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Notes & Group Questions for October 1 - 31 readings (*Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below*)

JOHN 5:1 - JOHN 17:26 (daily reading schedule at: www.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com)

10/1 - I'm not sure if you noticed this unique thing about Jesus' healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda today in John chapter 5 - the man did not seem to have faith in Jesus or know who Jesus was! You'll recall with many of the healings we read about in the Gospels people yell out to Jesus for healing, or reach for Jesus' garment, and show some sort of faith or recognition of who Jesus truly is. Well, here in John chapter 5 verse 6 Jesus asks this man at the pool: *"Do you want to get well?"* And then in the following verses the man still doesn't realize who Jesus is and doesn't ask Jesus for healing, but instead frets about not getting into the waters of the pool where he thinks the waters will heal him. Well, come verse 8 Jesus says, *"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."* I find this whole scene awesome and a great example of God's grace! Perhaps sometimes in our lives when we miss seeing what Jesus is doing, He will still often heal us or care for us! Even sometimes (though I don't think always...) when we seem to looking for the other "waters" that we think will heal us. Even sometimes when we don't ask Jesus for healing, he'll still do it for us. **Q: Has Jesus ever done something amazing for you without you asking for it? Perhaps even when you were looking for somebody or something else to fix or heal something for you, is there a time when God's grace showed up on the scene instead and made the situation right?**

10/1 - I am intrigued by Jesus' words in John chapter 5 verse 30 today, particularly in light of the book of Judges that we recently read, which was a dark time in Israel's history - *"But I do nothing without consulting the Father. I judge as I am told. And my judgment is absolutely just, because it is according to the will of God who sent me; it is not merely my own."* I love that Jesus says his judgment is absolutely just. And I believe this is true - 1. that Jesus will judge us and that 2. his judgment is just. I think this is both something to be celebrated - there is no one else I would want to judge me... - and I think this can be sobering - if his judgment is absolutely just, then it is obvious that we cannot "sneak" anything by Jesus. Everything we have ever done or will do will be judged by Jesus. I think ultimately it is very healthy to recognize this. Maybe initially this realization will keep us from sinning because of some fear of judgment - but ideally this realization matures into a love for Jesus that encourages us not to sin because we would not want to disappoint Jesus whom we love with all that we are. **Q: Do you believe that Jesus is your judge? Do you believe that Jesus will judge you absolutely justly? Do you believe that God is a just God? A God of justice?**

10/1 - Today in Matthew chapter 12 we read about Jesus' teachings surrounding his healing on the Sabbath. Note that in verse 14 the plots to kill Jesus begin: *"Then the Pharisees called a meeting and discussed plans for killing Jesus."* **Q: Why do you suppose these plots started at this point?** I don't know that it was this one incident per se that began the plots in and of itself - but it was probably a culmination of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing ministries up to this point that started murmurs and discussions and finally led to plots. I think Jesus' wisdom and power and popularity with the people were seen as a threat. **Q: Do you think that Jesus' wisdom and power and popularity with the people are seen as a threat by some in our world today? What are some examples of people threatened by Jesus in our world today?**

10/1 - I read an interesting commentary on Matthew 12 verses 11 & 12 today: *"And he (Jesus) answered, 'If you had one sheep, and it fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you get to work and pull it out? Of course you would. And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep!'"* The commentary said that in this verse Jesus contrasts the worth of an animal with that of a human being. I think for most of us, we would agree that a human life is more valuable than an animal life. However - interestingly, not everyone in our world today feels that way. I recently heard a radio talk show host ask a woman if she saw both her beloved dog and a stranger drowning in a lake and she could only save one of the two, who would she save. And the woman basically said her dog - she hemmed and hawed about saying that straightforwardly, but basically she said her dog was her family... And so the stranger - the human - would lose out in that situation. **Q: If you could only save your beloved pet or a stranger (human) from drowning, who would you save? Who would God save? Do you think God places a higher value on human life than animal life? Do you think some people in our world place higher value on animals than human life? What are some examples of this?**

10/1 - I love the Isaiah prophecy in today's readings, summarizing the quiet aspects of the ministry of Jesus! Matthew 12, Verse 21 makes me tear up to really meditate upon: *"And his name will be the hope of all the world."* **Q: How does this**

verse strike you? Do you believe that Jesus' name is the hope of the world? Is Jesus' church a part of the hope of the world?

10/2 - In Luke chapter 6 verses 12 & 13 today we read - *"One day soon afterward Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles."* Every time I read about Jesus' calling of the apostles, I always think about myself. **Q: What would I have done if I was called by Jesus to be an apostle back then? What would I do if I was called to follow Jesus in this way today? What would you do? Would you leave everything behind and follow Jesus?**

10/2 - Today we read 3 amazing verses that I don't think we can hear often enough. And my hunch is that we don't follow these teachings often enough... they can seem initially so counter-intuitive - just like leaping for joy is when you are persecuted for loving Jesus. But these 3 verses are clearly such an important part of living the Christian life. And when you really meditate upon them, you'll see that they really are not counter-intuitive at all, but completely wise. Verse 28 - *"Pray for the happiness of those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you."* And verses 35 & 36 - *"Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don't be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate."* **Q: How are you doing on praying for the happiness of those who curse you or hurt you? How are you doing in loving your enemies and doing good to them? Do you believe we should be compassionate in these ways?**

10/2 - Okay... today is a big day my friends! We are starting the Sermon on the Mount! Whoo-hoo! (are you cheering here with me?? :) And as we do, let me encourage you in a few ways on what we'll be reading here. First of all, personally, these 3 chapters of Matthew (5, 6, 7) have been transformative for me over the years. Before I had faith in Jesus, I would continually read these chapters and I kept thinking to myself - "This guy has got some wisdom! I like what he's saying!" And I do believe that the Spirit was no doubt working on me as I read these chapters. So, I do ask that you would be sensitive to the Spirit as you read The Sermon on the Mount. **What is the Spirit speaking to you as you read?** Which verses are really jumping out at you - maybe making you think about some areas of your life that might need some tidying up... I know that this happens to me every time I read the Sermon on the Mount. Here's my other big request for you as you read through the Sermon on the Mount - and really all of the gospels. Try to experience what you are reading as something more than just "historical" teachings or "historical" readings. Try to envision yourself maybe down at your local park and maybe imagine that Jesus was actually at that park surrounded by a bunch of your neighbors and imagine that you heard Jesus actually saying these words to you and your neighbors - today. **Would this change your perception of what you are reading?** Or, maybe imagine that indeed Jesus is not just at your local park - but in your very home saying these words to you. And truly - He is - as you are reading the Bible you are hearing directly from Jesus. I just want to encourage you that the words you read here in the Sermon on the Mount are incredible spiritual food. And I don't think we can come back to these 3 chapters of Matthew often enough. I pray that you will let the Spirit of Jesus speak directly into your mind and your heart as you read and meditate on the meanings of these 3 chapters of the gospel of Matthew...

10/2 - Matthew 5: 17-18 are interpreted in different ways - but a friend of mine has encouraged me when in doubt, just stick to the text, which is wise. So, let's look at the Jesus' words here in this text - *"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them. I assure you, until heaven and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God's law will remain until its purpose is achieved."* **Q: What does the reading of this text say to you?** Related to these verses above, quoting this from Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion book - which I have found to be a very helpful commentary to our daily readings: "In the Old Testament, there were 3 categories of law: ceremonial, civil, and moral. 1. The **ceremonial law** was related specifically to Israel's worship. Its primary purpose was to point forward to Jesus Christ; these laws are therefore no longer necessary after Jesus' death and resurrection. However, the principles behind these laws - to worship and love a holy God - still apply. 2. The **civil law** applied to daily living in Israel and these laws cannot be followed specifically today in our modern society and culture. But the principles behind these laws are timeless and should guide our conduct. 3. The **moral law** (such as the Ten Commandments) is the direct command of God, and requires obedience. The moral law reveals the nature and will of God, and it still applies today." So, there you have it from one evangelical commentary. I know probably different people reading this blog are going to interpret these verses a bit differently. This framework of these 3 categories of laws above and their fulfillment in Jesus I personally have found helpful and agree with. One other commentary I found related to these verses says this: "Christ does not terminate the law. *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; we establish the law. (Romans 3:31)* The law will always be there to point out what sin is, but the law is not the focus, Christ

is the focus. Only He can cleanse, and sanctify and change the heart and mind." **Q: How do you look at the Old Testament law in your life? How do you integrate the Ten Commandments, for example, into your daily life? Or do you?**

10/2 - Matthew 5:27-30 are Jesus' teachings about adultery. And really I think these teachings, along with many others in the Sermon on the Mount, are even more so about what is going on inside our hearts. Jesus discusses how the law says clearly how we are "not to do" something - it's very apparent and very "exterior" if we commit a sin like adultery. Jesus says that the exterior/apparent/obvious sin is wrong for sure - but Jesus is equally as concerned with what's going on in the "interior" - inside our hearts. Jesus proposes that if we have looked at someone lustfully with our "interior", we have committed the same sin as if we had actually committed adultery on the "exterior." **Q: Do you see how Jesus' teachings in today's readings are really focusing on the condition of our hearts? How is the condition of your heart today when it comes to these teachings?**

10/2 - Matthew 5:27-28 reads: *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* **Q: Are there any good books or websites you can recommend to the group related to achieving victory in this area of our lives? Or any habits or practices of yours that you are comfortable sharing about how you avoid the sin of lust in your life?**

10/3 - What a blessing to read the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6! I have to confess, I don't say this prayer very often... and Jesus seems to indicate pretty clearly that this is a good way to pray. :) I do pray often throughout the day - but usually it's pretty immediate stuff - bless this meal, thank you for this day, bless my time at work, etc. etc. What a great thing it would be if I could remember to actually pray the Lord's Prayer a bit more... **Q: How do you pray? Or, in how many different ways do you pray? Do you pray specific prayers regularly, like the Lord's Prayer? Do you keep a list of people by your bedside to pray for regularly? Do you pray by writing in a journal?**

10/3 - Matthew 6:24 has always always been a verse that's convicted me and still does today: *"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."* There is so much truth here in these 3 little sentences... Who are we serving in our lives today? I once read that one good indicator is to take a look at your monthly budget. Where does the money go each month? Interesting way to look at this. Maybe another way to look at this is how you spend your time each week. How much time is spent at work, volunteering, being with God, being with family/friends, taking a Sabbath, etc. Maybe looking at how we spend our time and money is a good way to see who or what we are worshipping? **Q: Do you believe that it is true that we cannot serve two masters? What are some ways that help you make sure that you're not serving money in your life?**

10/3 - Today in Matthew we continue the Sermon on the Mount! Chapter 6 verse 27 is solid science from Jesus: *"Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not."* **Wouldn't you agree that scientific studies show that severe worrying (anxiety) can actually decrease the longevity of your life?** Jesus knew his science! :) Truly... I do think you'll continue to be amazed by the scientific validity and Truth that is exhibited in the Bible over and over and over again as we read it this year!

10/3 - Chapter 6 verse 34 has always been one of my favorites to remember: *"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."* Great great truth here. **I'm not sure if anyone has ever read a Dale Carnegie book about worrying?** It's called "[How to Stop Worrying and Start Living](#)." It's been probably 10 years ago since I read this book. But, I remember Dale writing about how he lived his life in what he called "day-tight compartments". He used a cargo ship analogy, which I won't be able to explain here well. But, basically, Dale got to the point where he mentally segmented his time off into morning prep time, time with family over breakfast, morning work time, lunch time, afternoon work time, dinner time, family time, time to read, sleeping time. And while he was in the present time of each of these "compartments" of his day he would not worry at all about the other compartments even in that very same day! It's pretty interesting to think about... when you are at work, you focus on work and you don't daydream or worry about your personal life - but, once you are off work, you then don't worry about work at all. I don't know... maybe this Dale Carnegie "day-tight compartments" is only helpful to me... I recommend you listen to Jesus' advice on worrying before you listen to Dale or mine! :) But, if you do worry a lot, this Dale Carnegie book may very helpful for you as well.

