

## Read Ezekiel 1

**The appearance of the wheels and their workmanship was like sparkling beryl, and all four of them had the same form, their appearance and workmanship *being* as if one wheel were within another. Ezek 1:16**

When I was preparing for basic training I had to take the ASVAB. This is a test administered to every incoming recruit to determine if you're an idiot or not. If you're determined not to be an idiot, the test should indicate what areas of expertise you could be most easily trained. My recruiter told me not to worry about studying for it, because it would be easy for me. So on test day, everything was going fine until I got to the mechanical portion of the test. There were simple schematics of machine parts and you had to determine how the machine worked. Thanks to some strategic guesses on that multiple choice section, I came out considered to have a good working knowledge of machines. My local auto mechanic would challenge that assumption.

Of all the machines I have ever come across, this one in Ezekiel 1 is the most confusing. The description is mind-boggling and goes beyond verse 16. This is where we find out that these four wheels that Ezekiel sees are actually all inside of one another and able to turn freely without being on the ground. I get the sense of the gears of a clock, but more tightly packed. The wheels were covered in eyes, and seem to be manipulated by angelic beings, but not all the time. It's almost as if they were waiting on something. **I argue that the "something" they were waiting on was the command of God. This seems to be a description to me of the way God works. We look at our lives and see them as chaotic and confusing. But if we were to see a mechanism by which God works, we would see the orderly image of these wheels all being precisely turned and controlled. God doesn't work haphazardly, but works with the ability to be in complete control at all times. That doesn't mean that we have no choices to make. We need to choose to pray and ask God to make these moves. We need to submit that when we see God making a move, we move with Him. Our prayer today should be, "God if you're doing it, then I should be on board."**

## Read Ezekiel 2

**As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard *Him* speaking to me. Ezek 2:2**

I think as a teen I always secretly wanted to be a rebel, but I just couldn't pull it off. As much as I loved school in general, there were a few classes that I didn't enjoy (Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Algebra II, the list goes on). As I was sitting in class one day I thought of the kids in my school who skipped classes they didn't like. I thought about getting right up out of my desk and walking out of the classroom and leaving. But I wondered if I could even do it. So I made a move from my desk and raised myself just out of my seat to prove to myself that I could really do it. Then I sat back down and endured the rest of my class. I just wasn't the kind of person who could act on such a notion.

I'm sure Ezekiel thought the same thing about Himself as God is calling him. This isn't the most exciting call a person can receive. When I've been placed in a new position of

ministry, it's exciting. However, God tells Ezekiel twice that he is to share God's message even if the people aren't listening. That indicates to me that the people probably weren't going to listen. So why and how would Ezekiel be able to do this? Because of verse 2. In verse 1 God tells Ezekiel to stand, and in verse 2, the Holy Spirit of God gives him the strength to do what was asked. You see God doesn't send us off by ourselves to serve Him. A missionary could be dropped off in hostile area all alone to share the gospel, but he wouldn't really be alone. **God gives us what we need to do what He asks. In Ezekiel's day, the Holy Spirit wasn't a guarantee like it is for us today. The Holy Spirit moved and worked, but only today through Christ do we have Him living inside of us constantly. So what do you need to do that the Holy Spirit can't help you through? Nothing! Whether you want to be more bold to share your faith, obedient to avoid a particular sin, or even if you want to pray more effectively, the Holy Spirit can accomplish all of those things in you. You have the power through Him, but you need to add your willingness to His awesomeness.**

### Read Ezekiel 3

**"However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself." Ezek 3:21**

I've always been torn by the practice of flashing your lights at oncoming cars to warn them of speed traps ahead. When I first figured out what my parents were doing, I thought it was a great idea and a way for people to work together. After driving for a few years, I began to have second thoughts. If someone is driving at an unsafe speed, should I warn them so they avoid a ticket? Am I really helping them? It seems like I was helping people avoid a punishment that was supposed to curb that kind of behavior. I've found that I don't do this as often as I once did.

When we see someone who is sinning, what should we do? Ezekiel was given the task of going to his own people. There would be no excuse that he didn't know the language or the culture, because he grew up in it. God tells Ezekiel that He will tell the prophet when to speak, and one of those times is when God leads him to confront a sinner. Here is the interesting part. The warning wasn't just for the benefit of the sinner, but for Ezekiel himself. When I warn a speeding driver of a cop, I'm not really benefiting myself at all. But, the prophet was told that if he was led to confront someone over their sin, and he chose not to, that Ezekiel would be guilty of sin. By delivering these people from sin, he would also be delivering himself from judgment. Ignoring the sin of our family and friends is never the loving thing to do. We need to make sure that we come in an attitude of love and concern instead of acting as though we are the only righteous person in the room. I'm sure that Ezekiel approached his fellow countrymen with love and compassion. Not all listened, but it's clear that some must have based on this command to the prophet. **Who do you know around you that's struggling with sin? Maybe they're contemplating an unbiblical divorce. Maybe they are abusing alcohol or another substance. Maybe they're being a poor witness in some other way amongst unbelievers. Whatever it is, if God lays the person on your heart, pray and then go**

**and think about how you would want someone to approach you if the roles were reversed.**

#### **Read Ezekiel 4**

**Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. According to the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. Ezek 4:4**

School assembly day was always a great day. You had shortened classes, time to talk to your friends, and hopefully something fun to take part in. Sometimes that was the case (I still can't believe that Seatbelt Man autographed his picture for me!), but not so with the guy in the wheelchair. It was probably a Junior High assembly when the guy wheeled out and told us about how he jumped off a bridge into a river, only to find out the river was a foot deep. He broke his neck and had to spend the rest of his life confined to a wheelchair. The lesson was that we should think about our choices instead of just doing whatever comes to mind.

The man in the wheelchair had suffered, and the intended result was that we would see that suffering and we would make a different choice. Well Ezekiel didn't have a walk in the park on this assignment. God tells him to draw a picture of Jerusalem on a clay tablet and show it under siege. Then Ezekiel has to lay on his left side for a number of days that would be equal to the number of years Jerusalem has been in sin against the Lord. However, it also coincides to the 390 days that Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem as well. During his time laying there he's eating poorly and just miserable. And here is another example of a people that should have listened, but never did. **Do you have an unbelieving family member or friend who shuts you down when you try to talk about your faith? Pretty much all of us do, but what do you do about it? Do you just keep your mouth shut and pretend like there is no eternity for that person to worry about? God knew the choice they would make. Ezekiel probably figured it out pretty quickly as well. But God continued to reach out to them. He continued to make the truth known. God doesn't give up on the hard hearted, so neither should we. Don't write people off because they've always been hard to the gospel before. You never know what even in their life will suddenly show them who they are in light of eternity. And as believers we need to be there prepared to help them through it.**

#### **Read Ezekiel 5**

**'Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased ; then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My zeal when I have spent My wrath upon them. Ezek 5:13**

I had stitches when I was five because I don't listen to my mommy. There was always a puddle of water on one part of our playground, and in the winter it turned to ice. I decided to join everyone on the ice by running as fast as I could and then skating across it. Apparently I skated too far and hit the concrete, because I don't even remember it. I woke up in the nurse's office with my chin busted open. The doctor gave me 10 stitches and

after a week or so, I went it to have them taken out. He asked if I could count backwards from ten while he pulled them out. I said I could, until he pulled the first one. The pain was so bad (at least in my five-year-old memory) that I quickly chose crying over counting. They did give me the tweezers to keep as a memento, but my mom broke my heart when I wasn't allowed to use them to get candy out of the Christmas candy dish.

The pain that I went through wasn't fun for me or the doctor, but it was necessary. And the more I read the Old Testament, the more I see the heart of God in the destruction of Jerusalem. Would the loving thing have been to leave the people in their sin and not bring about the destruction? God had sent prophet after prophet and the people resisted and grew more rebellious. If He had not acted, there would have been no nation of God to save. The wrath of God was a satisfiable wrath, and it had a purpose. So many times people use the excuse that they were angry, but it was a righteous anger. The anger of God always has a purpose. The anger of humans often has no purpose except to make us feel better, but it rarely accomplishes that. **Do you struggle with the sin of anger? As Christians our desire should be like God, and one of those areas is how He handles anger. His anger always has a purpose. His intention is not to scare people, but to ultimately bring them back to Him. Love is always behind the anger of God. His love for His people and His desire that they would live lives that will be pleasing to Him and rewarding to them. Does your anger have a godly purpose? Don't use the excuse that this is how God made you. That's the argument that homosexuals use. You have a choice, and that choice needs to be to serve God at every turn.**

### **Read Ezekiel 6**

**"Then they will know that I am the LORD; I have not said in vain that I would inflict this disaster on them." Ezek 6:10**

Christians all over the world face tremendous persecution and hardship as a result of their unwillingness to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ. Often the imprisonment of these believers happens with absolutely no charges being filed. Family members beg to know where their loved one is being kept, but to no avail. It becomes clear that these believers will not receive any kind of due process, but will suffer for the crime of faith.

