

1 & 2 CHRONICLES & 1 CORINTHIANS Bible Reading Schedule

10 Weeks

WEEK 1

Chronicles are designed as books on history to inspire the present-day culture of the 5th century BC. The authorship is usually attributed to Ezra the Priest. He is thought of as the “Chronicler.” He had to live near Jerusalem and felt strongly about the role of the Temple among God’s people. Ezra would fit that designation because he was the overseer to rebuild the Temple in Ezra 6. Also, the prominence that the author gives to the Levites suggests he is one of them. Ezra is linking the past history of God’s people for inspiration and validation. His writing of Israel’s history, beginning with David, is meant to provide meaning and value for the present.

I Corinthians is a fascinating letter to a multiethnic church. We come face to face with some of the everyday problems the early Christians were dealing with in a pagan culture. Paul takes criticism head-on; he confronts sexual immorality and reminds people about the importance of marriage and the downfall of divorce. Plus, cultural issues about eating meat sacrificed to idols, proper attire for women (covering or no covering?), and concerns about suing a fellow believer arise in this letter. There’s an emphasis on the proper use of spiritual gifts and the significance of the resurrection. We will benefit from this letter as it provides guidance for us as we deal with similar problems today.

DAY 1 – 1 Chronicles 10 & 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

After spending nine chapters on the genealogy of Israel, we begin with the fall of King Saul and the launch of David’s reign in Israel. The Book of 1 Chronicles presents David as the first real king in Israel. Saul failed to fulfill God’s purposes as King. You will notice that many of the details that we read in I & II Samuel are not included. The Chronicler does not mention Saul’s armor bearer, for example (1 Samuel 31:6), or the rest of the troops. Verse 13 says it all: “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord.” If you want to read more about this situation, let me refer you to 1 Samuel 13 & 15. What excites you about reading the history of David in God’s plan? We will cover the highlights during the next four weeks.

What do you notice in this introduction addressed to believers in Corinth? I notice that Paul is quite upbeat. The Corinthians had lots of problems, but Paul remained hopeful and believed that God would carry them through. Now, as he begins this letter, he is affirming their spiritual

gifts and their enthusiasm for the Lord. But later, he will confront their misguided approach to spiritual gifts. Paul is a half-full prophet who believed that the Corinthian believers were genuine and teachable. He optimistically affirms the church and prepares them for some valuable instruction, since Paul was always thinking the best about what God could do for them and through them. What affirmation from Paul for these believers catches your eye? Do you believe God will be faithful to you? How so?

DAY 2 – 1 Chronicles 11 & 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

This chapter teaches me that David did not succeed on his own. He had some of the best and finest warriors in Israel on his side. But he was a great leader because he generated respect and loyalty. I have often thought of how God has blessed me with loyal friends and partners in the Gospel. By myself, I would be vulnerable to discouragement and defeat. But the comradeship of many has sustained me, and God has used brothers in the Lord to accomplish his purposes in my life. In the Old Testament, the prophets often stood alone. But true leadership and spiritual influence are the product of teamwork and shared ministry. David truly models this dynamic. Is there anything from this chapter that impressed you? How so?

The Corinthian believers were arguing over which of the leading evangelists (Paul, Apollos, Peter) was best. Paul rebukes them for their quarreling and worldly comparisons. As a minister of Christ and the Good News, he and the others are only channels through whom God works. Celebrity pastors and dynamic preachers often get a following just in time for that leader to stumble. These comparisons and competing factions are contrary to the will of God. Verse 13 shows clearly how Paul felt about these divisions. Human charisma can actually be a tool in the hands of the enemy. We can appreciate how God uses certain people in our lives, such as musicians, preachers, and pastors, to point us to the Lord, but they should never be a substitute for Christ. Amen?! The Lord wants his people to be in harmony, which is a rare feature in today's world. Why do you think unity is so important to the Lord? How are you building up others so that the church is united?

DAY 3 – 1 Chronicles 12 & 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

This chapter can appear a little complicated because it begins with the warriors David received when he was running from King Saul. Verses 1 to 22 highlight the soldiers who defected to David while Saul was king. But this shift in loyalty became a transition in full force as David was anointed King in Hebron. (V23) The Chronicler is concisely summarizing the change in leadership and loyalty from Saul to David in this chapter, emphasizing the warriors who joined him before he was king and also when he was later made King in Hebron. The transition of kingship could

be filled with animosity between tribal groups, especially when the new King is from a different tribe. The author stresses the unity among the tribes with the declaration that “everyone in Israel agreed that David should be their king.” (V38). How does this chapter compare with what you remember about the story of David becoming king?

As I read these verses in 1 Corinthians, I resonate with the temptation to count on human wisdom, which is the approach of so many in our world today. The cross seems foolish to people of the world. But God has been using the weak things and the surprising things to show his truth and his wisdom. Verse 22 reminds me of something I read recently about God visiting Muslims in Iran with dreams and visions. 90% of those who profess Christ in Iran have experienced this kind of visitation from God. The Arabs are more like the Jews, as it says, “It is (God’s wisdom) foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven.” However, the Greeks or Gentiles are more like us Westerners, “And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.” The plan of God to reach Muslims with a heavenly vision or dream is in line with this truth, that they are more convinced by a sign from heaven. So, Iranian Muslims are coming to faith in Christ like never before. Foolishness to us Westerners, but the very vehicle of salvation to hundreds or thousands of Muslims! Also, these verses remind me of what the religious leaders said about the Apostles, “The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.” We have no need to impress the world with our knowledge or eloquence; rather, the simplicity of our devotion and courage will shine the light of God’s presence the strongest. Do you agree? How do you respond to this teaching?

DAY 4 – 1 Chronicles 13 & 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

This idea of moving the Ark to Jerusalem seemed like the right thing to do for David and for the people. Jerusalem was already thought of as the City of David because it was captured from the Jebusites. These next few chapters will be about establishing the worship of God in Jerusalem. You probably don’t even notice that David and the leaders neglect to ask God how they should bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. We learn in chapter 15 that this displeased God. Uzzah’s life was sacrificed because they proceeded without inquiring of the Lord and didn’t realize that no one should touch the Ark. It seemed right to them from their human point of view. The presence of the Ark was a huge thing, and everywhere it resided, God brought his blessing. David was not sure what to do, and now he was afraid of God. Of course, he didn’t pursue the Lord for direction; in fact, he was fearful and angry. This posture will not resolve the situation. Do you ever give up praying or seeking God because something bad has happened in your life? What causes you to distance yourself from the Lord like David was doing?

I think that the message of this paragraph in 1 Corinthians (2:1-5) is such an important principle in today's celebrity culture that I chose not to have us read more than these five verses. How important do you perceive the principle of the Spirit's enabling compared to human wisdom? Paul did not want to draw attention to himself but rather to Christ crucified. The mystery of Christ is the beauty of the Gospel revealed to a sinful, lost world. Paul experiences the glorious privilege of being a spokesman for the Lord, making sure no human takes credit for something only God could do. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to Paul, and the reason why the Corinthians responded to the message of salvation. We are powerless without the Spirit's help. How does this truth challenge you?

DAY 5 – 1 Chronicles 14 & 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

How do you like reading the history of David? This record of his reign in Israel is very much a summary of his exploits. It is not unusual to have a foreign enemy try to attack before the new king can get established. The Philistines hope to do just that. David would show godly leadership, only wanting to do what the Lord gave him permission to do. As we read yesterday, he neglected this important step of inquiring of the Lord. But not this time! This first battle was fairly strategic because it would show the other nations that God was on their side and also show that David was a formidable foe to them. "So David's fame spread everywhere, and the Lord caused all the nations to fear David." (V17) What does it mean to you to first inquire of the Lord?

I have often thought of verse 9 in our reading from 1 Corinthians to be about heaven and the marvelous, beyond our imagination, place it will be. But here the use seems more tied to the revelation of the Gospel and what God has had in mind for those who receive Christ since the beginning of time. It could point to heaven, but it might just be about the secret gift of salvation offered to us by grace and grace alone. The deposit of the Spirit in the hearts of believers helps us understand "the wonderful things God has freely given us." (V12). The gift of the Spirit is elevated in these verses and is so crucial to discerning spiritual things that are beyond the understanding of mere human wisdom. It says we have the mind of Christ by the Spirit because the Spirit reveals Christ's thinking to us. Walking with the Lord is a spiritual relationship and is impossible without the Spirit's help. How do you interpret these words for your own life?

WEEK 2

If setting up David's reign in Jerusalem, or the affirmation of God's promises to David, or his many victories in war interest you, you will enjoy this week of readings. You can also anticipate the importance of "seeking the Lord," the "promise of a dynasty," and the "assurance of victory when God is on your side." I am so glad that we get to read about David's journey, which is such an inspiration for people who love God. He was a man after God's own heart.

1 Corinthians addresses some of the issues we have already read about, but on a deeper level. The division in the Corinthian Church was unacceptable. Paul will display strong leadership as he confronts this concern. This will fill up our minds for today and tomorrow, revealing how significant unity is to our God. Plus, these new believers have lived in a pagan culture for most of their lives. Sexual sin, idols, homosexuality, pride, and various forms of worldly behaviors are very concerning for Paul. These issues still continue in our world and in our culture today.

DAY 6 – 1 Chronicles 15 & 1 Corinthians 3:1-15

After the evidence of blessing to Obed-edom's home and household (13:14), David wanted the Ark to be at the center of worship in Jerusalem. This time, his preparation for the move would be in line with God's instructions. This chapter highlights a successful move. I notice verse 29 because I recall that Michal, David's wife, rebukes him in 2 Samuel 6:16-23. This is another example of how the chronicler summarizes some events in such a concise way. Eight verses in 2 Samuel 6 are reduced to one in our reading for today. David's enthusiasm for worship as he celebrates the Ark and the meaning of placing the Lord before all things is very attractive and worth repeating. I encourage you to read the 2 Samuel 6 account because Michal's attitude does not go unpunished. How would you describe David's heart for worship, keeping in mind the numerous psalms he wrote?

What if Paul were a Republican and Apollos were a Democrat? (Verses 1-9) What kind of division might that cause in today's Church? You would then get a glimpse of how immature the Corinthian believers were in regard to who they chose to follow. A very worldly approach, "Aren't you living like people of the world?" (V3). You know that God wants to do a work in us (believers) so much so that onlookers will notice the difference. The result will be humility and togetherness. One of the most significant paragraphs in this letter (as well as other letters written by Paul) begins in verse 10 and continues through verse 15. I have taught on this section so often because it clarifies the importance of using our lives to build God's Kingdom on the foundation of Jesus with things that last (gold, silver, jewels, v12). There are believers who will have little to show for their lives because they buried their talent or were unproductive in their

service for the Lord. Our lives matter and will be rewarded accordingly when we stand before Jesus and give an account for how we used our lives to honor Christ. Verse 15 illuminates the assurance of salvation but also affirms the sense of regret we might have if we live dormant lives as followers of Christ. How might you surrender to God's purposes for you by using the gifts he has given you and the resources that are from him?

DAY 7 – 1 Chronicles 16 & 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

The major part of this chapter coincides with several Psalms that were written by David. The closest duplicate is Psalm 105. This is primarily a Psalm of thanksgiving. Thanks stems from remembering what God has done, telling others about His goodness, and offering one's life and resources to the Lord. If you are truly thankful, your life will show it. There's much to choose from in these verses about thanksgiving, so focus on two or three verses and pray to the Lord in your own words. Yesterday, we read about David bringing the Ark of God to Jerusalem. However, the Tabernacle stayed in Gibeon with Zadok as the priest. (V39) David's plan was to reunite the tabernacle and the ark with a new temple in Jerusalem. But as we will learn tomorrow, God had different plans. David's ambition seems admirable, but it is not what God had in mind. In the meantime, Israel will have two worship centers, one in Gibeon and one in Jerusalem.