10/3 - In Matthew chapter 7 verse 6 we read: *"Don't give what is holy to unholy people. Don't give pearls to swine! They*

will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you." I understand what is being said here - and I can think of specific instances in my life where this type of thing has happened. My question though for each of us is this - how do we show our friends, family, neighbors the love of God? Honestly, I have an evangelistic heart - but I don't think I really openly evangelize much. I love God so much - and it tears me up when I see my friends struggling with addictions - particularly when it seems like they are seeking God but settle for an addiction. So - I don't think this verse 6 is referring to these types of situations - people seeking God in all the wrong places. I think we are called to share the love of God with our hurting friends - with a hurting world. **Q: How do you do this? Do you pray for others? Do you give others books or Bibles? Do you send them spiritual emails? Do you invite them to church? Do you "preach the gospel at all times, and use words when only necessary?"**

10/4 - Matthew chapter 11 opens up with Jesus teaching about the importance of John the Baptist's ministry and the transitioning from the old covenant to the new covenant, which can be seen in verse 13: *"For before John came, all the teachings of the Scriptures looked forward to this present time."* Basically, this could be rephrased that all of the Old Testament was prophesying about the coming of Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. **Q: Do you believe this to be true about the Old Testament?**

10/4 - Matthew 11, Verse 20 is a convicting one! *"Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where he had done most of his miracles, because they hadn't turned from their sins and turned to God."* This is something for each of us to really examine ourselves on. **Q: Have we heard Jesus' teachings? Do we believe in his miracles? And in light of these things - have we turned from our sins? And have we turned to God?**

10/4 - Today we read Matthew chapter 11 verses 28 through 30, which are amazing verses for each of us to consider, particularly if we are struggling with the burden of sin or the burden of worry or the burden of regrets (and the list could go on - you can fill in the blank for your life): *"Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."* **Q: Have you ever experienced the power of these verses? Have you ever come to Jesus weary and carrying heavy burdens and found rest? Is there anything in your life today that is heavy that you can give to Jesus?**

10/4 - The passages on the faith of the centurion today are powerful - especially his words in Luke chapter 7 verse 7 - *"Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed."* **Q: Can we learn something from the faith of the centurion in our lives today?**

10/4 - Wow.... Verse 35 in Luke chapter 7 is such a profound teaching of Jesus' for each of us to consider: *"But wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it."* Take a few moments to really meditate on this verse and what it means. For me this verse is a reminder that sometimes in life we have to move forward in faith on something "wise" we've heard, but maybe not experienced - and then later see that the wisdom is true. I'm not sure if I'm going to explain myself well here... but my thought is that as followers of Jesus, I think we can get lazy in our faith at times. As just one example - maybe we don't think we really need to give financially to our church. We know the wisdom of [Malachi 3:10](#), but maybe we haven't really experienced the wisdom of giving. So, maybe we need to follow the wisdom first - and then we will later know the full truth and beauty of the wisdom. Hope this makes sense? I'd just say that if there is a struggle in your life that God is calling you to leave behind or move forward on - go for it! If you know you should be doing or not doing something - go with that wisdom you know and then it will "shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it." Please follow Wisdom! Please follow Jesus! **Q: How has Wisdom shown itself to be right in your life?**

10/4 - In Luke chapter 7 today we read about the "immoral" woman who kissed and put perfume on Jesus' feet. Verse 39 is a powerful testament to Jesus' character - *"When the Pharisee who was the host saw what was happening and who the woman was, he said to himself, "This proves that Jesus is no prophet. If God had really sent him, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"* How ironic... this Pharisee thought that Jesus was not sent from God because he let a sinner touch him - when indeed it is this very act that proves that Jesus was sent from God! Jesus loved everyone - and still loves everyone today - and wants to be in relationship with all of us. No matter what this woman's sins were. No matter what our sins were or are. Jesus loves us and wants to be in relationship with us. **Q: Like the woman in this story, will we humble ourselves and come before the feet of Jesus? And will we ignore those who might suggest we're not "good enough" to be in relationship with God or Jesus?** Remember, Jesus came to call the sinners, the sick - and not the righteous. Let's not act righteous before Jesus, but come to his feet as we really are and worship Him for who he truly is!

10/5 - Mark chapter 3 verses 33-35 make an impact on me each time I read it: *"Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he looked at those around him and said, "These are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."* This last sentence is a powerful proclamation from Jesus. If we are obedient to God's will in our life we are brothers and sisters and mothers of Jesus. Pretty amazing to think about! Jesus is not only our savior - but our brother. And later he calls us friends. Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary puts it this way - "It is a great comfort to all true Christians, that they are dearer to Christ than mother, brother, or sister as such, merely as relations in the flesh would have been, even had they been holy. Blessed be God, this great and gracious privilege is ours even now; for though Christ's bodily presence cannot be enjoyed by us, his spiritual presence is not denied us." **Q: How is Jesus your relative? How are other believers your relatives? Do you believe people in your church are your family?**

10/5 - Mark chapter 4's parable of the Farmer scattering seed is a parable that I am sure can convict each of us in various ways. Verses 16 through 18 I am afraid can sometimes represent all too well the "soil" of our hearts... *"The rocky soil represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. At first they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word. The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the Good News, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for nice things, so no crop is produced."* The crowding out of the Good News by the cares of this life and the desire for nice things is where I am afraid we miss the mark too often. And when we succumb to these cares & desires, indeed, no crop is produced. However - I do pray that there are moments in life where we can see the amazing power & truth in verse 20: *"But the good soil represents those who hear and accept God's message and produce a huge harvest--thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted."* I just pray for more consistency in our lives to live in verse 20 than in the previous verses... **Q: How is the soil of your heart? Which verses in this parable are you living in these days? Are you receiving God's Word into your heart? Will you allowing God's Word in your heart to produce a huge harvest?**

10/5 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew Chapter 12 verse 30 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Anyone who isn't helping me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me."* This is a really really powerful verse if you think about it. **Q: And I think we then need to ask ourselves - are we really helping Jesus? How are we really working with Jesus? How are we really being obedient to Jesus' teachings for our life? Are there times in our lives when we are actually working against Him?**

10/5 - Jesus' teaching on the sign of Jonah in this chapter of Matthew 12 is awesome! In verse 40 Jesus prophesies His death, burial and resurrection: *"For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights."* And then the following verse is just so powerful and convicting: *"The people of Nineveh will rise up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And now someone greater than Jonah is here--and you refuse to repent."* **Q: In what ways is Jesus is greater than Jonah? And greater than Solomon? (as we read in verse 42) How has understanding Jesus' teachings led you to repent in your life?**

10/5 - Matthew 12 verses 48 through 50 are powerful: *"Jesus asked, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "These are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!"* I read an interesting commentary that said that these words from Jesus were stating that spiritual bonds are as strong as physical bonds. And that in this teaching Jesus was paving the way for a new community of believers - the church! Very cool... **Q: How are you a brother and sister and mother of Jesus?**

10/6 - Matthew 13 verse 22 in this chapter is convicting for me, as I have experienced this in my life in the past.... *"The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the Good News, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life and the lure of wealth, so no crop is produced."* and I still struggle with the "cares of this life" crowding out the Good News in my life today! I think in some ways this might be a life long struggle. **Q: How are you doing on this verse? Where is God's seed of the Good News being sown in your life? In the good soil of your heart?**

10/6 - In today's Matthew 13 readings we go through 5 parables that begin "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." Great way to start these parables! They do indeed give us a glimpse of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Do these parables speak to you as you read through them? I know they do for me. Sometimes in encouraging ways. Sometimes in

convicting ways. I love verses 31 & 32: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants and grows into a tree where birds can come and find shelter in its branches."* I think if we cultivate the seed that Jesus plants in our hearts - the Gospel - we will see an amazing plant grow that will ultimately bless others. From the tiniest beginnings, with patience and faith, can come the largest of plants. **Q: How have you let Jesus plant a mustard seed in your heart? How have you been patient and allowed the seed time & space to grow? How have you watered and cared for the seed of the Gospel planted in your heart so that one day it will be a beautiful tree of life for yourself and others you come in contact with? In 2010, how will you allow Jesus to grow a new mustard seed tree with your life?**

10/6 - I love the last 2 parables in today's readings in Matthew 13! The treasure buried in a field and the pearl of great price. And the thought of being willing to give up absolutely everything to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. How about for you? Are you willing to give up absolutely everything to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven? Is there a price too high that you would not be willing to pay? I will share with you this somewhat related tangent. I had this really interesting jog several years ago. And it was before I was a Christian, so I didn't equate my thinking with the "Kingdom of Heaven" at this time. But, here were my thoughts that night on the jog. As I was jogging I thought to myself - I am a "billionaire"! Why? Because I am blessed with this opportunity to jog, and to check out the beautiful night air around me, and more than anything because of this wonderfully complex thing in my skull called the brain. :) The brain that allows me to do all these things and to simply think and enjoy life. And I thought to myself - at what price would I give up the ability to use my brain? Would I sell my brain for 1 billion dollars? And the answer is obviously no - because there would then be no point to living in this life without the brain. So - I reasoned with myself, well - "Then I am a billionaire!" I have a billion dollar asset in my skull! :) I hope this isn't too random of a tangent. Maybe you'll realize that you are a billionaire today too though? :) To tie this back to the Kingdom of Heaven. Would I sell of my rights to the Kingdom of Heaven for 1 billion dollars. No. So - I guess then technically, I am a multi-billionaire now! 1 billion asset value for the brain + 1 billion asset value for the Kingdom of Heaven! The point being... or maybe the question to you. **Q: Which would you prefer - 1 billion in cash, or the Kingdom of Heaven? Is there any price you would place on giving up the Kingdom of Heaven? If not - how will you pursue the Kingdom of Heaven with all of your worth? And how will you then share this amazing "pearl of great price" with others around you?**

10/6 - I love the parable of the growing seed in Mark chapter 4 verses 26-29. This parable only occurs in the Gospel of Mark. I equate the seed to be the Gospel, which is filled with so much power and truth and life that *"the seeds sprouted and grew without the farmer's help, because the earth produces crops on its own."* The Gospel message is so powerful on its own that it will produce a bountiful crop. Or - maybe the Bible is another way to look at the seed. Reading and studying the Bible will ultimately produce a bountiful crop in our lives. It can't help but not do so. What do you think the seed represents in this parable? I'll share with you that I have been thinking more and more about farming these days - and the wisdom in how farming works. You plant, you water, you care for the soil, you wait, the plant grows. And this takes time. You reap what you sow. And I contrast this with our society today - or myself - and how everything moves so fast. We want instant gratification. Now! :) We don't like to wait on anything. We don't like the concept of farming... and I'm afraid that this speed of life today can really be unhealthy - or maybe superficial is the word I'm looking for. In any case, I think the patience and process of farming is something that has so much value for us still today. If we are struggling with sins or sadness or whatever, I think we absolutely need to take these things to Jesus for healing - but, we would do well to realize that Jesus may want to do some farming in our hearts. He may want to plant some seeds, and give the seeds some time to grow. Sure, maybe sometimes we'll get an instant gratification healing or answer. But I think more often than not we should be ready for some farming to occur in our hearts. And to thank God for the wisdom of this process! **Q: What do you think of my farming analogies in the reflections above? Has our modern world forgotten about some of the principles of farming the land? Have we forgotten that we reap what we sow? Have we lost our patience, to the point where we will not even wait for the harvest to come in at its appointed time? Are we trying to control things in our modern day life that aren't controllable? Such as the "pace" at which a seed grows into a plant and a plant into a full harvest? In losing some of our knowledge of the principles of farming and growing, are we at risk of losing ourselves?**

10/6 - I think my little tangent on farming and being patient during the process, above, might play in well to Jesus' next parable of the mustard seed in Mark 4 verses 30 through 32: *"Jesus asked, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed. Though this is one of the smallest of seeds, it grows to become one of the largest of plants, with long branches where birds can come and find shelter.""* I think if we can have faith in the seed that Jesus plants in our hearts - be it the Gospel, the Bible, healing, patience, faith - we will see an amazing plant grow that will ultimately bless others. From the tiniest beginnings, with patience and faith, can come the

largest of plants. **Q: Have you ever let Jesus plant a needed mustard seed in your heart? And have you been patient and allowed the seed time & space to grow?**

10/7 - The structure of today's readings in Mark chapter 5 are amazing! The narrative starts with Jairus asking Jesus to heal his daughter who is about to die - but, then, in the middle of the narrative Jesus' journey is stopped by a woman who simply wants to touch Jesus' robe so that she will be healed from a 12-year suffering. And verse 34 in this portion is just so beautiful as Jesus says to the now healed woman: *"Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. You have been healed."* Then, the narrative cuts back to Jairus, but it sounds like it's too late for Jesus to come to the house. Messengers report that the little girl has died. Jesus simply tells Jairus in verse 36 - *"Just trust me."* (which is something so powerful that I believe Jesus says to you and me today too - "Just trust me." Don't worry about anything else in this passing life. "Just trust me.") And then in verses 40 & 41 we read: *"Then he took the girl's father and mother and his three disciples into the room where the girl was lying. Holding her hand, he said to her, 'Get up, little girl!'"* **Q: Why do you think Jesus' healing ministry is focused on in the Gospels? Do you think Jesus' healing ministry continues in our world today? How?**