There is something else that we learn of God's discipline here in this chapter. Not only will God discipline His children when we sin, but He will make the sin clear to us. God went about and had the idols and altars destroyed that Israel had given their hearts to. In times that I have been disciplined by the Lord over my sin, I have always known what the sin was. It may partly have been because I felt guilty, but I also believe the Holy Spirit makes our sin clear to us so that we can avoid it in the future. If we were unaware of what we had done wrong, His discipline wouldn't serve a purpose because we wouldn't know what to avoid. God's Word and His actions are not in vain. He has a purpose behind everything that He does. When I know that God has lead me to a particular place, whether I wanted to be there or not, I begin to think about what it is that God wants me to learn. As Christians we need to remember who God is. Because of what He had done in Ezekiel's time, the people would know that He is the Lord. **He is not just a god among gods. He's not just available to talk when you feel like it. He's not someone we**

consult at particular moments of our lives. He has complete Lordship over our lives. There's not a think He says "yes" to that we should ever respond back with "no". Let's remember that He is a God of love, and as a result of that love, He doesn't promise He won't take us through times that are painful. Sometimes the pain is what's required to give us a strong reminder of what we should stay away from. What sin is God plainly telling you to drop that you keep ignoring? He is not just telling us that leaving that sin would be a good idea. He's telling us it's His will for our lives.

### Read Ezekiel 7

**'Now the end is upon you, and I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways and bring all your abominations upon you. Ezek 7:3**

Matt Holliday is not my favorite player. The St. Louis Cardinals picked him up halfway through the 2009 season, and he was a great addition. Solid bat, good fielding, and just an overall great player. That is, until the playoffs came. Holliday dropped an easy fly ball that could have ended a game, but instead allowed the Dodgers to win the game and ultimately the series. After the season was over, Holliday wanted a new contract, but he didn't base it on his performance. He based it on everyone around him. So he waited for the other available players to sign contracts, so he could compare his numbers and ask for more. The problem is, the other players didn't sign for much money, so he had nothing to compare himself to. For the first time, he would have to stand on his own merits as a player, instead of magnifying the deficiencies of others.

Notice here how God is going to judge. He's not going to judge based on the behavior and actions of other people, but of the guilty themselves. Certainly Israel wasn't the only nation prone to idolatry and worshipping false gods. But, they were the only one that had been chosen personally by the Lord. So when the time of judgment came, they couldn't compare themselves against other nations, but only the standard God sets. **Do you realize that everything we do is measured by the standard God sets? And His standard is perfection, which means we can't hit it. Only through Jesus Christ covering my sin, can I know that when God does a final examination after my death, He will see the perfect life of Jesus covering my imperfect life because I asked Him to. Who are you comparing yourself against: man or God? If you compare yourself against enough people, you'll eventually feel good about yourself and not worry about your sin. God wants us constantly aware that He is the standard setter. So stop comparing yourself to other Christians or even to non-believers. On the day you stand before the Lord, there will be no one standing near enough to make you look better. You will be judged alone.**

### Read Ezekiel 8

**Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun. Ezek 8:16**

While I was in high school we went to the same church for that entire time, before finally moving to a new church when I started college. Our family had committed to giving towards the building fund, but of course after moving we certainly didn't have any intention of continuing that support. A few months later we received a letter from the church asking us to keep our commitment. We had left because we felt the Word of God wasn't being clearly taught, and the pastor and church knew our reasons. But the church still decided to ask us to support them financially. A year later after they had their new addition, I was talking to one of their members who went on and on about their building, but said nothing of any ministry they were doing. In fact, that church had been ignoring the needs of those in their neighborhood, reaching for those in more affluent neighborhoods further away. They were more concerned with glorifying their church than their Lord.

Where does our worship go in church? While it seems a no brainer that our worship is for our Lord, I've been in services where the church seemed to be glorifying themselves more than God. In this passage, you have men inside the house of God who are bowing to the sun and worshipping it. The sun didn't secure their nation for them. The sun didn't build and support the work of the temple they worshipped in. The people of Israel had misplaced their worship. **Is your church misplacing its worship? Are you emphasizing the pastor, the building, or God? Churches that stop growing and ministering after a pastor leaves, were building themselves on the wrong foundations. Is the Word of God shared and explained, or do we get by with new facilities and funny stories? Make sure that before you walk into your church, you remember what the purpose is. It's not to make friends, or to put in your time. It is set aside so that you and I have a place we can go and shut out the world and allow ourselves to be fully attentive to God's message for us.**

### Read Ezekiel 9

**The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, *even* through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." Ezek 9:4**

I never had to send artillery rounds into battle, but we trained on enough fire missions during my time in the military that I always had a fear in the back of my mind: putting rounds onto friendly targets. There were a few times during training that one of our artillery units would land a round short or long and we would cease fire until they figured out their mistakes. Air Force pilots don't have these same worries. They often support troops from the air in the same way that we do from the ground. But these pilots are equipped with laser guided bombs. So they drop the bomb on an estimated target, and troops on the ground use a targeting laser on the appropriate target. The bomb seeks out that laser and can destroy its target without risking the lives of friendly troops.

If I had to describe God in one word, the word I would most use is that He's personal. I believe that still covers words like loving and forgiving, because they make up the personal care that God shows towards His people. It's an overwhelming thought to know that the God of the universe knows and cares for me and listens when I pray. Here in

Ezekiel 9, we have another proof of the personal nature of our God. When He brings destruction upon Jerusalem for their idolatries, He spares those who have not allowed themselves to be sucked in by falsehoods. He places a mark on their forehead, similar to the one that will be used in Revelation to determine who is for the antichrist, and who is for the Lord. So once again, God is accused of being an Old Testament God of judgment, we see that judgment falls on those who deserved it, but those who were truly distraught over the choices of the city were spared. **Does sin really bother you? And not just your sin, but do you find yourself disturbed by the sin of others? If this judgment were coming to your town today, would He place a mark of protection on you? What do you do about sin? Do you challenge fellow believers to leave their sin behind? Do you simply go along with the sin and fail to set an example that will cause others to choose selflessness over selfishness. God is paying attention and is completely aware of all our choices. Let us live set apart in a world of unbelievers who all live pretty much the same.**

### **Read Ezekiel 10**

**Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. Ezek 10:18**

Remember the first time you used a microscope? As you looked through the eyepiece, you suddenly realized that there was so much more going on in this world that we had never seen. Some of it I wanted to see, like chloroplasts in a leaf. Some of it I didn't want to see, like the 20/20 report on bedbugs in hotel sheets. Either way, it made me aware that just because I can't see something, doesn't mean it's not happening.

This is especially true on a spiritual level. We talk about God, Jesus, or Holy Spirit, but we forget about the angelic work that is going on all around us. What if like the prophet Elisha, we could have our eyes truly opened for a few moments to see the angels, and the demons, that move around the places that we live and work. In the case of the temple, God removed His glory and His presence from the threshold, or the entrance of the temple. And so the angels hovered above, watching the movements of the people who were oblivious below. **I don't want to be oblivious. I want to remember that I am a servant of the Lord, and there are many other unseen servants moving about me many of my days. Are you living as if the unseen does not exist? Let's remember that our lives are all about faith...trusting the unseen over the seen. Remember today, and be praying for, the unseen spiritual battles that are going on around us.**

### **Read Ezekiel 11**

**And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, Ezek 11:19**

If I needed a heart transplant, it is a very involved process. You can't just shove any heart-sized object into my chest and have everything work. You have to find a heart from someone with a similar blood type, and the replacement heart has to be in good working order. A surgeon would be unwilling to place a new heart into someone if he knew that it wasn't a good fit. It would be a waste of the heart and a danger to his patient.