We are still learning about the problem of division in Corinth as we read the rest of chapter 3. Paul emphasizes the significance of being the temple of God together, which is meant to be holy and harmonious. The things that destroy our togetherness as God's temple are jealousy, argumentativeness, and divisiveness. The concern behind his words pertains to believers following a particular human leader when Christ offers you, as his child, everything you need. "Everything belongs to you..." (V22). We will read about being the temple of the Holy Spirit in chapter 6 as an individual, but here the emphasis is in the plural. We all, as believers, are together in the Spirit. In Ephesians 4:3, we are called to keep the unity of the Spirit, which means to guard it, saturate it with love, and live at peace with others. How are we doing, in your opinion, at New Harvest in this way? How are you doing in keeping the unity of the Spirit?

DAY 8 – 1 Chronicles 17 & 1 Corinthians 4:1-21

David has the ambition to build God's house, which would be the Temple. But the Lord has other ideas. However, the main theme is the promise of a dynasty through David. It is fascinating to realize that the chronicler is writing many years later, during a time when David's dynasty appears to have ended. But the writer believes in God's faithfulness despite exile and two kingdoms (north and south), and no descendant of David serving as King. If God spoke

through the prophet Nathan, then the promise is secure. Verse 14 parallels God's promise in 2 Samuel 7:16, prophesying that David's house and God's kingdom through his descendants would last forever. At face value, that is an amazing statement. We know that the dynasty leads to Jesus, and the only way it could be thought of as lasting forever. David's show of gratitude is a great example to us. Remain grateful and humble, and God will bless your life. How do you respond to this chapter?

The arrogance of the Corinthians was a big obstacle to unity, growth, and God's purposes being accomplished. Verse 7 expresses Paul's concern with this challenge, "For what gives you the right to make such a judgment (who is a better leader)? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift?" For most of this chapter, Paul speaks to the Corinthians like a father. He has a right to do so since the church actually exists because of Paul's missionary endeavors. How does Paul express tough love to these spiritual children; how does he express tender love to them as well? How is that a good example for us regarding our relationships with those we love?

DAY 9 – 1 Chronicles 18 & 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

One of the reasons I remember why David wasn't called to build the temple is that he was a warrior. This chapter brings that out in a very decisive way. David conquered the Philistines, Moab, Zobah, Damascus, and Edom, which expanded the territory similar to God's promise for the Promised Land in the Book of Joshua. Verses 6 & 13 say a lot, "So, the Lord made David victorious wherever he went." Receiving the favor of the Lord is something to think about in your own life. Why are you a follower of Jesus Christ? How did that happen, and how much should you take credit? You were also born into the wealthiest, most prosperous country in the world and had the opportunity to hear about Jesus. God's favor is immense and clearly seen in his goodness to you.

Have you ever heard of something we refer to as "church discipline?" The Apostle Paul is directing the leaders in the Corinthian Church to excommunicate a rebellious sinner who is unwilling to repent. We have often said that the church in America is too much like the world we live in. In verse 1, it suggests that unbelievers don't even do what the church allows to happen with a sexually immoral man having relations with his stepmother. Yikes! Is there accountability among fellow believers in the modern church? According to Paul, there should be. In fact, the believers in Corinth seem proud of themselves when the situation calls for shame and repentance. The purpose of closing the door on this man is to hopefully lead him to repentance and not be condemned. His sin is likened to yeast, which would eventually spread through the whole loaf. It does seem that this situation and others are weakening the church day after day in Corinth. How do you respond to this strong example of tough love? You

understand that this type of situation continues today. Church leaders and pastors have to be strong enough to confront continuous, blatant sin.

DAY 10 – 1 Chronicles 19 & 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

There is much more of a story behind this battle, of course. Hanun, the King of the Ammonites, was overly suspicious and misread the situation as well as David's motives. This miscue would cause much pain and disaster for these new enemies of David. Previously, Hanun's father had treated David fairly with kindness. But this all changed when Hanun ordered the beards of the Israelite messengers to be shaven and the robes to be torn at the buttocks; what a cruel and embarrassing act against the peacemakers of Israel. Even with such a humiliating act against the Israelites, it does not appear that David quickly put an army together to avenge the Ammonites. But Hanun was forming alliances out of fear, purchasing other soldiers for a battle against the Lord's people. Joab's words to his brother are repeatable for us today: "Be courageous! Let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. May the Lord's will be done!" (V13) The Lord did help his people defend their land from invasion. David accomplished three objectives in this victory. 1) He challenged Hadadezer's supremacy. 2) He threw the alliance of the Arameans into disarray. 3) He prevented any possible alliance between the Arameans and the Ammonites in the future. God was with him and with his people.

I felt like the principle presented by Paul in this short reading from 1 Corinthians 5 was especially relevant to our understanding of judging people. Our tendency is to severely judge people in the world who don't even have the help of God's Spirit to live rightly. But ignore fellow believers who are connected to each other in Christ. In fact, we are called to speak the truth in love to each other. Matthew 18:15f clearly tells us to "go" to the brother or sister if you realize they are chained to sin or have offended you personally. In this way, we are called to judge each other with a vision to help each other along the way. Galatians 6:1 says it best: "Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help (restore) that person back onto the right path." Judging people outside of Christ will be futile unless your words of truth lead them to the Lord. How are you tempted to judge people in the world? How are you prone to overlook the sins of your fellow believers? This principle is very important to the health of Christ's Church.

WEEK 3

Our next section, as we read about the history of David, pertains to preparation for the Temple. The Chronicler has an especially high regard for the Temple since most scholars believe it was Ezra who wrote these words of history for us. Ezra is responsible for the construction of the 2nd temple as recorded in the Book of Ezra. Since several of these chapters are lists of names, we might cover more than five chapters this week. But nonetheless, we are closing in on the conclusion of 1 Chronicles with 2 Chronicles right around the corner.

1 Corinthians 6 & 7 address suing believers, holiness, sexual purity, marriage, divorce, and singleness. All of these topics are still relevant today. It is so helpful to have the Apostle Paul write on these topics through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 11 – 1 Chronicles 20 & 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Are you surprised that the chronicler does not include the story of Bathsheba? You should be. But it was obviously a low point in David's life and leadership. When the kings went off to battle, David stayed home. But even the story about Absalom's rebellion is omitted as well. This chapter concisely wraps up David's exploits as a warrior king. But you might want to read 2 Samuel 11 & 12 because this coincides with the wrap-up of these victories for God's people. Both David's leadership and his spiritual pursuit of God are the focus of the author as he highlights the highlights of David's life. However, there's a lesson not to be missed. David did not go to war when the kings of the land were doing so. It was a time of inactivity. It is during these critical times that we may be most susceptible to temptation. God usually has things for us to do that will make a difference in others and bring glory to God. Resolve to take the action God has prepared for you ahead of time, as Ephesians 2:10 clearly tells us. Don't give temptation a foothold in your inactivity.

Yesterday, we read about the immoral person who needed to be confronted and disciplined. Today, we have another challenging topic concerning the church in Corinth. Most people would ask why not get a lawyer and go to court to resolve disagreements? But Paul tells us why this is negative and undermines the work of God in the church if believers are suing each other and competing in the secular courts of law. Oftentimes, we submit ourselves to the wisdom of the world as the secular courts do not always affirm Christian values. But more importantly, the basis of going to court is often revenge, and the Bible is clear we are not to avenge but leave room for God's punishment. The conflict among believers reflects a spirit of disunity and gives the lost world another excuse to discredit the church and the Christian message. Paul affirms how different the life of a believer is meant to be. Verse 11 is a great summary: "And that is

what some of you were (lost, immoral, selfish, and living contrary to God's way). But you were washed (forgiven), you were sanctified (set apart), you were justified (not guilty) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." What a privilege to represent the Lord in this world, instead of letting our lives be watered down in a society operating by human wisdom and natural instincts alone!

DAY 12 – 1 Chronicles 21 & 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Yesterday, I mentioned how the chronicler highlights the good things from David, but obviously, this situation with the census was a step back in David's life. But the chronicler even attributes the sin to Satan's enticement. I think of Satan's involvement as temptation, but David is responsible, as he gave in and ultimately made the decision that was disobedient to God. David's role in the census comes out in 2 Samuel 24:1f with no mention of Satan. This whole chapter is about making things right with God after sinning against him and giving in to the devil. The sin might be thought of as idolatry because David was putting his confidence in the size of his military. Also, there might be pride in how big the nation of Israel had become. David's decision to allow the judgment of God through a plague points to David's understanding of the character of God compared to the corruption of mankind. There's a lot to think about in this chapter. What might be your focus after reading about David's pride and idolatry, but also his confession and repentance?

Did you know that the Greco-Roman world was very promiscuous? The Apostle Paul is deeply concerned about the sexual relations of believers in a world where everything is permissible. It sounds like the 21st century, right? There are several points of application in these verses. Two of them are of particular interest to me. The fact that a believer's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit emphasizes the importance of taking care of your body and not submitting it to sinful acts contrary to the will of God. Then, Paul tells us that all other sins are outside the body, but sexual sin affects our own bodies and can lead to disease, harm to others, and bondage to shame with intense spiritual damage. There's no doubt that Paul elevates the consequences of sexual sin in how he describes the detrimental uniqueness and destruction such sin causes. So, Paul says, "Flee sexual sin!" (V18). Why does Paul have such an intense warning about sexual immorality? How might the Lord be speaking to you through these very relevant verses?

DAY 13 – 1 Chronicles 22 & 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

David is actually more involved in building the temple than I remembered. He is organizing materials and preparing his son, Solomon, to lead the charge. I remembered the reason that David was not allowed to build the temple, as he mentions in verse 8, "You have killed many

men in the battles you have fought. And since you have shed so much blood in my sight, you will not be the one to build a Temple to honor my name.” There is a sense that shedding blood made a person ceremonially unclean in the laws of God. This may be the reason because David was only doing what God instructed him to do as he defeated the surrounding nations. The Temple is a strong emphasis for the chronicler. The Temple expressed the sovereign and personal relationship between God and his people. It served to teach Israel about God’s exclusive dominion and their total dependence on him. We do not have the same emphasis as the New Testament teaches us that the Body of Christ is God’s temple, and when we gather, he has promised to be in our midst. What impresses you about this chapter?

Christians in Corinth were surrounded by sexual temptation. The city had a reputation even among pagans for sexual immorality and religious prostitution. It was to this kind of environment that Paul gave instructions on sex and marriage. Plus, believers married to unbelievers were ready to throw out their marriage commitment. Paul tells them not to unless the unbelieving spouse wants to leave. In this case, you may let them leave, and you are no longer bound to them in marriage. Sexual commitment in marriage is an important priority for a Christian couple. I read the statistic that 40% of marriages in the U.S. are sexless. Physical intimacy was designed by God within marriage to enhance the special nature and oneness he wants for us in marriage. In chapter 6, we read about sex outside of marriage as a violation of God’s will. But sex in marriage is important. The issues around divorce heighten the plan of God for marriage to be a lifelong commitment. These two issues are still causing pain and marital dissatisfaction today. How do you respond to Paul’s instruction about sex and marriage?

