that he did sin. Job will eventually slip, by saying that God was unfair. No one but Elihu, at the end, will suggest that God in His wisdom uses disaster for reasons other than punishment. God's wisdom is what none of them could grasp. So for us, it is good to keep in mind that bad things are not necessarily a sign of punishment in our lives or in the lives of others. That may be the first thing we feel, but the message of this book says something more.

Vs. 12-21 This is the "truth" that Satan shared with Eliphaz that now drives the thinking of Job's friends. What is sobering is that these friends received "spiritual" information that is empowering, driving them to ruin their friend. This doesn't happen in the church, does it? *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,*²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,*²⁶ *and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.* (2 Timothy 2:24-26) Paul wrote this to Timothy in dealing with believers in the church in Ephesus.

V. 17 In my mind this is the key to understanding the attack on Job and the lie that Satan gave Job's friends. The answer is assumed to be "no." But that's not true, is it? Since the fall in the garden, God has known, but kept secret, the way the answer would be "yes" in Christ. Even in the OT, those who drew near to God in faith sensed and understood in the very character of God, that salvation and righteousness were possible. This didn't come through religion or just through the Scriptures, but by being close to God. They knew it by faith. It's like, you don't know how He will do it, but you know Him, His love and His wisdom, and that He will and can do it. When it all works out, we don't understand all the events or reasons, but knowing God has to be enough.

Vs. 17-21 All of these words are from Satan. Knowing what you know of the Lord and the Bible, how many half-truths can you find here? The attempt is to destroy all hope. Thankfully, the things he says are not the full truth, and our hope is in the Lord.

As disciples saved by grace, our following is not because of what we expect God to give us on this earth or any other ideas of justice or fairness. All that is gone. We live knowing our Father, serving His Son, following His Spirit, who indwells us. Regardless of what happens in life, knowing God in Christ is enough.

Job 5

Notice that all of what Eliphaz says is right and good, but it is terribly misapplied to Job. Much of what he says is consistent with God's words elsewhere. Tomorrow we'll read Psalm 38, and this sounds just like that psalm.

Vs. 1-7 Eliphaz really wanted Job to see the one-to-one correlation between what had happened to him and his sin.

Vs. 8-16 Notice in this section that the first verse says to seek God, and the rest of the verses tell you why to do that. It was all good advice, but applied to the wrong guy. He was insisting on Job's sin and understanding God's actions as very one-dimensional.

V. 13 This verse blows my mind, because Paul quotes the first part of this verse in 1 Corinthians 3, showing Paul's breadth of knowledge in the OT and showing that these guys were saying good stuff and eternal truth. This is like singing a happy song at an execution. It can be a great song, but it doesn't fit the situation.

Vs. 17-27 Verses 17-18 sound like something out of Hebrews. All of this is good stuff. (Keep in mind that although only one "friend" is speaking at a time, they are all in agreement, having probably discussed this matter and made their judgment on their way to visit and "comfort" Job.) But you see here the subtle charge Eliphaz and Co. are making against Job. They are saying Job's troubles are God's reproof because of sin. This isn't something Christians do to each other, is it? What if it is simply God's will to allow something to happen for His greater purpose in reality and for some fine tuning in our lives? Pruning, as in John 15, doesn't mean reproof because of sin. It means that the Father is helping us and furthering His own plans for us and others.

Job 6

Vs. 1-7 This is the bitter weight of his emotional and physical anguish.

Vs. 8-13 This is a good question. Of course we see what is happening behind the scenes spiritually and we know the end of the book. We could yell to Job, "Don't wish for death; it will all get better." But from Job's perspective there is this thing that has come upon him that has shaken some of his understanding of God.

V. 9 is asking why God doesn't just take him. At the end of the book, Job will understand God's wisdom in not allowing him to die. If God doesn't take life needlessly and lets life linger on purpose, we need to wait on Him and not "play" God on earth. All of the talk of "mercy killing" is misguided.

Vs. 14-23 This seems like a warning to his friends, that they will get in trouble for approaching Job like this. Job was right.

Vs. 24-30 It looks like Job is appealing to them to stop before they are guilty of injustice. They couldn't prove Job was guilty; they could only accuse him. In v. 30 Job says that he would know if he was guilty.

Job 7

Vs. 1-6 This gives you the idea that months have gone by and Job is tired of suffering.

Vs. 7-10 And, when Job finally dies there will be no memory of him. Verse 7 seems to be an appeal to his friends for mercy and consideration.

Vs. 11-21 These words seem to be directed toward the Lord. Because Job was lingering and anticipating death, he felt justified in questioning and venting against the Lord. He never cursed God, but he greatly misunderstood God's actions. Of course that is easy for me to say. I do the same thing when I'm in pain or when I face bad news.

Vs. 14-16 It seems like the effect of hearing about Eliphaz's vision was that it made Job's desire to die even more intense. Job had great temptation bearing on him to take his own life and not wait for God's vindication. That was Satan's work and Satan still does the same today.

Vs. 17-21 Job's understanding of God was that if we sin, He forgives. Of course Job was one of a kind and close to God. He understood God's grace and mercy. So then, this was strange to him that God would so demolish him and not forgive him. But Job knows he hasn't sinned. He doesn't have a category for understanding God or what is happening to him at this point in time.

It is interesting that Job wasn't allowed to die and that the impulse to desire death came through Satan. Our own troubles, the plight of the dying, and the lives of the mentally challenged fulfill God's purposes. We are not God. He can end things whenever He desires. Often He is working through these things to accomplish purposes on so many levels, in so many lives, that we cannot comprehend it. We are not God. The impulse to end these things is not from God, since God is the One who gives and takes away. If we really want to "play God," we need to show love and comfort until He takes life away. We know His wisdom, His goodness, His love, His character. That is enough. Our trust in waiting and living needs to be totally in Him. He needs to be enough.

1 Corinthians 14:18-40

In showing the abuse of the gift of tongues in Corinth, Paul has also been saying that the purpose of their gatherings should be to edify, strengthen and encourage one another. Paul has shown that tongues is impractical in terms of edification, unless others are there who understand what is being said. Now Paul and the Spirit will show that tongues had/has a very narrow purpose.

Vs. 18-19 These verses really conclude what Paul was saying yesterday. Notice the exaggeration in what he says. There is a hint of rebuke in these words. The Corinthians should have been more focused on building up others instead of showing their stuff. They were acting like they were lost on earth, living for themselves and not engaged in the harvest.

Vs. 20-21 Paul is quoting Isaiah 28:11-12, *For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the Lord will speak to this people,* ¹²*to whom he has said, "This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose"; yet they would not hear.*

In Isaiah, the people in view are Jews. The gift of tongues was a sign to the Jews that God was taking His offer of "rest" and redemption to others. They would know this because a foreign people would be declaring the praise of God to them, the Jews, the people of God. My opinion is that this was and is the only purpose of the gift of tongues. It was a sign to the Jews. This is how it was used in Acts, and I think the reason it was so prevalent (and misused) in Corinth is that the church was next to the synagogue and the church was very, very Jewish in membership. Think this through. In which other churches/letters do you find any teaching about tongues?

V. 22 This is Paul's conclusion and you have to follow his reasoning closely. Notice that Paul says "sign," not "gift."

A sign not for believers seems to mean that unbelievers are *shown* something by this sign. Believers do not have anything revealed to them, so it is not "for" them. In Acts, this "unbelief" took the form of not believing that the gospel was going beyond the Jews. In Acts 10-11, that "unbelief" was demonstrated by Jewish believers of the circumcision party who took Peter to task for visiting a Gentile. The gift of tongues was a sign to them of their unbelief, to show them God's working beyond them and to help them conquer their unbelief. It showed them something. You notice that the gift had a very specialized purpose, because even in talking about "unbelievers," it meant a very specific group of unbelievers and a specific kind of unbelief. The message of redemption was given, for a time, to the Gentiles. The Jews were now hearing the message of redemption that had been theirs to tell, through the stammering lips of Gentiles.

So then, what does it mean that prophecy is *for believers*, showing or revealing something to them?

Vs. 23-25 Hang on to your hats. This will be funny.

V. 23 I thought tongues were supposed to speak to unbelievers. But tongues only speak to a particular kind of unbelief and a particular kind of unbeliever, that is, “unbelievers” who do not believe that the gospel has gone beyond the Jews. Here, the unbelievers, who were probably Gentiles, have no concern about the gospel going out beyond the Jews and are only listening for the message. They say Christians are mad.

V. 25 But now doesn't it seem that the gift of prophecy "spoke" to the unbeliever? Here, an unbeliever falls on the ground, worshipping God (apparently coming to faith in Christ), yet notice that through the work of prophecy bringing life to this person, it **shows or reveals to the church and Christians that God is really among them**. The effect of prophecy in the church is that it leads the church to bear fruit and that is the sign to believers that Christ is among them. Notice the effects of this prophecy on the unbeliever: conviction, called to account, heart disclosed, falls on face (repentance), worships God. But the "sign" is for believers, showing them that they are on the right track, in the harvest, and that God is among them. All of that can happen through "prophetic" preaching.

Notice the word *really*. Can it be that we “think” we have God among us because of the emotion of worship music and because we hold a service, but that He's *really* not there? How do you understand what Paul is saying here? The effect of "prophecy" is changed lives and fruit in the harvest. This seems to be how you know *God is really among you*.

I know this is radical; and, admittedly, it is my take on things. Notice that the only place worship is mentioned in this service is from an unbeliever coming to faith in Christ in the service. Paul apparently thought that the service of the church should be understandable to a lost person. If you follow the definition of prophecy that Paul is using, it is one part revelation and three parts teaching, instruction, and encouragement. I think the last three parts are a part of a particular kind of teaching and preaching that the church still needs.

Vs. 26-33 Notice that there is a slight change here. Up until now, Paul has been teaching about the gifts and the purpose of the service. Now, Paul is directing, giving commands to the leaders on how to arrange the service. These letters were written first to elders, and then to the congregation. In a case like this where Paul is giving orders, we are now reading the part for elders who serve and direct the church. If you catch this change and understand the different tone here, it will make the next section about women more understandable.

V. 26 Notice the parts, and notice the purpose is still edification.

V. 31 This is a way to understand the purpose of prophecy and edification, *that all may learn and all be encouraged*.

V. 32 Following the Spirit is no excuse for disorder. I love this, *the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets*.

Vs. 34-36 Earlier Paul said women could pray or prophesy publicly, if they wore a head covering. So, what is this? Often, people who are ardent for women's rights either disregard these verses or claim Paul is quoting someone in the church. You've read enough of 1 Corinthians to know that when Paul quotes an opponent, it is very clear what he is quoting, and he gives a good, clear answer. As we've seen in chapter 11, the newfound freedom of the Jewish women was, in some cases, taken too far. In chapter 11 it was expressed in not showing submission to their husbands publicly; and here, I think, it is in publicly arguing with and not submitting to the elders of the church.

I believe the difference here is in v. 26. Paul is now speaking to the elders, giving them orders, and talking about leading the church as only the elders are to lead the church. In meetings where elder level decisions are being made and expressed, women were apparently arguing. Paul says if it was a congregational meeting and women were present during these discussions, they were to be silent and subordinate at this level of leadership,

I try to be as broad as I can be without violating what God says, but the last church meeting I was in showed the truth and wisdom behind what Paul is saying here as two vocal women made quite a show. One was a single woman who wasn't a member and whose spiritual maturity was very questionable. The other was an elder's wife who chided her husband (who was leading the meeting) in front of the group. Her contribution was the "cherry on the top" to an already tragic meeting.

I think both here and in 1 Timothy 2, the silence and submission of women is seen in the context of church leadership, specifically, leading the church as elders lead the church. Note that in 1 Timothy 2 after Paul talks about a woman's silence, he immediately talks about elder leadership. The context of the silence here in 1 Corinthians 14 is criticizing and not submitting to the elders' leadership in the church.

Vs. 37-38 Talk about Paul declaring his spiritual authority. This is a command of the Lord. That means it is binding on us too. And if they didn't agree with Paul and couldn't recognize the Lord in what he was saying, Paul said they were not recognized as leaders or as spiritual people. And of course, it wasn't Paul, it was and is the Spirit who is speaking. O Weh!