God here is talking about a heart transplant, but He's not replacing a heart that is failing, but a heart that is dead. These people had died to shame and remorse. Their hearts were hard and beyond conviction. God's desire was not just to bring judgment on His people, but to awaken them inside. He would replace their stony and unfeeling hearts with living hearts of flesh, easily affected by the realization that judgment came because they set aside their God. **Your heart may not be a rock, but are there some rocky areas? Some people that you are very calloused towards? Some needs that you know of in the lives of others, but have chosen to ignore? Or are there sins you are making excuses for instead of pushing them out of your life? Let us pray today that God would give us a heart of flesh. Let us look at our lives fresh and see the areas that we have hardened against who God wants us to be. Let's stop living like we're the only person on the planet who has issues and problems.**

### Read Ezekiel 12

**Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "None of My words will be delayed any longer. Whatever word I speak will be performed,"'" declares the Lord GOD. Ezek 12:28**

Getting hit by a pitch in little league was rough, but not nearly as bad as when you get hit in the major leagues. You have big, strong pitchers throwing in the 90's and some guys have been hurt very badly with injuries ranging from broken hands to Ray Chapman who actually died after being hit in the head by a pitch. After a hitter is hit, he has two choices: take your base or start a fight. I've never understood the guys that walk 4 or 5 steps down towards first and then decide to charge the mound. I don't think a pitcher should be attacked because a ball got away from him, but it's amazing how ferocious these guys get after being hit.

Is the batter who walks five steps towards first base more compassionate than the batter who immediately charges the mound? Of course not, because the delay was minimal and didn't change anything. We can't really learn grace and compassion from a baseball player, but we would be wise to learn from God. How many days did God have to watch, hear, and even see the sin of Israel contained in the thoughts of His people? There is no one who endures more when wronged than our Lord does. Yet, He delayed His judgments in order that the people could apologize, turn back and stop hurting the heart of God. But they choose to continue as they were. **Do you immediately lash out when someone wrongs you? If we were to be like Jesus, we would be willing to allow the other person to acknowledge their mistakes. We all know that there are times that we realize we made the wrong choice, but someone else telling us embarrasses us. So instead of jumping down someone's throat after a mistake or grievance, give people a moment to correct the situation on their own. They'll appreciate you, and they'll see grace and compassion. Just because someone acted like a jerk to you, doesn't give you the right to repay that attitude to them. Let us live the compassion of Jesus with those around us when they do wrong.**

### Read Ezekiel 13

**Behold, when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked, 'Where is the plaster with which you plastered it?' Ezek 13:12**

Living in Pennsylvania has been a big change from living in the Midwest. While there are many differences between the two areas, one of the biggest involves houses. Not the price difference, but the fact that you can find 100-year-old homes in Pennsylvania that are still fit to live in. We saw many homes for sale that needed some updating, but were still structurally sound from top to bottom. I could count on one hand the number of 100-year-old homes I've ever seen in Missouri. I'm not saying that Missouri doesn't have its fair share of craftsman in its past, but if you brought back the builders from 100 years ago to look at their homes now (or the place their homes once stood), I think the Missouri builders would feel a sense of sorrow that their work didn't stand up.

False prophets were a dime a dozen in Israel. It's no wonder that the people were so easily misled, because there were plenty of people who claimed to speak for God who had never met Him personally. These false prophets were accused of putting up a whitewall of lies that was likened to plaster. And as the destruction comes, even as these prophets said all would be well, God asks what good their "prophecies" were? They worked so hard at all the wrong things, instead of allowing God to direct their words and their work. **What will your work look like in 100 years? Are you doing eternal things, or just living the week to week life that we get so easily caught up in? You find yourself living day to day, paycheck to paycheck, moment to moment, but never really making plans to go anywhere. Seek out God's will for you. His desire isn't just that you float through life, putting up a little plaster here and there, only to see your work and effort have no real meaning. Find something, maybe through your church, or interaction with your neighbors, or helping those less fortunate that will allow you to make a permanent mark on people, and a mark that will outlive yourself.**

### Read Ezekiel 14

**Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations. Ezek 14:6**

Harvey and Paula Darden were starting to have that feeling...we're in the wrong place. They had been invited to tour the White House, but as they got there they were directed into an invitation only breakfast hosted by President Obama. Harvey tried to tell security that he was sure they were in the wrong place, but security told them to "go with the flow". Soon after, the Dardens found themselves in the main banquet room. As Harvey looked around, he KNEW they were in the wrong place. Everyone was very well dressed, except for He and Paula whom he described as looking "exactly like tourists to the White House."

We've all had that feeling that we're not in the right place, and it always makes me feel uneasy. Maybe I think I'm going to get in trouble or something, but I just hate knowing that I've messed up. God points out to the elders of Israel that they have messed up and

that their in the wrong place. They have put idols in their hearts and set them up in their lives, instead of allowing God to have first place. But the Lord says to them to repent and turn away. That's always God's desire; not that we say sorry, but we then do something about it. He also says to "turn your faces". Literally the phrase means "put them back where they belong". They should have been looking at God, but they were looking everywhere else. **Where are you that you shouldn't be? This can be a place you go physically or mentally. You know you shouldn't be there, but you try to rationalize or justify why it's ok for you. There is nothing that allows sin to be ok for one person that isn't ok for another. Get yourself back where you belong. Put God first. Identify your idols in your life and turn away from them. And idol is anything that you place in priority above or alongside God (family, job, money). Acknowledge your idols today and remove them from first place.**

### Read Ezekiel 15

**Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,' " declares the Lord GOD. Ezek 15:8**

It's everyone else's fault. So many people look for someone to blame for their circumstances, instead of taking a hard look at their own involvement in the situation. The employee who doesn't get a raise, blames the boss instead of examining how diligently he has been working. The student who does poorly in a class blames the teacher who just "doesn't like me". The marriage that falls apart is always the fault of the other spouse, and never the one you're talking to. We are just so unwilling to accept the blame.

In this chapter God talks about the wood of a tree and the wood of a vine. The wood of a tree is useful in many ways, and can be fashioned into something that stands the test of time (furniture, home, etc). A vine is not good for this kind of work. It's basically just fuel for the fire, and will burn up for a time and then be done. The people of Jerusalem were like vines. They weren't producing anything lasting, but were simply burning up their lives with nothing to show for it. And in this case, God may have gotten the blame. He's mean because He brought destruction on His own people. He's not keeping His promises to protect and watch His people. Actually the only reason destruction came upon the people is because they were unfaithful. They used to walk with God when things got tough, but the generation at this time in history were completely turned to false gods or no gods at all. **Are you a faithful person? Do you keep your relationship with the Lord in first priority at all times, or does it waver? Do you blame God or others for the problems that occur due to your sin? When you find yourself making decisions apart from what God wants you to do, you are being no better than the Jews who ignored Him in the same way. Every time we ignore Him instead of magnifying Him in our lives, we find ourselves out of the will of God, and wasting time that could have been spent on meaningful things. Is your life producing something that is lasting, or just burning up in the days of your life? It's a constant question all through the book of Ezekiel.**

### Read Ezekiel 16

**"Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma; so it happened," declares the Lord GOD. Ezek 16:19**

In my early days of working for an insurance company, I fielded a lot of questions that I didn't know the immediate answer to. So I would go to people that had been with the company a while and ask them to fill in the blanks that my training had missed. One man called me and said we had given him \$1500 to take care of a repair to his car, but he wondered if he had to use that money to do it. My immediate thought was that he could probably do whatever he wanted with the money. But as I asked a co-worker, they told me that the gentleman had a responsibility to use the money to repair his car. What if he had another accident and we found that he hadn't used the previous payout for the intended usage? Auto insurance isn't paying you because you were in an accident, but it's paying to repair your car to the condition it was in before the accident. Spending the claim money on something other than the claim wasn't acting in good faith and could have his policy cancelled.

Just as there was a specific intention for the claim money, there is a specific intention for the gifts that God gives to us. Whether it is blessings in our family, job, or anywhere else in life, the intention is always that we would glorify God. I don't praise myself for my home. I don't praise myself for the work I do in the ministry. As soon as I do that, I've lost sight of who gave these gifts to me in the first place. As Christians, we should remember who gave us our money, time, and ability to act. And as Christians, all those elements of our lives should be used to glorify God. **Are you spending your gifts from God on yourself? Are you seeking the praise and prestige of men? Every time we act apart from God, we damage our relationship to Him. It allows selfishness to rule in us. And that means we are less likely to find His will for our lives. We've lost sight that God's gifts are given to equip us to be the person He wants us to be. Let us not waste these gifts on takers...let's us them for the giver.**

### **Read Ezekiel 17**

**On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar. And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches. Ezek 17:23**

England has nearly always been a monarchy, and subjected itself to the rule of the king or queen of the royal family. But from 1653 to 1658, England was a republic. The people had become tired of the selfishness that seemed to dominate those who sat on England's throne. So they rebelled, along with most of England's army, and captured the ruling king, Charles I, and killed him. And everything seemed great for a while. Oliver Cromwell, who had led the Army, served as Lord Protector over England until his death in 1658. At that time the republic began to break down. The Parliament seemed to forget what they had fought for, and people were losing confidence in the system. So they searched for the exiled son of Charles I, and soon after placed Charles II as king of England. When England decided to return to the monarchy, they continued with the same royal line they had been under before. There was a feeling that God had allowed the royal

family to gain his position, and so to restore them would be as restoring God's plan for the nation.