10/7 - Today in Luke chapter 8 verses 29 through 31 we will read some sobering verses – *"For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss."* Jesus then expels these demons from the man into a herd of pigs. The One Year Bible Companion has an interesting commentary on these verses that says Jesus did not simply destroy or send these demons into the Abyss, "because the time for such work had not yet come. But it will come. The book of Revelation records the future victory of Jesus over Satan, his demons, and all evil." This is news for each of us to pay attention to! Satan, his demons and all evil are still out and about in our world today. And honestly - make no mistake - we each need to be very cognizant of the evil that can pursue our hearts. I don't mean to scare you – but also, I do mean to scare you. :) When I first became a Christian 9 years ago, I instantly understood God's love and grace and goodness. And I honestly thought for a short while that the world was just so good, and that there wasn't really any evil in the world. There were just humans that made bad decisions. Well, fortunately I shared this viewpoint with a wise Christian friend of mine. He prescribed that I read 2 books – 1. [This Present Darkness by Frank Peretti](#) and 2. [The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis](#). My friend also told me this – "The devil's greatest trick is making you think that he does not exist. If you don't believe he exists, then you won't even realize it when he's tempting you." Wow. So true. If you are like me, where I was a few years ago, and you are not so sure that there is an actual presence of evil in our world – an evil that pursues people's hearts – then I prescribe these 2 books above to you as well. Now – the good news – Jesus is still the answer to expelling demons and evil and sin away from us today! Jesus is Risen and is so infinitely more powerful than any of the evil that is out there. So – more important than reading those 2 books above, my prescription to you really is to stay as close to Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit as you possibly can in this life. And you will have no need to fear evil. Stick with Jesus. **Q: Okay, I've typed a lot here without a question. . . Here it is. Q: Do you believe in the existence of evil in our world today? Do you believe that Satan exists? Do you believe that demons exist? Do you know the one true Remedy and Salvation and Protection from all evil? Will you run into Jesus' arms for this safety forever?** And my last piece of very serious advice if you are struggling with a sin that you know is putting you in contact with evil – you must must must leave that sin behind. I know that all sin is risky and dangerous and dumb, but I think you also will know if you are really entertaining a sin that is leading you down a very dark path. Please confess that sin to Jesus and God and repent. Seek counseling and professional help immediately if it a serious sin or addiction. God will give you victory. Yes, it may be a long and painful process of getting free from the addiction, but you must take this journey to freedom. The freedom will justify the pain it takes to get you there. Paul tells us to flee from sin. Flee from evil. **Will you flee?** Please flee.

10/7 - The structure of today's readings in Luke chapter 8 are amazing. The narrative starts with Jairus asking Jesus to heal his daughter who is about to die - but, then, in the middle of the narrative Jesus' journey is stopped by a woman who simply wants to touch Jesus' robe so that she will be healed from a 12-year suffering. And verse 48 in this portion is just so beautiful as Jesus says to the now healed woman - *"Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has made you well. Go in peace."* You know what is really beautiful about this verse? This woman is the only individual in all of the Gospels that Jesus addresses as "daughter." What a beautiful Savior we have... **Q: How has your faith made you "well?" How has Jesus healed you?**

10/8 – Matthew 9 Verses 37 & 38 are so powerful in today's readings: *"He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his*

fields." I think each of us can reflect on this teaching from Jesus. **Q: you agree with Jesus that the harvest is so great? And the workers are few? Do you pray to God for more workers for his kingdom work? How are you one of God's workers in his kingdom work? What are some ways in 2010 you could become more of worker in God's kingdom?**

10/8 - Matthew 10 verse 16 stands out: *"Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. Be as wary as snakes and harmless as doves."* This is good advice for us today as well. Jesus is still sending us out today as his followers. And I do think this teaching is wise - for us to be wary and harmless at the same time. It's an interesting line to walk, but I believe a very wise one. I believe the only way to really walk this line well is through the blessing of the Holy Spirit. I don't think we can do it on our own... **Q: How in your life do you balance being wary and harmless? Do you have an example of where this balance really paid off in your life?**

10/8 – Matthew 10 Verse 38 is the first mention of the word cross in the gospel of Matthew: *"If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine."* What strikes me about this verse is that Jesus is teaching that we do have a cross to bear. And we have a choice to make of whether we will take up the cross and follow Jesus. **Q: What is your cross in your life? Do you think you know what it is? How do you bear your cross daily? How do you choose to follow Jesus daily?**

10/8 - Today we read in Mark Chapter 6 verse 4– *"Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family."* This verse reminds me that sometimes when we really move forward in our faith, our friends ("hometown" from the verse above) and our relatives can sometimes not understand what is going on with us. I think there are phases of our walk with God where really it becomes very personal – between us and God – and through that process God will transform us. And our friends and relatives sometimes may not appreciate our change for various reasons – just as Jesus' friends and relatives did not appreciate his ministry in this verse. I hope that this verse can be of comfort to you if by chance you are having challenges reconciling your faith and your changed heart with your friends & relatives expectations of who you were in the past. Know that you are on the right path. As long as you are staying focused on God and his will for your life, you may have to accept some loss of "honor" (per the verse above) in your status with your friends and relatives. You may not seem to be as "cool" or "fun" as you once were in your friends' eyes. But – if in God's eyes you are loving Him with all of your heart and you are loving your neighbors as yourself, then you are eternally cool and fun in the Kingdom of Heaven. And that's where it really counts. **Q: Where are you seeking "honor" in your life today? In the eyes of your friends and relatives – or in God's eyes? Have you ever sought honor in the eyes of the world and realized it was not worth it?**

10/9 - Today we read in Mark Chapter 6 verse 46: *"Afterward he (Jesus) went up into the hills by himself to pray."* What a beautiful verse for each of us to meditate upon! Jesus went by himself to pray to God. It is interesting to note that this took place just after Jesus fed the 5,000. Jesus had been working hard – he is God and yet he still felt the call to pray to the Father. I think this verse is such a great reminder that you and I need to follow Jesus' example in this verse. And we're so not God! :) So, think about how much more crucial it is for us to pray. Jesus knew that God was his source of strength. His comfort. His wisdom. And prayer was the one sure fire way for Jesus to really connect and spend time with God. **Q: How is your prayer life these days? Are you finding a good amount of time each day to be by yourself and pray? If not, how can you schedule this time into your calendar each day?**

10/9 - In Matthew chapter 14 today we read about two miracles - Jesus feeding the 5,000 (or really 10,000 to 15,000 counting men, women & children - Matthew just counted men, as his Gospel was written to a Jewish audience, which had men eat separately from women and children at that time/place) and Jesus walking on water. While these 2 miracles are amazing and again confirming that Jesus is God - a couple of other things stood out to me. First was verse 23: *"Afterward he went up into the hills by himself to pray."* **Q: If Jesus did this - do you think we should do the same? How often do we get away from the "crowds" or even the "disciples" or loved ones in our life to be by ourselves and pray? Do you do this at least for a few minutes each day? Do you do this for longer periods of time too? How do you model this behavior of Jesus' in your life and slip away from the crowds to pray by yourself? How often? Where and How? Also, do you take spiritual retreats? Do you take the retreats alone or with others? Is prayer a central part of the retreats?**

10/9 - Verses 29 & 30 also stood out to me today: *"All right, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he looked around at the high waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted."* These verses made me wonder in our own lives – **Q: Are there times or areas in your**

life where Jesus has said, "Come", and you've moved forward in faith? But then - the waves came... the challenges came... the doubts came... the insults came.... and you started to waver in your faith? Maybe you got scared - and started to sink? Well - I do admire that Peter did cry out to Jesus to save him in this situation - and we then get the reassuring verse 31: *"Instantly Jesus reached out his hand and grabbed him."* If you feel like there are some areas in your life where you are sinking - will you cry out to Jesus to save you? Do you believe he will instantly reach out his hand and grab you?

10/9 - It is very interesting to note that Jesus' miracle of feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle, along with the resurrection, that is described in all 4 gospels! In John chapter 6 verse 14 we read - *"When the people saw this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, 'Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!'"* The Prophet the crowds are referring to comes from Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 15 & 18 - *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."* **Q: What do you think the significance is of the miracle of feeding the 5,000? Do you think Jesus is concerned for our physical needs? What is a time in your life Jesus took care of your physical needs?**

10/10 - Wow... verses 28 & 29 in John chapter 6 are so beautiful and simple that I think it is easy to miss the strong meaning behind this conversation between the crowd & Jesus - *"They replied, 'What does God want us to do?' Jesus told them, 'This is what God wants you to do: Believe in the one he has sent.'" Check out that very last sentence. This is what God wants you to do. Believe. That's it. It's that simple. Believe. Not give away all your money to the poor. Not do thousands of good deeds. Not become a perfect person over night. Just believe. Believe. Yeah, okay, maybe God will ask you to give away some money and do good and become better person after you believe... :) But the key is first and foremost to Believe.* **Q: Do you Believe in Jesus, the One whom God sent? When did you first Believe? Feel free to share your testimony with the group!**

10/10 - And John 6 verse 35 is so powerful as well - *"Jesus replied, 'I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in me will never thirst.'" Jesus saying he is the bread of life is similar to him saying he is the Door or the Vine. Bread is a beautiful metaphor that Jesus supplies divine nourishment to us spiritually. For me, this verse also reminds me of The Lord's Supper in our churches today.* **Q: How is Jesus your bread of life? How has Jesus quenched your thirst?**

10/10 - Okay, so John chapter 6 verses 53 through 58 are some verses that get interpreted several different ways - some saying these verses speak of the Lord's Supper and some saying they speak only of faith in Jesus because the Lord's Supper had not yet been instituted by Jesus at this time. I think the key for us to focus on is that Jesus is our nourishment - our literal spiritual food if we have faith in him. It is interesting to note that many disciples turned away from Jesus after this teaching. I love Peter's reply to Jesus in verses 68 & 69 after Jesus asks if the Twelve will leave too - *"Simon Peter replied, 'Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. We believe them, and we know you are the Holy One of God.'" True words indeed Peter. True words indeed.* **Q: If not Jesus, to whom would you go? Does anyone else have the words that give eternal life? Are you looking forward to eternal life with Jesus?**

10/10 - In Matthew chapter 15 today we read about Jesus confronting the Pharisees on their "age-old traditions." I read in Zondervan's & Tyndale's commentaries that after the Babylonian exile (we'll read about the exile late this year in the One Year Bible), Jewish rabbis began to make meticulous rules and regulations governing the daily life of people. And that these rules were added to God's law and were essentially elevated to the same sacred status by the Pharisees. In 200 A.D. these traditions of the elders were put into writing in the [Mishnah](#). I think what Jesus gets at here in this chapter is that the Pharisees were allowing the "rules & regulations" to overshadow the spirit of God's law. They were not honoring their parents because of the practice of [Corban](#) - giving \$ to the temple. Which, giving \$ to the temple is a good thing... but at the expense of the great thing of caring for your parents? I know we all could probably go round and round on what is the greatest good - how should we spend our time and our money and our lives. I like that Jesus basically takes it to the heart. What is the heart of the matter? No matter what the matter is - taking care of your parents, giving to your church, obediently following God's will, receiving God's grace - what is the heart of the matter? One thing that I have been so blessed to learn over the past few years is that the condition of our hearts matters. Immensely. The motives of why we do something - anything - matters. Immensely. We are called in Proverbs to *"guard our hearts, for it is the wellspring of life."* If we do not care for the state of our hearts, we can become very regimented or insensitive in our thinking and doing. We might even get to the point in verse 8 of this chapter where Jesus quotes from Isaiah: *"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away."* **Q: How is the state of your heart today? How is it**

close to God? How does your heart yearn for Jesus?