DAY 14 – 1 Chronicles 23 to 26 and 1 Corinthians 7:17-31

These next four chapters list the names of leaders and the organizational plan for the Levites, the Priests, the Musicians, and other officials. You may choose how much of these stipulations you want to read, but let me reference the first verse of chapter 23, “When David was an old man, he appointed his son Solomon to be king over Israel.” That is a very complex process, which is recorded in 1 Kings 1 & 2; it is not surprising that these are long chapters. But if you have the time, I would suggest reading this part of the story. Things were about to unravel until Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan got involved. Check it out! Otherwise, the record of leaders and officials found in these chapters tells us that the nation of Israel had grown significantly, and many key people were needed to orchestrate all that was to take place among God’s people.

The reading from 1 Corinthians reminds me that Paul thought Christ would return soon, most likely before he died. He says it very forthrightly, “The time that remains is very short.” (V29) So, a strong emphasis in these verses pertains to marriage and anything else that might distract a

believer from one's focus on Christ and his Kingdom. If you are already married, stay married; this is God's will for you. But if you aren't married, consider your primary calling to the Lord and your undivided attention to ministry and evangelism. Paul was challenging these believers to be "all in." They were to forfeit their rights, willing to suffer, and even die for the sake of Christ. Tomorrow's reading will pick up right where we left off with a singleness of purpose because Christ is sure to return very soon. Why is it good to anticipate the Lord's return and the fact that it could be today? How might that kind of urgency affect your life?

DAY 15 – 1 Chronicles 27 to 29 & 1 Corinthians 7:32-40

Of course, chapter 27 reads very much like the previous four chapters, but as we jump into chapter 28, David is speaking to the assembly as well as giving a charge to Solomon as God's chosen King. Verses 20 & 21 of chapter 28 are often repeated words to God's people through someone like David or from God himself, like we read in Joshua 1:9. Courage, follow-through, and the promise of God's presence are sure to bring success. David set the example of generosity in chapter 29 so that the people also gave generously for the building of the Temple. As I read David's prayer, I am impressed that David elevates the Lord's honor and majesty, as well as he prays that the people and also Solomon would desire to obey God wholeheartedly. (VV18&19) The people were filled with joy and gratitude for God's choice of Solomon to be their King. The chronicler concludes his record of David's reign as King as we close chapter 29. We will pick the story of Solomon next week in 2 Chronicles.

As I mentioned, verse 32 in 1 Corinthians continues the theme of undivided devotion to God and serving him. Marriage is such an important relationship that it takes special effort and valuable time, which could otherwise be devoted to the Lord. Paul is giving his rationale for staying unmarried like him for the sake of the Kingdom and the urgent day he lived in. I am thinking of several verses that affirm the wholehearted call to serve God, like we read in 1 Chronicles 29. I invite you to look up these verses: Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Colossians 3:23-24; and 1 Timothy 4:15-16. Of course, there are dozens more, but my challenge to you is to ask yourself this question: "Am I all in?"

WEEK 4

The history of God's people continues with Solomon and his task of building the Temple. Most Biblical historians believe that the Chronicler wrote this record of history about 400 BC with the purpose of assuring the people that God keeps his promises. The author's purpose is to provide hope in spite of the circumstances. The record is reminding people of God's activity through David and now Solomon. The theme and purpose could be summarized by the words of King Jehoshaphat, "Listen to me, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will succeed." (2 Chronicles 20:20)

We will pick up on 1 Corinthians in chapter 8 with some topics that were very prevalent in the 1st-century culture of Corinth. These topics will overlap for us concerning certain aspects of our lives and our faith today. I will be sure to make the connection so we can apply what is timeless to our lives. The topics have to do with dietary issues, idolatry of the day, sacrificed foods, along with adjusting for the Gospel to reach people different than ourselves. I look forward to our week of readings together.

DAY 16 – 2 Chronicles 1 & 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

In many ways, this chapter is a summary of Solomon taking over, but also specific to a very important prayer from Solomon. Verse 1 repeats words that were descriptive for David: "Solomon took firm control of his kingdom... God was with him, and God made him very powerful." But the specific part is especially noteworthy as it is also mentioned in 1 Kings 3:5-14. Solomon asks for wisdom more than anything else. Isn't that fascinating? It especially grabs my attention since we are studying Proverbs this summer as a church. Solomon, when asked by God for anything he might want, his replies to the Lord, "Give me wisdom and knowledge to lead... this great people of yours." (V10) The Lord was so pleased with Solomon's request that he promised to bless him beyond his imagination with wealth, riches, and fame. (V12) The last three verses in this chapter summarize Solomon's wealth and splendor. How do you respond to Solomon's request? What does that say to you about God, Solomon, and prayer?

I always remember this statement and now I know where it comes from: "knowledge puffs up but love builds up." (V1) The first three verses in this chapter present a principle that is very significant. In fact, the Apostle Paul will write one of his most famous descriptions of love in chapter 13. Here he alludes to it as well. It is those who truly love God—not just those who know all the answers—who are acknowledged by God as his own. Verse 4 presents another question that the Corinthian believers had pertaining to food offered to idols. The first thing

that Paul does is give a general principle of theology rather than a specific response to the question. Verse 6 is more like a creed that should govern all our questions. It seems like Paul is giving them freedom to eat the food offered because an idol is nothing but a piece of metal or wood. However, why do it if it could cause another believer to stumble? Why flaunt one's freedom when it could cause a weaker believer to violate their own conscience? The ability to adjust actually reflects maturity. Tomorrow, we will read about how Paul personally dealt with this issue as a mature believer.

DAY 17 – 2 Chronicles 2 & 1 Corinthians 9:1-18

The construction of the Temple was quite a project, right!? Solomon's testimony to King Hiram elevates the Lord God before this foreign king. But in verses 11 & 12, this King also speaks well of God and of Solomon. I wonder what might be genuine adoration and what was purely political? David's reputation continues as a legacy for Solomon as the King of Tyre addresses David as "my lord." (V14) There's no doubt that Israel is the ruling nation among the peoples of that land. Over one hundred thousand foreigners were assigned tasks for the building of the Temple (V17), 153,600 to be exact. This is explained in more detail in 1 Kings 9. Verses 5 & 6 are my focus for meditation as Solomon endeavors to build a magnificent Temple for God, which could not even match the majesty of God as described in verse 6, "Not even the highest heavens can contain him." Our readings this week focus on the Temple, which is meant to reflect the glory of God. How does that come out in this chapter?

Our reading from 1 Corinthians 9 points to Paul's reasoning for Christian teachers and preachers being supported by those they serve. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 as rationale for compensating those who minister the Word and lead the Body. An ox can eat while it treads the grain (V9). Paul had every right to receive financial support, but chose not to. He wanted the Corinthians, who were quite materialistic, to realize that he did not share the Gospel for money, nor was he motivated in that way at all. This was one example of how Paul gave up his rights for others. In verse 5, we notice that Paul is revealing his singleness, which made him more focused on serving the Lord, as he had previously referred to in chapter 7. But he has a high regard for marriage and affirms the partnership of marriage, as other ministers would travel with their wives, who also had the right to receive support along with their husbands. It seems that the Corinthians might not have appreciated or given Paul the proper respect he deserved. But their lack of support did not deter Paul and Barnabas from preaching the Gospel and serving the people. Paul lived for the approval of God, which is also a great example for us. Did anything catch your eye in this section about Paul's ministry and his commitment to always live for Christ and others instead of himself?

DAY 18 – 2 Chronicles 3 & 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

The dimensions of the Temple reminded me of the Tabernacle from the Book of Numbers. The size of the Temple is twice as big, but the portions are similar for the overall structure and the dimensions of the main room and the Most Holy Place. The permanent construction of the Temple utilized far more lumber, gold, and decorative artistry with cherubims, pomegranates, hanging chains, and jewels. The details for construction were more elaborate in 1 Kings 6. The focus on the Most Holy Place gets my attention. This was thought of as the divine throne room. It housed the Ark of the Covenant. It was probably elevated to demonstrate the special sacredness of this interior room, which was purposed to honor the presence of God. The reverence displayed is a good reminder for us that the Israelites knew personally the greatness of God and chose to honor him with the most decorated and revered room in the Temple, even though the Temple as a whole was thought of as God's house. How does this presentation of the Temple stir your heart?

Our reading in 1 Corinthians 9 surprises me with its significance. The principle of adjusting for the sake of the Gospel, as demonstrated by Paul, is as important today as it was then. This was another aspect of being willing to give up one's rights out of consideration for and impact on the lives of others we meet. It says Paul became a slave to identify with slaves; he postured himself as a Jew to win Jews; he would become weak to win the weak... and so on. The summary is easily understood, but much more difficult to live out. Paul shows how far he was willing to go in adjusting his lifestyle and behavior to that of the people to whom he was preaching in order to win them to Christ. Then, he uses an illustration of running a race in verses 24 -27. As an athlete, I always relate to this kind of analogy. How much more should we be willing to sacrifice for the Gospel?! How do you respond to Paul's teaching about finding common ground? (V 22, NLT)

DAY 19 – 2 Chronicles 4 & 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

What do you think about the specifications necessary for the Temple? There's a sense of the original Garden of Eden in mind, according to Biblical scholars. The Sea represented the life-giving waters for plants, animals, and human life. The water was also used for cleansing, as the water-basin in the Tabernacle had been previously (Exodus 3:18-19). Solomon used such great quantities of bronze that it could not be measured. Hiram-abi caught my attention as we have previously been introduced to him from Tyre (2:13f). "His mother was from the tribe of Dan in Israel and his father from Tyre." (V14) His contribution was immeasurable in so many ways. He may have been more than willing to help because he was possibly a God-fearing man. These instructions are dictated almost verbatim from 1 Kings 7:40-47. The Temple would be a

place to honor God and seek fellowship with him, as the Bread of the Presence represents in verse 19. The remaining chapters on the Temple are meant to highlight the predominant feature of Israel's life on earth – honoring the Almighty God!

I wanted us to end with verse 13 because it has played an important role in my life. The idea of temptation in this verse can accurately be translated as “test.” When the devil visited Jesus in the wilderness, it was described as a test. Temptation can definitely test my allegiances. Will I honor God and obey him, or will I cave into my own selfish desires? The Israelites displayed disobedience in many ways. The Apostle Paul summarizes their debacle in this chapter. Their poor example builds to this powerful principle of standing strong in the midst of temptation, like Jesus in Luke 4. Possibly the most noticeable teaching from this verse is that the Lord will NOT allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to endure and resist. Sometimes the Bible tells us to simply “flee,” run away from it, which could very well be the Lord's plan of escape. There is much to contemplate in this verse, so please do so: “The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation (test) to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.” (V13) AMEN!

DAY 20 – 2 Chronicles 5 & 1 Corinthians 10:14-33

Have you ever felt the special presence of God while worshiping? I can recall several times when I sensed God's closeness during worship. You obviously know that worship is not a modern concept but rooted in the community of God's people since the beginning, way back in Genesis 4:21 with the creation of musical instruments. Abel brought an acceptable sacrifice as worship to God and gratitude for his provision. But this record reveals the development of worship with 120 priests playing trumpets (V12). The sacred entry of the Ark was the inspiration for the moment. There was a built-in sense of awe regarding the power of the Ark and its connection to Israel and God's protection and provision. The words of worship in verse 13 are repeated several times in Psalms and still today, “He is good! His faithful love (hesed) endures forever!” Why are those simple words so inspiring and meaningful?