Vs. 39-40 Paul said not to forbid speaking in tongues, I think, because the gift still did have some validity in their situation next to the synagogue.

Sorry for the teaching here. You don't have to agree with me. If you are feeling choked by all of this, have someone stand behind you, with their arms around you and put their hands together into a big fist just below your sternum. Now have them hug you tight, jump up and pull the fist into your diaphragm when they hit the ground. Better?

Psalm 37:30-40

Vs. 30-31 Notice the connection between the *mouth* and the *heart*. What ultimately is determined are the actions or direction of that person. They are following the Lord.

Vs. 32-33 I think we can agree that this is true in an ultimate sense in reality, and in a general sense on earth. As we are seeing in Job, there are times that the Lord allows His own to suffer. There is love involved and there is the wisdom of God bringing forth His plan of redemption.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:35-37)

V. 34 The first part of this verse is what I want to be content to do, without needing to see the second or third part of this verse in my lifetime.

Vs. 35-36 Understanding of course, that we might not see this in our lifetime.

Vs. 37-38 This is certainly true in the ultimate sense of the kingdom of God. Paul wrote the following verse knowing that his death and departure were near. *The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18)*

Vs. 39-40 This is true of all who know and love the Lord, yet it may be true as we fulfill the Lord's mission for us in dying for His name in the face of mocking unbelief, just as our Lord died. Life doesn't end at death, and our vindication and salvation are ever present.

Reading Job and reading this psalm is interesting. I want to say I know all of this is true, but really I need to trust the Lord, not my expectation of what this justice will look like or when it will come. God and who He is has to be enough.

Proverbs 21:27

Amen.

AUGUST 23

Job 8-11

As you read Job, here are a couple thoughts to consider:

First, what kind of man was Job? Just think, he didn't have the Holy Spirit within him and he didn't have a Bible. Yet, even when God allowed this to happen to him, with his friends brutally accusing him, Job held on to his knowledge of God; and it saved him from ruin. He was definitely "one of a kind" on the earth.

Second, was it OK for God to use Job like this? Remember the death of Stephen and all those people Paul locked up and voted to kill? Those people hadn't sinned either. Was it OK for God to do that? Is it OK for God to use you like that too, and take away all you have to further some purpose of His that you don't understand? Does God somehow become unjust and unfair? Our love for God, our trust in Him and our understanding of our salvation in our Lord is what makes or breaks us on earth.

Job 8

Vs. 1-4 Bildad the Shuhite (shoe-height) was one of those short men of the Bible. The topic of justice is where Job and his friends run off course. They all had the view that things, such as what Job was experiencing, came as the result of sin and God's justice/punishment. Notice this jab at what happened to Job's kids.

Vs. 5-7 Everything here is true, if in fact a person had sinned; but Job hadn't. What is wrong here is that this isn't a statement of spiritual fact. It is an accusation and a call to repentance.

Vs. 8-10 Bildad is telling Job to look at experience on earth over the long years of humanity up to that point.

Vs. 11-19 The idea here is that just as papyrus can't grow without a marsh, no one gets treated like Job without sin being present.

Vs. 20-22 This is both a warning to Job and a call to repentance. This is all good truth; but used like this on the wrong man, it is the hammer of Satan himself, pushing Job toward doubt, anger and self-loathing.

Job 9

Vs. 1-2 Job uses the words of Eliphaz's vision about a man being righteous in the sight of God. Job wants to know how you might appeal God's "judgment." He was now assuming that God had judged him.

Vs. 3-10 Job knew that he wouldn't be able to answer back to God because of God's wisdom, though he was only thinking of God's "wisdom" as in knowing Job's deepest sins. What is so interesting in all of what Job says is that he is only inches from the truth. He understood God's wisdom in creation. When God speaks to Job in the last chapters, He will use much of what Job

says here to correct Job. Job doesn't understand that "bad things" do not mean he sinned. Job doesn't understand that in His wisdom, love and purpose, God can bring hardship into our lives without being unfair and unjust.

Vs. 11-12 Job knew of God's authority and that he wouldn't be allowed to speak back to God.

Vs. 13-21 Job says many times that he is innocent, but he knows that if God wanted to find something, He would. Job didn't understand forgiveness. All he can think is that his situation is a result of God holding on to a grudge regarding Job's sin.

In reading this I got a twinge of what Paul says in Romans 9:20, *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?* I'd bet that Paul knew these verses in Job.

Vs. 22-24 This is where Job steps out of bounds. He accuses God of destroying the blameless and the wicked in judgment. Job is right in that he was blameless. He was wrong in assuming God had judged him. Although Job didn't see the bigger picture we saw in chapter 1, it still was a matter of trust. In a sense, the fact that his friends were judging him, and accusing Job of sin, pushed Job in this direction. Job hadn't cursed God, but now he was showing the limits of his understanding and trust of God. Job was accusing God of injustice. Job should have known that God could not pervert justice, and it should have led him to silence.

V. 23 These are hard words against God. Remember that Job had lost all of his children at one time. He is still mourning.

Vs. 25-35 Job thought again that he would die soon and there was no way to find justice on earth before God. The fact that he was in so much pain and misery made it impossible to cleanse himself or speak to God.

Job 10

Vs. 1-7 Here Job's understanding of God has fully run aground. God wasn't contending against him. It is interesting to think that Job's friends pushed him to this. It is also interesting that God knew that Job and his friends had this enormous misunderstanding of His ways. God is teaching and allowing them to show their hearts and the flaws in their understanding. So, why is God showing US all of this?

Vs. 8-12 Job understood God's part in the making of men and in showing men love and mercy, but then why was God suddenly destroying Job and forgetting that love that He had shown Job?

Vs. 13-17 This is like accusing God of having always been waiting for Job to slip.

Vs. 18-22 What is interesting is that even though Job had a limited understanding of God's goodness and justice, he held it so tightly, that even in this tragedy, it really kept Job out of trouble. Somehow he never doubted his innocence or God's just, loving character. He just couldn't put it all together. Could we have done any better even though we know more than Job did and we have the Spirit?

Job 11

Vs. 1-7 Zophar (literally, friend) gets unfriendly and totally nasty with Job. In fact, all of his friends will get meaner and meaner as they desperately try to "save" him.

Vs. 8-12 This is so close to what God will say later about His wisdom, but this is totally directed toward God's wisdom in seeing and punishing Job's sin. Verses 11 and 12 are cruel attacks on Job.

Vs. 13-20 This is another version of "turn to God and He will turn to you," except that Job hadn't turned away from God. I suppose Zophar was trying to show he really loved Job after he just said Job was dumber than a donkey. Nice guy.

1 Corinthians 15:1-28

There is a lot of great stuff in these verses. Enjoy.

Vs. 1-2 This message was being called into doubt, but Paul showed that it had worked on them.

Vs. 3-7 The message was linked to the resurrection, and the resurrection was a broadly known fact for which there were many, many witnesses.

Vs. 8-11 This might show that it may have been a point of contention that Paul wasn't one of the original Twelve. Here Paul defends himself a little. He will defend himself a lot in 2 Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians we'll see more clearly that Paul was being put down by others in Corinth as a 2nd rate apostle.

Notice the "tension" of Paul's working: it was God's grace, but Paul worked hard. The Spirit wrote these words, saying that Paul worked harder than, literally, "all" of them. Yet, it was the grace of God working in Paul. There is a reason why most of Acts is about God's work through Paul, and why God used Paul to write most of the New Testament letters; but it's God's working, not Paul's. Paul understood that God both enabled and drove him.

The point in this section is the final verse, *Whether then it was I or THEY, so WE preach and so you believed.*

Vs. 12-19 As I suggested earlier in the letter, Paul wrote with emotion and I think there is some emotion here. And, the logic is very tight. If you have some time, try reading this chapter out loud a few times. This is a great portion of Scripture. Verse 19 is very powerful. Even unbelievers understand the truth in this confession that if believing in Jesus is just for this life, it is a waste of time. The resurrection, the close of the age, and the fulfilling of the plan of redemption are always linked together and they are always in view.

Vs. 20-28 Notice that there is no mention of Satan here. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Paul will talk about death's defeat one more time in this passage. One interesting note is that when Jesus talks about the church, He says, *the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.* The gates of Hell were looked at as the entrance to death, not the office building of the bad angels. The gates of Hell were like the "broad gate" to destruction, or like an open mouth ready to devour those who had died. Obviously it preaches better if those gates are the military headquarters of the enemy; but in the resurrection, *Death is swallowed up in victory* (1 Cor. 15:54b). What to do? Preach both.

Isn't it interesting how the plan of redemption, the close of this age, and the resurrection are all linked together? Everything in our lives in Christ is focused on those coming events. We can never lose sight of the harvest, because it is the field of this life. How can we ignore it? Yet, many believers do. Among the people we are trying to reach in the harvest, the fear of death reigns. The promise in Christ is life. Hebrews 2:15 - *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

Psalm 38

Vs. 1-11 Doesn't this sound like Job? This was David's experience and was the true result of his sin. It might have been because of his lying that resulted in a town and family of priests being slaughtered, or it could have been his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. David's guilt was real and deserved. Reading this, you can see that what Job's friends were saying was biblical, but horribly misapplied to Job.

V. 12 As a result, people were waiting for David to fall.

Vs. 13-14 Unlike Job, David was quiet in his suffering. He was broken because his punishment was just. Job kept talking, egged on by his friends, because he thought God was being unfair.

Once David confessed his sins, he was forgiven and knew to be silent before God in the face of the accusations of his enemies.

Vs. 15-16 Still, David knew of God's heart and faithfulness. And, God had made promises to David.

Vs. 17-20 In spite of David's brokenness and confession, his enemies only wanted his ruin - not justice or reconciliation.

Vs. 21-22 David's plea to God was based on what David had learned of God's love and faithfulness.

Since we are not Job, we need psalms like this to encourage us to confess our sin and trust God for His forgiveness and love.

Proverbs 21:28-29

V. 28 I guess this not only means that false witnesses die with their lies and that truth endures, but it also speaks of the legacy of these two men in the lives of others.

V. 29 Again, the idea here is truth. The upright doesn't need to do stuff or live in a way where he has to pretend that things are other than they are.

AUGUST 24

Job 12-15

There are tons of things you can see in these chapters: individual truths, Job's rebuttal of his friends, Job's pain. It's all here. I'll highlight a few things that stand out to me.

Job 12

Vs. 1-3 Job is saying that everyone knows what his friends are saying, but in Job's case it is misapplied. Notice that v. 2 looks like 1 Corinthians 14:36.

Vs. 4-6 These verses show that the depth of Job's suffering just keeps on going, deeper and deeper, every day. The verses also show a secondary effect to Job's suffering. Others were not only mocking Job; they were laughing at everyone who sought to live to honor God. Verse 5 is true of all of us, and we need to beware. I am one of those who, when I hear of someone's misfortune, think, "What did they do to bring this on themselves?" God is showing us in the book of Job that while this thought might be natural to think, it is not always true.

Vs. 7-12 This is interesting. It is no accident that Job argues from nature now, and God will use this argument against him later. Job is saying that nature will confess that it is the God of creation who is doing this to Job. Job could see that God Himself was ultimately responsible. But God will show that His wisdom in creation should have taught Job to trust God when he didn't understand God.

Vs. 13-25 Notice that after the affirmation of v. 13, Job lists what God does. Underline or circle every use of *he* that you find. While Job is kind of right in all of this, because of his misunderstanding of God, he puts a dark twist on everything. God may allow the death of the righteous, but as God says in Psalm 116:15, *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.*

Job 13

Vs. 1-2 Job is referring back to 12:1-3.

Vs. 3-12 After being verbally beaten by his friends, Job thinks he would rather talk to God and plead his case. Job understands that his friends have spoken falsely of God and he's warning

them that God won't be happy. At the end of Job, God will be mad at them and say that while they spoke falsely, Job spoke the truth.

Vs. 13-19 It would appear that God allowed Job's friends to abuse him to get Job to the place of wanting to stand in God's presence and declare his case. These verses show how strongly Job loved God and could not let what was happening to him defeat what he had trusted in all of his life. Verse 15 is this undying confidence in the love and truth of God. What a guy.