10/10 - In Matthew 15 verses 10 & 11 today we read: "Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "Listen," he said, "and try to understand. It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth." **Q: Do you agree with these words of Jesus? Are you cognizant of the words that come out of your mouth on a moment by moment basis? Have you ever had to conscientiously change the words that come out of your mouth because they were not blessing others? Do you use profanity? (or am I being a Pharisee by even asking this question... :) I think it's a fair question - does profanity come out of your mouth? Do you think this is pleasing in God's sight? (Psalm 19:14)**

10/10 - Jesus continues to speak about the importance of what is in our hearts in verses 18-20 today: *"But evil words come from an evil heart and defile the person who says them. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all other sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you."* I think this takes us back again to the Sermon on the Mount - where Jesus teaches us in one example that yes, it is wrong to commit adultery. But, if you commit adultery in your heart, it is just as wrong. Because if you commit adultery in the heart, you have defiled your own heart. And from the heart could come the actual act of committing adultery - which would then shatter several lives. But it all starts in the heart.... So - the good news? Jesus can heal our hearts! Jesus is in the business of heart-healing! **Q: In your life, are there any areas where you might need to refocus from some external actions and start focusing on the state of your heart? Maybe by focusing on what's going on inside your heart, the external actions will ultimately change? Maybe allow Jesus to heal your heart - and then your external life will be healed as well? I'm not sure you can go about this the other way - trying to work from the outside back in... I think you need to start on the inside first and work your way out. But don't do this alone - let Jesus walk this healing path with you. Let Jesus tattoo your heart with his healing love! Why do you think our hearts are so important to Jesus?**

10/11 - Mark chapter 7 opens up with a gentile woman begging Jesus to release her daughter from the control of a demon. Verses 27 through 29 are a fascinating look at Jesus' ministry - *"Jesus told her, "First I should help my own family, the Jews. It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even the dogs under the table are given some crumbs from the children's plates." "Good answer!" he said. "And because you have answered so well, I have healed your daughter."* Here we see that Jesus' ministry was initially to the Jews, but here he heals a gentile woman's daughter because of her humility and faith. And of course as we get to the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' ministry is clearly for "all nations". In fact, Mark's Gospel is a good indicator of how Jesus' ministry quickly expanded beyond the Jews as Mark likely wrote this Gospel in Rome and to a primarily Roman gentile believer audience. **Q: How are you helping take the Gospel to all nations? Are you supporting missionaries or ministries doing this work? Are you doing it yourself?**

10/11 - In Matthew chapter 16 verses 11 & 12 stood out to me: *"So again I say, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' " Then at last they understood that he wasn't speaking about yeast or bread but about the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."* And I wonder today - are there false teachings that we should beware of today? I believe there are... and there have been times in my life where I have bought into false teaching's. How can we know if a teacher is false? That is a great question. I would say that each of you are doing an amazing thing to help discern whether a teacher is false by reading the entire Bible. I believe the Bible to be the ultimate Truthful teaching that we can read - and thus, if you come across teachers that differ radically or go against the teachings of the Bible, you need to be wary. Don't get me wrong - every pastor / minister / priest is going to have some different takes or views or interpretations of the Bible. By slight degrees... If there are major differences, then you should be worried. In addition to knowing the Bible relatively well, the key to discerning false teachers will be the Holy Spirit. If you are getting bad "gut feelings" (hopefully coming from the Holy Spirit) over and over again about a teacher, there might be an issue. Pray to God about this and ask for his guidance. I realize this can be a sensitive issue! I'd say don't freak out about this and start wondering if your pastor is a false teacher.... :) But, be aware. I do believe there are still false teachers out and about today unfortunately. **Q: How do you discern false teaching from true teaching? Is there a time you can share with the group you were deceived by false teaching for a time?**

10/12 - The last few verses in Mark's readings today are some of the most powerful verses that each of us should really reflect upon in our lives today! I wish I reflected on these verses more often. Check out chapter 8 verses 34 through 38 and spend a few moments really reflecting on these verses and on how they speak to how you are living your life today: *"Then Jesus called his disciples and the crowds to come over and listen. "If any of you wants to be my follower," he told them, "you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for*

yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul? If a person is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, I, the Son of Man, will be ashamed of that person when I return in the glory of my Father with the holy angels." These are incredible verses above! I think the first obvious question these verses open up to us is simply this - do you want to be a follower of Jesus? If the answer is yes, then the instructions that follow are simple and yet not always so easy in our fallen world: 1. give up your own selfish ambition. 2. shoulder your cross. 3. follow Jesus. How are you doing on these 3 points in your life today? And what a profound truth there is in that we will find true life if we give up our life for Jesus - the Good News. I actually have been thinking about this point quite a bit lately. And my thoughts have revolved around "my identity" - and where I get my identity from. I think so often I get my identity from my work or my ministry or my friends or my social life - the problem in all of this is that you'll keep seeing the word "my" in my identity. And I'm realizing more and more that my identity should be in Jesus alone. Jesus should be the identity. The reality. I think that I am really searching for true life in all the wrong places - in my work, in my friends, etc. And true true life is really only found in one place - Jesus. **Q: How about you? What is providing your identity in your life today? Do you think it is possible that your identity could simply be found in Jesus? How is your identity found in Jesus? Do you want this to be the case? Do you think we would do well to not be ashamed of Jesus and the Good News in these adulterous and sinful days... ?**

10/12 - Today we read about Peter's confession of Christ in Matthew chapter 16. In verse 15 we hear Jesus ask: *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" And then in verse 16 Peter replies – "Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* I believe this is a question that is asked of each of us today as well. **Q: Who do you say that Jesus is? What does Jesus being the Christ mean in your life today?**

10/12 - In verse 18 we read - *"Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."* Praise God for Jesus instituting the body of Christ, Jesus' church! And all of the powers of hell will not conquer the body of Christ! Do you praise Jesus regularly for the church you attend? Do you pray for the ministry of your church regularly? Do you pray often for your pastors / ministers / priests? Do you pray for others that attend your church? Do you pray for those that will soon be coming to attend your church? I have to say - I absolutely love my church. I honestly cannot imagine what my life would be like without the church. I met first met Jesus thanks to the church about 6 and a half years ago. And Jesus changed my life forever. Thank God for the church! I realize that some of you may feel that some churches have some issues and so you don't go to church at all at this time. However, I honestly do believe that we are called to be in community with others in a church – be it a big church, small church, house church, etc. - and that you really can find a great church if you search prayerfully. Trust me, they are out there! If you are not currently attending church - maybe because of bad experiences you had at another church in the past, will you pray about this with Jesus? Will you attend a different church again soon? I honestly believe it will bless you immensely to attend church again on a regular basis. Also, I am reminded of a classic line from Billy Graham – "If you ever find the perfect church, please do not join it. You'll mess it up!" :) Indeed, there are no perfect people out there, and hence no perfect churches. But let us be the church anyway! The church may be a majestic mess, but it is Majestic indeed! And I do honestly believe that the body of Christ is the "hope of the world". Please be an active participant in this Hope. **Q: I'm curious what your thoughts are on the church today? And I'm not talking about any one denomination - I mean church as the overall "body of Christ" Christian churches worldwide. Big churches, small churches, house churches, cathedral churches. Do you personally go to church regularly? Why or why not? Have there been periods of your life where you have not gone to church regularly? Have these been good or not so good periods of your life? What would you say to someone now who does not go to church about church? How might you encourage someone to go to church? Why does it matter if they go to church or not?**

10/12 - Verses 24 - 26 are so powerful today: *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?"* Wow... there is so much going on in these verses... I pray they speak to you powerfully as well? **Q: How do you follow Jesus? How do you put aside your selfish ambition? How do you shoulder your cross? Do you know what your cross is? Are you trying to "keep your life" in any area of your life? Or, will you give up all of your life - every area - to Jesus so that you will find true life? Is there anything that this world has to offer that is worth more than your soul?**

10/13 - Mark chapter 9 verses 33-35 always stand out to me and I personally always need to be reminded of Jesus' teaching here in the last sentence: *"Jesus asked them, "What were you discussing out on the road?" But they didn't*

answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. He sat down and called the twelve disciples over to him. Then he said, "Anyone who wants to be the first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else." **Q: How are you doing on this last sentence? When in your life are you taking last place? When are you the servant of everyone else? Do you think this last sentence applies to Jesus' life? Do you think we should model how Jesus lived his life in this regard?**

10/13 - Today in Matthew chapter 17 verse 20 stood out to me: *"You didn't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I assure you, even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."* **Q: As you think about this verse, how about your own faith. How much faith do you really have? Do you have enough faith in Jesus? And in all of God's promises? Or – do you ever hedge your bets? Do you also place a lot of faith in your own power? Your own skills? Your own "smarts"? Do you truly have complete faith in Jesus and Jesus alone? If so, and if it was Jesus' will, do you believe that you could move mountains?** I don't think that this idea of not having enough faith means that we need to "try harder" in any way. I think it means we simply need to depend more - rest more - relax more - give more - to Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Trust that his grace is enough... As a great Chris Tomlin song goes - "All of you is more than Enough, for all of me." **Is Jesus more than enough for you?**

10/13 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 18 verses 3 & 4 are something for each of us to consider: *"I assure you, unless you turn from your sins and become as little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."* I find it interesting the order of the words - first, turn from your sin. THEN - after turning from your sins - become as little children. It seems that we cannot become humble as children without first turning from our sins. This makes sense if you think about it. If you are still living in sin, how can you become humble like a child? You must first repent of the sin before moving toward humility. I think this teaching is a tough one in our modern age. It doesn't sound quite right... become humble like a child? Why?? But, there is so much wisdom in it. **Q: In what areas of your life do you want to become humble like a child? What are some steps you can take to become humble like a child?**

10/13 - Verses 19 & 20 are awesome: *"I also tell you this: If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them."* Again, these verses remind me of the importance of being in community with other believers regularly. The importance of church. And not just showing up to church on Sundays, but really investing in your church. Serving. Giving financially. Being part of a small group. Doing life together with others. Being the body of Christ. I will admit that there have been periods of my life where I really felt like I did not need the church. That I did not need to be in community. These have turned out to be lonely or hurried or stressful seasons when I look back on them! I realize now more than ever that I need the church. I love my church. I love everyone in my church - warts and faults and all - and I believe they love me in return, warts and faults and all. **Q: How has Christian community been important for you in your life? Have you had seasons in your life when you didn't have Christian community? What is an area of your life today that God might be calling you into Christian community?**

10/13 - Today in Matthew chapter 18 we read about Jesus' strong teaching on the need for us to forgive others in our life. And not just to forgive someone once... but many many many times. Why? Because God has been so gracious to us - he has forgiven us for our many many many sins through our faith in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. If God has forgiven us many times over - who are we to not forgive others many times over as well? Are we better than God? :) We all know the answer to this one. No. But, we are all called to forgive as gracefully as God has forgiven us. We are to forgive, just as we have been forgiven. **Q: Who is someone in your life today that you need to forgive? When and how will you forgive this person?**

10/14 - Hmm... I found John chapter 7 verse 12 intriguing today as it said this about Jesus - *"There was a lot of discussion about him among the crowds. Some said, 'He's a wonderful man,' while others said, 'He's nothing but a fraud, deceiving the people.'"* **Q: Does this verse sound familiar to you at all? Maybe like something we would hear about Jesus or Christianity in our modern world today?** "Jesus & Christianity is wonderful. Jesus & Christianity is nothing but a fraud, deceiving people." Times really have not changed much have they?

10/14 - Jesus' words in John 7 verse 17 are powerful - *"Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own."* I like that - if we want to do the will of God, we will know whether Jesus' teaching is from God or is his own. **Q: Do you want to do the will of God? When you read Jesus' teachings in John,**

do you know that his teaching is from God?

10/14 - John chapter 7 verses 37 & 38 are powerful verses for each of us to meditate upon - "*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow from the heart of those who believe in me.*" Wow... these are powerful words from Jesus. And so true. I know that I have been very spiritually thirsty in my life in the past and Jesus has most certainly quenched that thirst in my life. And I do believe that rivers of living water flow from the heart of those that believe in Jesus. This is the Holy Spirit, which indwells within us when we are in relationship with God the Father through Jesus the Son. This living water flowing from our hearts - the Holy Spirit - is an intriguing topic. I know different folks experience the Holy Spirit in different ways. I do hope that each of us do tangibly experience the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives each and every day. I do know there are some days where I really sense and experience the Holy Spirit in my heart and life. And there are some days where I may not - but I don't believe the Holy Spirit has departed. It's more likely that I'm just caught up in the hustle / bustle of this life and focused on the flesh / world and not the Spirit. **Q: Do you believe that rivers of living water will flow from the heart of those that believe in Jesus? Are you thirsty? Are those around you thirsty?**

10/14 - I love John chapter 8 verse 12 today: "*Jesus said to the people, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."*" **Q: Do you believe that Jesus is the light of the world? Why would we want or need a light in this world? Do you believe there is darkness in this world? Do you need the light that leads to life?**

10/15 - I love John 8 verse 29 where Jesus says - "*And the one who sent me is with me--he has not deserted me. For I always do those things that are pleasing to him.*" **Q: If Jesus always did those things that are pleasing to God, do you think that you and I should do those things that are pleasing to Jesus and to God? Meaning, it seems to me that Jesus was clearly very intentional with how he spent his time. He only did those things that are pleasing to God. How intentional are you and I in how we spend our time? Do we make sure we are only doing those things that are pleasing to Jesus (who is God) and God the Father?** I know I don't. I wish I did. I pray that I will spend more and more of my time doing those things that are pleasing to God. Let us pray that Jesus' personality permeates our personality and all that we do!