One of the most important themes of the Communion Meal is unity. This was lacking in the Church of Corinth. The sacrifices the people practiced in Corinth were pagan and ultimately offered to the devil. These pagan practices were confusing and causing division. If you know that the food presented has been used in pagan worship, the believers were called to avoid it. But there was often uncertainty about the food, and their freedom in Christ superseded the superstition of these pagan practices. However, not everything is beneficial, so refraining from eating food that might be compromised could be the wisest thing to do. I like how Paul

summarizes these verses in 31 to 33. First, believers are to do everything for the glory of God (V31, worth memorizing). Second, believers are not to give offense and should avoid doing anything that would harm another person's Christian faith. We respond maturely when we take into account what is best for others rather than holding on to our personal privilege. How do you respond to these two summary points?

WEEK 5

The record of the chronicler moves through history quite quickly. But two more days on the dedication of the Temple isn't surprising since the author is very interested in the role that the Temple played in the religious life of the Jews. Plus, you will probably enjoy reading about Solomon's accomplishments, which will carry us through this week.

I Corinthians 11 to 13 will be even more relevant because there's instruction on communion, teaching on the body life of the church, and the monumental chapter on love. Communion plays a central role at New Harvest, so understanding the practice of communion and the meaning of the Lord's Table will be right up our alley. This is sure to be a memorable week of reading God's Word.

DAY 21 – 2 Chronicles 6 & 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

The dedication of the Temple will spill into our reading for tomorrow. Obviously, the Temple is the focal point, but the significance of Jerusalem is right there with it. Jerusalem is an amazing place. I loved walking the streets of Jerusalem in 2016. The western wall of prayer was indeed inspiring, but the whole city had a sense of God's presence for me. In Solomon's prayer of dedication, he declared that the Temple was the house where God's name would be present. (V20) Israelites were invited to call on the name of the Lord in his Temple, the place where the covenant was preserved, and the place where God was acknowledged in praise and confession. Seven petitions are recognized in Solomon's prayer. What do you learn about prayer from Solomon's prayer?

These first 16 verses in 1 COR 11 are a bit confusing. It seems to me that the Lord wanted order and proper interactions in the church between men and women. But the head covering usually identified a woman as married and thus a wife. This teaching isn't so much about the general dynamics in the church between men and women, but the importance of honor in marriage. Often, these words are interpreted as teaching that limits a woman. But verse 5 tells us about a woman praying and prophesying, which is meant to build up the body of Christ. But her ministry should be under submission, as anyone in the church should be willing to be accountable to others. There might have been some concern with a woman's newfound freedom in Christ and speaking out of turn or not doing it in the spirit of submission. Verses 11 & 12 clearly teach that men and women are created and designed by God and mutually dependent on each other. Ultimately, we are dependent on God and accountable to him. In a real and significant way, I think the Apostle Paul is affirming the importance of strong marriages with mutual respect and

love. The core relationship in creation is the bond between a man and a woman in marriage. How might you honor marriage in a world where more and more people are ignoring the sacredness and commitment God had in mind for marriage?

DAY 22 – 2 Chronicles 7 & 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Did you notice an oft-repeated verse calling on God to heal our land? God's message to Solomon explains his reason for punishment: "because his people abandoned the Lord..." (V22) They worshiped other gods instead and bowed down to them. But the thing to notice is God's heart to restore his people. The response to God is contained in verse 14; the people need humility, repentance, seeking the Lord, and prayer in order to be healed from their distress. The chapter gives an encouraging account of the Temple and the celebration called the Festival of Shelters, which lasted for a week. It commemorates the Israelites' 40-year journey through the desert after their exodus from Egypt, during which they lived in temporary shelters. The festival involves building and living in temporary dwellings called sukkahs, and is a time of joy, harvest celebration, and remembrance of God's protection. The dedication of the Temple was chosen to take place during this festival. It was a time of celebration and thanksgiving because of the goodness of the Lord, "He is good! His faithful love endures forever!" (V3) Do you think verse 14 applies to the present situation in our country? Why or why not? What might God's message be to you through this familiar verse?

COMMUNION is the main concern in these verses from 1 COR 11. The first principle of communion is one of unity, not just with God, but with each other. Division in the Body made sharing communion together disingenuous. Plus, the spirit of communion was riddled with pride; there was a lack of focus on the meaning of the meal, and believers were causing themselves more harm than good. This section is the primary teaching on the Lord's Table in the Bible. It gives us the words of institution; it explains the proper approach; and it elevates the importance of self-examination. There's a lot here to understand and apply. At New Harvest, we make the meal available every Sunday, so reading and contemplating these 20 verses is worth your while. What do you think it means to partake in an "unworthy manner?" How do you respond to the idea of harming oneself by eating the meal in an unworthy manner? My takeaway is to share in the communion meal with Jesus as my primary focus. "Do this in remembrance of me!" Also, this meal points to a heavenly meal which is referenced in Revelation 19 as the wedding feast of the Lamb. Why is communion so special? What newer idea surfaced for you through this reading?

DAY 23 – 2 Chronicles 8 & 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Even though Solomon was considered a man of peace, in these first couple of verses, we learn that he made sure of the boundaries and stability of Israel. He also enlisted foreigners for his labor force and gave the best positions to his people. This is a “newsy” chapter revealing that the Temple and royal palace were under construction for 20 years. Solomon’s empire was very large, as this chapter outlines the extent. Some of life is being attentive to the details. Solomon showed an awareness of leadership that included maintenance and supervision. What is your takeaway from today’s Old Testament reading?

Too often, diversity disrupts unity. There are diverse gifts of the Spirit, but only one Spirit. The problem of division was paramount in Paul’s mind. Tomorrow, we will read about his profound illustration of spiritual gifts and how they work together like the human body. The purpose of the spiritual gifts given in a variety of kinds is meant to bless the church. They are given to us as believers for the common good of the church. This list of nine spiritual gifts in verses 8 to 10 is representative rather than comprehensive, right?! As Western believers, we might be inclined to make a list and present it like this is it. But in the New Testament, there are gifts given by the Spirit that far exceed nine. One scholar gave a total of 27 found in the NT, which again is not meant to be the sum total. The activity of the Holy Spirit is also quite diverse, but given by him alone. The Holy Spirit is well aware of how best to gift people in the Body of Christ. His profound ministry is at work to help us serve, pray, witness, and know the truth, as well as change us from the inside out. How would you describe the Spirit’s work in you? What might be your spiritual gift(s)?

DAY 24 – 2 Chronicles 9 & 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Scholars are not precise on where Sheba was located, but the Queen’s visit reflects the wisdom and extent of Solomon’s fame. Her acknowledgement of God’s involvement had to be encouraging to the readers in the 4th century when the Chronicler wrote this account of Israel’s history. Verse 8 is especially descriptive, with the Queen actually giving praise to God. “Praise the Lord your God, who delights in you and has placed you on the throne as king to rule for him.” Very interesting. Some scholars suggest that the Queen was thinking of herself and her country since Solomon could take over Sheba as well. His military power and expansion made the surrounding countries nervous. Solomon used the wisdom God gave him to promote the strength and security of Israel during his reign. Some of the numbers and amounts are so big that it is hard to grasp such wealth. We have especially wealthy people in our world today, so big numbers aren’t unusual for us, but still hard to comprehend. I must say that this account of Solomon keeps everything positive, but the truth is Solomon had many foreign wives who influenced him negatively. The transition from Solomon to one of his sons was far from smooth

and launched God's people into a downward spiral with a division among God's people that would never be reconciled.

Don't you think the illustration of the human body (1 COR 12:12f) as reflective of the diversity of people and the diversity of God's gifts is so profound? Romans 12:4-5 uses the same analogy but in a much simpler way, of course. Unity has always been a high value to our God. He is the bridge builder as he sent his Son to give us access to a relationship with him. The reason for togetherness and yet diversity in the Body has to do with caring for each other and working together because we need each other. Verses 25 & 26 give us a good summary of caring and helping each other. "If one part (one person) suffers, all parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all parts are glad." Paul wraps up this section with another list of gifts which correspond to some of the roles in the Body. Again, he does something very similar in Romans 12:6-8 as well as Ephesians 4:11. I mention that verse in Ephesians because it tells us why God gives gifts = to equip the Body of Christ for ministry. Gifts were too often viewed with pride in the Corinthian Church. The blessing of gifts is intended for helping others, not elevating ourselves. How do you respond to this interesting and insightful presentation on spiritual gifts?

DAY 25 – 2 Chronicles 10 & 1 Corinthians 13

I told you things were going to decline quickly. It seems obvious to us that Rehoboam should have listened to the advice of his elders and been more gracious to the people. But he embraces the ideas of the younger men, and many people rebel. The interesting phrase from the Chronicler is "this turn of events was the will of God..." (V15) So often, the author of this historical record portrays all the events of life as under the sovereignty and determination of God. Literally, it says that "God brought this about." There are aspects of life that will only be understood when we are in heaven. This is one of those occurrences, in my opinion. A divided kingdom seems contrary to the will of God, but the Lord oversees everything. His sovereignty will make sense in heaven. Practically speaking, Rehoboam's arrogance was both unwise and immature. However, God did not give up on him and will watch over Judah while the northern tribes will go their own way. This will unfold for us next week.

Our reading in 1 COR is quite a turnabout from the intensity and chaos in 2 Corinthians 10. Love never fails! I guess that would be the phrase that gets my attention. What aspect of love catches your eye? This is a beautiful reading from the pen of Paul. It is so eloquent that some have suggested that he was quoting a poet on love. But I am inclined to take these words as uniquely inspired by God, elevating the importance of love. Paul's abrupt insertion of these words is meant to emphasize that love is more important than any spiritual gift. The most important thing for Christians is to deeply and consistently love people. There couldn't be a more

thorough presentation on what it means to love. There's no question that this portrays love in the fullest way possible. You can sense the marvel of love's definition, which will one day fill the environment of heaven completely. How does the comparison speak to you in verses 1 to 3? What stands out to you from the definition of love in verses 4 to 7? Why is love the clearest reflection of spiritual maturity, according to verses 8 to 13?

WEEK 6

This week will launch us into the first three Kings to succeed Solomon. Their leadership will be limited to the southern kingdom known as Judah. We learned that a divided kingdom was the will of God, which could seem confusing since I can't give you a good reason for it. But let's read on and see what we might discover. Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa are Judah's kings in succession. You can anticipate Abijah's courageous declaration to Jeroboam, king of the northern kingdom, by midweek. This was especially interesting to me. The readings from 2 Chronicles will be quite thought-provoking and give us some points of application.

We will aggressively complete 1 Corinthians this week (chapters 14 to 16). The readings will be longer, but I don't want to leave chapter 16 hanging on until the following week. We will then be ready for the inspiration of 2 Corinthians, one of my favorite books. However, we will receive helpful instruction this week on public worship, amazing truth about the resurrection, and final thoughts from Paul to the Corinthian Church.

DAY 26 – 2 Chronicles 11 & 1 Corinthians 14:1-40

What would be your natural instinct if people had disappointed you or even abandoned you? You might have a variety of responses, but letting go of it probably wouldn't be your first choice. Rehoboam and the men of Judah would be inclined to set things straight with Jeroboam and the rebellious Israelites. But the prophet said no, "So they obeyed the message of the Lord (from Shemaiah) and did not fight against Jeroboam." (V4) That's a good start for the smaller southern kingdom. The Lord would bless that decision, and the result would be priests moving to Judah and even people who wanted to honor the Lord and David's legacy. (V17) But good starts do not always mean a good finish. Let that thought help you anticipate tomorrow's reading.