Here in Ezekiel we see another monarchy restored. The two great eagles that are mentioned are the kings of Babylon and Egypt, and the idea is that kings from another nation, and a line other than David, had rule over God's people. But verse 23 begins explaining that there is another king coming to bring a restoration to the throne. The fulfillment of this promise is Jesus. Another king never sits on the throne of Israel, and so when Jesus arrives and seems to have all the makings of a king, the people are desperate for Him to be just that. They were ready to have a king on the throne again. **Are you displacing the King in your life? Imagine that your life is a throne with your name on it; who sits there? Do you allow Jesus to sit on the throne of your life and have lordship over you, or do you often ask Him to get up so you can take control? That's exactly what you do when you choose to deliberately cave to temptation. That's exactly what you do when you ignore God's calling for your life because it seems too difficult. Jesus is not just a man...He is a king. He died to purchase your life. Will you depose Him today, or depend on Him? The quality of your day today will depend very much on who sits on the throne of your life.**

### **Read Ezekiel 18**

**What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, "The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge"? Ezek 18:2** My guess is that out of all the areas of Ezekiel 18, this one might be the most confounding. The rest of the chapter really describes what is going on here: children will not pay for the sins of their fathers. Now the consequences of sin certainly affect the children. When a husband gets a divorce, it affects his children. However, the children don't actually pay the penalty for that sin. If a righteous son comes from an unrighteous father, will the son pay for his father's unrighteousness? God says the answer is no, and that's why He disregards this proverb.

For God, each and every person is judged as an individual. If my parents are believers in Jesus Christ, their faith is not credited to me. In the same way, if my parents were deliberate and willful sinners who never chose repentance, that doesn't mean I will be the same as them. It always comes down to a choice. **We can allow our families to influence who we are, but our choices are always our own. If my dad is an alcoholic, that does not guarantee I will be one. If my dad is a pastor, that does not guarantee I will be one. Have you been accepting the blame for the sins of your parents? Is a bad upbringing still haunting you? Do not accept blame for the sins of others, because God does not credit them to you. Remember that God sees you as an individual. So don't live in the past, but live in the presence of God.**

### **Read Ezekiel 19**

**'And fire has gone out from *its* branch; it has consumed its shoots *and* fruit, so that there is not in it a strong branch, a scepter to rule. Ezek 19:14**

Being the son of a professional athlete must be difficult. I watch a lot of college sports, and much will be made over a young man who is the son of a great basketball or football player. But so many times I've watched these young men get hyped for who their father is, instead of their own abilities. I can often see these fathers in the stands, desperate to see their sons compete at the same high level they used to play. And I don't know if I should pity the fathers who can't let go of the past, or the sons who can't please their fathers. Athletic family dynasties are rare.

The people of Israel absolutely begged God for a human king. And when Israel and Judah split into two nations, they both continued with a king on the throne, and it ultimately destroyed each nation. The people were warned that these men would concern themselves with their own fortunes than that of the people, and still God was begged. Now God is making it clear that the royal family has been exhausted. There will only be one more ruler, but when the days come that Israel is reestablished, there will be no king sitting on her throne. Jesus will come one day, in power and authority, and He will be their king. He will not be removed for someone better and He will not be found incompetent. **What do you plead with God to do in your life? All of us have prayed a prayer that we later thanked God for not answering. The reason this happens is because we start asking God for whatever it may be, without seeking whether it's His will. Israel sought their own will without wisdom and we have seen where it got them. Be as diligent to seek God's will in your life as you are in seeking your own. Recognize that God is putting together so many details you and I can never see, that we must trust Him when our prayers appear to be delayed or unanswered.**

### **Read Ezekiel 20**

**But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they *lived*, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. Ezek 20:9**

The Army Achievement medal can be awarded for numerous reasons, and often is awarded as a leadership and/or integrity award. Towards the end of my enlistment I participated in a joint exercise with another unit and found myself outside of my normal duties and forced to learn a lot of new tasks. After I got back to my regular unit, I received the Army Achievement medal on recommendation from the other unit's commander due to my performance at their base. The last line of the commendation always struck me. "Specialist Tibbetts' performance is a credit to himself, his unit, his country, and the United States Army." I realized that my performance as a soldier was always representative of something bigger than myself.

Sometimes as Christians we forget that we are representing someone bigger than ourselves. God says here in Ezekiel that He took his actions for His name's sake. God's will is that His people would make Him known among the nations as well as among their own generations. When this doesn't happen, God will do what is necessary to glorify

Himself, and as a result, bring more people to Him. We need to really examine what we are doing to glorify that name of Jesus Christ in our lives. **Have we forgotten who made us what we are today? Is His name being glorified by our actions and words? Do people hear us speak the name of Jesus, or do they hear the same words out of our mouths that are spoken by those who live in the flesh? Remember today that you represent not just yourself, but your God. And those who know of your faith, will base their judgment of who God is, based on your attitude towards Him.**

### Read Ezekiel 21

**Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you will be seized with the hand. Ezek 21:24**

Everytime I'm asked to name my top favorite movies, I always take a hit from people when I get around number 3. That's because I have included my holiday favorite, Home Alone. That movie provides more one-liners and classic jokes than I can count. The two burglars, Harry and Marv, are hitting all the houses on a very ritzy street, but after they leave Marv leaves their calling card: he plugs up a sink and leaves the water running. Marv's hope is that they will be called "The Wet Bandits". Instead, when the two are arrested at the end of the movie, the police are able to identify every house they burglarized because of the calling card they left to get the credit.

What should we do with sin? We're always to leave it behind. Sin is not a joke and it's not bad decision; it is a moment of separation between us and a holy God. The problem in our culture today, is that sin is no longer hidden. It is out in the open. Many people flaunt it in the hopes of making the unacceptable move towards the realm of the acceptable. How many times have I heard someone mention drug use on TV, and they receive applause and yells of encouragement from an audience? More times than I can count, and I think "Are we trying to show everyone how stupid we are?" **Sin deserves no applause and no remembrance. Us making light of our sin is like Marv flooding those houses: we're trying to get credit for something that we really don't want credit for. Will drug use be a joke before the Lord? Will He want to hear us joke about sexual experiences committed outside of marriage? God wants us to be serious about sin. Don't build a monument to the good 'ol days when you did whatever you wanted. Those are exactly the days that Jesus had to save us from.**

### Read Ezekiel 22

**'As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.' Ezek 22:22**

When I told a friend that I'd like to get half of a hog butchered for our family, I wasn't aware that I would really end up doing so much butchering myself! So I showed up that morning at my friend's home, and watched as they turned pigs into chops, roasts, and sausage. My turn came up and I had no idea what to do. So an experienced butcher began all the major cutting and gave me the pieces that were to be turned into sausage. But not

everything in my pile was to go in. There were pieces of fat that needed to be cut off first, otherwise they would clog up the grinder and would make the sausage too fatty. So I separated out the usable from the unusable, and ended up with the best sausage I've ever had.

At this point you may feel like God is being extremely repetitive with His people. He continues to point out their sin, and now talks about Israel being like dross. Dross is the impurities and the dirt that is found in a solid metal, and the only way to get it out is to melt the metal down and scoop out the impurities. God is saying that these people's choices literally made them the impurities in His land. So God is separating the usable from the unusable. He's beginning anew with Israel, even to the point of removing them from their homeland. But again, there is a point. It isn't an angry God getting even with His people, but a loving God revealing the seriousness of sin and removing it. **Has God been doing some melting in your life? Have you ever thought that losing your job, or having those financial difficulties was part of God's process for your life? Perhaps He's removing something that will allow you to live a life that is closer to His desire for you. We don't want to have our world melted down, but there is nothing we should be more willing to hold onto than holiness. When we chose comfort over correction, we'll find ourselves disappointed in our relationship with God. Not because of His actions, but because of ours. What needs to be scooped out of your life? The act of examining your life and asking God to reveal the impurities in your heart is like having your heart melted so that God can scoop out the dirt.**

### Read Ezekiel 23

**Now her sister Oholibah saw *this*, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister. Ezek 23:11**

At Winter Park one year, some friends and I found a jump off to the side of one of the major ski runs. It had nearly shaped into a ramp and was about 10 feet above the ground. So we decided to all ski off of it. Matt went first and he planned to get airborne, sprawl out his feet and legs into an X and then nail the landing. But when he got into the air, he chickened out and just started flailing all over the place. After his crash landing it took us five minutes to find his skis that had popped off, and one ski pole was never found. After that, no one else really wanted to try it anymore.