Vs. 20-22 So that Job could speak with God, Job would like two things.

Vs. 23-28 It is no news to Job that he is a sinner, but he knows that what is happening to him doesn't "fit" the love and devotion he has for God. Why would God do something like this to him? Job's relationship to God made sense up to this point. The silence isn't something Job understands.

Job 14

Vs. 1-6 One of Job's thoughts here is that since all people are born in sin and sin is our natural state, the violence being done to Job is unusual and not because of inborn sin. Verse 5 also says that there is a time when life on earth ends.

Vs. 7-17 It appears that Job is saying that his only vindication would be on earth. In the cases of things that get cut and grow back, a person's life is not like that. Once we leave the earth, we are gone. Job was afraid that God's wrath would bring him to death and he wouldn't be able to grow again once God saw he was innocent.

V. 13 This looks like Job understood something about death and resurrection. Most places in this chapter Job is speaking of dying, as being removed from life on the earth. Here it seems he knows where you wait after you die, and that eventually you will be raised (remembered) by God. But it doesn't seem like Job knew that the new life would be bigger and better than the first.

Vs. 18-22 Here Job falls back into hopelessness. God is relentless and destroys the hope of man. That is Job's pain and grief speaking. Verse 22 shows what he was feeling with every breath.

Job 15

The bell rings. This begins round 2. Eliphaz enters the ring.

Vs. 2-13 Notice that these comforters have now completely lost their cool.

Vs. 4-5 They were right in sensing that Job was accusing God, but then, they had incited Job.

Vs. 7-8 This is exactly what God will say, but they are wrong in saying this, since Job was not being punished for any wrongdoing. It probably would have been good for all parties to have stopped talking, but then, we wouldn't have the book of Job.

Vs. 14-16 These are the words of Satan from Eliphaz's vision in chapter 4.

Vs. 17-35 This now is a very one-dimensional view of how God treats the wicked. This will also get Eliphaz & Co. in trouble. God doesn't always pay on Friday and judge those who rebel against Him immediately. God did the same to Pharaoh; He allowed Pharaoh to become great so that He could use Him for His glory. God humbled Pharaoh in the sight of all nations, but some rebels go to the grave with their pride. The first twinge of humility they feel is when they stand before God and realize they had lived in lies and committed a huge, irredeemable mistake.

In our reading today, Job spoke about God's wisdom and power and then applied this rather darkly to God, who capriciously raises up and puts down. This is what Job felt had happened to him in losing everything. Job couldn't yet see that God's actions are motivated by more than punishment for sin and blessing for obedience. While God's works are always done in justice and

wisdom and love, it doesn't mean that we'll understand what He does or understand what He allows to happen to us. We know that God is working every day to redeem men and women on this planet; and everything He does works toward that, whether we understand His wisdom or not. Because of Jesus, we understand God's love and wisdom and His constant work in the harvest of mankind. In fact, read Isaiah 53, and you'll see how some of what happened to Jesus sounds like Job. Through God's Word and through Jesus, the love of God incarnate, we know Him and we know we can praise Him in circumstances we don't understand. He is enough and we can bless His name.

1 Corinthians 15:29-58

Vs. 29-34 Paul/the Spirit uses a couple of "common sense" arguments, and then Paul really rebukes the Corinthians. The resurrection is a "red letter" doctrine and not something to be ignorant about. If you read this out loud you can feel Paul in this passage.

V. 29 This is an argument from general human consciousness. Almost everyone, even an unbeliever, thinks there is an "after life." Pagans even had rites for the dead, believing they were alive in another world. This would also be like saying that the demonic exists, as evidenced in the unbelieving public's interest in the occult and horror movies. They may be unbelieving, but they still sense that these forces exist.

Ironically, some people in this church didn't get what unbelievers knew to be true. The dead are raised.

Vs. 30-32 The resurrection makes the gospel absolute. The resurrection not only means life for those who know Christ, but it also means judgment for those who don't because every person must bow to Christ. It makes Jesus the only Savior and the only saving message on the planet. This is what put Paul in danger. If there were no resurrection, Christianity would only be teaching about morality. Our gospel is a universal, irresistible, global reality. When Paul spoke of the resurrection and all that is inherent in the resurrection, it made his message one that called for a decision, not simply benign assent.

V. 32 is actually a quote from Isaiah 22:13. Maybe that's where the Epicureans got it. It means the same thing in both cases. If there is no resurrection and life with God, there is no judgment, there is no basis for morality, there is no necessity and there is no point.

Vs. 33-34 This is a very stinging rebuke to this super church with all the gifts. They had people among them who were either unsaved or incredibly spiritually immature, and the Corinthians were OK with that.

Vs. 35-41 Oops! So much for "there's no stupid question." Actually, it is sort of the way God answers Job at the end of the book.

Vs. 42-50 This is not only great teaching on the resurrection; it is our hope. Isn't it amazing to think that our resurrected body will be infinitely better than our physical bodies? I'm looking forward to those "six pack" abs, but even more, I'm looking forward to fully bearing the image of Christ. I'm working toward both now, but looking forward to the certainty of that day.

Vs. 51-57 More great Scripture.

V. 51 belongs in every church nursery.

Basically this is saying that the only exception to the process of death and resurrection will be those who are present when Christ returns before the Tribulation to take the church. *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the **dead in Christ** will rise first.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16) In taking those of the church who are alive on the planet at that moment, there will be an

instant translation of the body from physical to spiritual. This also means that at the rapture, all who have died in Christ, from the death of Jesus until that time, will be raised.

At the end of the Tribulation when Jesus comes, all the righteous dead (from Adam to John the Baptist) will be raised. His angels will gather those believers living on the earth, but those believers will not be changed. They will live on earth with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom.

V. 57 Our victory is in Christ. The powers of death (gates of Hell) cannot defeat us.

V. 58 So then, we should be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Christ in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 39

What a great psalm.

Vs. 1-3 This looks like a very weary David struggling to wait on the Lord.

Vs. 4-6 Just like Moses in Psalm 90, *teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom*. Understanding our place in life, on this earth, in this time, should make us focused in following Christ in the harvest.

Vs. 7-11 Our hope is in Christ.

Vs. 12-13 A cry for restoration.

Proverbs 21:30-31

Amen.

AUGUST 25

Time to celebrate! Today we are almost half way through Job and we'll finish 1 Corinthians. And, there are only 123 shopping days left until Christmas! Get a *Frappuccino*® (or the local equivalent of something you like) and go nuts.

Job 16-19

I really wonder if Job would have said some of this if his friends hadn't accused him and urged him on. It seems to me that Job's friends were the greatest challenge that Satan threw at him. In defense of his friends, they had been mobilized by a lying vision and so they thought they were on a mission. But, if they had known God as deeply as Job did, they would have known, too, that Job wasn't guilty and that something else was going on. In that case, their only recourse would have been to comfort Job and strengthen him until God spoke.

Job 16

Vs. 1-5 The irony of how they were treating Job is that he was a champion of the weak and knew how to encourage them. Job would have treated them with kindness.

Vs. 6-11 It isn't God who is wearing out Job; it is Job's friends. But wait, the fact that God is allowing this means that God is involved. But, for what purpose? We shall see.

V. 9 Job is suffering in pain and grief; and now he has Moe, Larry and Curly entertaining him, so we should go easy on him. Still, he is wrongly accusing God of motives like hate. Job clearly had something to learn.

Vs. 12-17 Job was wrong to accuse God of all of this.

V. 17 sounds like Isaiah 53:9.

Vs. 18-19 These verses hint at Job holding some knowledge of God that told him there was still hope.

Vs. 20-22 Job really wanted to talk with God. It may have been too, that he didn't want to be shamed in the sight of others, since he had put so much hope in God and spoken of Him to others.

Job 17

Vs. 1-2 Not only was his spirit broken, but now Job felt he might not recover from the poison of his friends.

Vs. 3-5 It sounds like Job wanted God to make a pledge for him, because now that God had brought this event into his life, no one else would.

Vs. 6-10 Notice the reaction of the righteous to Job. They know that Job is innocent and are appalled that this could happen. Still, they hold to their faith and trust in God. Job's friends, on the other hand, should be warned. Verse 10 is like Job saying to them, "put up your dukes."

Vs. 11-16 After Job's burst of energy, he seems to fall back into despair.

Job 18

This is like tag-team wrestling, except Job is alone and there are three of them fighting against Job. Now Bildad enters the ring. If you look at what Bildad says, he is basically saying, "This is what happens to the wicked. Oh look, it just happened to you. Any questions?"

Vs. 1-4 Can you believe that Job had a friend like this? Here Job is in his grief, scraping pus out of his boils, and Bildad decides that Job needs a good beating.

Vs. 5-21 In this description of how the wicked are going to get it, he is describing Job in somewhat veiled terms.

Job 19

This is a very strong chapter.

Vs. 1-6 They were destroying Job with their misapplied righteousness. Job is basically saying that if he has sinned, it is between him and God and they should let him alone.

Vs. 7-12 Job is crying for their compassion, but all they see is that Job must have sinned. In v. 11 Job is overstepping his bounds, but this is out of his grief and agony. I think God understood.

Vs. 13-19 Can you imagine this? Everyone was condemning Job because of what had happened to him: everyone he had helped, his family, the entire community. That is a lot of rejection to throw on top of a very high mountain of grief and pain.

Vs. 20-22 What a sincere cry for help and compassion.

Vs. 23-29 Job doesn't understand what has happened to him, but there is something he knows because of knowing God. He knows that there will be a fair, final judgment; and in that judgment, he will be vindicated.

Vs. 28-29 Job knows his friends will be judged for what they are doing.

Reading this reminds me of Paul's words in Ephesians 5:15-16, *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* As disciples in the harvest, the easiest way Satan can stop us is to get our eyes on ourselves, our needs, our rights and what we deserve. What we know because God has saved us lifts us above all of that. The Word shows that this world is dying, that God's love is enduring, and that now is the time to work and sacrifice. We are loved beyond reason and left here to work with the Lord

to make disciples of those He died for. It is no news to us that this life is full of danger, and it shouldn't shake our confidence in the Lord if He uses us as an example to the world, to angels and to men. We need to keep alert to His working. His love never fails. I think this is why we have the book of Job.

1 Corinthians 16

Vs. 1-4 Notice that Paul says this is the same thing he directed the churches in Galatia to do. We've seen this reminder to the Corinthians ever since the first chapter. Paul tells the Corinthians that he is giving them the same teaching and directives that he gives everywhere in every church.

This "encouragement" for them to help the church in Jerusalem will continue into 2 Corinthians and be complete when Paul writes Romans, which is actually written from Corinth just before Paul headed to Jerusalem with this gift.

Vs. 5-14 I think these verses comprise a unit, because the Corinthians needed help now, but the help they thought they needed wasn't available.

Vs. 5-9 Paul was coming, but the Lord had him busy in Ephesus. Notice the *wide door* and *many adversaries*. The fruit that the Lord provided drove Paul on even in the face of danger. Paul saw suffering as an indication that he was near the battlefield and important matters were being decided. We see this in Job.

Vs. 10-11 Timothy was probably returning with the letter, but it is clear from I Timothy 4, that some people didn't respect him. Timothy would probably have been a help to those who were really following Christ, but not to the critics.

V. 12 Apollos wasn't in a hurry to visit Corinth, that high maintenance church.

Vs. 13-14 Therefore Paul told them to stand strong in the Lord. Notice all of the advice. This sounds like what Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:58, in the reading from yesterday, and in the verses above, from Ephesians 5:15-16. This is how we should live every day.

Vs. 15-18 And Paul told them to look to the servants/leaders among them. Stephanas and his family had devoted themselves to the service of the saints. They might not have been "super" apostles, but they were worth following. Paul urged them to receive these servants as leaders and to give them the recognition of the church. Notice that Paul talked about people being recognized or not recognized at the end of chapter 14. I was reading this morning of Jesus teaching His disciples that the humble servant would be the greatest among them. Looking at Corinth, I don't think they were looking for that kind of leader. Second Corinthians will show that they enjoyed the forceful kind. I think this is why Timothy was scorned and why they didn't appear to value Stephanas.