It is interesting to read this chapter, but it might seem a bit irrelevant since the public speaking in tongues is not something we practice at New Harvest. But speaking in tongues was a big deal in the Corinthian Church. However, this emphasis seems unique to this church. This is the only letter that gives instructions and boundaries for speaking in tongues, except for the occurrences in the Book of Acts. But there is a point that is quite valuable and worth noting, "prophecy strengthens the entire church." (V4) I have asked the Lord for the gift of prophecy as it suggests in verse 1. I think the Lord has helped me to be prophetic many times. But of course, my definition for prophecy is "forthtelling God's truth," not "foretelling the future." I think that is the basic definition, even here in this chapter. The Word of God challenges believers, who are motivated by the gift of prophecy, to share the Word of God in a way that speaks directly to

those who are listening. Does that make sense? How do you respond to this chapter, realizing that the definition is “forthtelling the truth?” There is one more paragraph that I want to clarify (Verses 34-35). In 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul already gives some instruction about women praying and prophesying in the church. Then, it must have happened. But our paragraph sounds like women should never say anything in church. But what if the main statement in verses 34-35 is “If they have questions, they should ask their husbands at home...” Most scholars believe that some women were speaking out of turn and actually needed more instruction in God’s truth. The modesty and submissiveness of a woman were especially important regarding public ministry and speaking. The women whom God used throughout the Bible had the common thread of maturity, humility, and respect for the leaders. This is quite a chapter for us; how are you applying it to your life?

DAY 27 – 2 Chronicles 12 & 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Just when you might think things are going forward in just the right way, wham! In fact, it summarizes Rehoboam’s life and leadership in verse 14, “But he was an evil king, for he did not seek the Lord with all of his heart.” The Chronicler emphasizes the godliness of people and leaders quite often and usually omits the bad stuff. So, I would suggest that Rehoboam drifted mightily away from God since the author expresses such demeaning words to summarize Rehoboam’s life. So sad! Even after repenting of his/their sins, the consequences are very severe, right? Rehoboam’s grandfather was David. It tells me that people can drift very quickly, and leaders can become arrogant and hardhearted. It will move in a better direction, thank God, as Rehoboam’s son, Abijah, becomes king. How does this heavy chapter affect you?

I think it is always worthwhile to review the Good News, which Paul does at the beginning of this chapter. This is the only place where we read about 500 people seeing the resurrected Christ at one time. Some of these living witnesses were still alive 20 years after the resurrection because that is approximately when Paul wrote this letter. This affirms the fact of our Lord’s resurrection since each of these witnesses could tell you about it. The factual credibility of the resurrection has always been important to me. I have read and studied authors who have outlined how sure we can be of the resurrection of Jesus. The fact that the disciples gave their lives as martyrs is a powerful verification of who would die for a lie. Verse 10 has been a favorite for me. I have always been a worker. But working within my own strength has proven to be foolish. But God’s power at work within me has made the all-out effort possible. How do you respond to Paul’s words from verse 10?

DAY 28 – 2 Chronicles 13 & 1 Corinthians 15:12-34

The boldness of Abijah has to be the focal point of this chapter in 2 Chronicles. He spoke more like a prophet than a king. His concerns with the northern kingdom under Jeroboam seem quite valid, with their rejection of David, the abandonment of God's city, the worship of idols, and the unauthorized priests who did not have God's blessing. That is quite a list, which was confronted prophetically by King Abijah, concluding with the defeat of Jeroboam. But the positive record of Abijah in this chapter does not match the short but condemning statements about him in 1 Kings 15:1-4. The Lord was good to Abijah because David was his great-grandfather. Rehoboam was Abijah's father, of course, and his dad had abandoned his spiritual allegiance to God, and I would suggest that Abijah did the same thing. The Lord honored Abijah's leadership during this war against the rebellious northern kingdom, but it seems to me that the Lord was ultimately displeased with Abijah. We can do some good things for God, but the Lord always focuses on the condition of our hearts. How is your spiritual heart before the Lord?

The resurrection becomes the central topic for the rest of chapter 15 in this letter to the Corinthians. The importance of the resurrection cannot be overemphasized. Everything pertaining to our faith now in this life, and especially about our anticipated life in heaven, hinges on the resurrection. If some were doubting whether there is such a reality as the resurrection, Paul is confronting them with both barrels. Beginning in verse 20, Paul teaches on the truth of the resurrection. With Adam, we all died; but through Christ, who is the firstfruits of resurrection, we can live on. Firstfruits means that he, Jesus, has launched the great harvest of God's people who will be resurrected. Paul is confronting the pride of the Corinthians, as some of them have denied the resurrection. He is telling them how futile it is to believe in Christ if he is dead in the grave. Why would Paul risk his lifetime, and again, if there was no hope of eternal resurrection life? He wouldn't! How do these words inspire you? How would you describe the importance of the resurrection to someone who is skeptical?

DAY 29 – 2 Chronicles 14 & 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Isn't it refreshing to read verse 2, "Asa did what was pleasing and good in the sight of the Lord his God?!" The main emphasis of his concern to please the Lord was to eliminate pagan practices among the people of God in Judah. There was peace in the land until an army from Ethiopia decided to attack Judah in verse 9. It is hard to imagine such a huge army advancing to destroy God's people. But Asa was ready as he cried to the Lord. This was a tremendous victory enabled by Asa's complete dependency on God. His prayer is definitely the most inspirational part of this chapter in verse 11! "O Lord, you are God; do not let mere men prevail against you." There's no doubt that Asa begins his reign on the right foot. I wish I could say this will continue throughout his life. But like his Great-grandfather, Solomon, he will fade in his devotion and dependency on God. Friends, do not let that happen in your life. Finish well!

The strong hope of the resurrection fills these verses. This characterized the outlook of the early Christians. They were able to endure their suffering because their eyes were fixed on what lay beyond this life. This is Paul's strong message as he encourages them to have faith with sure confidence that Jesus will return, and when he does, they will enjoy a resurrected body forever as followers of Christ. Jesus' bodily resurrection was the foundation of their faith in their own resurrection one day. How do the words of verses 35 to 58 inspire you? What stands out to you? My interest centers on how once I was a man after Adam, made from the dust of the earth. But now I am a person connected to Christ who came from heaven. I am now assured of heaven and can even live right now as a heavenly man (person). (VV45-49) My hope is based on Christ alone and the assurance of his resurrection that makes my destiny sure as well. I hope these words fill you with hope, as one day we will enjoy resurrection life with resurrection bodies forever. Why would Paul end with a challenge in verse 58? How does that challenge you today, even as you have an eye on eternity?

DAY 30 – 2 Chronicles 15 & 1 Corinthians 16

There's something in me that is uncomfortable with forced allegiance to God, as we read in verse 13. In words from verse 15 (NIV), it says, "they had sworn it wholeheartedly." I know it is an expression, but who actually loves God wholeheartedly? Not everyone is at the same place spiritually at the same time, so if it is demanded and the consequences are death, my experience tells me, people will fake it. Religious pride can be the result, which might lead to being judgmental. The importance of humility is also lost. By the next chapter, we will read about an outcome that occurs, which seems to stem from religious pride and taking God for granted. The chronicler presents this religious expectation of wholehearted devotion as a positive thing, and so I think my response could be off somewhat. But legalism does not produce spiritual health and vibrancy. I sense some legalism in this approach of demanding devotion to God. What do you think?

The first thing I notice in chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians has to do with giving. "Set aside a portion of the money you have earned." As you do, you recognize that all this money is God's and he has enabled you to earn it. Also, I have enjoyed the personal sharing of Paul in this letter and other letters like it. Paul was a more relational person than we give him credit for. He cared deeply for people and appreciated the sacrifice and devotion of other believers immensely. You can sense his love and support for those in his life. In verse 22, he says, "Maranatha." It means "Our Lord (please) come!" This became a simple but repeated prayer in the early church. It is still a significant emphasis for us today. Don't you want Jesus to come back?! Well, I encourage you to pray this prayer, "Maranatha!" Also, is there a person or a phrase in Paul's final remarks that

gets your attention? If so, how? Possibly, think of people in your life that you appreciate and send them a text or offer up a prayer, or share a word of encouragement the next time you see them. Let Paul be our example of encouraging and supporting each other.

WEEK 7

Both our Old Testament and New Testament readings are especially exciting to me. We will focus on the life and leadership of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles. I bet you have heard of him. His life has some things we can emulate, but as always, he is a human being. I think we should understand how these kings were elevated to the status of gods. They were the celebrities of their day. Remaining humble was almost impossible for them. Let's get ready to see how Jehoshaphat does in keeping God first.

2 Corinthians includes topics that are important for each of us as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Some of the things we are about to read are front and center for us, like the glory of the new covenant, or the new creation that is found in Christ, or the idea of being the Lord's ambassadors. But this first week of readings in 2 Corinthians will keep us busy with only the first two chapters. However, this too will be very practical with several points of application.

DAY 31 – 2 Chronicles 16 & 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

This is our third chapter on King Asa. Overall, he displays a sensitivity to God with dependence and obedience. So, why the sudden neglect of faith in the Lord, and why not inquire of God before moving out on his own? Asa pursues a human ally in King Aram. The seer, Hanani, confronts him for leaning on a pagan king for help and not on God. Asa had shown a real trust in the Lord previously. God had been a big enough ally for Asa in the past. This is the context for a monumental Scripture that has shaped my life and understanding. "The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." (V9) Hanani's words will become a timeless truth that I have witnessed many times in my life. But Asa gets angry with Hanani and throws him in prison. I recall the title of a book by Eugene Peterson, "The Long Road of Obedience." Asa had done many admirable deeds and displayed an allegiance to God, but it dwindles as Asa is nearing the end of his life. Remember, life is a long lesson in trusting God.

One reason you will enjoy this letter is that we get to know Paul on an even more personal level. Paul's approach to life and ministry is worth repeating, but it won't be easy. His life is an example of suffering, opposition, disappointment, and near-death experiences. But he remains... what? FAITHFUL! Something is presented by Paul in our reading that is especially important, in my thinking. He affirms the God who comforts and then tells us to be a funnel of that comfort (VV3-4). Way back in Genesis 12, the Lord promised to bless Abram so that he could be a blessing to others. This principle fills God's Word. God generously and consistently

shares his gifts of blessing, comfort, forgiveness, love... in order for us to receive them and then give them away. The sin of hoarding spiritual blessings is grievous to God, right?! This will be a theme in this letter as we enjoy reconciliation, for example, so that (purpose) we might offer the same to others. I only wanted us to read these first seven verses because this principle of sharing the gifts God gives us with others is at the heart of ministry as a disciple of Jesus. How has God blessed you? And how might he want you to be a funnel of blessing for him?

DAY 32 – 2 Chronicles 17 & 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

The story of Jehoshaphat is one of consistency and reliance on God. In fact, under his leadership, the teaching of God's law spread throughout Judah. He commissioned the officers, some Levites, and two priests to go to the towns of Judah and teach the people about God's ways. (V9) The impact of a godly leader cannot be underestimated. The people esteemed him, and the surrounding nations feared him. This was due to the Lord's favor because he honored the Lord. He experienced the promise of 2 CHRON 16:9. Did you take time to memorize that verse? Hanani was punished by Asa for saying those words, but Jehoshaphat was blessed by the truth of those words. Jehoshaphat actually learned from his father's mistakes. There were two years when Asa and his son, Jehoshaphat, shared the reign as king. During that time, there were conflicts and oppression that Jehoshaphat would have to overcome and correct. He did just that as he consolidated power within Judah in an effort to restore peace and stability. When we do it God's way, which is wise, there is much evidence that the Lord will bless and restore. I believe that, do you?!