10/15 - John chapter 8 verses 34 through 36 are such powerful teachings for each of us to recognize - "*Jesus replied, "I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free."*" **Q: Do you believe it is possible to be a slave of sin? Do you believe Jesus can set us free from the slavery of sin? Are you free?**

10/15 - I believe verse 58 is one of the most powerful statements Jesus makes in the Gospels - "*Jesus answered, "The truth is, I existed before Abraham was even born!"*" Or the NIV of this verse is - "*"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*" Jesus is quoting Exodus 3:14 here when Moses asks God who he should say sent him to free the Israelites from Egypt and God says - "I AM. Tell them I AM sent you." Jesus here knows what he is doing when he says that even before Abraham was born, I AM. Jesus is saying he is God. And He is. But, to the religious leaders at this time, this was blasphemy to their ears. And hence, they attempted to stone Jesus in the very next verse. **Q: Do you believe Jesus when he says, "before Abraham was born, I AM"?**

10/15 - Continuing this agricultural / farming theme - in Luke chapter 10 verse 2 today we read this teaching from Jesus to the disciples - "*These were his instructions to them: "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. Pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest, and ask him to send out more workers for his fields."*" **Q: Do you believe that the harvest is great? Do you pray to God to send out more workers for his fields? Are you one of those workers? How are you participating in the harvest? If you're not participating in the harvest in some way, will you pray to God to show you where He would have you participate in the harvest?**

10/15 - Luke chapter 10 verse 20 is an incredible teaching from Jesus for us to heed even today - "*But don't rejoice just because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered as citizens of heaven.*" I do think that sometimes we rejoice over the wrong things - secondary things. The primary thing is our relationship with Jesus. And then there are secondary good things that perhaps we do or are involved with in the Kingdom. But, don't rejoice over those. Rejoice that you are in an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the one thing that matters. Today in Luke chapter 10 verse 21 we read - "*At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.*"

Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure." What a great opening line – Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit! In your life today - are you full of joy through the Holy Spirit? Do you want to be? I read a great commentary from the One Year Bible companion on this verse with this wonderful Q & A - "What was Jesus' relationship to the Holy Spirit? Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, baptized by the Holy Spirit, anointed by the Holy Spirit, guided by the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and filled with the Holy Spirit. He lives in union with the Holy Spirit, and was dependent upon the Holy Spirit." **Q: What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit today? Are you dependent upon the Holy Spirit in your life?**

10/15 - Today in Luke chapter 10 we read about Jesus visiting Mary & Martha and Martha becoming upset with Mary for sitting at Jesus' feet and not helping her work in the kitchen. To which Jesus says to Martha in verses 41 & 42 - *"But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it--and I won't take it away from her."* **Q: What do you think is the one thing worth being concerned about Jesus is referring to? Is this really the only one thing you are concerned about in your life today? Or are you possibly being distracted by other "details"? Did you personally identify more with Mary, who sat at Jesus' feet, or Martha, who became upset because of her busyness? Which one of the two would you like to identify with more? Do you think that sometimes as Christians we can get too busy and miss out on spending time at the feet of Jesus? Will you examine your daily schedule and look for ways that you are "overbooking" yourself, and thus missing out on quiet time with the Lord? Will you resolve to be more like Mary and spend some quality time with Jesus - particularly during this Easter season?**

10/16 - Jesus' teaching in Luke chapter 11 verse 23 is so important for us to understand - *"Anyone who isn't helping me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me."* How does this verse speak to you? For me it convicts me. Yeah, maybe for some of my time I am helping Jesus and the Kingdom of God, but I think there is a lot of time where I am not working with Jesus. I am maybe indulging in some seemingly harmless trivial pursuits or material pleasures - but they aren't really working with Jesus. And am I then, at those times, actually working against Jesus? I don't know. I want to pray on this more. I do know that we are called to rest & relaxation in our lives - a time of Sabbath rest each week. We don't have to be frantically seeking to "do" & serve Jesus 24 x 7. But, I do think it's possible that we can live our lives more "intentionally" - meaning, examine the intent of why we do what we do. And ultimately, is what we are doing with our time helping and working with Jesus? Or is it not? I think being intentional with our time and how we are spending our lives is so important... because time flies as we all know. **Q: How are you helping Jesus in your life today? Are there any ways that you might actually be working against Jesus?**

10/16 - Jesus' teaching in Luke chapter 11 verse 36 is powerful for each of us to consider! *"If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant, as though a floodlight is shining on you."* That second little clause there I think is key - with no dark corners. I'll admit that I have traveled through life with some dark corners. And it is no way to go. The dark corners do affect the Light really shining in you and through you - and the dark corners I believe can affect your relationship with God. I pray that if you know you have a dark corner in your life, confess it to God and Jesus. Pray for forgiveness and repent! God will fill you with light - a light that will penetrate and remove those dark corners in your life. But, you've gotta confess them & repent of them with God... You know it's worth it. To live a radiant life, as though a floodlight is shining on you is the only way to live! **Q: How is God's light filling your life? Are there any dark corners in your life? Will you hand those over to Jesus' healing Light?**

10/16 - Wow... Jesus goes after the Pharisees in Luke chapter 11 today... Verses 39 through 41 are powerful: *"Then the Lord said to him, "You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are still filthy--full of greed and wickedness! Fools! Didn't God make the inside as well as the outside? So give to the needy what you greedily possess, and you will be clean all over."* I think these verses are important for us to meditate upon as well today. **Q: How are we clean inside? Or do we put on a show and just clean up our external appearances for others? As we saw in Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew - God is very interested in the condition of our hearts. Our insides. Are our insides clean?** Bob Deffinbaugh with Bible.org's great commentary on our Luke chapter 11 readings today titled "Fundamentalists in Formaldehyde" is [at this link](#).

10/16 - Jesus' teachings in Luke chapter 12 verses 2 through 3 are also important for us to reflect upon in our lives today - *"The time is coming when everything will be revealed; all that is secret will be made public. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear!"* I once heard a pastor say during a sermon - "nobody sins in a vacuum. Meaning, nobody's sin does not affect others. When we sin - even when we are "alone" - it affects our community in ways we do not fully realize." I think

this is so true. When we sin - even what we have done or said in the "dark" - we hurt not only ourselves, but others. And God the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, who is pure Light, have heard and know what we do in the dark. We cannot hide it from them. Better to confess it to God, repent, and be cleansed by the Light. Then, go, and sin no more. Plus - it's a darn scary thought to think that what we do in the dark might be shouted from the housetops for all to hear! :) Live your life such that no matter what you do or what you say, you wouldn't be embarrassed to read about it in tomorrow's papers... **Q: Do you believe that every single thing you do will be revealed one day? Do you believe that all of your secrets will one day be known? Are you living your life in preparation for meeting Jesus face to face?**

10/16 - Luke 12:10 today we read: "*And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.*" Below is a brief commentary from Bible.org on the "Unpardonable Sin" from Luke 12:10, which can be found on Bible.org.

"At first appearance this text seems to be warning the disciple that he might lose his salvation by denying the Savior, by his hypocrisy. This is not the case, however. There are several reasons why this cannot be the case.

- (1) Man's salvation is not based upon his works, or his faithfulness, but on Christ's shed blood and His faithfulness.
- (2) The Scriptures consistently teach that man did not choose God but that He has chosen man, and that the one who is saved is eternally secure.
- (3) In our text, there is a definite change from the second person ("you") to the third person ("whoever," "him," "everyone").
- (4) The unpardonable sin, referred to in verse 10, is elsewhere clearly a sin which an unbeliever commits, which terminates any further opportunity to be saved."

Q: How should we live our lives to ensure we never blaspheme against the Holy Spirit?

10/17 - In Luke chapter 12 verse 40, Jesus is speaking about his second coming at the end of the age - "*You must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.*" But, this verse also always seems to speak to me about the end of my life here on earth as well. One of 2 things will happen during our life that will bring our earthly life as we know it to an end - 1. Jesus' second coming (which no one knows the day or hour) or 2. we will die. I know it's not something we all want to think about... but someday our earthly bodies will die. And I guess when I read verse 40 above, it makes me realize that not only do we not know the day or hour when Jesus' 2nd coming will be. We also don't know the day or the hour of the end of our life either. So... this verse then speaks to me clearly - you must be ready all the time! And, I don't view this as something to be anxious over. But, I do think it's serious for us to consider. I don't know about you - but sometimes I'm a procrastinator. And when it comes to our faith in Jesus, there is no luxury of procrastination. We must have faith in Jesus, be living for Jesus, and really, be willing to die for Jesus - today. Now. Not tomorrow. Today. **Q: Are you ready all the time? Are you looking forward to Jesus coming again in Glory?**

10/17 - Chapter 12 verse 48 is also a powerful teaching from Jesus for us today - "*But people who are not aware that they are doing wrong will be punished only lightly. Much is required from those to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given.*" This is convicting... think about it. The more we begin to know about Jesus and God and the Bible, the more we essentially have been "given." And when this holy knowledge has been given to us - much is required. Much is expected. Maybe in our past we were not aware of our sins. Maybe we were not aware of sin at all really. Today, if we have been blessed with the knowledge of living by Jesus' teachings, we should not be acting as we did in the past when we did not know any better. **Q: Have you been given much? How are you living up to what is required of you?**

10/17 - I love Jesus' teachings in Luke chapter 13 verses 18 & 19: "*Then Jesus said, "What is the Kingdom of God like? How can I illustrate it? It is like a tiny mustard seed planted in a garden; it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds come and find shelter among its branches."* I think if we can have faith in the seed that Jesus plants in our hearts - the Gospel - we will see an amazing plant grow that will ultimately bless others. From the tiniest beginnings, with patience and faith, can come the largest of plants. **Q: Have you let Jesus plant a mustard seed in your heart? And will you be patient and allow the seed time & space to grow? And will you water and care for the seed of the Gospel planted in your heart so that one day it will be a beautiful tree of life for yourself and others you come in contact with?**

10/17 - Jesus' teaching in John chapter 9 verse 3 is powerful - "*It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "He was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him."* Wow. He was born blind so that God's power could be seen in him. I wonder about this in our lives today. **Q: When we have challenges or struggles, is it possible that they are happening so that the power of God can be seen? I know this can be tough to fathom when you are in the midst of a challenge or struggle - or, if you are blind for example, like this man in John 9. But... no matter what life throws our way, do you think that God's power can be seen in any circumstance?**

10/17 - John 9 Verse 27 is great when the healed man says - *"Look!" the man exclaimed. "I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"* Hmmm.... Verses 39 through 40 are a dialogue that each one of us should reflect upon - *"Then Jesus told him, "I have come to judge the world. I have come to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind." The Pharisees who were standing there heard him and asked, "Are you saying we are blind?" "If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "But you remain guilty because you claim you can see."* **Q: How are we behaving today? Are we allowing Jesus to give us spiritual sight? Or do we think we can see well enough spiritually without Jesus? Without Jesus, can we see or are we blind...? Will we allow Jesus to heal us of our spiritual blindness right now?**

10/18 - I love Jesus' teachings today in John 10 verses 9 & 10 - *"Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness."* What a great analogy - Jesus is the gateway to salvation. Life in relationship with Jesus will be full of green pastures - this reminds me of [Psalm 23 verse 2!](#) And then Jesus tells us that his purpose is to give us life in all its fullness. I think all too often we look for fullness of life in all the wrong places... when all we have to do is walk through the gate. **Q: Have you walked through the gate? How can we help lead others in our life who don't know Jesus through the gate?**

10/18 - Jesus calling himself the Good Shepherd is so very beautiful and fitting in John 10 verses 14 & 15 - *"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep."* After we walk through the gate of faith to fullness of life with Jesus, he will be our Good Shepherd forever. He is a shepherd that knows us - and we know him. He will protect us with his rod and staff - again, a little [Psalm 23 verse 4.](#) :) And more than anything else, this Good Shepherd has laid down his life for us. **Q: Do you consider Jesus to be your Good Shepherd? How does Jesus shepherd you?**