Vs. 19-20 The Corinthians should have valued the greeting of *Aquila and Prisca*. Apparently they loved this couple.

Vs. 21-24 This is one of Paul's stronger endings. Notice the mention of any who do not love the Lord being accursed.

So what does it mean to love the Lord? We all love Jesus. Right? I think it would be better to define love as doing what Jesus said to do (John 14:21-23, John 15:8-10): following Him in the harvest, reaching out to the lost, making disciples, who make disciples. As shown in this letter, the church can be full of people who do church and use their gifts for themselves, yet don't really love their Lord. Jesus Himself said that not everyone who calls Him Lord will enter the kingdom of Heaven. The safest way to follow Jesus and show that we love Him is to obey Him in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. Had the Corinthians obeyed Jesus like that, many of their malfunctions would never have been.

Psalm 40:1-10

Another wonderful psalm. This is the first year that I've felt the connection between reading Job and reading these psalms.

Vs. 1-3 This was not only David's experience, but it became Job's experience too. Waiting on the Lord is worth it and out of it you get *a new song* and a heart of praise.

V. 4 This is the blessing of those like Job who hold to what they know is true about God.

V. 5 This is what David discovered by waiting for the Lord, and it is also what Job discovered.

Vs. 6-8 Even in 1 Corinthians we saw something like this. The people were doing church things, but the love of God was not within their hearts. They didn't delight to follow the Lord as their spiritual father Paul did.

Vs. 9-10 David gave great testimony to the Lord and His deliverance. The book of Job is testimony. And just reading Paul share his heart with the Corinthians is an amazing testimony of God's works and grace in working His plan of redemption.

Proverbs 22:1

Maybe this is the same as saying that being approved by God is the best thing on this planet.

AUGUST 26

Job 20-22

As I read this again today, it reminded me how some of the stuff Job's friends say is really good. The last part of what Eliphaz says in chapter 22 reads like a psalm. But what are we learning here? Life on earth is not heaven on earth. The global, spiritual, and earthly drama is deadly. In the plan of redemption and purpose of God, He works in complete love and justice and wisdom. We don't see that, but that doesn't change Him. In His plan, He didn't even spare His Son. If it is His will for His purpose to lead us to be *killed all the day long* (Rom. 8:36), that should be OK; because it is offset by another reality. As Paul says in Romans 8:31-32, *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?*

Job 20

Vs. 1-19 Zophar is determined that the wicked never win on earth. As he describes their demise and their crimes, he is probing to see if he can touch a nerve with Job. I'm sure he is trying to mention things that Job had done. Nice guy.

Vs. 20-29 Interestingly, this wicked man is rich, just like Job. What a coincidence. Not only that, God's judgment on this man is revealed in physical agony. Hmmm.

Because Job's friends are so black and white about God's justice, it will force Job to consider if God really does judge like that on earth. The answer will stretch all of them. The reason why God prospers the wicked and allows the suffering of the righteous on earth all has to do with the harvest. In heaven there is pure and simple justice.

Job 21

Vs. 1-7 This is Job being very dark in his words. Although justice will be executed by God, that doesn't mean it happens on the earth. Job is telling them to really look around instead of just spouting religious baloney.

V. 5 The key here is that Job is righteous, and look what happened to him. If the only things that matter in the world are blessing and justice, then they should *be appalled* at what happened to Job.

V. 7 What Job said here made me think of what Paul said in Romans 9:17, *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."*

Job asked "Why?" In God's redemptive purpose He allows the ungodly to prosper for His reasons. Surely one of the reasons God allowed William Randolph Hearst to have the influence he had was to tell his reporters to "puff Graham" (give big exposure) during a crusade in 1949. The media exposure helped propel Billy and his crusades onto the front page and into the front rooms of America. That example is visible and obvious. There are millions of examples happening around us where God allows those who hate Him to prosper, but He is using them for His ultimate purpose. And in His wisdom and power, God is able to do this with perfect righteousness, justice and love, honoring our free will to whatever degree that free will exists.

Vs. 8-13 God allows them to have pleasure.

Vs. 14-16 God allows them to disrespect Him.

Vs. 17-26 God allows things to look unfair.

Vs. 27-34 Job says their words are empty and false, I think, because of the extreme exaggeration. They were exaggerating to try to show Job that he was a sinner. In v. 31 Job says that his friends had the boldness to say this against him, but not the boldness to say this against those to whom it might really apply.

Job 22

This begins round 3.

Vs. 1-4 Here we go again. Eliphaz is sure that God only makes bad things happen if there is sin. Bad things happened; therefore, Job sinned.

Vs. 5-9 is Eliphaz just guessing as to what Job might have done. There is good truth in much of what he says, but he is completely wrong about Job. These blind accusations were criminal. And we know Job is innocent.

Vs. 10-11 Therefore, Eliphaz is saying, it has happened to you.

Vs. 12-20 Here, he is using some of Job's words against him. No one hides from God, and no one tells God to depart from them. The cruelty of these guys is beyond belief. Now, after thinking he has jolted Job by verbally beating him, it is time for some love.

Vs. 21-30 This would have given Job hope if this destruction in his life had been because of sin; but because there was no sin, these words would only hurt Job instead of heal him.

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Paul was no stranger to suffering. In fact, when Jesus called Paul He said to Ananias in Acts 9:15-16, *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."* A lot of Paul's deep suffering came from believers, and particularly from this church.

Corinth was a trial for Paul. Not only did Paul speak strongly in 1 Corinthians, but he will speak strongly here too, though only at the end. In both letters he had to defend himself; in fact, some say that 2 Corinthians is nothing but Paul having to defend himself, not for his sake, but to correct and balance the church. No other church that we know of received this many letters.

According to what we find in both letters, there were actually four letters written and two were lost. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul mentions a letter he had written, and then came the writing of 1 Corinthians. Later Paul wrote a letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:2-3 which was very strong, and got lost, and now he is writing 2 Corinthians. This was a high maintenance church. This is the only church where Jesus appeared to Paul to encourage him to persevere.

But, like Job, as a result of the problems and Paul's suffering, we get some amazing teaching and we see into the heart of this model disciple following Christ in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. Just like Job's confrontation with his friends, much of what Paul expresses here from his heart would never have been put on paper if he hadn't suffered emotionally because of these people. God had a purpose for Paul and for the Corinthians and for us in what happened here. Basically in chapters 1-9, Paul shares how God has soothed him and made sense of this in his heart. It is like Paul explaining how God has helped him. Chapters 10-13 are Paul taking up the challenge against him by the Jewish super-apostles who were ruining Corinth.

How do you start a letter of correction? Paul begins by focusing on how this entire trauma made sense to Paul. God was working in him, molding him through suffering and adversity to make him a minister for Christ and a blessing for others.

Vs. 1-2 Paul was an apostle *by the will of God*, not by the consensus of others. The calling and love of Christ wouldn't let him quit.

Vs. 3-7 Job couldn't yet see that his sufferings were going to be used by God to encourage many generations of men and women. Paul was experiencing this as it was happening, and unlike Job, was given spiritual insight into why God was allowing the suffering to happen. As disciples, nothing happens to us that is random. The Father prunes us, not because of disobedience, but so we will be more fruitful. In Paul's case, the suffering was not just a part of following Christ, it was making him more skilled in following Christ and nurturing disciples. In fact, the suffering that Paul had endured had newly quieted his heart and was tempering the tone of this letter.

Vs. 8-11 This might have been the horrible night of shouting in Ephesus in Acts 19. The effect was that they thought they would die. In addition to this fun, Paul was deeply worried for the church in Corinth. Apparently he had made a quick unplanned visit to Corinth after sending 1 Corinthians, and that meeting must have been a fight and very upsetting. So he sent them a very strong letter via Titus (a letter written after 1 Corinthians, but was later lost), and then he was terribly worried about the response of the church. Oh, and did I mention he thought he was going to die?

Somehow we get the idea that if we are really, really, really mature in Christ we won't get stressed and we will never enter into conflict. I always think of Paul here, the guy who had been in the third heaven, getting rattled in the danger and heat of the moment, thinking he would surely die. But even in that emotion and fear, God used it to teach Paul what we're reading here, equipping us for the harvest. There was no way to burn this on Paul's heart except to take him through the furnace of adversity. Reading books and attending seminary classes only go so far. And we are no exception. The Father will prune us to be fruitful, and even more fruitful, for the harvest and making disciples.

Psalm 40:11-17

You feel David's desperation in this psalm. Reading this psalm along with Job and Paul gives you a sense of the weight of needing God and His help. You sense the hope and understanding of eventual victory, but David was straining under the present weight of danger. In this danger you see the weakness of the body of death in its despair, its fear, its loneliness, and its desire to run and seek immediate comfort and security. That is us too, even as disciples.

Vs. 11-12 We went from the victorious tone of the last verses to this desperate cry. David was fearful of the imminent danger, and he was struggling with a losing heart.

Vs. 13-15 David didn't just want deliverance and vindication; he wanted the Lord to take pleasure in saving those who wait on Him.

Vs. 16-17 David hoped that this deliverance would be a source of rejoicing and confidence for all who witnessed it, yet the work that God was doing in David's heart and life had brought him to the place of humility and need. The Father was pruning him.

Proverbs 22:2-4

We're OK up until v. 4. How do we understand this? I would understand this with Jesus' words about our treasure being in heaven and living here, serving in humility. Paul had riches, honor, and life in Christ, though as he told the Corinthians, *To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless...* Working in the harvest makes you rich in the closeness of Christ and the blessings of the gospel.

AUGUST 27

Job 23-27

What is kind of interesting to see is that as a result of this conflict with his friends, Job is getting clearer in his thinking. It's almost like he is coming closer to understanding God in what is happening to him. When God makes His statements to Job at the end, some of what He says sounds like some of what Job is beginning to say. This is all to suggest that there is even wisdom in God allowing these friends to misunderstand Job the way they did. When God finally speaks, Job has almost come to the place of solving the mystery for himself.

Job 23

Vs. 1-7 In spite of his suffering, Job is very positive about the reception he would have from God. Job is confident that if he were to present his case to God, he would be acquitted. He is right in that, but wrong in the reason for this trial.

Vs. 8-12 Job couldn't see God, but he knew God could see him. And Job himself was confident that he had not strayed from God and that God knew it. It is interesting that Job felt that if tried by God, God would pronounce him "pure" *as gold*. He didn't consider that God was trying him to drive out impurities (not sins) in his thinking, so that Job would be refined and become as pure as gold.

Vs. 13-17 Though some light is breaking through here, Job still considers God to be hard and mad at him.

Job 24

Vs. 1-9 This is what the wicked do to others. Job knows the wicked will be judged. But this entire ordeal has made him wonder why God delays. The answer to this will be the same answer as to why Job is suffering: Trust in God's wisdom and goodness.

Vs. 10-12 As a result of the way the wicked treat the poor, this is what happens to the poor. Verse 12 is a pretty strong statement by Job, but it makes more sense if you understand him as saying that God doesn't execute judgment immediately.

Vs. 13-17 This is still the mystery of how the Lord works with the wicked. It seems that everything they plan works out for them, but having read Esther, we know that isn't true. And, eighty years on this planet is less than a scratch on the timeline of eternity.

Vs. 18-20 Job is quoting his friends and their black and white idea of God's judgment.

Vs. 21-25 So, why does God allow this at all? Job seems to be beginning to understand that that mystery is tied together with his own mystery. Verse 25 is a challenge to his friends to prove him wrong. Obviously they can't, and with that, they are running out of ways to beat Job.

Job 25

Bildad gives the best speech of all the friends because it is not only the shortest speech, but also because it is their final speech.

Vs. 1- 6 Notice that what he says here, and what all Job's friends have said, is hinged on these words which they heard from a spirit. Actually, the words and vision from Satan confirmed what they already believed. They believed in total depravity from conception on. But the full truth is more than that. As we saw in the garden when Satan spoke with Eve, he dealt in lies that were framed in half-truths. The minute God promised Adam and Eve that one of their offspring would crush the serpent's head, God was declaring there was a way for man to stand righteously before Him. Knowing God through His Word and through the love of Christ, we have the correct answer. Job knew that a future righteousness existed in the promise of God to Adam and to Noah and he held to this in his heart because he knew God.