This short paragraph in 2 Corinthians 1:8f has my attention as I have counted on God's desire to deliver people in their troubles. The intensity of Paul's problems is noticed in the fact that he thought he would die. Literally, the word used is "deliverance," but I actually like the word "rescue" even more (NLT). Rescue fits the nature of what Paul faced with the overwhelming odds of being taken out. This might be a physical illness, but more likely, the oppressive situations of persecution and imprisonment were on his mind, which could quickly lead to execution and death. "We have placed our confidence (hope) in him!" There's the key. Even though the circumstances did not seem hopeful, Paul trusted in God's plan and purpose. God had been faithful in the past, and he will be faithful again. It's with that kind of confidence that I pray for people as a pastor. "And you are helping us by praying for us." (V11) Do you have that kind of confidence in prayer? God is faithful and completely trustworthy!!

DAY 33 – 2 Chronicles 18 & 2 Corinthians 1:12-24

We don't learn about God's displeasure with Jehoshaphat until tomorrow, but I was uneasy with the alliance between a wicked king named Ahab and Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah. God was gracious to Jehoshaphat on the battlefield as he was dressed like a king, and Ahab was in disguise. The enemy soldiers almost took him out (V31). The chronicler doesn't spend time focusing on the kings of Israel, but in 1 Kings 18f we read about Ahab's encounter with Elijah and Ahab's wife Jezebel. In fact, the Scripture suggests he was the most evil king to ever reign in Israel. Jehoshaphat lacks wisdom, or he would have never agreed to partner with Ahab. Plus, the way that Ahab treated the prophet Micaiah should have been a strong enough indicator that Jehoshaphat was doing the wrong thing. Ahab's selfish approach to his life and leadership had come to an end. No one can hide from God with a human disguise or any hidden deception. Ahab's error was fatal. The lesson in this story is intense, but don't ever forget that nothing is hidden from the Lord.

There's no doubt that Paul is addressing a specific concern in our reading today from 2 Corinthians 1. It seems that Paul has had a change of plans. Because the Corinthians were easily offended, they criticized Paul for being fickle. Some were looking for the slightest mistake so that they could criticize him regarding his ministry as a whole. Paul had to be tenacious. Verses 21 & 22 stand out to me because they address something that is true for me and every believer. Listen to the way these two verses are translated in the NIV, "Now it is God who makes both us and you (then and even now) stand firm in Christ. (How?) He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Those words are not only significant; they are timeless until Christ returns. Christ, the anointed one, has anointed his followers with the Holy Spirit who lives in us. The NLT adds words of explanation when it reads, "He has commissioned us." When people were sent on a mission, they were often anointed with olive oil. Paul affirms this about himself, the Corinthian believers, and you and me still. How do you respond to these two verses?

DAY 34 – 2 Chronicles 19 & 1 Corinthians 2:1-11

Obviously, Jehoshaphat's covenant with the wicked Ahab conflicted with his covenant with the Lord. In chapter 16, Hanani, the seer, was thrown into prison by King Asa. (16:10) This punishment was unjust, of course. So, it is good to know that Hanani is still serving the Lord and is free to do so in our reading today. The chapter highlights Jehoshaphat's delegation of authority to make judgments according to the laws of God. The aspect of Jehoshaphat's delegation to other leaders, Levites, and priests that caught my attention was the importance of character. Honesty, integrity, and faithfulness were mentioned right along with the responsibilities of the job. The "how" of leadership was equal to the "what." Make sense? For example, he got the job done, but the spirit in which he did it caused hurt and division among

the ranks. Not good! Jesus did many miraculous things, but how he did them was most impressive. “Learn from me for I am humble and gentle in heart.” (Mt 11:29) What does it mean for you to consider how you do things as important as the accomplishment of doing things?

I recall a debate about the message in our reading urging them to forgive. In 1 Corinthians 5:1f, we read about the sinner who was unwilling to repent even though he was living with his father’s wife immorally. Sometimes Paul’s push for forgiveness, in verses 5 to 11, is connected to that story from 1 Corinthians 5. But I think a more likely connection has to do with a Corinthian leader who continually opposed Paul, which would relate to the context of what Paul had been writing about. It was time to forgive. This is a very important principle because holding a grudge harms the fellowship of the church, but even more so, the person who won’t forgive. The message of Christ is one of forgiveness that, when received, is also meant to be shared. Jesus had a few parables about not forgiving, which demonstrated his deep concern for withholding forgiveness. In fact, Paul tells us in verse 11 that withholding forgiveness is something the devil uses to outsmart us. The New Testament teaching on forgiveness is quite thorough and encourages us to put the situation in God’s hands and let go. Why is forgiveness such an important topic for us? How grateful are you for the forgiveness Jesus offers? How willing are you to share it with others who may have hurt you?

DAY 35 – 2 Chronicles 20 & 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

You have just read the most famous story about Jehoshaphat. The worship leaders, with singing, led the people against the enemy who were marching to Judah to battle the people of the southern kingdom. God caused confusion and even infighting, so much so that the enemy soldiers killed each other. The prophet (V14) who spoke up displayed amazing faith and courage to assure God’s people the “battle belongs to the Lord.” (V15) The Lord definitely honored his name against the pagan nations ready to attack. After God’s victory, it says that the surrounding kingdoms were consumed with fear and dared not move against God’s people. Jehoshaphat’s kingdom was at peace (V30). But I noticed two things of interest: Jehoshaphat was very much afraid when he heard about the large army coming against him. I might be surprised that he was afraid, but I also take some encouragement from it because sometimes I respond with fear. Jehoshaphat would regroup and seek the Lord with humility. In spite of his fear, the Lord was with him. Secondly, Jehoshaphat calls Abraham God’s friend (V7). This is impressive to me because the Bible only says that one other time in the Old Testament (Isaiah 41:8). James 2:23 recognizes Abraham as a friend of God, but that would be written hundreds of years later. Jehoshaphat was especially strong in his understanding of the historic faith of God’s people. Overall, he served God well during his reign.

One of my favorite concepts is “the aroma of Christ.” The backdrop for Paul’s analogy comes from incense that was scattered along the parade route of a victorious Roman general. It was received in two ways, as Paul writes. For the captives who were on their way to the arena and death, it was a “dreadful smell of death and doom.” For the victors, it was “a life-giving perfume.” So, it is with the lives of those who proclaim the Good News, which either leads to eternal life or seals the fate of the person who rejects it. The idea of being the aroma of Christ is actually very challenging to me, probably to you too. How is this encouraging to you; how is it challenging to you?

WEEK 8

2 Chronicles tells us about the next four Kings of Judah as we tackle the next five chapters. I have not had the time to read about these kings and besides Joash, I am not as familiar with this part of Judah's history. So, we can go on this exploratory journey together. Thanks for wanting to do it with me.

My ignorance of 2 Chronicles is matched by my familiarity with 2 COR 3 to 5. These are very special chapters and teach us so much about ministry through the New Covenant. By the time we wrap up our reading this week, we will be commissioned as Christ's ambassadors. I can't think of a more significant title and calling than that. Can you?

DAY 36 – 2 Chronicles 21 & 2 Corinthians 3:1-11

I wasn't expecting to read such a terrible story about the oldest son of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram. He is definitely a "downer." It is unthinkable to us for anyone to get away with killing all their brothers, right?! And listen to these words, "Jehoram followed the example of the kings of Israel and was as wicked as King Ahab." (V6) If you remember, Ahab was thought to be the most wicked king of the northern kingdom ever. This is the first and last time we read about Elijah in 2 CHRON. How would you like to meet a hero like Elijah and the only thing he has to say to you points to destruction and death? It makes me wonder what motivated Jehoram to live like he did and do what he did? His behavior is devilish. "No one was sorry when he died." (V20) I have only participated in a couple of funerals that had a similar feel. People were not outwardly demeaning but inwardly you could feel their distaste and relief that the person had died. Wow. This is what we read as this chapter concludes. What might be a "take away" for you?

Paul is comparing the old with the new covenant in 2 COR 3. The writer of Hebrews does something very similar in chapter 8 & 9. The positive effect of the New Covenant is seen in the believers as the Holy Spirit works in their lives. The essence of the New Covenant is summarized in these words, "The Spirit gives life." According to the NC, the Lord planned for his presence to live in the hearts of believers. The author of the new life is the Spirit of Christ. The Lord Jesus is at the right hand of God but his Spirit lives among us and is in us as believers. How much more glorious is this reality than the covenant of the past written on stone tablets? Now God's life is written on our hearts. Essentially, Paul is affirming the truth that believers are evidence of God's new life in us. We are "'letters' (V3) written not with pen and ink, but with

the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts.” How does that inspire you?

DAY 37 – 2 Chronicles 22 & 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

There is no God in Judah at this time. The events and violence that took place during this seven-year period could be described as “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” The value human life was at an all-time low in Judah. Israel from the north was firmly planted in the soil of sin but now Judah looks very much the same. A primary character in this chapter is the mother of the king, Athaliah. Guess who was her mother? Jezebel. Things were so bad that an infant boy named Joash had to be hidden or he would be killed on the spot. It is hard to imagine living like the royal family was living at that time. These verses are a quick read for me unless I want to focus on selfishness, sin, arrogance, and willful murders, but I don’t!

It is a difficult reality to know that most Jews reject the message of Christ. This is what Paul is writing and is still true today. He uses the idea of a veil. The veil reminds us that the Jewish people are blinded from the truth. Christ came to remove this veil of unbelief. “This veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.” (V14) In Christ, we now have access to God and by the Spirit we get glimpses of his glory. The Spirit reveals Christ, provides freedom in the Lord, and is at work transforming us into the “image” of Jesus. The NLT says, (he) makes us more and more like him (Christ). Paul uses the historical event of Moses coming down Mt. Sinai and the face of Moses is glowing because of being face to face with Yahweh. The people didn’t want to see him like that out of fear so he put a veil over his face. This veil represents the barrier of faith in Christ for most Jews. However, I am thrilled by the possibilities that the Spirit provides for you and me as recipients of the New Covenant found in Christ Jesus. What aspect of Paul’s teaching in these six verses gets your attention? Why?

DAY 38 – 2 Chronicles 23 & 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.

Athaliah was a devilish leader, as I mentioned yesterday realizing her mother had been Jezebel. It took the priest seven years to finally say enough is enough. Jehoiada, the priest might lose his life but it would be worth it, for sure. Who else would stop the wicked queen, Athaliah? She had everyone executed that could threaten her position, so she thought. Evil people might think they can get away with their godless behavior and ruthless disregard for human life. But even the best plans for evil go sour. By this time Judah had slipped so far away from God that Baal was worshiped in Jerusalem. Jehoiada knew what God would want since it was recorded in 1 Chronicles 24 & 25. The hero of this chapter is the priest. However, he could have acted sooner but the chances of success might have been less. Athaliah naively believed that she had

everything set for her wicked leadership. I sense that Jehoiada had waited for the right set of circumstances to arsenal the support and plan to eliminate such an evil queen. Nothing would have changed without the courage of Jehoiada. So too, there are times when we must speak out, correct a wrong, and do what is right. When such a situation arises, gather up your courage and act. Amen!