10/18 - John chapter 10 verse 30 is a powerful teaching from Jesus! *"The Father and I are one."* Many churches celebrate Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in the Upper Room after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Thus, rounding out the Trinity. (Bible.org has a great overview of the Trinity [at this link.](#)) The Father. The Son. And the Holy Spirit. **Q: Do you believe Jesus when he says, "The Father and I are one" ? Do you believe Jesus is God? Do you think the majority of our world believes Jesus is God?**

10/18 - Wow. Jesus' teachings in Luke chapter 14 verses 12 through 14 are so powerful - *"When you put on a luncheon or a dinner," he said, "don't invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will repay you by inviting you back. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the godly, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you."* **How often do we do something for others - in hopes of getting something back in return? Maybe it's simply praise? Or maybe it's indeed an invite to something else in the future?** Kind of the whole idea of "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine." Jesus tells us there is another way - care for others that cannot repay you. Because God will repay you. And who would you rather receive repayment from for your good deeds - humans or God? **Q: Do you think that caring for the poor is giving to God? How do you give to God?**

10/19 - Today in Luke chapter 14 verse 27 we read – *"And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* I don't know about you, but I'm not so good at carrying "crosses." I'm not so good at taking on perceived burdens. I'm not so good at suffering at all. I like to get my way. I often feel entitled to get a lot of good stuff in my life. . . And yet. . . Jesus says if I am to be his disciple I must carry my cross. And I must follow him. I think sometimes in our culture we want to keep up with our neighbors – be hip; be cool; be relevant; know the latest styles; wear the latest fashions; and this list can go on. Jesus tells us to carry our cross. And truly, this is the eternally hippest / coolest / most relevant decision any one of us can make – to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Nothing else matters. **Q: How about you? Are you a disciple of Jesus carrying your cross? Do you know what your cross is? Do you want to know? Are you following Him? Are you letting worldly and pop-cultural cares fall to wayside of your life as you walk along the true path of following Jesus?**

10/19 - Beautiful verses today in Luke chapter 15 verses 8 through 10 - *"Or suppose a woman has ten valuable silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house and sweep every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found her lost coin. In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."* **Q: Do you**

believe that there was joy in the presence of God's angels when you repented? Or... when you will repent? That is a beautiful thought indeed!

10/19 - The story of the shrewd manager in Luke chapter 16 today concludes with some powerful teachings from Jesus. Verses 8 & 9 stand out to me today - *"And it is true that the citizens of this world are more shrewd than the godly are. I tell you, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. In this way, your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven."* I like that teaching - we should use our worldly resources to benefit others. So, I've been thinking about this a bit more lately. And I wondered what it would be like if I went through my days consciously trying to make other people happy. I don't think I've really ever done this over a sustained period. Maybe I've glimpses of using my resources to benefit others. To make them happy. I want to do more of this... **Q: How about you? Are you consciously using your resources (time, treasure & talents) to make others happy in your life each day? How?**

10/19 – Luke 16 Verse 10 is also a strong teaching from Jesus today - *"Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won't be faithful in large ones. If you cheat even a little, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities."* I think there was a very popular book out there a while back called "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff." Well, it looks to me in this verse that God sweats the small stuff. And you and I should sweat the small stuff. We need to be faithful in small matters in our daily lives or else indeed we will not be faithful in large matters. **Q: Will you join me in sweating the small stuff when it comes to matters of our integrity before God? How have you learned to be faithful in small matters?**

10/19 - Today in Luke chapter 16 we read about the rich man and Lazarus. I have always found verse 31 to be such a great reflection on what it means to have having a soft heart and a strong faith - *"But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.'"* Basically, Abraham is saying that people whose hearts are hardened to faith will not even believe it if a dead man returns to them and tells them to repent. They still won't repent even with this miracle. And I believe this is true. Let us pray that our hearts are soft and open to faith and that we can share the Good News of Jesus with others in our life whose hearts may be becoming more and more hardened with each passing day... **Q: Do you think it's possible to share the Gospel to people with hardened hearts? Have you ever seen someone with a hardened heart repent and come to faith in Jesus?**

10/19 - Wow. I love Luke 17 verse 10 - *"In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty.'"* **Q: I wonder if sometimes we do good works for Jesus expecting some praise or return on our works?** This is obviously not a good motive. We should simply be obedient to Jesus and not expect praise for our obedience - from Jesus or from others. It is simply a blessing for us to be called to Jesus' service. That is more than enough.

10/19 - Today in John chapter 11 verse 35 we read the shortest verse in the Bible – *"Jesus wept."* Though this may be the shortest verse, I do not believe it is small in meaning. What does it say to you that Jesus wept? What does it mean to you that Jesus wept? I love this verse because to me it shows Jesus' humanity (while at the same time he is divine). During his time living as a man on earth, Jesus experienced the full range of emotions that you and I experience today. Jesus was tempted. (though, unlike us, he did not give into temptation and sin ever) Jesus was joyful. Jesus was angry. Jesus loved. Jesus wept. **Q: Knowing this about Jesus, does this help you to realize that you can approach Jesus with absolutely any situation in your life that you might be struggling with? Do you believe that Jesus will understand you if you are weeping? Do you believe that Jesus will rejoice with you when you are rejoicing?** I do. "Jesus wept" says so much to me about who Jesus was, is, and forever will be. Jesus wept.

10/20 - Wow. I love Jesus' teaching in Luke chapter 17 verses 20 & 21 - *"Jesus replied, 'The Kingdom of God isn't ushered in with visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is among you.'"* And truly, of course, literally the Kingdom of God was amongst those Jesus was speaking to with this verse - Jesus himself was there. But, also the Kingdom of God is still amongst us today. Jesus has risen from the dead. He lives in the hearts of men and women. We do not need to look for visible signs to which we can say - here it is! Truly, the Kingdom of God can be within you. And once the Kingdom of God is within you it is amazing to see how Jesus can transform your life and those around you through his peace, grace and power. **Q: How is the Kingdom of God among you? How are you sharing the Kingdom of God with others?**

10/20 - The story of the persistent widow is fantastic! I love it... Luke 18 Verse 4 may be one of the most humorous verses in the Bible - *"The judge ignored her for a while, but eventually she wore him out. 'I fear neither God nor man,' he said to himself, 'but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out"*

with her constant requests!" Great stuff! Jesus teaches that persistence pays off, which I think is very good to consider with our own faith journeys. Verse 1 is the moral of the story: *"One day Jesus told his disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must never give up."* **Q: Do you pray constantly? Do you know that you must never give up?**

10/21 - Today we read the story of the Rich Man in Luke chapter 18! There are tons of commentaries on how to interpret this story - including this commentary from Bob Deffinbaugh at Bible.org titled "**Blessed Babes and a Miserable Millionaire**" [at this link](#). The verses that always speak to me the most are verses 29 & 30 where Jesus teaches - *"I assure you, everyone who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, will be repaid many times over in this life, as well as receiving eternal life in the world to come."* These are really some powerful verses for us to consider. Basically, I read - and I know from experience - that truly following Jesus comes with some costs. The costs may be loss of wealth, or worldliness, or power, or glamour, or friends, or even family perhaps. But, if we are accepting these costs for the sake of the Kingdom, then they are in my estimation our crosses that we must bear to truly follow Jesus. Following Jesus is not always easy. The world's temptations will do everything they can for us to not follow Jesus. "It's too hard to follow Jesus." "Come have fun." "It's too much cost to follow Jesus." But... we really need to stay in constant prayer and stay close to God to realize that following Jesus - along w/ all the costs that may be associated with following Jesus - is the only True way to live life. All other paths will lead to misery. Following Jesus and accepting the costs or our crosses ultimately leads to life in abundance. And life for eternity. **Q: Are there costs in your life that you are willing to accept to follow Jesus? What are they? Is there any cost you won't accept?**

10/21 - Today in Mark chapter 10 we read about the Rich Man. I have heard plenty of sermons on this passage of scripture and read a bunch of commentaries. The message is probably not that every Christian needs to sell all they have, give to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven. However... this could be the message for some of us. Basically, the message is probably more along the lines of what in your life are you holding on so tight to, that you need to let go of? What are you worshipping? What are you letting stand in the way of your relationship with Jesus? And what must you let go of? What's your "camel" that's holding you back? It might be money or material possessions. It could be an addiction. It could be status. It could be anger. It could be lust. I don't know what it is for you - that's between you and Jesus. **Q: What is your take on the Rich Man / Rich Young Ruler? Why do you think Jesus said he should sell all he had and give to the poor? Are there areas in your life where Jesus has asked you to give up something? Maybe something material or maybe something more like an addiction or obsession, etc.? Have you obeyed Jesus in this regard? Was it a blessing to obey Jesus?**

10/21 - In Matthew 19 we read a discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees on divorce. The context of this discussion basically revolved around 2 Jewish schools - Shammai and Hillel - and their differing viewpoints in Jesus' day on Deuteronomy 24 verses 1-4: *"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD . Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."* From the NIV Study Bible commentary - The Shammai school held that "something indecent" from verse 1 above meant "marital unfaithfulness" - the only allowable cause for divorce. Hillel emphasized to the preceding clause, "who becomes displeasing to him" in verse 1 above - they would allow for a man to divorce his wife for anything she did that he disliked. Jesus in the midst of these 2 viewpoints seems to take to the side of Shammai - but, only after first pointing back to God's original ideal for marriage. So... there you have the context. What does that mean for us today? I honestly will say that I don't know. I do know that many folks are divorced. And many are married. And many are single. So... I guess I'd encourage you to read more or study more about the topic of divorce if you feel God is calling you to this. I do believe in God's grace in each of our lives and I believe in Jesus... Bible.org does have a pretty long overview of **Marriage, Abortion and Divorce** [at this link](#) - I haven't read it all, so I can't say that I agree with everything at this link... but, if you're interested in diving more into this topic you may want to read. Also, Bible.org's commentary on today's readings in Matthew chapter 19 titled "**Questions About Marriage and Divorce**" are [at this link](#). **Q: Please do share your wisdom / thoughts / books / websites / other resources on this topic? Please be graceful in your remarks as many of our participants have gone through a divorce. If you yourself have been through a divorce, and are willing to share your learnings / experiences from it, this could be beneficial perhaps to some others.**

10/22 - Matthew chapter 20's parable of the vineyard workers is one that I have at times had challenges with. I, like the workers who labored all day, would think - "that's not fair!" Well... but then I came to realize that I believe this story is a parable of **Grace**. God's grace. And you know what - God's grace is not "fair." And thank God for this being so! God's grace is so powerful and all-encompassing and life-giving and healing and saving. And God's grace is offered to me. And to you. And to our neighbors. And to everyone. God's grace is offered to people that have sinned against God. Me. You. Our Neighbors. Everyone. God's grace is offered to people who become Christians early in their lives and live wonderfully giving lives. And God's grace is offered to people who become Christians on their deathbed after living destructive lives, but who finally repent and surrender to God. God's grace is given freely. Like these workers in this story, we may accept God's grace at different points in the "day" of our life. Though, of course, some never do ultimately accept God's grace and there is grave risk as the day grows longer... **Q: How about you? What part of the "day" are you in? When did you accept God's gift of grace? Please feel free to share your testimony.**

10/22 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew 20 verse 16 has always been convicting to me: *"And so it is, that many who are first now will be last then; and those who are last now will be first then."* I see the wisdom in this verse... but yet, I still think that I try to be "first" in many ways in my life. I don't like being "last". I like being honored. I like being the star. I don't like being the servant. I don't like to be the guy supporting the star. And yet, Jesus is calling us to be last. To serve others. To let others go first. **Q: How about you? In what areas are you trying to be "first" in your life? How do you see the eternal wisdom in being "last"?**

10/22 - As this chapter proceeds we read about Jesus prophesying his own death and resurrection. And then, we see Jesus prophesy about the end of James & John's life when their mother and they ask to sit at Jesus' right & left in heaven. Check out verses 22 & 23: *"You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of sorrow I am about to drink?" "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" "You will indeed drink from it," he told them.* You will indeed drink from it... James ended his life being martyred for his faith in Jesus. And John ended his life in exile on the island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. And I wonder again about us today... sometimes we hear about the "health, wealth and prosperity gospel", and think that's what we've signed up for as Christians. **Q: But... do you think that it might be possible that at some point in your life that you might be called to drink from the bitter cup of sorrow that Jesus drank from? If you are called to drink from that bitter cup, will you indeed drink from it?**