God is speaking of two cities: Samaria and Jerusalem. He is talking about them like lovers, which shows us the seriousness of the relationship to God. He doesn't have a physical relationship with them, but He is drawing a comparison. Think about how you would feel to find out the person you loved was having an affair with someone else? And not a one time affair, but a constant and deliberate affair. That's what the Samaritans were doing, and it saddened the heart of God. But He says in all of this Jerusalem watched what was happening to the Samaritans, and they decided to do the same thing! They wanted to be liked by the nations surrounding them, and instead of being friends, they became slaves. **Why aren't we willing to see the failures of those around us and stay away from the same mistakes? We think we can do it better. We think we can get away with it. When someone else makes a mistake, it is a time that we should be**

learning a lesson. God is completely in love with us, but when we turn our affections elsewhere, there will be consequences. **Who's example are you following: those that you know live for themselves, or those who live for Him? Every time you choose earthly possessions over heavenly ones, you've emulated the wrong person. Every time you put your feelings above the feelings of others, you have emulated a failure somewhere. Let us today think about who's example we're following. Will it bring us closer to our Savior or further from Him?**

### **Read Ezekiel 24**

**In your filthiness is lewdness. Because I *would* have cleansed you, yet you are not clean, you will not be cleansed from your filthiness again until I have spent My wrath on you. Ezek 24:13**

I really try to help my kids clean their dirty faces. Not long ago, my son started getting little bumps around his mouth, and I explained that they were caused by the irritation that comes from a dirty face. Sometimes he'll come up to me and be talking and I'm looking at him thinking, "Can you not feel that peanut butter around your lips?" So I listen to him and then say, "Interesting. By the way, you have dirt on your face and you need to wash go wash it." Often he asks, "Because those bumps will come back?" Exactly.

As Christians, we have to remember that we still get dirty in our sin. Jesus has cleaned us up, but He did the cleaning. Israel didn't realize that their sins were piling upon their own heads. In their filthiness was lewdness. One sin was leading to another. Just like the peanut butter face led to further consequences, allowing ourselves to remain in sin is always leading us down a darker road. And God wants to clean us up, not to shame us over what we've done, but to protect us from what's lurking around the next corner of our lives. **When you recognize your sin, are you attempting to clean it up yourself? Don't be embarrassed to come before our Jesus and tell Him you're dirty. Don't be embarrassed to tell him that you have stained your life with selfishness. He's the only one who can clean us, but we have to be personal. We have to come to Him. God will let us walk into the consequences if we're unwilling to make the changes He desires for our lives. Are you trying to clean yourself up, or will you just admit who you are before an all-knowing God and let Him do what only He can? He loves you just as much as He always has.**

### **Read Ezekiel 25**

**'For thus says the Lord GOD, "Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the scorn of your soul against the land of Israel, Ezek 25:6**

Moving to Pennsylvania has been tough on this old Missouri Tiger fan. I don't get to watch a lot of games, but I try to follow them the best I can from afar. What has been funny is how people in my church now know what "Mizzou" is and if a Tiger game is on, they will watch it! The next day people come in and congratulate me over a win, or console me over a loss. One person was enjoying picking on me after my team had lost. I

told him that even though Missouri lost, so did our rival Kansas. And while I wish Missouri had won, it was nice to see Kansas lose too.

Sports are a bit trivial, I grant that. But, do we find ourselves sometimes enjoying and even wishing for the demise of other people? Do you see why the nation of Ammon fell? Because they had a party when Israel was decimated. God's purpose was reconciliation, not humiliation, of His people. But, Ammon is celebrating the downfall of a nation, and the death of thousands of people. **The first lesson is that I hope our nation is always a supporter of Israel. God said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that He will "bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you, I will curse." So let us listen to the answer of politicians when they are asked their position on Israel. Secondly, are you taking joy or pleasure in the downfall of another person? Is there an ex-spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend who is struggling or even suffering, and you're enjoying their moment of agony? Are you happy to see the struggles of someone who has refused your friendship and gossiped about you? No one was wronged more than Jesus Christ when He was hung on the cross, and still He asked the Father to forgive them for their actions. As Christians let us not take pleasure in the pain of others, irregardless of how much pain they may have caused us. The Christian life isn't about allowing our emotions to control us, but our Lord.**

### **Read Ezekiel 26**

**I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken," declares the Lord GOD. Ezek 26:14** While visiting Nashville, Tennessee in high school, our group went to see the Parthenon in Nashville's Centennial Park. The city, called the "Athens of the South", built a full-scale replica of the Parthenon which once sat in Athens, Greece, but now sits in ruins. The sheer size of it was unbelievable, and it caused me to have a greater appreciation for the ruins I had seen in pictures and on television. The ruins of rubble didn't do justice to the majesty of the actual structure.

God brings a judgment upon Tyre here in Ezekiel 26, and His words for the region still hold true today. The current state of Tyre doesn't do justice to the magnificent city that once stood. Here in verse 14, the Lord says that the city will be a place for the spreading of nets, and all that really exists there today are a few fisherman's huts where they do in fact spread their nets when not out to sea. Ancient residents of the city would come back today and ask "What happened?" **Don't we ask ourselves that question a lot? What happened that caused us to be where we are today? Where did it all go wrong? The problem is that we ask questions after the fact, instead of before. Why don't we ask ourselves more often, "What will happen?" The man who has an affair and asks questions later finds his life in ruins. The teenager who shoplifts and asks questions later finds that people no longer have any trust in them. Let's ask questions. Stop making mistakes and taking inventory later. Start examining your daily routines and choices. Don't create the barren landscape that comes from a life that we have failed to think out.**

## Read Ezekiel 27

**Your wealth, your wares, your merchandise, your sailors and your pilots, your repairers of seams, your dealers in merchandise and all your men of war who are in you, with all your company that is in your midst, will fall into the heart of the seas on the day of your overthrow. Ezek 27:27**

How do we identify friends? I wouldn't say I have a lot of close friends, but that's mostly because of my insecurities about whether people really want to be friends with me or not. As we've gone through the process of buying a house, our realtor has been very friendly to me. However, I am under no illusions that once the house is sold and paperwork is done, that we will continue to talk on the phone as regularly as we do now. It's not a friendship, but a short-term friendly relationship.

God likens the city of Tyre to a ship. Not a small fishing troller, but a regal sailing ship with the finest of everything. Her relationships with the people around her have allowed the city to have everything it could ever want. But the relationships weren't real. People were buying favor from Tyre. They were with Tyre as far as is could take them. It's a reminder for us to examine our own relationships with people. Do we have real friendships and relationships or just surface encounters? Real relationships are what Jesus developed. He didn't appear to enter into friendships to see what He could get out of them, but to see what He could give through them. **Instead of waiting for friends to come to us, I'm reminded that there are plenty of people out there who are looking for a genuine and trustworthy friend. Who better to fill that spot than a believer in Jesus Christ? Are you being genuine with people? Are you talking about them differently when they're gone than when they're around? Are you using people for your benefit, but failing to be there for them on the same level? Let's develop real relationships, so that people will see that we are genuine people sharing a genuine Savior.**

## Read Ezekiel 28

**'Will you still say, "I am a god," in the presence of your slayer, though you are a man and not God, in the hands of those who wound you? Ezek 28:9**

An Air Force transport plane flying over Alaska in the mid-50's ran into a terrible snowstorm. The navigator contacted a nearby airbase to verify their position, and he was told that his plane was hundreds of miles off course. The airbase gave him correct coordinates to fix his heading, but the navigator continued to insist that his own calculations could not have been so far off. So the plane remained on the navigator's course, until the plane ran low on fuel and the crew had to parachute out. Unfortunately for them, temperatures were as low as -70 Fahrenheit and the crew froze to death in minutes. The pride of that navigator doomed not only himself, but the lives of his entire crew.