The idea of us being compared to jars of clay (V7) is impacting, in my opinion. In fact, there are several comparisons in these verses that are fairly well known and pack a punch. “Decaying on the outside, renewed on the inside,” for example (V16). The truth about the devil’s influence among unbelieving makes perfect sense to me. “The god of this age (devil) has blinded the minds of unbelievers...” (V4) But we don’t give up. There is a high calling for us as mere human beings to point people to Christ. We don’t need exceptional talents but only the sincerity of our faith along with the courage to press on. We already learned that the veil hiding the truth of the Gospel from the minds of unbelievers is removed by faith in Jesus. The key is the Gospel, not just the significance of our words or the influence of our lives. Rather, the power of God that shines even brighter through weak human beings like us. Paul does not want the Corinthian believers to give up (V16). Don’t focus on the circumstances of this life, but on the wonder of life in Christ that far exceeds anything this life has to offer. His main goal in this chapter is to keep the power and priority of the Gospel first in your life. How do you see that in this chapter? What might God be saying to you through these inspiring words?

DAY 39 – 2 Chronicles 24 & 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Jehoiada is my hero and just think the Lord blessed him with 130 years on earth and he remained faithful to God (V15). His influence among the people was very great. I also noticed the offering chest (V8) placed at the gate of the Temple was filled up as people passed by with their offerings, a tax instituted by Moses (Exodus 30:11-16). As a young man and a newer believer, I had the opportunity to attend an all-black church in Omaha, NE. I lived in Omaha for 3 years as Wendy and I were married there and I served in Youth for Christ. One of our students attended this black church. When they took the offering people paraded up to the front to place their financial gifts in a “chest” of sorts. They were singing and dancing as they proceeded to the front of the church. It was a new experience for me. Many of these new friends in the church had just enough to live on but they loved giving to the Lord. It seems to be that same way in this story from the first half of 2 CHRON 24. After Jehoiada died, things changed so rapidly for the worst. Zachariah, Jehoiada’s son spoke out and the King order for him to be executed. Joash would die as punishment from the Lord. Joash is another example of a King falling away toward the end of his life.

The resurrection is a big deal, right?! (2 COR 5) So, when I wanted to emphasize the resurrection and the Gospel, I recently picked this passage for my presentation in the Marion County Jail. I think it has everything to teach regarding heaven, resurrected bodies, the focus on faith, and the day of reckoning. To me, this gives a stronger more concise presentation about our heavenly bodies than even 1 COR 15, which we read a couple of weeks ago. These words tell why Paul was not afraid to die. How might this also help you be confident and relinquish any fear of death? The judgment seat of Christ is an important topic for us. One day we will stand before Christ and give an account. Eternal life is obviously a free gift received by grace through faith. But we will also be judged by Christ. This judgment will reward us for how we lived on this earth for the sake of Christ. We also read 1 COR 3:10-15 on the subject of rewards about a month ago. Only deeds representing gold, silver, and precious stones will last and be rewarded. How we live matters. And, we have the Holy Spirit to help us. Anything we do in his power through his leading will be rewarded one day in heaven. Amen!

DAY 40 – 2 Chronicles 25 & 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Amaziah is the king for this chapter. God speaks to him and leads him to victory, right?! So, why the idols (V14)? What is he thinking? I actually have no idea. It must be caused by pride as he is impressed with his accomplishments. It seems utterly foolish to worship the gods of a defeated enemy. Even the King of Israel, Jehoash knew that Amaziah was full of pride and arrogance (V19). We know that a clear biblical principle throughout the Scriptures is, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” How might I possess pride or think of myself too highly? Romans 12:3, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” Amaziah died a defeated man with very little to show for himself that really matters. His example is one of folly and not of godly wisdom. How might God want to use these negative examples from 2 Chronicles in your life?

This is another section in 2 COR that is packed with memorable verses like the love of Christ compels me to being new creations in Christ to the calling of God as ambassadors of Christ. Wow! All of these statements are worth our attention but verse 16 also has something worth considering. I like how the NLT words this: “We have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view (instead, we realize they possess an eternal soul). At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now!” This reminds me that our human interactions are more than two people talking about stuff, but actually we are dealing with someone who will live in fellowship with Christ forever or who will be separated from God for eternity. That’s huge, right! I can get rather focused on the things of this life and forget about the bigger story, the most important reality... the new creation that is

possible and available for anyone who believes (V17). Plus, every day I have a calling on my life as a follower of Christ to represent him (ambassador) to the world; that is, to everyone I meet. How do you respond to these verses packed with so much truth?

WEEK 9

Our sequence of kings continues, of course. We will anticipate the story of Hezekiah during the second half of the week. Hezekiah has four chapters dedicated to his life and leadership. I am looking forward to renewing my memory of his life. I remember that his faith and accomplishments are a breath of fresh air for us after so many kings began strong and slipped from their close relationship with God and succumbed to pride. Do you think that also happens in Hezekiah's life?

Even though this part of 2 Corinthians isn't as familiar, I think you will be surprised how interesting it is and how it remains practical as well as inspiring. We have issues around partnerships formed, repentance offered, and generosity called for. We will cover these topics and more this week from chapters 6 through 8.

DAY 41 – 2 Chronicles 26 & 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

The Scriptures teach us that good things can be passed down generation after generation, but so can the sins of the fathers. Uzziah begins well, very well. But by verse 16, pride has got a grip on him. This is the repeat pattern of his father and grandfather. They began well and finished poorly. I am ready for this same storyline for the next two kings, as one generation repeats itself again and again. But I don't believe it has to stay that way. With God's help, people can break the generational curses of those who were before them. I have prayed that in my life, and have prayed that for others many times. We realize this truth about life, and yet we believe God is bigger than the curses of the past. Noah had no righteous example, but he lived righteously anyway. He broke the generational cycle in his day. One very tangible concern was Uzziah's lack of gratitude. God had been active in his life and through his life, but his conclusion was to take things into his own hands. Gratitude, along with humility, can protect us from pride and self-centeredness. How well do you know that everything good in your life comes from God? Why not thank him for it right now?

I immediately notice verse 1 in this 6th chapter of 2nd Corinthians. It tells me not to receive God's grace in vain. To receive God's grace in vain is basically to keep what God has given you to yourself. This is to neglect the high calling of being his ambassadors by doing nothing and saying nothing concerning what God has done for you. Paul and his partners could never be accused of that because they laid down their lives for Christ. Verses 4 to 10 are quite a list. That is such a compelling list to me and also a convicting list, to be honest. But Paul did all of this because he was a servant of God (V4). Verses 8 to 10 dictate a number of comparisons with both sides of

the coin being presented, telling us that no matter what, he would remain true to his calling for Christ. I am sure something stands out to you from Paul's strong words and stirring list of qualities. Which qualities or comparisons stick out to you? Why? What might God be saying to you through it?

DAY 42 – 2 Chronicles 27/28 & 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

I thought that we could tackle these two chapters, with Jotham only taking up nine verses and Ahaz getting much more attention. However, Ahaz gets more press just like the bad news we get on TV. Chapter 28 is a difficult one to read. Life at that time in history had little regard for human life. It is hard for us to understand how this could be. But I would suggest that life would be like that and even more so if it weren't for Christ and his influence through the Spirit in our lives. It is reported that 1/4 of the people on Earth are believers in Jesus. If so, they (we) possess the Spirit of the living God in our hearts. Through the Spirit, God's will is accomplished through the lives of Christ followers. This is dramatically affecting our world for the better. Oh, there are still wars, poverty, violence, and crimes of every kind in this fallen world, but it would be unimaginable if the Lord had not intervened through His Son. I am thankful today that God chose to allow me to enter life when he did. To know Christ is everything to me in such a disappointing and unpredictable world. I am grateful for Jesus!

Obviously, this is a very short reading from 2 Corinthians 6, but the topic seems quite relevant. What does it mean to be unequally yoked? Yoked is the term used for teaming two oxen together, for example, as they pull a plow. Each animal pulls equally. At least that's the idea. In our Scripture, Paul urges believers not to form binding relationships with nonbelievers because this might weaken their Christian commitment and standards. This does not mean separating yourself from interaction with nonbelievers or even forming a friendship with them. Paul emphasizes our witness to people who need Christ. But these binding ties, like marriage or in business, can cause one to compromise their allegiance to Christ and weaken their testimony. The idea is that believers should do everything in their power to avoid situations that force them to divide their loyalties. Does that make sense? What if you are already married to a nonbeliever? In 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, Paul tells Christians to stay with their nonbelieving spouse. Maybe the believing spouse can win them over to the faith.

DAY 43 – 2 Chronicles 29 & 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

It is important to be reminded that since the divided kingdoms of north and south, Judah had been considered the faithful remnant of the Lord. Israel had drifted far from the ways of God, but Judah had maintained an allegiance to the Lord during these years of division. However,

King Ahaz in Judah reversed this, as we read about yesterday. Remember back when Jeroboam founded the northern kingdom, the righteous people from the north went to Judah to escape Jeroboam's wickedness. But Ahaz changed that by making metal images and worshipping the gods of Damascus in Judah. His apostasy was so great that more righteousness was found in the north than in Judah (28:9-15). That's why this chapter begins a hopeful journey with Hezekiah at the helm. In the first year of his reign, Hezekiah began to restore the Temple (V3), which is the focus of this chapter, of course. The restoration of the Temple can be symbolic of our own personal growth as a believer. The priests removed the defiled things first. (VV15-17) Cleansing of themselves and of the Temple had to precede the dedication of the Temple for genuine worship. Cleansing first, then filling of the Lord through his Spirit, also fits our spiritual lives, right!? Confession of sin and even repentance precede God doing a new work in our hearts. Does that make sense? How might this be something you practice today?

2 Corinthians gives us some personal interaction from Paul to the Corinthians, which I always appreciated because Paul can seem like a distant teacher but he actually has a very warm heart toward people. But the section that I have focused on over the years more than any other part in this chapter is the distinction between worldly and godly repentance (VV8-12). Worldly sorrow pertains to feeling bad about something because you were caught or people were mad at you. But godly sorrow, which refers to genuine repentance, produces "earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm..." (V11). This kind of sorrow leads to change, that is, going in the right direction after realizing you had been moving in the wrong direction. Clarifying what genuine repentance means has become an important emphasis in my life and in my ministry to others. How does this presentation from Paul on repentance touch your heart? The personal connection that Paul shares in our reading today is meaningful, but the spiritual principle on repentance is timeless. How would you try to explain genuine repentance to someone?

DAY 44 – 2 Chronicles 30 & 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

This chapter is actually one that features the wisdom and impact of Hezekiah. Restoring Israel's worship with the Passover is a major accomplishment. And his invitation was so inclusive, even if most of the people from the north ridiculed and laughed at the messengers. (V10) Also, his approach was flexible since it wasn't possible to celebrate it at the usual time, he deemed it more important to do it than if it hadn't been done. This meant it would be celebrated a month later. But the best, most profound adjustment was concerning the purification of those who had traveled so far. They weren't ready, nor did they have the opportunity to purify themselves according to the requirements of the ceremonial laws. But Hezekiah was gracious and prayed for them and called it good. I love that. But the act of traveling so far and the reality of many

others rejecting Hezekiah's offer made a gracious acceptance understandable and proper. What do you think? Hezekiah reflected God's heart, in my opinion. Isn't it marvelous to know that our God is gracious, compassionate... slow to anger, abounding in love!?

This begins some of Paul's most extensive teaching on the importance of generosity. There are two verses in the reading today that get my attention. The first one is verse 7, since I gave a six-part sermon series on this one verse several years ago, and I still remember it. If we are to excel in something, it is worth researching and teaching on all six topics. His whole point is that we might serve and love and testify, but all the while neglect the importance of giving. That is contrary to a devoted believer. I actually think I did two sermons on giving in the series, instead of just one, because the emphasis is obviously about financial giving. But verse 9 is even better because it reveals the motivation behind the giving. Jesus' example of giving shows that he was willing to become poor so that he could make us rich. It gives us at least two things to think about: our spiritual lives are the most important aspect of our lives, and the Lord has made a way for us to be rich spiritually. And, our generosity is meant to be a reflection of how rich we are in Christ so that we can freely and graciously share with others the material gifts we have, knowing that we are spiritually rich. What stands out to you about generous giving in these verses?