V. 6 There is no reason for us to be proud, but I'm not sure that this kind of self-effacement is honoring to God either. We need to see ourselves in Christ.

Job 26

From here to chapter 31 are Job's closing words of argument. This part of Job's argument seems to show that God's power and ways are deeper than our understanding. That will be good for Job to remember in a few chapters.

Vs. 1-4 It seems that Job is showing them that they have helped no one by what they have said. Even though it was God who gave them breath, whose breath actually came out of their mouths?

Vs. 5-14 As Job described God's ways and showed his accusers that he knew a lot about God, Job failed to apply God's wisdom to his own situation. In describing God's power like this, Job was not giving God the trust He deserved. His power is irresistible and beyond our understanding, but His character of love doesn't change.

Vs. 13 and 14 continue the theme of God's breath, by mentioning both wind and whisper.

Job 27

Vs. 1-6 Job still thought he got a raw deal from God. Notice that the theme of breath from 26:4 is still being developed. Job said that as long as he had breath, he would continue to follow God in integrity and hold to his own innocence.

Vs. 7-10 This is a warning to his friends. They accused him of being wicked; now Job says that their behavior toward him defined them as being wicked.

Notice *will* in vs. 9-10. Job is defining a godly person. He cries to God, delights in the Almighty and calls upon God at all times. That is a very interesting definition of the righteous, virtually hidden in the text.

Vs. 11-12 Now Job will tell them about the wicked.

Vs. 13-23 But Job acknowledges that the wicked eventually are judged. He just doesn't include himself with the wicked. He is still thinking along the old lines: "The wicked get judged, the righteous get blessed. I'm righteous and have incurred judgment, so God made a mistake." God will correct this wrong thinking in a few chapters.

As we think of our work in the harvest, we need to remember that there is judgment coming for all who do not turn to Christ as their Savior. While God is showing us something important

behind the events of Job's life and the pruning He is doing in Job's life, the storm of God's judgment is on the horizon of the field of harvest. We need to submit to our Lord and follow Him, making disciples, who make disciples.

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:11

2 Corinthians 1:12-24

V. 12 Paul is gently defending himself here. His mention of conscience, simplicity, sincerity, etc., shows that he's dealing with criticism. Notice that the mention of *earthly wisdom* is sort of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1.

Vs. 13-14 Paul had no hidden agenda or ulterior motives as he worked in the harvest. Especially in the case of Corinth, he didn't allow them to help him financially. It must have been apparent that they didn't trust him. In accepting the message that Paul brought; however, they acknowledged Paul as a servant of Christ. Paul hoped that when they were glorified before Christ, that they would be proud of knowing Paul as the servant the Lord sent to them.

Vs. 15-24 What you notice in this section is Paul's outpouring of heart to show the Corinthians that he loved them and was working for their good. This will be typical of the letter up to chapter 9. This gentleness and expression of how God soothed Paul's own heart will explain some of his digressions. It is sad that Paul had to live under this tension and suspicion, but as a result God tempered his heart; and we have this letter and what Paul taught about the Lord and leading His people.

V. 17 I think the best way to understand this is as follows. At the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul mentioned that neither he nor Apollos would be able to visit them. The Corinthians apparently had deep issues that needed an authority figure. It seems that Paul made an unplanned visit to Corinth, and it was a real showdown with a group or an individual. Whatever it was, it was hard. He planned to go again; but instead of risking another confrontation, he decided to send a very strong letter suggesting that the church or churches of Corinth should follow the Lord and exercise discipline. The fact that Paul decided to forgo this second visit was used by his critics to show that Paul was insincere.

Vs. 18-22 Paul is motivated by the glory of God and the work of Christ, not politics. His only interest was in their growth in Christ. Instead of looking at people and motives, they needed to look at the "non-vacillating" effect of the power of Christ among them. They came to know Christ who fulfills all of the promises of God. Not only did they find the power and working of Christ, Paul pointed to the faithful workers of God among them. They should have felt honored because of the heartfelt love of men like Silvanus, Timothy, Paul and others. God would faithfully continue working with them, and they should have been thankful for all the effort being made on their behalf. Both Paul's conscience and God bore witness to Paul's sincere intentions and pure handling of this matter.

Vs. 23-24 Do you see how Paul was trying to answer their suspicions and still express his love? Paul didn't "lord it over them," but worked with them, even taking their immaturity into account.

2 Corinthians 2:1-11

V. 1 After sending 1 Corinthians, Paul made an unplanned visit; and it was a hard one.

Vs. 2-4 Apparently Paul found his "soft side." Actually, what you see is Paul letting them into his reasoning and his heart in making these decisions. These aren't "rabbit trails," but instead he is opening up to show them the process of his thinking. He is trying to describe the influence of his affection for them in making these decisions. Verse 4 is very strong and passionate. I don't think the super-apostles had this same heart for the people.

Vs. 5-11 It seems likely that this letter was sent to reprimand someone who was creating dissension against his authority. This guy and Paul probably had it out. Rather than Paul going back to confront this person, he wrote the letter to tell the church to correct this man before Paul returned. This action showed their spiritual maturity in standing for Paul and following the Word. Paul reminded the church to show love and forgiveness to this repentant person.

Just as side note here, look at these things that Paul wrote regarding conflict in the church.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 - *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

And the following was actually written from Corinth when Paul made his scheduled visit over the winter. *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.* (Romans 16:17)

I once spoke to a member of a search committee who expressed a major problem with someone on the church's board. My advice to him was to take care of the problem before they hired a pastor. It amazes me that some groups that have problems won't deal with them but expect someone totally new and unsuspecting to move his family, relocate, enter a situation, and then find the church is built over a cesspool of problems and dishonesty. And we wonder why the harvest gets neglected. Paul's simplicity needs to be modeled in following Christ. To follow Him in the harvest, the group needs to be honest, and behavior needs to reflect love and obedience to Christ. Ignoring problems makes it impossible to move forward in love, and the harvest is forgotten.

Psalm 41

Earlier in the year when we read this psalm, I mentioned that it could have been written when David was running from Absalom, and the friend in v. 9 could have been Ahithophel. That could be. On the other hand, when David began to run from Saul he was certainly betrayed by many "friends," and his situation looked hopeless. Imagine, David had all of the army of Israel searching for him.

Vs. 1-4 It appears that David considered himself to be this poor man. When he was running from Saul for those ten years, living in caves and on the open fields in the wilderness, he was certainly poor. David's sin could have been because of the priests who were killed, because of his lying, or because David sought refuge with the Philistines rather than going to God.

Vs. 5-9 Doesn't this sound like Job? It seems that David is still running from Saul, but having seen God save him in many small ways, his faith was strong. He was suffering, but he still believed. If this wasn't Ahithophel in v. 9, it could have been any of the fighting men, including Abner, who turned on David when Saul declared his hatred for David.

Notice that v. 9 is prophetically referring to Jesus. *I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, "He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me."* (John 13:18)

Vs. 10-13 Notice how David says, *but you*. God saved David from the intent of his enemies and upheld him, because he sought to live according to what he knew was the true, loving character of the Lord. This is just like Job. David fell, but what made him a man after God's own heart was that he rose and followed the Lord.

Proverbs 22:5-6

V. 5 I think it is safe to assume that this is generally how God does things, but Job's friends were telling Job that this is what had happened to Job because of his sin.

V. 6 This is every believing parent's prayer and hope.

AUGUST 28

Job 28-30

At this point in Job the temptation is to go, "Whatever!" or "Oh, be quiet." But let's not be like his friends. There is still some fun to be had. As you go through these chapters, do some exercise. "You mean like do 25 pushups and 25 squats after each chapter?" Good thought. No, Bible study exercise. Underline words that are repeated and look for organization in the arguments. These chapters work out well for that.

Job 28

First, read the chapter through and see if you can figure out where Job is going. Look for key verses where Job takes his "search" one step further.

If you've done that, or just want a shortcut, then read these verses one after the next and you'll understand the organization. Verses 1, 12, 20, 23, 28. Wasn't that fun? That's what you begin to notice if you read your Bible year after year.

Vs. 1-11 Man can do all of this in finding wealth and commanding the earth's resources.

Vs. 12-13 But man can't find wisdom. Not only that, man (including you and me) doesn't realize how important wisdom is, and at this point, neither does Job.

Vs. 14-19 Wisdom isn't found in wealth.

Vs. 20-22 Not only is it hidden from the living, but also from death and those who are dead. Interestingly enough, man's great adversary in the Bible is not Satan, but death. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul and the Spirit say the last enemy to be put to death is death. Death, in a sense, will also swallow Satan. But as big and powerful as death is, there is no wisdom to be found there.

Vs. 23-28 Job says that wisdom is found with God and it begins with *the fear of the Lord*. This is all very interesting, since God will say this to Job. God will not justify one inch of what happened to Job or tell him why He allowed it. All God will do is say that His wisdom, as Job says, is not to be questioned. Added to this, of course, is that Job knew of God's love and righteousness. Job will say later, in light of God's wisdom, he should have just kept quiet. Of course, too, if Job wrote Job, then God let him in on the conversations with Satan that began the adventures. That information would have helped Job broaden his understanding of God and of what is happening on earth.

Job 29

Job is not only mourning the good ol' days, but he is also recounting, honestly, that he was really a very cool guy and a helper of many. The word to guide you here is probably *I*. Follow it and you'll follow Job through his photo album.

Vs. 1-6 Who wouldn't miss those days? Job was only months removed, but he has suffered losses that none of us could imagine. Notice that the real focus here was Job's relationship with God. Even in Jesus' suffering, the hardest part was enduring His Father's wrath, becoming sin for us.

Vs. 7-17 Job was loved not just because the wisdom of God was in him, but because he was a man of action, protecting the poor, the widows, the blind, the lame and the needy. Job was a man of God.

Vs. 18-20 I guess we would all hope for this. This was Job's expectation of how the story would end.

Vs. 21-25 Since the wisdom and grace of God were on Job, he was sort of like Solomon, only utterly righteous before the Lord. His word was sought after and God made him like that.

In all of what we read here, it seems a little self-promoting. I think that Job was pushed to this by his enemies, just as Paul will be pushed, in 2 Corinthians, to blow his horn a little. On the other hand, Paul was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to keep him humble. I think that this humbling process was also a part of what was happening to Job. Job hadn't sinned, but I think that God knew that without a lesson in humility, Job would have fallen. Tomorrow Elihu will begin talking and he will suggest this.

Job 30

Now look for *now*.

Vs. 1-8 Not everyone appreciated Job's godliness. Now that Job was suffering, the rabble roused themselves to howl at him. Of course, we can also see God's wisdom in this. We saw in Esther that for the short time, when the enemies of the Jews thought they could kill the defenseless Jews, they stepped out in their arrogance and showed the world who they were. That was a wise way for God to smoke them out and get them to voice their hate and pride. The same thing had happened here.

Vs. 9-15 Apparently these people were made bold to spit and do all sorts of stuff because God humbled Job.

Vs. 16-19 This is how Job felt. He felt poured out; because, in his mind, God had cast him in the mire.

Vs. 20-23 This change will be pretty obvious to you because Job starts saying *you*. Job is wrong here, but we know more about the behind-the-scenes story than Job does.

Vs. 24-31 Job now seems to be summing up the past three chapters, lamenting how life has totally crashed in on him. Here he is crying for help in the same way that those he had helped had cried for help, and wonder of wonders, no help came. There was no Job to help Job. God Himself allowed Job's mean friends to assault him. God Himself held Job's help back. Why? So we would have this book and have to struggle with God's use of our lives in light of the plan of redemption going on, on our planet.

If you were in a discipleship group, you'd be discussing what you found in these chapters.

I know it is hard to be patient with Job's entire lament, but there is something for us in this as disciples. There is deep suffering on this planet, and there is suffering as we follow Christ. We're reading of Paul's suffering, and in his responses to the Corinthians, we see that there was a reason for the season of darkness he experienced. What proves our spiritual maturity and understanding of God more clearly than when we follow Him through "pitch black" life and still embrace the love of Christ and the wisdom of God? Anyone can follow or sound spiritual when everything is great and you're on your way to Applebee's. For most people on this planet, life resembles Job more than it does Applebee's. How do you really tell someone to hang on in the storm, unless you've hung on in the storm? How do you learn how to hang on in the storm, unless you go through the storm and love and trust Christ, and make Him totally enough. And it really helps to read Job and Psalms.