10/22 - Today in Luke chapter 19 we read the awesome story of Jesus' interactions with Zacchaeus the Tax Collector. As we read through this story about Zacchaeus "the sinner," does anything maybe correlate with our life story today? Consider verse 9 – *"Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."* **Q: What does this mean that Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost? Did Jesus seek Zacchaeus? Did Jesus save Zacchaeus? Now, take a moment if you will to reflect back on your life and your interactions with Jesus. Like Zacchaeus, were you a "sinner?" Like Zacchaeus, did Jesus seek you? Are there moments in your life where you really have felt that Jesus literally has been "pursuing" you? (I know I have had these moments in my life – thank God for them!) And, most importantly – like Zacchaeus – has Jesus saved you?**

10/22 - Interesting! The Story of the Ten Servants is something I reflected on back in our readings of Matthew. But what stood out to me today was verse 11 - *"The crowd was listening to everything Jesus said. And because he was nearing Jerusalem, he told a story to correct the impression that the Kingdom of God would begin right away."* This is very interesting to note that Jesus told this story to correct the impression that the Kingdom would begin right away! The Jewish people were looking for a Messiah that would overthrow the Roman political structure. A fighting / revolutionary Messiah that would free Jerusalem from Rome. Instead, as we all know, Jesus died on a cross with nails that were driven into his hands and feet by Roman soldier. Not quite what the Jews at this time were expecting in a Messiah... And here we have this story that's purpose is to show the Kingdom would not begin right away. This makes sense. It is the paradox of the Kingdom of God being already / not yet. And while Jesus first came to usher in the Kingdom, its fulfillment is not complete until his Second Coming. **Q: And - while we are awaiting the fulfillment of the Kingdom, how are we utilizing the talents God has given us? How are we utilizing our time, treasure, and talents? Is it for the Kingdom's benefit?**

10/23 - In Luke chapter 19 today we read about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem - and of course, this scene of people shouting "Hosanna!" will far too soon turn toward people spitting on and mocking Jesus on the road to Golgotha as he carries his cross. Bible.org's commentary on our Luke chapter 19 readings today titled "**The Untriumphal Entry**" is [at this link](#). Verses 41 through 44 are so beautiful as Jesus looks upon Jerusalem and cries. It makes sense because he

knows that the destruction of Jerusalem in coming in 70 A.D. Per Tyndale's commentary today, "In 66 A.D. the Jews revolted against Roman control. Three years later Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian, was sent to crush the rebellion. Roman soldiers attacked Jerusalem and broke through the northern wall but still couldn't take the city. Finally they laid siege to it, and in A.D. 70 they were able to enter the severely weakened city and burn it. Six hundred thousand Jews were killed during Titus' onslaught." And so, Jesus wept over Jerusalem... **Q: Have you like Jesus ever wept over a city's condition? Should we be weeping over the condition of our cities today?**

10/23- John 12 verse 10 stood out to me today - somehow I hadn't really noticed this verse before - *"Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus."* Lazarus was raised from the dead and they wanted him dead again... sad... The miracle had caused many to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Not surprising that those in that day who were against Jesus would also be against those close to Jesus. **Q: Think there might be some correlation in this regard in our world today? Is it possible that the closer we get to Jesus, the more the Enemy might come up against us in various ways?** It cannot defeat us with God on our side. But it may come after us.

10/23 - I like verse 19 today! *"Then the Pharisees said to each other, 'We've lost. Look, the whole world has gone after Jesus!'"* Unfortunately it was a bit of an exaggeration at that time and the 2,000 years following. **Q: But maybe in the future? How are you part of the Great Commission today?**

10/24- Today in Matthew chapter 21 verse 22 we read these words from Jesus: *"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."* This is a powerful verse if you really stop and think about it... **Q: Do you believe Jesus' teaching here? Do you believe that if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer?** I do believe this... but then there is always in the back of my mind - "but what about so-and-so who was ill and was praying in belief that they would be healed. But then they weren't..." I don't have any easy answer on this one. I have to believe there are probably some good resources out there for this tough question? **If you know of any resources / books on this subject of prayer - or, more specifically, unanswered prayers - please share with your group?**

10/25 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 21 verses 31 & 32 is convicting: *"I assure you, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. For John the Baptist came and showed you the way to life, and you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to turn from your sins and believe him."* This last sentence is so important for our relationship with Jesus. **Q: How and when did you turn from your sins? How are Jesus' teachings showing you the way to life?**

10/25 - Matthew 21 Verse 42 is so beautiful as Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22-23: *"Then Jesus asked them, 'Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures? The stone rejected by the builders has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous to see.'" And Jesus - like the son of the farmer in the parable just before this verse - was rejected and murdered. However, Jesus didn't remain dead - he rose on the third day and today he is the cornerstone of Christianity. He is the cornerstone of our churches. And probably the biggest question each of us needs to ask ourselves - Q: Is Jesus the cornerstone of your life? How is Jesus the foundation in your life which anchors and directs everything else you do?*

10/25 - Today we read in Matthew chapter 22 the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. This parable has always been so convicting to me personally. It's basically about a king preparing an amazing feast at a wedding banquet, and inviting a ton of people to come to the feast. But - the people don't accept the invitation! They are "too busy" - taking care of their fields and their businesses. And I think about this parable in my own life. Am I sometimes "too busy" to accept Jesus' invitation to be with him? Am I sometimes too focused on my work or my social life or other distractions? Do I get myself so "distracted" that I don't spend time with Jesus? And in doing this, am I missing out on an amazing spiritual feast? **Q: How about you? Do you believe that Jesus is inviting you to spend more time with him? Are you "too busy" to do so? Do you believe that spending time with Jesus will actually be an amazing spiritual feast for your soul? Will you accept Jesus' invitation to the wedding banquet?**

10/25 - In verse 21 we read Jesus' famous line *"Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God."* What you may not realize about the preceding verses is that the Pharisees and the supporters of Herod were trying to trap Jesus. Per the OYB Companion commentary, The Pharisees, a religious group, opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine. The followers of Herod - or Herodians - were a political party that supported the policies of Rome and Herod Antipas. Normally these 2 groups did not get along at all - but they united here to try to trap Jesus. If

Jesus had said it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees would say he is opposed to God. And if Jesus had said the taxes should not be paid, the Herodians would have had him arrested. Jesus answer amazed them both.. **Q: How do balance what you give to the government or worldly responsibilities and what you give to God in your life?**

10/25 - In Mark chapter 12 we read Jesus' profound Parable of the Tenants, which exposes the planned attempt on Jesus' life. At the end of the parable Jesus quotes from Psalm 118 verses 22 & 23 when he says in Mark chapter 12 verse 10: *"Haven't you read this scripture: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"* I have heard some awesome sermons on this verse – about how our Christian lives should be based upon and aligned with the true foundational Cornerstone – and that cornerstone being Jesus Christ. **Q: How do you believe that Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity? How is Jesus the cornerstone of your life? How do you align your life with Jesus' teachings?**

10/25 - Okay, so it's every so often that I post up about the non-Biblical (not the original text) sub-headings that translations put into our daily readings. For some reason I got a kick out of the NLT's subheading above Luke chapter 20 verse 9, "Story of the Evil Farmers!" (okay, I added the exclamation point). Is it just me, or is that kinda funny? I mean, the evil farmers in the story are not funny - and what they did is certainly not funny... hmmm... I think I've dug myself into a hole here. :) I'm sure everyone probably picked up on that the point of the farmer story is that Jesus is the son who was murdered in the story. And Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders - who has now become the cornerstone of our Christian faith. Nice quote by Jesus of Psalm 118 verse 22 there in Luke 20 verse 17: *'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.'* **Q: How is Jesus the cornerstone of your life?**

10/26 - I have heard Jesus' teaching about the 2 greatest commandments in Mark chapter 12 verses 29-31 summarized as simply Love God & Love People: *"Jesus replied, 'The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these.'"* Here is a very interesting note about Jesus' quote above from Deuteronomy 6:4 that starts *"Hear, O Israel!"* - This verse begins what is known as the Shema - which was named after the first word in this verse and means "Hear." [The Shema became the Jewish confession of faith](#), which was recited by pious Jews every morning and evening and it is still recited in synagogue services today. More very interesting information about The Shema from a Jewish website is [at this link](#). **Q: How are you loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? How are you loving your neighbor as yourself? How often do you meditate on these 2 great commandments?**

10/26 - If you are into memorizing Scripture at all, Jesus' teaching Matthew chapter 22 verses 37-40 is certainly worth memorizing! *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."* So, I think it is fair to say that if you learn nothing else this year in the One Year Bible, please at least learn these 3 verses above. :) However - I am quite sure you will learn these 3 verses and so much more this year! Then, of course, to take things beyond just learning - we need to be applying the learnings from the Bible this year in our lives. **Q: How about these two commandments from Jesus above – how have you learned them? How do you practice applying them to your life each and every day? How do you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind? How do you love your neighbor?**

10/26 - Matthew chapter 23 verse 5 is referring to exaggerated phylacteries: *"Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels on their robes."* From bible-history.com - "Phylacteries (tephillin) are strips of leather to which is attached a very strong, square box made of parchment and painted black. The box contains four parts of the Torah written on parchment: [Exodus 13:1-10](#) and [13:11-16](#); [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#); [11:13-21](#). According to Deut 6:4-9 two phylacteries were used, one for the head and one for the arm. These (called frontlets in Deuteronomy) were put on in such a way that one box rested on the head, between the eyes (seat of the mind) and the other on the left arm opposite the heart (seat of the actions and the emotions, denoting that one loves the Lord with one's heart)." This definition and a good picture of what phylacteries look like is at bible-history.com [at this link](#). I don't think Jesus was demeaning phylacteries in and of themselves - but, he was demeaning those that used phylacteries only for "show," for the wrong motives - the wrong motive of people noticing us instead of giving the glory to God. Which can lead us to this question in our lives today - are there any "religious things" that we do in our life just for "show"? Just so that others will honor us? I think this is such a fine line and something that we have to monitor all of our lives. **Q: Are you monitoring yourself when it comes to your faith to make sure you are not doing anything for "show" or for the wrong reasons? Have there been times in your past where you have**

done things just for "show" when it comes to your faith? How did you catch yourself / notice that you were doing something just for "show"?

10/26 - Today in Matthew 23 we read Jesus' "Woe to you!" warnings and teachings. Verses 25 & 26 stood out to me today: *"How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! You are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy--full of greed and self-indulgence! Blind Pharisees! First wash the inside of the cup, and then the outside will become clean, too."* These verses reminded me a lot of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus very clearly goes to the heart of the matter with many of the Laws. These verses are such a strong reminder for us to guard our hearts - and what we let into our hearts - and the condition of our hearts. Because Jesus is much more concerned about the condition of our hearts than the condition of our skin. He wants to heal us from the inside out. **Q: How is the condition of your heart today? Will you allow Jesus to heal your heart? To heal you from the inside out? Where will you find true inner peace to heal you from the inside out? Have you ever been healed by Jesus from the inside out?**

10/26 - In Mark chapter 12 verses 41 through 43 today we read the powerful narrative of the Widow's Mite - *"Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two pennies. He called his disciples to him and said, 'I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.'"* **Q: How does this narrative speak to you? When it comes to your time, treasure, and talents, do you give to God out of your surplus? Or do you give to God all that you have? What should we learn today from the widow about giving?**

10/27 - Matthew chapter 24 verse 2 was literally fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans, under Titus, completely destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple building: *"Do you see all these buildings? I assure you, they will be so completely demolished that not one stone will be left on top of another!"* Verse 15 stood out to me today's readings: *"The time will come when you will see what Daniel the prophet spoke about: the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the Holy Place"--reader, pay attention!"* Per Zondervan's commentary, the primary reference in Daniel 9:27 & 11:31 & 12:11 was to 168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes erected a pagan altar to Zeus on the sacred altar in the temple of Jerusalem. Some believe this is a progressive prediction, which was also fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the temple was destroyed - and will also be fulfilled in the future by the antichrist.