DAY 45 – 2 Chronicles 31 & 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

It seems to me, more often than not, that when God's people are asked to be generous, they usually are. This is the case in point from our reading today. The response was far greater than anticipated or required. This coincides with 2 Corinthians 8 & 9 on the importance of generosity. Why might God's people be more generous than the everyday people of our world? For me, it is declared in Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." It is all God's. So, holding on to the Lord's resources is unthinkable, especially since he has made it so clear that we are to share his resources. The helpful principle of giving is often referred to as the tithe, which means 10%, or a tenth. By releasing the tithe, I demonstrate that I believe all that I have is his. How does the challenge to be generous affect your life?

This reading does not seem to fit the theme of giving. But the emphasis pertains to the offerings given as Titus and his companions would "take the offering to Jerusalem." (V19) The plan is to have two other Christian men travel with Titus to Corinth in order to guard against any criticism over the handling of the relief funds that they collected (8:20-21). Titus himself was a man of sterling character, whom all the churches praised. He and his companions would ensure that the money was properly handled. The credibility of leaders is so crucial to the health of the church. No other aspect of Christianity is criticized more than its fallen leaders. Preachers speak out

zealously and too often fall dramatically, staining the testimony of the church. But Paul elevates Titus as one with integrity. He became a faithful leader whom Paul could rely on as he placed him in responsible positions time and again. Titus is thought of as a pastor who served in some capacity in Corinth and also for a longer duration on the island of Crete as the pastor of that church. It is people like Titus who God has used to establish the church, then and now. I am grateful for several examples of integrity during my years as a follower of Christ. How important is your integrity? Why?

WEEK 10

Guess what? After ten weeks of reading about Judah's history of kings and wars, we are wrapping up with the last 5 chapters in 2 Chronicles. Plus, we will read the last five chapters of 2 Corinthians, which will be a lot of ground to cover. But wrapping up both books in the same week is preferable. Josiah will inspire us from 2 Chronicles, and Paul's amazing perseverance is sure to deepen our commitment to stick with it as a follower of Christ, whatever the situation might be.

DAY 46 – 2 Chronicles 32 & 2 Corinthians 9

The Chronicler summarizes in twenty-three verses the lengthy account of the siege against Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:17-19:37; Isaiah 36-38). God's response to the attack of King Sennacherib of Assyria was a blessing that resulted from Judah's and Hezekiah's faithfulness. The interchange between Sennacherib and Hezekiah appears to be ominous. But God's reliability is sufficient, and the Lord rescues his people and brings justice to Sennacherib. Hezekiah brings great hope and stability to Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord was pleased with him. But something is off as verse 31 leaves us hanging, but 2 Kings 20:12-20 fills us in more so. In fact, Hezekiah's response to the prophet, Isaiah, is very telling. "At least there will be peace and security during my lifetime." (2 Kings 20:19). Hezekiah prayed to be healed, and he was. But following that, Hezekiah had a son named Manasseh, who we will read about tomorrow. In my opinion, Hezekiah would have been better off dying during his illness than to be healed and hand the reign over to his son. This will possibly make you eager to read a very disappointing story tomorrow.

There is one verse in 2 COR 9 that has shaped my thinking on giving like no other: "You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. 'For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.'" (V7) Beginning in verse 6 until the end of the chapter, Paul gives us the most helpful instructions about giving. Verse 8 affirms God's desire to meet your financial needs in such a way that you have enough to share. The importance of sharing a portion of God's goodness with his church and his people is announced throughout the Bible. Many times, it is referred to as the tithe, which simply means a tenth. When God's people are generous, we more clearly reflect the image of God, who is more than generous; he is the life giver. Generosity brings God glory and spills over into a spirit of thanksgiving among God's people. Giving is a very significant aspect of one's devotion to Christ. Is that how you see it? What idea or truth stands out to you in this chapter?

DAY 47 – 2 Chronicles 33 & 2 Corinthians 10

There are a few questions that come to my mind as I read this upsetting chapter on the wickedness of Manasseh. What kind of influence did Hezekiah have on his young son? Hezekiah seemed so strong in the Lord, but I get the sense that he didn't have a high regard for his legacy. As I said yesterday, he was concerned about his life and peace in the land while he was living, but after that, he doesn't appear to care. So, Manasseh rules in the complete opposite of his father. Plus, Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh after God healed him. This has made a big impression on me. Wouldn't it have been better for Hezekiah to go to heaven and for Manasseh never to be born? (As I mentioned yesterday.) It is amazing to me how patient the Lord is with his people. Manasseh repents later on, and the Lord restores his position and forgives his sins. (V13) The record of Manasseh's reign in the Book of Kings does not include his repentance. The Chronicler gives us this insight and helps us understand why Manasseh would rule for 55 years, more than any other King of Judah. However, the people were not inclined to repent, and thus the history of Judah is in jeopardy.

2 Corinthians 10 begins a longer section of Paul's defense since some of the believers in Corinth were questioning his authority. Woven into these chapters are timeless principles that we do well to follow. The most thought-provoking message for me is found in verses 3 to 5. Paul uses a military metaphor regarding the spiritual battle we wage. Our weapons have spiritual power to break down strongholds, which is often a term used for the work of the devil. The weapons of warfare are mentioned by Paul in his letters with the clearest presentation in Ephesians 6:10f with the armor of God, and specifically the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. God's Word, coupled with prayer, is a mighty weapon in the spiritual battles of everyday life. Let me also add the shield of faith because our trust in God and the assurance of his victory helps us stand firm in faith. A major avenue for the enemy's attack is related to our thinking. "We take every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (V5) When Jesus was tempted by the devil, he utilized the timeless Word of God to resist him. This is why verses 3 to 5 have been my focus after reading this chapter. I realize how persistent the devil is and how the Lord has given me (and you) weapons to resist, stand firm, and defeat the devil. How do you respond to the attacks of the devil?

Day 48 – 2 Chronicles 34 & 2 Corinthians 11

I am interested in the discovery of the Book of the Law written by Moses. What that means is this record had been lost, probably during the time of Manasseh and his pagan practices. Fifty-five years without the Law of God governing the people would definitely cause a decline. Just think if we were without the Bible for 55 years, what might happen in the church? Left to

our own finite memories and propensity to sin and selfishness, the church would become very weak and forget her mission. When believers neglect fellowship and the reading of the Word, their lives decline as well. We often suggest that since women are not found very often in the Bible playing significant roles, that means they weren't supposed to. But Huldah, the prophet, played a very important role for God's people as she assured the repentant King Josiah that God would withhold his punishment. (VV26-28) Josiah pleased the Lord as he endeavored to honor God as King. What do you appreciate about Josiah in this chapter?

2 Corinthians 11 has several touchpoints for me. I know it is a longer chapter, but I am enjoying more time in God's Word during the month of August on purpose. I hope you have more time to give to your daily reading in the Bible. Verse 3 tells us that one of the devil's main goals is to disrupt our simple and sincere devotion to Christ. In this case, the false teachers were instruments in the hands of Satan. This same enemy, named Satan, disguises himself as an angel of light (V14). One of the most intense lists of achievements by any servant in the Bible is found right here in verses 22 to 27. Paul is unique in his affirmation of suffering and weakness as qualifications of true apostleship. Many of these experiences are recorded in the Book of Acts. Can you identify any of these specifically from Acts? The unique prescription of suffering and the Christian faith is one we have a tendency to ignore. Obviously, no one wants to sign up for hardship and suffering, but the truth is that God is noticed more easily through his strength given to us in suffering than our joy in victory. Do you agree? How does Paul's journey impact you?

DAY 49 – 2 Chronicles 35 & 2 Corinthians 12

Like Hezekiah, Josiah had the people gather for Passover, which most likely had not happened for 50 years because of Manasseh's ungodly leadership. The record tells us that this Passover was like no other since the time of Samuel (V18). The affirmation of Josiah is especially strong because his focus was to honor God first and foremost. But I sense a kink in his armor (literally and figuratively) as he displayed an unnecessary posture of pride and stubbornness against the king of Egypt, Neco. The random arrow of an enemy soldier would cause a fatal wound. It is a sober reminder that our lives are in the hands of God. My thoughts gravitate to Josiah's susceptibility to make even more selfish and stubborn choices, so God allowed the arrow to give him a quick exit from this life. I might be off on that opinion, but Josiah would be thought of as a godly king unless he had done more dishonorable things. Josiah died young, at age 39. It might be a new idea for you, but I think God takes people home to heaven at just the right time, and sometimes that means a shorter life on earth than expected. But he always has a purpose, and one purpose might be to keep someone from dishonoring their allegiance to him. What do you think about that?

2 Corinthians 12 has a paragraph that I have referred to many times. I am sure you know the verses I am talking about. Paul gives us the unique approach of boasting about his weaknesses because they have the potential of reflecting God's strength. That is because our weaknesses cause us to depend upon God's help and strength. I am fascinated by the "thorn in my flesh" idea that Paul shares in verse 7. Whatever it was, which no one is absolutely sure, caused Paul to reduce his pride and increase his dependence. The word of the Lord to Paul lives on for us: "My grace is all you need (sufficient). My power works best in weakness." I believe that message for myself and count it to be true for me too. Also, Paul said that the Lord spoke to him, which reminds me that God is a communicating God, the One who desires to reveal himself to us. Listening to God is a spiritual practice that grows as we wait on him, listen to His Word, and are also attentive to the whispers of the Spirit. I believe the Lord still whispers just as the Word of God teaches. When was the last time you thought you heard the whisper of God? How might you place yourself before him as a listener?

DAY 50 – 2 Chronicles 36 & 2 Corinthians 13

This chapter rapidly relays the record of Judah from 609 BC to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, plus the role of King Cyrus of Persia in the return of God's people to Jerusalem under the guidance of Ezra the Priest. We also see Jeremiah's influence as God's prophet, even learning about Jeremiah's role with Josiah as he wrote funeral songs for Josiah (35:25). Jeremiah had a long and arduous life as a prophet, but his words from God were fulfilled as this final chapter in 2 Chronicles declares in verse 21. Jeremiah told Zedekiah to submit to the Babylonians instead of looking to Egypt for help. Jeremiah 52 tells us about the punishment of Zedekiah for not listening; he was too stubborn and full of pride. He is defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, sees his sons executed, and is then led off to die in a prison in Babylon. Jeremiah spoke the Word of God, but hardly anyone listened. The Chronicler wants to remind God's people that history can repeat itself with ungodly leadership or the allegiance of godly kings like David. We, too, can shape the future for good by following the ways of the Lord, just like we learned in our study of Proverbs.

2 Corinthians 13 ends with a benediction that we often share at the close of our worship gatherings. It is simple and profound. Paul includes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which gives us another affirmation of God in three persons. Before this uplifting benediction, there are some points of emphasis that I want to affirm. The importance of examination is the call of verses 5 & 6. Many believers practice the prayers of examination, as we might recite Psalm 139:23-24 as our prayer. Or, Psalm 19:12-14 also has to do with spiritual examination and confession of sin. After that, Paul gives us a short but life-changing exhortation, "Be joyful. Grow

in maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace.” These words of instruction are simple but make a big impact when practiced in the Body of Christ. Which one of the four might you practice more intentionally? Hasn’t 2 Corinthians covered the Christian life so well? What teaching from this letter are you remembering?