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

This is a very short reading today, but very important for a few reasons.

Vs. 12-13 This is Paul completing the story of his inner conflict with this situation in Corinth. He has a father's heart for this church and is unable to find rest.

Two things are interesting here. First, God didn't give Paul rest. Paul couldn't settle his own heart even though he was a very spiritual guy. That's good to know and makes me feel better when I can't find rest. Second, there was a door for ministry opened to him, but Paul still couldn't rest. What kind of minister was Paul to let his inner conflict ruin his chance to have an impact on these people? He was normal and his unrest was inspired by the Spirit.

Vs. 14-17 Now this is Paul explaining what he learned in all of that unrest and conflicting feelings. This is also how Paul dealt with walking away from an open door. We would not have these verses, if he had not followed the Lord through this storm in his life. Actually, this entire description of what Paul learned will continue from here to 7:5, where Paul will begin talking again about meeting Titus. To me this is amazing. Paul is telling us firsthand what he learned in the storm, making sense of the problem in Corinth, the unrest in Asia and the unrest in his own heart. This is not a rabbit trail, but a divinely planned explanation of what it means to have a servant's heart and mind in the harvest. This is what God engineered in Paul through his distress.

V. 14 There was turmoil and not knowing what to do, but what Paul learned was that even in this confusion of heart, God leads. That's pretty cool.

Vs. 14-16 And what about that open door that Paul had to leave? Even for that brief moment, he saw how Christ used him in the harvest. Although his mind was not at peace, in Christ, the presence of Paul & Co. and their sincerity still attracted some and repelled others. God still used them, but involuntarily. Paul was amazed. With few words and in deep personal unrest, God attracted some to them and caused others to react with repulsion. They were ready to be used, but God didn't need their sufficiency. The Father Himself was drawing and repelling. He was the sufficient one. Paul learned that it didn't all ride on him. He could allow himself to be weak and trust the Father for the harvest. (By the way, Paul came back to Troas later.)

V. 17 This confirmed the truth for Paul against all the accusations (*peddlers of God's Word*). Note that there is a connection of words here with those in 1:12. The power came from God and was proven by their sincerity and their simple message, as they followed Christ in the harvest. Fruit was borne. Their ministry and its fruit were not based on their cunning, their market research, wisdom or strength. They loved Christ, followed Him in the harvest, and God did the rest.

Can God really use us when we're confused and broken? Do we have an appearance to keep up? In a moment, God humbled Paul more than he was already humbled. Paul was already broken, but God made the crack bigger and more fragrance came out. So now Paul himself was amazed and praising God. That's pretty cool.

Psalm 42

So, this is the second time this year you've read Psalm 42. Does it have any different sense for you now, since we're reading Job and 2 Corinthians? In a way, it seems to me that all of the emotions of waiting, hope and suffering roll together through all these books. In a way, it intensifies the message of hope and deliverance.

Vs. 1-2 It is interesting to me that all those who love the Lord cry out for Him the same way. Job longed for God's presence. Moses prayed to see God's face, and David focused his life on wanting to dwell in the Lord's sanctuary.

V. 3 This is probably David writing this, but it was put to music by the sons of Korah. David had been anointed when he was about twelve. So in those years running from Saul, where was God? Later God made a promise to David, but then his own son sought to kill him. How solid was that promise? Where was God?

In Job's case, this wasn't just the mocking of those in the community who knew Job, but his friends stood there accusing him and pointing to God's silence and Job's suffering as proof of his wrong.

V. 4 It isn't that we live in the past; it is that we strengthen our hearts in the Word and stand on the testimony of God's faithfulness as revealed in the Word.

V. 5 Ultimately we need to have our stability in the Lord. Faith that is dependent on others, or a church or props, will wither in the presence of persecution and hard times. David, Job, and Paul all hoped in God.

Vs. 6-8 Something about that storm sweeping over the land struck David with God's power and wisdom. And then David connected it to God's *steadfast love* that had accompanied him during all the hard years. That same power that commanded the might of nature commanded the love that had protected David.

Vs. 9-10 Notice the mention of *bones*. Then check out Job 30:17 and 30. In my Bible they are all on opposite pages, so I can circle each one and connect them with a line. It is interesting that in suffering, God's silence seems like a wound, and adversaries (Job's friends) intensify the pain.

V. 11 As our spirit is alive because of the truth of God, knowing and loving Him, we command our souls to wait and hope. Even Job was certain that his Redeemer lived. We know so much more than Job did.

Proverbs 22:7

Is this saying to stay out of debt or not to get poor? Humanly speaking, I guess this is true, but it is good to know that the Lord is Lord of them all. To me, working in the harvest as disciples makes being rich on earth very irrelevant. And every disciple is a slave to the Lord of all.

AUGUST 29

Job 31-33

Today we have Job's final argument of innocence to God. His friends will finally be silenced, but unknown to us, they brought along a young disciple who really has been listening. Elihu has seen the error of both Job and his friends. Elihu is a little off track too, but he will show Job some things he had not considered. Because of this, Job remains silenced and is ready to hear and be humbled when God speaks.

Job 31

IF you are having a hard time keeping up with Job, or IF you are falling asleep, highlight the word *If*. In looking at the things Job avoided and the things Job did, you have to look deeper than the *if*. He lists these actions along with other words also. So, you'll see a lot of "If...and" combinations. And then there is *let*.

What is interesting in reading this is that Job lived after the flood and before the great civilizations of that time were organized. The list of things that Job said were violations of moral law are very up-to-date. Not only that, compare Job's list to what Jesus says will be the "list" at the close of the age. (Matt. 25:34-46)

Vs. 1-4 This was Job's resolve not to be immoral. A man of Job's standing would have had power and access. Look at kings like Solomon and Xerxes and their huge harems. Look at Hollywood, Wall Street and Capitol Hill. Look at the internet, or rather, don't. Job saw this as a very dangerous thing and listed it first.

Vs. 5-8 Lying, cheating, stealing or abusing power to get ahead was next on Job's list.

Vs. 9-12 Notice the severity of what Job says here. Remember how much Solomon said at the beginning of Proverbs warning his son against adultery? Remember how David nearly destroyed his heart, his family and Israel through his adultery? We glorify adultery and romanticize it on TV and in our stories, but everyone who is wise calls it deadly. The immorality of vs. 1-4 may affect a few, but adultery affects many. Look again at the life of David after he did this with Bathsheba. God has shown us David's life for a reason. If one of the greatest men in the Bible couldn't escape the consequences, neither can we.

Vs. 13-15 This is tolerating injustice. Job says that a godly man will, must, act. Notice v. 15. That sounds like the preamble of the US Declaration of Independence. All men are created equal.

Vs. 16-23 This was Job's attitude toward the poor, needy, naked, widows and orphans. It wasn't just an attitude; it was a call to action.

V. 23 Deeply ingrained in Job's thinking toward God was fear. We could use more fear in our thinking about God. We still have it in our thinking that God is just a good old boy who chuckles at our sin and looks the other way, and even more now because of grace. Job's fear of God was at the root of what both he and his friends didn't understand about God. They were focused on blessing and punishment having a one-to-one relationship to God's justice. God's sovereignty, wisdom and eternal plan weren't part of their thinking. The fact that God could do things, in love and wisdom, didn't make sense; and that He could bring pain without judgment and allow the wicked to grow and prosper wasn't yet in their thinking. Trusting God's wisdom, love and sovereignty brings health to our fear of God, and it brings maturity to our view of God and our place on the planet during this time. And the fear of God is still the beginning of wisdom.

Vs. 24-28 Although Job was rich, his treasure was not on earth. And look at v. 27, he didn't "kiss his hand," thinking he was blessed by his own hand. He knew God had blessed him.

Vs. 29-34 Job blessed and helped his enemies; he welcomed strangers; he openly confessed his sins to God, and lived in the fear of God. What a guy.

Vs. 35-37 This is Job's last appeal for help and justice before God. Job will gain his audience with God in a few chapters.

Vs. 38-40 If Job had sinned, he himself wanted justice.

Job 32

Enter Elihu.

V. 1 The friends stopped because Job proved he was righteous and all they had were blind, brutal accusations.

V. 2 Notice that Elihu caught that Job never justified or defended God. It never entered Job's thinking that what God was doing could be right, not because of justice, but because of his eternal wisdom. It is one of those things where even if you don't understand God, you not only say, "blessed be your name," but you also go out of your way to justify the Lord. Job would learn this.

V. 3 He was mad at the friends because of their groundless accusations.

Vs. 4-5 This is interesting. We think of a young man as...well, young. But in those days, a man of 50 could have been a youngster. Imagine some guys sitting around the fire. One of them is 735 years old, another is 521 years old and one is 384 years old. They are joined by someone who is 101 years old, a mere child. Of course, Elihu could have been in his 20's. Also, notice that Elihu *burned with anger*. Do you remember what happened to Samson when the Spirit came upon him? It looked like anger. I think this was the Spirit.

Vs. 6-10 The rest of this chapter is Elihu, in some convoluted near eastern way asking permission to join in the discussion.

Vs. 11-14 Notice that Elihu had been carefully listening. This was directed at Job's friends.

Vs. 15-22 Still speaking to Job's friends, Elihu says he noticed they ran out of gas. On the other hand, Elihu is ready to burst. At that time the belly, not the heart, was the seat of emotions. Interesting imagery.

Vs. 21-22 This is basically saying that he has no agenda. What he'll say is simple and sincere. This sounds like what Paul has been saying in 2 Corinthians.

Job 33

Vs. 1-7 Elihu is the only one who uses Job's name. He is asking Job to *listen*, and telling Job he will not blindly hammer him like his friends did.

Vs. 8-11 He has been listening. He repeats the kernel of Job's argument back to Job.

Vs. 12-33 This is the key to Elihu's entire message to Job and he doesn't beat around the bush. God does what He does sometimes to prevent sin and to bring men to a place of closeness and humility before God. God does speak, just not the way we might think, or the way we might like. Can you see the ways that Elihu suggests that God speaks?

Vs. 12-18 Elihu suggests that God speaks to warn us and to keep us from doing stupid stuff before we fall into sin. This was something that no one had thought of.

Vs. 19-28 Elihu is saying that God uses pain to get our attention before something happens, not as a judgment, but as a help, a warning. In this section there is a sense of learning humility and crying out to God. He also suggests that there is a sense of self-awareness that comes through suffering that makes a person look into their life, activities and heart. This leads to perception into one's motives, and a person catches their attitudes and actions before they develop into full-blown sin. What this person confesses as sin is the sin they perceive was growing in them.

Vs. 29-33 Elihu suggests that God does this repeatedly in our lives. Job's silence is evidence that Elihu was speaking in the Spirit and was speaking truth. In the coming chapters, God's actions will be described as going even deeper than just working with us. Yet, isn't it cool that Elihu got right to the matter and gave Job something to think about immediately?

So here we are as disciples, working in the harvest, and something "bad" happens. Here is the real question: How long does it take you to understand emotionally that it was God and not others who blocked you? I say "emotionally" because it is easy to "think" the right answer and still get incredibly depressed and bitter. How long does it take us to redirect our following in the harvest once we grasp this, or do we mourn for the door of opportunity or season of life that just closed? Even as I write this, I know how important and hard it is to learn these lessons. I've gotten better, more mature, but I still bear some scars from not having grasped this truth, years ago. But then, the Lord knew I needed those scars to learn. So even in failure there is victory if we learn to love Him, if we grow to know Him better and learn to trust Him as we keep on following in the harvest. I had a little motto above my desk in Germany: "The only way to fail in Christ is to quit." Boy, did I learn the truth of that the hard way. And happily, I'm still learning and trusting and following. Christ is enough, and that's enough.

2 Corinthians 3

V. 1 After describing how the Lord worked in his heart, Paul realized that talking about himself like this was going to cause some of his critics to voice this complaint against him again. Apparently, some of these critics were very Jewish and demanded that visitors who came to the church should bring a letter of recommendation stating that they were "kosher."