Pride is easy to fall into. We don't like being embarrassed, but there are times that our faults and failures are so clear that we just have to admit them. Tyre's continued downfall came as a result of her pride. She insisted she was fine, even as she lay dying. The leaders

of the great city assured people things weren't so bad, even as everyone knew that the city was headed for its demise. **What causes you to become prideful? Do you hate being corrected? Do you want to appear as if you're in control and able to handle anything that comes your way? While we strive to avoid mistakes, the best solution when we make them is to own up to them. Believers in Jesus Christ would come across so much better if we would just admit our mistakes and be men and women of integrity. Let's not wait for others to point out our failures, but let us examine our poor choices, and plan against them in the future. Stop burying mistakes, and start making repairs.**

### Read Ezekiel 29

**"And it will never again be the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing to mind the iniquity of their having turned to Egypt. Then they will know that I am the Lord GOD." Ezek 29:16**

People who know little about cars place a lot of confidence in the key. They know that when they put the key in the ignition and turn it, the car starts. But what about when we put the key in and nothing happens? We pull the key back out and try again, and still nothing. It becomes clear even to the least mechanical of us, that the problem lies not in the key, but under the hood. We tend to forget about the engine, and give all the credit to that little key because it's what we see and touch everyday. We've placed our confidence in the wrong item. A shiny, perfectly cut key will never start a dead engine.

What is your confidence? Is it well-connected friends? Is it your own talents and abilities? Israel saw both their friends and their abilities stripped away at the same moment. When our confidence rests in anything other than the Lord God, we need to rethink our Christian walk. The entire point of accepting Jesus Christ is that you do not have confidence in anything of this world. You realized that only through Jesus could you be forgiven, and only through Jesus could you live the life God had been reserving for you. **Today, let's ask forgiveness for turning to our idols, because that's exactly what they have become when we place anything else in priority over our God. And let us place our confidence in an all-knowing and perfect God who wants to glorify Himself, but wants to do it through your life.**

### Read Ezekiel 30

**They will be desolate in the midst of the desolated lands; And her cities will be in the midst of the devastated cities. Ezek 30:7**

Driving with a friend through southern Illinois, he pointed out a huge airport in the middle of a field. He told me it was called the Mid America Airport, and that no one uses it. I thought he was just messing with me, because the terminal looked as large as the one in St. Louis and brand new. I figured it just hadn't opened yet, but recently I saw a news report that the \$300 million airport that was opened nearly 20 years ago, has no incoming or outgoing flights. It is a big nothing in the middle of nowhere.

Just like Mid America Airport, Egypt finds itself lonely, isolated, and desolate in God's prophecy towards them in Ezekiel 30. It had been a mighty nation, but their willingness to follow only their own idols brought them down. They were of no worth to a God who is constantly looking for value to be added to His kingdom. Sometimes we find ourselves sitting in desolation. **As one preacher recently taught me, "You can profess Christ, but you must also possess Christ." He must be a part of your everyday, or no matter how many people you are in the midst of, you are still isolated. Your life is becoming a desolation when you refuse to allow the Son of God complete access to your life. You become like an airport with no flights in or out. Let Jesus work His plans in you. Let Him have His itinerary in you. Stop sitting in the middle of nowhere, doing nothing. Let's give Him full rein over our lives today.**

### **Read Ezekiel 31**

**Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his hordes, 'Whom are you like in your greatness? Ezek 31:2**

Every so often, a new list of the 10 greatest quarterbacks in the NFL comes out. Or the 10 greatest pitchers, or the 10 greatest basketball players. These lists seem to be constantly changing, and do you know why? There is no standard to compare them to. For years baseball players were compared to Babe Ruth because he was the best. Then you had more talented players show up decades later, and the standard of "best player" changed once again. The problem is that these guys aren't compared against a standard, but just against one another.

Pharaoh had the same problem. He considered himself great as he looked around at the state of other nations and kings, and based on that comparison, he was great. He had wealth and military might, but his confidence was misplaced. The standard of greatness is always God, and Pharaoh certainly never admitted that in his life. As a believer God is always our standard, but let's be specific on how. He's our standard on greatness, integrity, love, forgiveness, and every other action of our lives. We cannot be satisfied in our personal daily devotional time with God, if we are unforgiving people. **We should never compare ourselves to other believers, but always to God's standards. You lie less than you used to, but God never lies at all. Let us remember that we're not aiming for 70% obedience. We're aiming for 100%, which we will never obtain because of our sin. So why try? Because trying is what keeps us in close relationship with Jesus. Becoming complacent with our current level of faith is what causes us to fall into sin and regret.**

### **Read Ezekiel 32**

**I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring your destruction among the nations, into lands which you have not known. Ezek 32:9**

My wife went on a mission trip to Peru for a week and a half last summer. While her Spanish was limited and she often spoke through interpreters, she was stunned to see that simply being from America caused people to listen. Peruvians would ask their friends and acquaintances if they'd like to hear from an American who had something special to

share. Without exception, they all wanted to hear from the Americans who had come a long way to share. She found it very humbling to know these people seemed to know so much about her, even though her knowledge of them was limited. Americans were being spoken of, even when they weren't around, and my wife found herself suddenly representing an entire nation in front of these people.

Egypt was a nation that God used as an example. All the way back to Pharaoh, he tried to teach the Egyptian people that there was only one God. But they continued to trust in their own devices, to the point that their destruction would become known in lands that were unknown even to Egypt. Somewhere the name Egypt would be a reminder to unknown lands of the folly that comes from pride and serving self. **Is your name being spoken of among people you don't know? Do non-believers use you as an example to others of what Christians are really like? And is that example a good one? I remember finding out that I had been referenced by someone I barely knew who mentioned me on the basis of my faith. In that situation it was a positive referral, but I kept thinking, "What if I had been a jerk to that person?" My actions didn't just affect people I knew, but have an impact on those I had yet to meet. If your name were circulated amongst people you don't even know, what would be the lesson people would be teaching and learning from your life?**

### **Read Ezekiel 33**

**"Yet your fellow citizens say, 'The way of the Lord is not right,' when it is their own way that is not right. Ezek 33:17**

We have seen great tragedy in recent days with the small nation of Haiti suffering through the aftermath of a tremendous earthquake. Now that rescue and recovery efforts have been going on for a while, some people begin to ask, "Why would God let this happen?" They use it as an excuse to say that God is unloving and they would never serve such a God. However, they never seem to credit God for the good things that happen in our nation or world. Those are always examples of human decency in their minds.

The news came to those who had been exiled from their home that Jerusalem had been conquered. Many Jews obviously didn't live in the city, and so they were exiled from their country earlier as Babylon came through their small towns. Some accused the Lord of being unfair or unjust, never examining their own actions. **We are so quick to point out the faults of others, but do we point out faults in a perfect God? We learned from Gideon that God is capable of patience in our unbelief, but that doesn't give us the freedom to accuse God of wrongdoing. He is a perfect God, working in the lives of imperfect people. Our sins and choices get us to the places we wish we had avoided, not God. Let's start examining our own way. Let's be aware of the faults in our life that cause us to be less than we can be.**

### Read Ezekiel 34

**They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. Ezek34:5**

Is a church successful even when it's shrinking in numbers? A pastor in Springfield, Missouri came to his church 15 years ago with a membership of 1200 people. Since that time, he has cut their membership rolls down to about 500, which is close to their average Sunday morning worship attendance. The problem became people had "joined" the church and rarely ever come back. The pastor was receiving notices to do funerals for people who had been members of his church for decades, but never came. So he wrote letters to all members asking who wanted to be a part of the church, and who may have moved on. Some were angry to be told that their membership was being removed, but all they had to do was simply come back to church. The church became healthier because they had a pastor who cared about the people as individuals, and not just as a crowd.

Why is the church important? Some people feel that church membership is simply a way to keep tabs on who is giving their offering to God and who is not. But there is so much more to it. There church is a large accountability group. It keeps us accountable in our witness. It keeps us accountable to serve by plugging us in according to our gifts. And it keeps us accountable to the Word of God by the preaching and worship ministry of the church. We certainly have the ability to study the Bible for ourselves, but the God-called pastor, preaching week by week can make a great impact on our lives. He clarifies the murky for us, and leads us to apply passages of Scripture that we may have never done on our own. He leads the church in a way that lets each person know they are an important piece of the puzzle. **Our first and foremost spiritual leader is Jesus Christ. We should do everything in light of His desires for us. But the times that Israel fell into deep sin and separation, were those times they had no spiritual shepherds to lead and keep them accountable. Don't just go to church. Be a part of it. Allow them to encourage and teach you. And above all else, when choosing a church, make sure they have a shepherd who takes his role as God's man with sincerity.**

### Read Ezekiel 35

**therefore as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will give you over to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you; since you have not hated bloodshed, therefore bloodshed will pursue you. Ezek 35:6**

There are a lot of great events and activities for churches to take teenagers to. Often times the cost can be as high as \$75 for a really good event, and I worry about the cost being a barrier for some of our kids. But then I see how much money they spend on cell phones, cell phone applications, ipods and other electronics. The realization is people will spend their money on what's important. If they think the event is important, they will come up with the money for it. If not, they'll spend their money on the things that truly interest them.