Vs. 2-3 This is very simple and powerful. The work of God was done by God through Paul & Co. God was their recommendation and the Corinthians were proof, like a letter. The work of the Holy Spirit cannot be faked. What happened to the Corinthians was proof that Paul was genuine. I'm wondering if the critics had fruit. I wonder if they could show that God had used them to save the lost and to make disciples, who made disciples, or were they "teachers" and not "evangelists." Jesus said, *you will recognize them by their fruits*. There are a lot of Christians who are all argument and opinion, but no fruit.

Notice here that Paul uses the *tablets of stone vs. human hearts*. That suggests that these super-apostles were very Jewish, trying to bring the church back to a more Jewish look. God promised in the OT He would give the Jews hearts of flesh. That would be the work of the Spirit. The message of the gospel was that forgiveness was found in Christ and life was lived following/worshiping God in the Spirit. That didn't mean that the Word wasn't necessary, but it did mean that the law hadn't worked righteousness and the law was not to be followed as a way to be in communion with God.

Vs. 4-6 Notice how Paul refers again to his weakness and that God brings about the blessing almost involuntarily. The message of Paul and his coworkers was the message of loving Christ and following Him in the harvest through the Spirit. The "letter," living by adherence to the principles of the law, would kill grace. Following God in the Spirit of Christ is what brings freshness and life.

Vs. 7-11 Notice the contrasts here. The *ministry of death* is contrasted to the *ministry of the Spirit*. The law could only lead to death and judgment; because, like a mirror, it showed sin without being able to clean it. The Spirit, on the other hand, leads to understanding the Word and the love of Christ; and He, Himself, helps us to obey and follow God. The law couldn't do that. Even though the law had glory, it was totally dwarfed by the glory of the new covenant in Christ.

Vs. 12-18 The law brought a veil of misunderstanding. The sin within us rebels against God and His authority in the law. But in the Spirit, the heart opens when confronted by the grace of God and the love of Christ. The letter and ritual of the law focused the stubborn on compliance. There is not a lot of ritual and strain involved in standing before the Lord with an unveiled face, grateful for salvation and forgiveness. This is the freedom of knowing Christ. It was the Spirit that gave Paul the power for bearing fruit in ministry, not Paul himself. Salvation and living for Christ doesn't come from works, but from the Spirit. Now, following the Spirit we prove the love of Christ over and over and grow closer to Him as we follow in the harvest. That is the increasing glory of knowing Christ.

Psalm 43

Vs. 1-2 The trial of waiting on God was intensified because of others. We've seen this in Job.

Vs. 3-4 The prayer for God's guidance and light. This yearning for God is tied to the altar (cleansing and worship) and the presence of God.

V. 5 As we read yesterday in Psalm 42, the head might understand; but the soul, the emotions of this body of death, can still be in turmoil. As Job learned, we have to have total trust in God. He is our hope and our salvation.

The very fact that we have psalms like this, inspired by the Spirit, means that God knows we will always struggle with our emotions and with waiting on Him. This struggle brings us closer to the Lord. I guess that is a part of what Elihu was telling Job.

Proverbs 22:8-9

Amen.

AUGUST 30

Job 34-36

As I read over this, it seems there are a couple of things to remember. First, in the final event, it is the Spirit who is writing this, so the message He is conveying is important for us. Second, Elihu, through the Spirit, puts his finger on some important points; but he is removed from Job's pain. In each chapter, we almost need to re-read chapter 1 to see what Job is grieving. Reading what Elihu says in correction to Job, you realize he didn't feel Job's agony. If this had happened to me, it would have been a miracle if I could have put two meaningful thoughts together. Job is speaking out of grief and incredible physical pain. Fourth, there is a reason this happened to Job, not only for his good, but for ours. Job was one of a kind, the most spiritual, righteous, God-loving man on earth. God knew He could hit him hard and take him to task even in his extreme suffering, because of who God had made him. Our job is to observe and learn what happened behind the scenes. Then we need to see where Job and his friends thought wrongly of God and learn to trust Him totally.

This reminds me of a question I've asked in teaching Acts, regarding why God didn't stop Paul before he was guilty of persecuting and killing so many believers. Why didn't God stop Paul? It was for His own purpose. God worked for the good of His plan of redemption. According to His wisdom, love, and purpose in the lives of Paul and all those battered believers He brought personal good (heaven is good) and ultimate good. And, Paul got the message - *But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost (of sinners), Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.* (1 Tim. 1:16) And like Job, Paul simply bowed to the sovereign might and wisdom of God. Here's the next verse of that quote. *To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.* (1 Tim. 1:17)

Job 34

Vs. 1-6 This looks like Elihu's introduction to his next point. Notice how he asks permission to speak, and then how he restates a part of what Job said.

Vs. 7-9 Unfortunately Job was pushed to express some stuff that made him sound like the ungodly. In v. 9 Elihu summarizes what Job said in 21:8-26. This was kind of silly of Job to say. We'd say it was excusable because of his pain, but because of his pain, his narrow view of God's actions and the pressure of his friends, Job showed what was in his heart. A statement like this is always wrong.

Vs. 10-11 Elihu justifies God. We may not understand God, but we know Him and should always justify Him. Notice too that Elihu doesn't try to prove Job is wrong. Instead, he proves God is right.

Vs. 12-33 Verse 12 is the cardinal statement here. All of their thinking had to give truth to this statement. God, the Creator, can never do wrong. Much of what follows here sounds like what Job's friends said, but it is meant differently coming from Elihu. He doesn't think this happened to Job because Job sinned. He is simply saying that if you don't understand what God is doing, don't charge Him with injustice. He can't do wrong. It seems to imply that we understand justice because of God's image. Surely the Maker and Sustainer of all, who gives us this sense of justice, can never be unjust.

Vs. 34-37 This is the charge against Job. Job had been prodded to accuse God of wrong. His friends insisted that Job's suffering was because of sin; and Job, therefore, assumed that punishment was the general meaning of things, only that Job wasn't guilty enough to deserve what happened to him. Note that this is not the same as cursing God. Satan never won his bet

with God. Job never stopped loving God or trusting what he knew to be true of God. And remember, Job was always in terrible grief and pain.

Job 35

Chapters 35-37 roll together as one argument with two parts and they will be Elihu's final words.

Vs. 2-3 It seems there are two things that Elihu thinks are wrong. First, Job demanded the right to have an answer. Second, Job took the statement in 34:9 further, by saying it was of no advantage to be righteous instead of rebellious.

V. 4 Here, here!

Vs. 5-8 This is an interesting statement, and even more interesting if you understand that it comes from God. We are not doing God a favor by being righteous, like cheering up the old boy. "Oh look, Dan obeyed. Now I feel better. Now I'm happy." God is complete in Himself.

Vs. 9-15 It seems Elihu is saying that it is only pain that makes us want an answer from God. We never ask for an answer when things are going well. Duh! This means that God's "silence" is really our perception, and evidence that we are focused on us and really don't know God and His working. Why don't we demand that God should tell us why things are going good? We don't mind His "silence" then, do we?

V. 16 The verdict: Job doesn't know God as well as he thought he did.

Job 36

In what follows, Elihu seems to finish showing that it is always better to be righteous, and then he moves to answer the question about our right to demand an answer.

Vs. 1-4 Unlike Job's friends who aimed at correcting Job, Elihu is focused on speaking *on God's behalf*.

Vs. 5-16 It seems Elihu is describing God's wisdom in dealing with people.

Vs. 17-23 The first two verses sound like Matthew 7:1-2, *Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.* The key verses here seem to be 22-23, where God is described as a teacher.

Vs. 24-33 Some people feel that as Elihu was speaking, a storm began forming on the horizon. Elihu seems to be saying to Job and the others that we should always extol God's works and trust His heart, power and wisdom. This is why Job has no right to demand an answer, because of God's wisdom and power. We behold His works from afar and really don't know Him well. Even with the Spirit, Paul confessed that we see as if looking into a clouded mirror. That face to face hasn't happened yet, so we always need to hold to the Word and what we know is true of God. He cannot do wrong.

This chapter flows into the next and then into God's description of His might and wisdom. We don't demand that God explain gravity to us, but we're sure thankful it works. We simply trust. And still, deep in Job, there was this sense of trust and understanding, that directing all of God's power and wisdom, there is a heart of love. This is why God will finally say that Job spoke what was true of God, unlike Job's friends who spoke what was wrong.

As disciples, abiding every day in Christ, following Him in the harvest, carrying our cross, we should expect God to bring the unexpected to us. We are living for Him and His work as His servants. Our problem is that we expect Him to work according to our likes and wishes. The great events of redemptive history all looked like disasters, and suddenly God used them to show His majesty and grace. To read about the greatest of these disasters, read the gospels or the short

version in Isaiah 53. That's our Lord, and the servant isn't greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than He who sent him.

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

Paul is still describing the effects of how God brought him and his co-workers through the emotional turmoil they were in. As we see it here, God brought Paul through these troubles in this particular way to give him this heart and these words for the Corinthians.

Vs. 1-2 Bearing fruit in spite of their weakness, they see they have been given this ministry by God's mercy. Paul is justifying God. Again, you understand that Paul is also addressing criticism against him in Corinth. Paul didn't choose the ministry. God chose him for the ministry by His mercy.

Vs. 3-6 But what about Paul not being a good speaker? Just like us, Paul's clearest witness for Christ was Jesus' light shining in his heart. So, it's not about us and our abilities, it is all about Him being able to simply shine through us. You don't have to be a well-educated super-apostle for that to be possible. If the gospel is veiled, it is not because of our inferiority. It is because of the enemy. Remember, there is an enemy.

Vs. 7-12 And, in submission to Christ, what comes out of the cracked pot? It is what God brings out through taking us through experiences that make us realize the greatness of His love and power and wisdom. Suffering in us produces life in others as we share what He is doing. God gives the glory to the message, not the cracked vase. But the cracked vase does get to see the glory of God.

You understand then, that God is doing exactly what Paul is describing. God took Paul through great distress to prepare him to write these words to correct and bring life to this troubled church. Isn't it interesting that this is very much like what we're seeing in Job? And why not? It's the Lord, and the same author of both of these servants.

As disciples, we need to see this pruning by the Father as normal in the harvest. When we see how God led Job and Paul and so many others, should we expect something easier for ourselves? If we really desire God to use us to bear fruit following Christ on earth, we need to let Him shape us through suffering. It is easy to be fruitless, but fruitlessness and comfort is our choice, not what God has called us to. Knowing Christ and His blessing in the harvest will look more like what we're reading, than what most Christians in suburban America are living. *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,*³⁰ *engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.* (Philippians 1:29)

Psalms 44:1-8

Vs. 1-3 You did it then....

Vs. 4-8 And you do it now....

It is in God we trust. He is enough.

Proverbs 22:10-12

V. 10 This reads like Romans 16:17-20.

V. 11 Maybe we are too tolerant of the cranky. If we really love *purity of heart* and gracious speech, we also need to rebuke the scoffer.

V. 12 The Lord sees it all. Nothing is hidden or will remain hidden. We should be praying for the Lord to do this and fulfill His promise, especially where it is hindering the harvest and the making of disciples.

AUGUST 31

Job 37-39

Job 37

Notice all of the stormy imagery. It is thought that as Elihu was speaking, they all noticed that a storm was approaching and Elihu got inspired and began to use it to describe God's power and wisdom.

Vs. 1-13 It seems Elihu became "caught up" in the emotion of this storm. He began to suggest that God knows all the ramifications of bringing a storm. He knows where the animals will be driven and where rain, snow and lightning will fall. He knows the purposes He has for the storm.

V. 9 Notice *the whirlwind*. Job lost his children to something like this.

V. 13 This is probably the key to what Elihu was driving at. It is not just that God makes it happen; it is the stated motives that guide His hand and His actions.

Vs. 14-20 This is Elihu's final challenge to Job. The argument of v. 15 goes, "If you don't know this, then what right do you have to say *what* God is doing in this situation you are in?"