Talk is literally cheap, but when we have to commit our money or our time to something, that is when we find what our hearts are really after. God tells the people of Edom that

bloodshed, violence and war will pursue them for one reason: that's what they pursued. They gave themselves over to it, and so later that thing they chased after becomes what has chased after them. It's amazing how the things we chase after are so rarely good for us. Think about things that you used to chase after that you've quit on. When I look on my old life I am often bewildered by the sins I used to chase after and be a part of. But at the time, they all seemed like they were giving me some sort of benefits. **When we chase after God, we find ourselves chasing after everything He wants for us. When we chase after sin, we find ourselves chasing after the things God wants us to be separated from. So think about what you are committing yourself to with your time and money. Are you committing yourself to the things of God or the things of man? Will there be benefit later as a result of what you're doing today.**

### Read Ezekiel 36

**But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Ezek 36:21**

Twitter is a website that allows you to tell the world what you are doing at any time of day in 140 words or less. Honestly, I view it as TMI (too much information). I don't need to know what anyone is doing more than once a day at the most. The early problem became people assuming the names of celebrities and then "tweeting" daily incidents that weren't actually coming from the stars themselves. For instance, you'll find "The Real Shaq" which is Shaquille O'Neal making sure people know which words are his and which are not because his name was hijacked by an imposter before he ever joined.

A name is a powerful thing. Someone mentions the name of a friend to you, and instantly there are certain thoughts that come into your mind about that person. But no one is more careful about His name than God. The third commandment is proof enough of that. But here God says that His rescue of Israel is for His name's sake. As His chosen people, their restoration will not be a vindication of Israel, but of God. Think of a Jewish Messiah coming in a world where Israel had been forsaken. Might we have wondered about God's true willingness to hold onto us despite our faults and failures? It would have been a valid concern. **Today, don't worry about what people think of your name. Care about what they think of God's name. Are you being a good representative for Him? Do people see you and your deeds, and glorify God or you? Let's remember we serve a God whose name is worthy to be praised.**

### Ezekiel 37

**I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. Ezek 37:26**

Peace is often sought after, but so rarely attained. In fact, I found a publication by the Moody Bible Institute from 1988. It said that during the "3530 years of recorded history, only 286 years saw peace. Moreover, in excess of 8000 peace treaties were made--and broken." Here in 21<sup>st</sup> century America we have seen allies turn to enemies and enemies to allies. Peace provided by man is fleeting and always corrupted by our selfishness and disregard for others.

God is bringing the two divided kingdoms back together. He is putting them under one king, Jesus. He is providing everything needed for them to be spiritually successful. There will be no more waiting for the Messiah. He will come and the choice of salvation will be clearer than ever. I could imagine some might say that a covenant of peace from someone who created Hell is a bit of a stretch. But remember, there are two destinations for every person. God gives as much eternal access to Heaven as He does to Hell. In either case, we make the choice. **God's covenant of peace is there if we will simply declare our willingness to follow Jesus and give Him control of our lives. God has made a covenant of peace with you, but are you living in it? Are you bringing your sin before a God of peace? He will not reject your repentance because He is a God who loves us and wants to see us move from sin. Are you encouraging others to give their lives to the God of peace? Show them today the benefits of a covenant with a personal God. He will not break his peace treaty with us because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for us.**

### **Read Ezekiel 38**

**and you will say, 'I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will go against those who are at rest, that live securely, all of them living without walls and having no bars or gates, Ezek 38:11**

There are major college teams who are known for scheduling "cupcakes". These are smaller schools that the major schools have every right to play, but probably shouldn't play against every week. These major schools beat up on these little schools for several weeks and then their winning record appears more impressive than it should. They're not willing to pick on someone their own size, and are taking advantage of the weak.

Who are you most bothered by in the scriptures above? There are a group of people who live in unwalled, unprotected villages. Maybe they couldn't afford to get the protection they needed, or they were just too trusting. Then you have the aggressors who don't just invade, but invade the weakest people around. Clearly God was displeased with the invaders, but there are many of us who might place the blame on the unprotected cities. They should have been more careful, or more prepared for such an attack. But at the end of the day, someone was taken advantage of. We do not hold the victims at fault in this situation, but the attackers who caused it. **Are you harassing the helpless? Maybe a friendless person at school or work is an easy target for you. Perhaps you have become nitpicky and are truly harassing someone. We need to recognize that there will always be people weaker than us. Our responsibility as believers is to never allow the weakness of others to give us an excuse to show our strength. Jesus was stronger than every person around Him, yet at the cross we see a picture of someone who would not overcome the weak just because He could.**

### **Read Ezekiel 39**

**On that day I will give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off those who would pass by. So they will**

**bury Gog there with all his horde , and they will call *it* the valley of Hamon -gog. Ezek 39:11**

When I was 16, I visited the Little Bighorn Battlefield Memorial. Custer's last stand is often mentioned, but I really didn't know much about it, other than they had lost a battle during the Sioux war. What I didn't know was that the American soldiers who died there were buried there. We don't do that today, but in those days they couldn't carry the bodies back from the wilderness of Montana to be with their families. And over the years, the downfall of Custer has been speculated for many reasons, but none seems bigger than pride. Custer refused an offer of additional soldiers before the battle, and told his men at the outset, "Hurrah boys, we've got them! We'll finish them up and then go home to our station."

Gog planned on invading Israel and enjoying a rousing defeat. Instead of victory, God promised them they would find a cemetery to rest in. Just like Custer and the nation of Gog, our sin can sometimes be our final resting place. Think back to a sin that you dealt with for a long time. Remember how defeated you felt over your failures? Even though it wasn't a physical death, I remember feeling useless and worthless for God. I wasn't living an effective life and as a result, my sin had become a grave to me. I was no more useful than a dead man. **Is your sin killing you? Is it killing your witness? Is it killing your passion for the Lord Jesus Christ? Custer's pride was his final resting place. And we will be in danger of losing spiritual battles if we refuse to put our trust in the Lord and allow Him to guide our steps.**

#### **Read Ezekiel 40**

**For the burnt offering *there were* four tables of hewn stone, a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and one cubit high, on which they lay the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice. Ezek 40:42**

I'm not going to say this is the situation in every church, but every church I have been in or personally interacted with, devalued the time of offerings to the Lord. In the Baptist church, we usually keep the plates hidden somewhere until the ushers need them and bring them out. There isn't a great deal of thought put into our offering times, and as a result I imagine many people don't think of themselves as offering anything to the Lord. They think of it as a collection time for the church.

Look at how prepared the priests were for a time of offering. There was a specific place that they sacrificed the offering. They never had to look around for their tools, because all of them were readily available in the right place. In the life of Old Testament Israel, there really was no more important time. This was their way to repair broken relationships between themselves and God. They knew that they should never approach God without first cleansing themselves of their sin. **Does your church value the time of offerings? Is it a time of worship, or just a time of collecting money? Think of how this time could be improved in your church, and discuss it with you church leadership. Pray and ask God to help you worship during this time and to be prepared for it. Don't hurriedly write out a check or grab some cash out of your wallet during the prayer. Prepare yourself in your house to be in God's house.**

### Read Ezekiel 41

**The altar was of wood, three cubits high and its length two cubits; its corners, its base and its sides were of wood. And he said to me, "This is the table that is before the LORD." Ezekiel 41:22**

There have been a few highly prized football recruits that have not had the professional careers that they were expected to have. And why not? Because they forgot about football when it wasn't football season. Instead of working out, they spend more time eating out. When it came time for teams to pick their players for the new year, one guy had ballooned by 40 pounds in just a few short months. He knew he was good and decided not to put as much effort into the off season. Yet one of the greatest professional athletes of all-time, Michael Jordan, was known for working in the off season as if he were still playing the game night in and night out.

Are you keeping God before you when it's not Sunday? Here we see the table for sacrifices in the temple. And do you notice that it was before the Lord? It was always before the Lord. There was, never a time off that God wasn't ready for someone to do business with Him over their sin. Yet we live our lives as if there is an off-season from faith when Sunday is over. God is ever-present and ever-aware of who, where and what we are. **Our role is to be like the table...before the Lord. Think about the off-season breaks you took from the Lord this week? Remember the sin you fell into as the distance grew? Remember the confusion that came from not knowing where to turn next? Let's commit today to live our day before the Lord. Let us give ourselves and our day as an offering to Him.**

### Read Ezekiel 42

**When the priests enter, then they shall not go out into the outer court from the sanctuary without laying there their garments in which they minister, for they are holy. They shall put on other garments; then they shall approach that which is for the people. Ezekiel 42:14**

Going home for Christmas in the military is incredible. When I was in basic training, we were required to travel in our class A dress uniform. So I walked through the airport and boarded the plane in it. People were so nice and introducing themselves to me in the airport, and the stewardess on one of my flights gave me way more than my allotted number of Mountain Dew's. And seeing my parents in the terminal was a moment that gave me great pride for choosing to enlist in the first place.

There's something about a uniform, but when it comes to priests, God prefers the uniform be left in the church. The priests had a special garment to wear when they were ministering, but when they left the temple, they could wear the shirt of their favorite chariot racer (the NASCAR of the day) or whatever else they wanted. During those times away from serving as priests, they were to be like the rest of the people. **If you serve in some vocational ministry, learn to leave your office at the office. Learn to just be a person and a friend to those in your church. And when a minister from your church is around you outside of church, talk about something else. Let them leave the office**

**at the office. In fact, let's leave our church lingo and traditions at the door as we interact with a world that doesn't understand Lord's Suppers and sanctification. Let's be real people, saved by a real Savior to the world around us.**

### **Read Ezekiel 43**

**For seven days you shall prepare daily a goat for a sin offering; also a young bull and a ram from the flock, without blemish, shall be prepared. Ezek 43:25**

Many Sunday nights after church, we would go over to Tom's house for two reasons: his mom bought lots of Mountain Dew, and he had a pool table. So that was mainly how I learned to play, just by hitting pool balls for hours on Sunday nights. I remember later playing a game at someone else's house and they said "no slop". I had no idea what that meant until they explained "We don't count a made shot unless you called that ball for that pocket before your shot." This sounded like a terrible idea since I often aimed for one pocket, but got the ball to carom into another one.

When it comes to our offerings, we should call "no slop". I have to admit looking around from time to time during our offerings and noticing people fumbling in wallets and tossing whatever they could grab or count out before the plates were passed. There seems to be so little thought in our giving. Or we hear of a need in our church, and instead of figuring out how we could meet it, we simply wait for someone else to fill the nursery rotation. That's slop. Israel was instructed to prepare the sacrifice for an entire week leading up to the actual moment of giving. They paid great attention to the animals they would sacrifice, to ensure that they were in top condition. And we want to throw in a few crumpled green backs or a hastily signed check? **Why don't you prepare yourself now for your next time of offering to the Lord? Why don't you pray over your tithe? Why don't you ask God to prepare you now for the offerings of your time and abilities that will soon be called upon? God planned out His greatest offering in Jesus Christ, before the world was even formed. Let us repent of hasty obedience.**

### **Read Ezekiel 44**

**And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set *foreigners* to keep charge of My sanctuary. Ezek 44:8**

Churches are constantly looking for new ways to build relationships and fellowship among their members. So the new idea is to have restaurants open up within the church. While this may sound like a good idea at first, does anyone else see a problem with the church employing people on Sunday morning to serve its members? Churches are bringing in people, regardless of their spiritual condition and paying them to serve believers. While it may build fellowship with those who stick around, it seems that those outside the church body are being sacrificed.

God always had very clear and distinct rules about the responsibilities of His people. Only certain people were permitted to offer sacrifices. Only certain people were permitted to enter the holy of holies. This was always for a purpose. God didn't want the holy things in his house to be cheapened. **Did you know that God says that you are a**

**sanctuary (1 Corinthians 6:19)? What are you outsourcing and leaving to foreigners? Are you making your pastor responsible for your spiritual life? Are you counting the church as responsible for your spiritual growth? What kind of work is being done by lost people in your own church? Are the outsourced custodians and office supply people being reached with the message of the gospel? Things are foreign when they simply don't belong in their current location. What foreign things have penetrated your life or your church?**

### **Read Ezekiel 45**

**You shall have just balances, a just ephah and a just bath. Ezek 45:10**

Public speaking when I was in high school was so frustrating. At that level of competition, there were still too many factors being considered other than what you were saying. If other teenagers were doing the judging, they usually picked their friends. Some judges went with the person who entertained them the most. And then some would consider the content and delivery together. It was so difficult to gauge because one speech could play out differently with different judges. It was too subjective.

God is giving instructions on weights used for transactions, and He really emphasizes one rule: make sure your scales are fair. Merchants learned many different tricks to cause a scale to read lighter or heavier, depending on if they were buying or selling. So God instructs them to make sure everything is weighed equally. **Would God say that to you today? Do you need to weigh people equally? Are there some that you immediately get an attitude with? Do people see you playing favorites? God wants us to deal with people equally. When we play favorites, we're sending a bad message about the heart of Christianity. And if we play favorites, we push forward the beliefs that God plays favorites too, which is contrary to James 2:5. So examine the situations you come into today. Are you being consistent and fair, or are certain people feeling your indifference towards them?**

### **Read Ezekiel 46**

**But if he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince. His inheritance shall be only his sons'; it shall belong to them. Ezek 46:17**

While I know the reality of life is that parents often leave an inheritance to their children, it's disturbing to hear those children talk about using an inheritance while their parents are still alive. If I had to choose between parents or access to their money, I'd choose the parents every time. Imagine if a mom and dad had a caretaker in their home during their final days, and the parents changed their will to leave their inheritance to the person who had cared for them at home. My guess is that the children wouldn't be very happy to see that inheritance go out of the family.

God is saying here that an inheritance is for the children of the family. An outsider, like a servant, might have been allowed access to some of the funds of a future inheritance, but it wasn't theirs to keep. In the same way God has provided an inheritance for us as His

children. That inheritance is Heaven, but it is not for everyone. While God wants to see every person come to know Jesus and to receive Heaven as their reward, if they have said "no" to Jesus, He will say no to them. **Do you sometimes worry about your future retirement, or ability to leave something for your children? How about making sure they have a spiritual inheritance. There are many children who grow up in Christian families, and think they have the inheritance of Heaven because of the kind of family they were raised in. The reality is that we must belong to God to receive from God. Teach your children the importance of their own personal relationship with Jesus. Help them to have it, but give them responsibility for it.**

### **Read Ezekiel 47**

**It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and *the others* become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Ezek 47:9**

For years I wondered about the science of having freshwater rivers flow into saltwater oceans. How in the world could freshwater mix with the salty ocean water without causing problems for marine life? The simple answer, is that it doesn't. When the water is examined where fresh and salt meet, you will find a dead zone. There are few species that can live in either type of water, and so the marine life knows to stay away from the area, or they simply won't be able to survive. They have to stay in the water they were made for.

We see this picture of water actually flowing out from the temple. What could this water represent? We see the water providing life to creatures far from it and foreign to it. Have a guess? It's salvation to the Gentiles. One day the curtain of that temple will be torn in two, showing that there is no longer a division between God and man, but that through Jesus Christ we can come before the Father. **So those even in the farthest reaches of the earth will have access to the life giving and inheritance providing gospel of Jesus Christ. Are you helping to spread that message? It's life for all who hear and believe, but how can they believe if they've never heard? Who is in your life that needs to hear the truth about Jesus and their sin?**

### **Read Ezekiel 48**

***It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray as the Levites went astray. Ezek 48:11***

Dewayne was a talented basketball player, and was certainly better than I was. So I was surprised when Dewayne started the season on the bench next to me (where I belonged). The reason our coach put Dewayne on the bench was clear: he didn't practice hard. He showed up late, and he didn't put in a lot of effort and was just waiting on the games to start. But it seems that our coach wanted to see maximum effort anytime he put on the uniform. He was expected to be a basketball player and teammate whether it was practice or gameday.

God's desire with Israel is that the priests would be taken care of. However, if a priest hadn't been faithful to the service God called him to, then there was no guarantee of God's provision for them. Christians often feel that they are entitled to God's blessings simply because we are Christians. And while salvation is free, rewards are earned for faithfulness. Should a prayerless and selfish Christian receive all that a prayerful and selfless Christian does? The Bible is clear that the answer is no (James 5:16). **What are you expecting of God? Why are you expecting it? God expects us to live as a Christian on Sunday and everyday. We don't take vacations from our faith. Are you expecting faithfulness because you're showing faithfulness? God gives us so much of what we don't deserve, but sometimes we get a return on exactly what we've given or have failed to give.**