Vs. 19-20 Job wanted to talk to God. Elihu is suggesting that if Job isn't wise enough to figure out what God can create with a thought, how is he going to really duke it out with God? Hooking himself up to God would be like hooking up to a zillion watts and a gazillion volts.

Vs. 21-24 Again, Elihu justifies God.

Job 38-39

Job finally got what he wanted. God arrived in the approaching storm. Notice that God speaks to Job out of the very thing that killed his kids.

God never defends His actions in allowing this to happen to Job. At this point, we are the only ones who know the whole story. What God does is describe why Job should just trust Him. To do this, as my uncle says, first God takes Job on a nature hike and then He takes him to the zoo. Isn't God's wisdom totally beyond our comprehension, how He can direct, control and sustain the entire universe and all of life? There is so much that exists that we don't even know about in the spiritual dimension, on the microscopic level, in events taking place in deep space (and what is space anyway?). And yet He doesn't even break a sweat to sustain it or create it. He holds it all together and directs it. And we know Him in the person and grace and salvation of Jesus our Lord. "Trust" is an awfully small word when we consider His work in our lives and how He uses us.

Job 38

Vs. 1-3 Oops!

Vs. 4-7 God created the earth and the sons of God were there and rejoiced. Notice too, apparently at that time all the angels rejoiced. God knew of the rebellion that would follow and that is a part of this story.

Vs. 8-11 The sea was thought to be wild, mighty and untamable, but not to God.

Vs. 12-15 Even in controlling the day, God controls the affairs of men, particularly the wicked. This is an interesting mixture of physical and spiritual realities.

Vs. 16-18 This too is a mixture. The lowest part of the earth is the ocean floor, but lower still are the gates of death.

Vs. 19-21 Light is still a mystery. An honest scientist would admit this.

Vs. 22-24 Somehow I don't think Job knows the answer to this one.

Vs. 25-30 Does the rain have a father? Not only that, the mechanism in the creation of rain is still a theory. But it's OK because God knows.

Vs. 31-33 According to Genesis, God created all of this in 24 hours and he did it for us.

Vs. 34-38 This is intricacy beyond our thinking. It is beyond Matthew 10:29, *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.* But it is all seen and understood and planned by God.

Vs. 39-41 Now God takes Job to the zoo. This probably should have been the start of chapter 39. Both the king of the beasts and a scavenger rely on God for their food, and He orders it all according to His wisdom.

Job 39

Vs. 1-4 Apparently there are particular breeds of mountain goats where this is still a mystery. God is responsible for this secret.

Vs. 5-8 I never think about wild donkeys, but God was responsible for their scorn and ranging. It was ordered by His wisdom.

Vs. 9-12 In God's wisdom, He ordained this strength and independence to remain untamed.

Vs. 13-18 In God's wisdom He made her foolish and fast. Who are we to judge?

Vs. 19-25 Not only is the horse a great domestic animal, but it has an instinct for battle. Who knew? God made the horse this way.

Vs. 26-30 And then there is the eagle, or vulture, or both. It is all in God's sovereign control.

The point in all of this is that God's infinite wisdom and intricate sovereignty are so great, that we should trust Him for what we don't understand. If we know God in Christ, we know His love, His salvation and His work on this planet of death. That should be enough for us to trust Him completely, and take up our death daily and follow Him in the harvest.

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:10

In Paul's recent suffering he was overwhelmed by the emotions of certain death, and then added to this was all the distress and conflict he felt with the church in Corinth. Through that experience of suffering ("death"), the Lord gave Paul what he needed to speak to this church. That was an interesting way to prepare Paul.

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Vs. 13-15 In order to understand this you have to read Psalm 116. Paul is quoting v. 10. It is a psalm of deliverance. I bet Paul read that over and over during this time. Paul expected the leaders and people in Corinth to understand this reference since this was a very Jewish church.

Paul is saying that he and those with him shared the same experience as the psalmist. Even though they were threatened, they still believed and went on speaking for God. Paul says here that they kept on because they knew they would be raised with Christ. Paul knew that God would use that experience, however it turned out, to bring His grace further and to bring glory to His name.

Vs. 16-18 This is very much like what Jesus told His disciples. Jesus said they shouldn't fear those who could only kill the body. It was in all of His teaching that we are to live for the kingdom and leave the rest to Him. It also reminds me of Jesus telling Peter that Peter couldn't follow Jesus "now," but that he would follow later. The destination wasn't death, but the Father's

presence. The reason Peter couldn't follow was the work of redemption; but rightly understood, it gave Peter something to look forward to when his work was done.

Based on the resurrection and the spiritual reality given by God, we can risk it all for Him. Notice that the Spirit can use the suffering of today to cause daily renewal and preparation.

V. 18 This assumes that a disciple following Christ in the harvest is learning to see the spiritual. This is not automatic. Many church goers are lost on earth and do not see God working to redeem, much less see their part in it.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

This section explains vs. 16-18. The point is that the body must die, but God uses that daily process of death to produce all sorts of wonderful things. I would say though, that this process of death and renewal only really happens if our eyes are on the harvest and the eternal plan that God is working through Christ, through us, in this world.

V. 1 Notice the contrast between the tent and the house. Remember 1 Corinthians 15:42.

Vs. 2-5 It is normal for us to groan while we are in this body, but this isn't just any groaning. We all groan. The context of Paul's groaning wasn't just his arthritis; it was his work on earth for Christ and the difficulty of following Christ bearing the body of death. It is a spiritual understanding of what is happening in life, understanding this body of death and understanding that our hope is in the resurrection. Read Romans 8:23. It seems kind of funny to say this, but if a person isn't groaning inwardly, it is very likely they are not in the harvest, or a disciple. They really don't have a very present longing for the resurrection. Because of God's promises to us and the Spirit who is the guarantee, we know that God is with us and we will be raised. Having a hope like this allows us to "leave it all" in the harvest. Not to have this groaning and longing might mean we are too happy enjoying earth.

Vs. 6-10 So this is why Paul has that positive attitude. *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* ²²*If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.* ²³*I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.* ²⁴*But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.* (Philippians 1:21-24)

V. 9 Notice our aim as we live and work in the harvest. Therefore there is not fear, but instead, expectation when we get to v. 10.

V. 10 Paul saw this as a positive thing. This entire spiritual perspective and the spiritual life Paul is talking about here can only be found following Christ in the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. If a person is not involved in that, they can never arrive at this heart and mind for Christ. It should be with joy that we stand before our returned Lord, offering back the "talent" He gave to us with its multiplied effect in the lives of others in the harvest. *His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'* (Matthew 25:23)

Psalm 44:9-26

After having read the first eight verses yesterday, were you ready for this? Suddenly it seems like everything reads like Job.

Vs. 9-16 If Job's friends heard this, they would say the people sinned. The Lord used situations like this in the life of Israel to humble them. One event that comes to mind was when the Assyrians marched on Jerusalem when Hezekiah was king. The Assyrians were consuming Judah although the people were following God.

Vs. 17-22 But, like Job, they had not sinned. They had really been trying to follow. Unknown to them, God used this event to bring their hearts to a "critical mass" intensity in prayer and humility before the Lord.

V. 22 Notice that Paul quotes this in Romans 8:36, *As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'* If you reread this section of Romans you'll see that there is a very strong theme of being safe in the sovereign plan of God. But safety doesn't mean understanding what God does. Nor does safety mean not suffering during this time on earth.

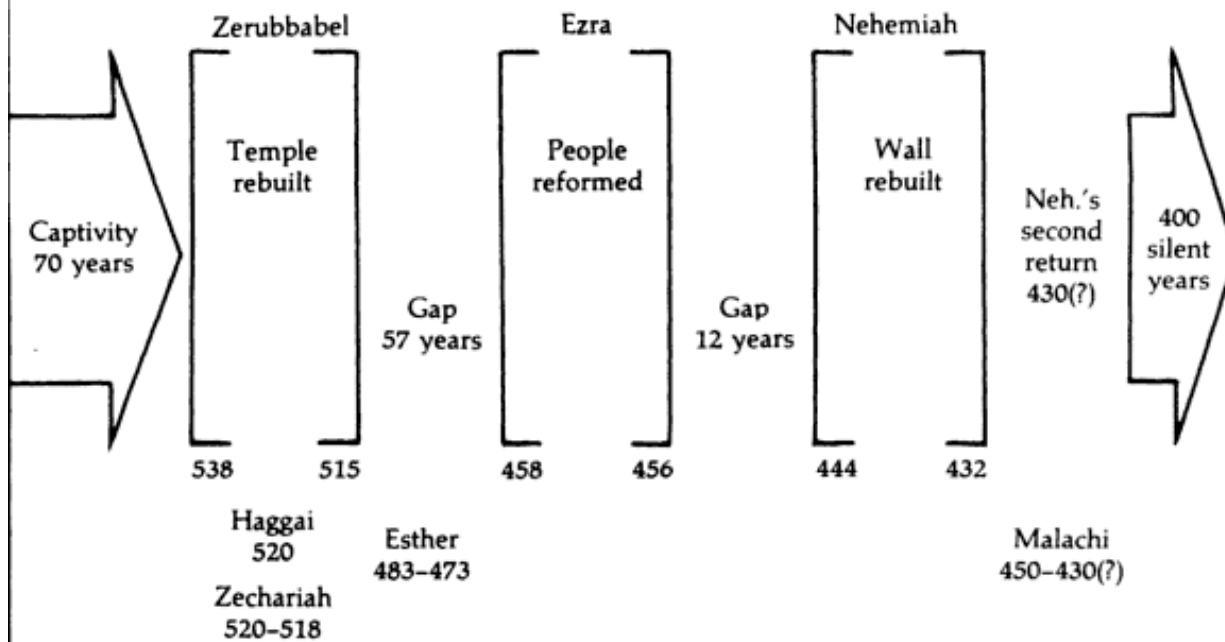
Vs. 23-26 *For the sake of your steadfast love.* We have read all of the historical events that happened in Israel. There will be a few more details in Jeremiah and Daniel, but basically we have everything. So, what could this event have been that was such a distress to Israel? The Sons of Korah wrote for the temple worship, and so this must be the southern kingdom. When was there a time when the people were following God closely, but when there was an enemy at hand that was conquering the land? I would guess this was written during the time of Hezekiah when the Assyrian army was capturing the land. (See 2 Kings 18.)

Why was God allowing this? In His purpose, He was accomplishing a million things, changing the face of nations and empires. But why did Judah have to suffer like this? I'm sure there was more than one reason. But if this did happen when I think it did, it may have been used to humble the hearts of the leaders of Judah and King Hezekiah. In their desperation they cried out. The depth of their despair and seeking God was heard by the Lord as a lesson to all of us. Their tears were turned to praise when God visited the Assyrian army. Just like Job and Paul, suffering preceded praise and a true understanding of the depth of God's wisdom.

Proverbs 22:13

This is sort of like the joke, "I exercise every day. I do a half a sit-up when I get up in the morning, and I do the other half at night when I lie back down." There is some area in all of our lives where we are the sluggard.

The Three Returns from Exile



Chronology of the Postexilic Period

Persian Kings	Dates of Their Reigns	Biblical Events	Scripture References	Dates
Cyrus	559-530 a.c.	Edict of Cyrus for the return	Ezra 1:1-4	538 a.c.
		First return of 49,897 exiles, under Zerubbabel (to build the temple)	Ezra 2	538
		The altar and temple foundation built	Ezra 3:1-4:5	536
Cambyses	530-522			
Smerdis	522			
Darius I	521-486	Haggai prophesied	Book of Haggai	520
		Zechariah prophesied	Book of Zechariah	520-518
		The temple completed	Ezra 5-6	515
Xerxes (Ahasuerus)	485-465	Accusation against Judah	Ezra 4:6	486
		Esther became queen	Esther 2:17	479
Artaxerxes I (Artashasta)	464-424	Artaxerxes stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem	Ezra 4:7-23	ca. 464-458
		Second return of 4,000-5,000 exiles, under Ezra (to beautify the temple and reform the people)	Ezra 7-10	458
		Third return of exiles, under Nehemiah (to build the walls of Jerusalem)	Book of Nehemiah	444
		Nehemiah's second return	Nehemiah 13:6	ca. 430
		Malachi prophesied	Book of Malachi	450-430 (?)