10/27 - Verses 26 & 27 really stood out to me today as some very wise teaching's of Jesus' (well, yes, all of Jesus' teachings are wise! :), which we would all do well to take note of: *"So if someone tells you, 'Look, the Messiah is out in the desert,' don't bother to go and look. Or, 'Look, he is hiding here,' don't believe it! For as the lightning lights up the entire sky, so it will be when the Son of Man comes."* For some reason that little line, "don't bother to go and look" really stood out to me. Basically, Jesus is saying that if you have to GO somewhere to see the "messiah" in the end of days, it ain't the messiah! :) When the true Messiah Jesus comes again, you will know it without a doubt - Jesus will light up the entire sky! What a beautiful thing to imagine... **Q: Are you looking forward to the day of Jesus' return? Have you always looked forward to the day of Jesus' return? How often do you sincerely say or pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Do you think this is a good thing to say & Pray?**

10/28 - In Mark chapter 13 today we read about the signs of the end of the age. For me personally, Jesus' words in verses 32 & 33 have always been so powerful when it comes to end-times considerations - *"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come."* I think this teaching from Jesus is so important for each of us to keep in mind. No one knows the day or the hour of the end of times. Only God the Father. I have some friends who are very into speculating and discussing end-times prophecies and events. For me personally, these verses above make me realize that we truly do not know when the end of time will come - but, yes, we know it will come. And therefore I believe we should live every day loving God and loving people around us - and not get so focused on speculation of end times that we forget about these 2 great commandments. . . :) My other thought on these verses is this - not only do we not know when the end of the age will come, but we do not know when the end of each of our lives will come. Hopefully we will live long lives. But it's not guaranteed. You know how life is - there is cancer and there are accidents and the list could go on. So, I guess I'd recommend this - don't worry about when the end of the age will be. Don't worry about when the end of your life will be. Instead, be on guard and be alert each and every day to make sure you are loving God and loving people - as if each day might be your last day. I am reminded of something I read on another Christian blog recently and it really did make me think. Here's how this blog put it, and I think this relates well to these Mark verses - "Breaking News: mortality rate is

STILL 100%! You are not guaranteed all the days you believe you have coming to you. What would you do differently if today was your last day alive?" **Q: Powerful question for each of us to consider, no? What would you do differently if today was your last day alive?**

10/28 - Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 24 verse 36 has always stood out to me - particularly when my friends today want to dive into conversations about "if" the end is near: *"However, no one knows the day or the hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows."* No one knows the day or the hour - only God. Good for us to keep in mind. We're not God. :) Verse 35 is an amazing reminder that Jesus' words in the Bible will outlast every single material thing around us today: *"Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will remain forever."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus' words will remain forever?** In today and yesterday's readings in Matthew chapter 24 we read about the end times. **Q: Do you do much study of the end times? What are some books or resources or websites you could point others to, to study more about the end times?** I have to admit, I don't think about the end times very much. I know they will come, but I guess I feel like focusing on the end times too much might distract me from doing other ministry here and now. **How often do you think about the end times? Do you think there should be a balance of time and study when it comes to reflecting on the end times versus being active in ministry in our world today?**

10/28 - Today in Matthew chapter 25 we read about the 10 bridesmaids and verse 13 certainly stands out as Jesus teaches: *"So stay awake and be prepared, because you do not know the day or hour of my return."* **Q: What do you think it means in our lives today to be "awake" and ready for Jesus' return? Are you "awake" this very moment and ready for Jesus' return?** One of the most important points of this parable is that when Jesus returns you won't be able to barter or buy your way into the Kingdom. (as the 5 un-wise bridesmaids tried to do). You yourself will be ultimately responsible for your own spiritual condition! **How are you owning up to this responsibility?**

10/28 - Today we read in Matthew chapter 25 verses 14 through 30 Jesus' "Parable of the Talents." This story of the three servants has often been a parable I have struggled with. For a long time I didn't get what was so wrong about the guy who buried the money. "He at least gave back to the master the same amount he was originally given," I thought. "What's so wrong with that?" Well, as I read this parable again, the thing that really stands out to me is that this parable is not talking about simply money. . . but I think it is talking about our very lives and our time here on earth. I read it now as if God gives each of us a certain amount of time to live on this earth and a certain amount of gifts and skills. And then, we have to ask ourselves - will we simply just go through life very stably & comfortably with those gifts and skills - perhaps even just going through the motions and serving ourselves - to the extent that when God calls us home, we have really not produced much of anything in our lives? What if we spend our time & gifts in such a way that by the end of it we haven't really blessed or served others? We simply give back to God at the end of our lives what God gave to us and nothing more. OR - is it possible that God is calling each of us to do so much more with our lives? Is God calling us to really use the time, gifts and skills he has given us for something bigger than ourselves? Is God calling us to produce a great harvest of loving and serving and blessing others in our lives? So that when we arrive at heaven's gate at the end of our lives we will hear verse 21 from God Himself - *"The master was full of praise. Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!"* **Q: How about your life today? How are you multiplying the skills and gifts that God has given you in your life? How are you investing your skills and gifts in loving service of others? How are you at least "doubling" God's investment in you? What stood out to you in reading the parable of the talents this year?**

10/28 - Today in Matthew chapter 25 we read about the Final Judgment. Verse 34 is an amazing thing to imagine coming in the future: *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* What a beautiful thought - come and inherit the Kingdom prepared for YOU from the foundation of the world! **Q: Do you believe in this inheritance? Do you look forward to this inheritance? How often do you think about this inheritance?**

10/28 - Verses 37 through 40 are so powerful for each of us to consider while we are still here on earth: *"Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' And the King will tell them, 'I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'"* Whatever we do for one of the least among us, we do for Jesus. And - what we do not do for the least among us, we do not do for Jesus. **Q: How is God calling you today to give food, give water, show hospitality, give clothing, visit the sick, or visit those in prison for the least among us? How do you do this**

for Jesus?

10/29 - Today in Luke chapter 22 we read in verses 3-6: *"Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, and he went to the leading priests and captains of the Temple guard to discuss the best way to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted, and they promised to give him money. So he agreed and began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus so they could arrest him when the crowds weren't around."* Sad... Bible.org has a powerful essay on **"The Biography of the Betrayer"** [at this link](#). **Q: Do you think Satan can enter people today?**

10/29 – Matthew 26 Verses 26 through 28 today certainly will remind us of why Communion / the Lord's Supper is so important to us as believers in Jesus: *"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* This all took place the night before Jesus was crucified. The bread represents Jesus' body, given for us. The wine represents Jesus' blood, poured-out for many through Jesus' atoning death. **Q: Do our readings in Matthew today remind you of Communion / The Lord's Supper at your church? Is this a positive remembrance for you? How important is Communion / The Lord's Supper to you personally these days? Do you look forward to this remembrance at your church? Have you ever experienced Communion / The Lord's Supper with others in settings outside of your normal worship experience? Maybe at a prayer gathering or outside or in other beautiful settings?**

10/29 - In Mark chapter 14 today we read the beautiful story of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who anoints Jesus, and as he tells us in verse 8 - *"She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time."* A new insight I learned on this today is from Zondervan's commentary - In Jesus' day it was a normal Jewish custom to anoint a dead body with aromatic oils in preparing for burial. Jesus seems to be anticipating suffering a "criminal's" death, for only in that circumstance was there no anointing of the dead body.

10/29 - Wow. Jesus' teaching in John 13 verses 14 - 17 are so powerful today: *"And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. How true it is that a servant is not greater than the master. Nor are messengers more important than the one who sends them. You know these things--now do them! That is the path of blessing."* **Q: Are you on the path of blessing? What might it mean to "wash other's feet" today? Yes, perhaps at times it literally means wash other's feet. Could it mean other acts of service as well that perhaps we maybe think we are "too good for" or "above" in any way? Jesus humbled himself to wash other's feet. Are you humbling yourself to serve others in ways that your ego might not like?**

10/30 - Matthew 26 Verse 35 always stands out to me whenever I read it: *"No!" Peter insisted. "Not even if I have to die with you! I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples vowed the same.* I guess what jumps out at me in this verse is the question - are we really any different from Peter? Would we proclaim that we would not deny Jesus if you asked us straight up? Yes I think we would proclaim that. But then... I get to thinking. About how we live our life sometimes. About the decisions we make. About maybe even the bad habits we foreswore off when we were a new Christian. **Q: And yet... do we still find ourselves going back to those bad habits - back to those sins? And, if we are doing this conscientiously - are we in a way denying Jesus when we knowingly sin now? Are we at times denying Jesus as our Lord by our actions? At times, are we really that different from Peter?**

10/30 - I love the dialogue today between Thomas and Jesus in John 14 verses 4 through 6! Somehow I didn't quite remember the context of Thomas' question setting up Jesus' profound statement in verse 6. Beautiful. Jesus starts us off in verse 4 - *"And you know where I am going and how to get there."* *"No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We haven't any idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."* These last two sentences of Jesus' we've probably all heard many times. But how often have we asked Thomas' question either to ourselves or to God or to now one in particular - "how can I know the way?" Jesus answers this for us perfectly. **Q: Have you ever felt in your life that you didn't know the way? Do you believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life?**

10/30 - John 14 Verses 12 through 14 today are so convicting for me - because I really rarely follow this teaching (or fully believe in it?) of Jesus' - *"The truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father. Yes, ask anything in my name, and I will do it!"* **Q: Do you believe that you can do**

the same works Jesus has done, and even greater works? I'll confess - I'm not so sure that I do. I mean, it's encouraging to think that I could, even if I don't fully believe it. And, yet, I believe most everything else Jesus teaches. Why would I doubt this teaching? Maybe it's because I have some sort of inferiority complex - or maybe I think it would be prideful to think this. But Jesus teaches it quite plainly! Or... maybe... I haven't really asked Jesus for the guidance and wisdom to believe this - and asked for even just this in his name.

10/30 - Wow. Today's John chapter 14 readings start off strong with a very short sentence of teaching from Jesus in verse 15 - *"If you love me, obey my commandments."* Not too complicated there, eh? :) Really... it's quite easy to understand. And believe. But to obey... hmmm... I've been thinking about that "obey" word quite a bit lately. In fact, it's a word that has been spray painted around my neighborhood lately - "obey" - I think for some political statement reasons. It's not really a popular word. But it's a pretty straightforward teaching from Jesus. Obey. Obey my commandments. "If you love me, obey my commandments." I really do believe that true freedom is found in this. When we are obedient to Jesus' teachings and God's will in our lives, we truly will be living "free" lives. I know it sounds like an oxymoron. But I believe it is true. The more we obey Jesus' teachings, the freer we truly become. **Q: Do you think this is true? Are you obeying Jesus' teachings in your life? Do you feel freer?**

10/30 - Well, if we are wondering how on earth we can possibly obey Jesus' teachings, He graciously answers this for us in the next two verses in today's readings in John 14:16-17: *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you do, because he lives with you now and later will be in you."* Basically, we cannot obey Jesus' teachings on our own. Using our own will power or smarts or strength, we will fail. We need the Holy Spirit, living with in us, to give us the grace and strength to obey Jesus' teachings. The Holy Spirit rounds out the Trinity and leads us and guides us. **Q: Are you looking for the Holy Spirit? Do you recognize the Holy Spirit living within you? Do you believe the Holy Spirit is leading you into all truth?**

10/30 - Today we read one of my favorite chapters in the Bible - John 15. I cannot tell you how much this chapter means to me and I hope to you as well. John 15 takes place just after the Last Supper, the night before Jesus dies on the cross, so this is one of Jesus' last teachings to the disciples - and to you and me. It is so beautiful. My quick personal story on this chapter is that I have only preached verbally once - and it was when I was in Bulgaria several years ago on a short-term mission trip. Our team ended up going to a small Roma church - and I mean small - in a village outside of the capital city of Sofia. As we drove up to the village where the church was located I saw rows and rows of grape vines in and around the village. I knew I would be preaching that evening - each person on our team took a turn every night. And initially I was planning to preach from a Psalm - but, when I saw the vineyards I quickly decided to preach from John 15, and it turned out to be so beautiful. I literally ended up outside of the church - all of us could not fit in the tiny 1 room church - under some grape vines preaching from John 15. God showed up. I cannot even remember what I said, but God moved. I pray that as you read John 15 today God moves for you as well. John 15 is something special. (John 16 & 17 are something special as well. . .) **Q: Have you ever been on a mission trip and had a powerful experience that you can share with your group?**

10/30 - Today in John 15 verses 12 & 13 we will read these words of Jesus - *"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* **Q: Why would Jesus give us such a command as this? Why would Jesus give this command the night before he died on the cross? How did Jesus show his love for us? Do you agree that there is no greater love than laying down one's life for his friends? Did Jesus do this for you and me? If we are to love each other as Jesus loved us, how do we do this? When we look at Jesus' life and how he lived it, what might we be able to model in our lives? When we look at Jesus laying down his life for us, how might we be able to "lay down our life" for our friends? Do you love others as Jesus loved you?**

10/31 - John chapter 16 is amazing today! I love verse 8's teaching from Jesus about the Holy Spirit: *"And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment."* One commentary on this verse and verse 9 today says: "Apart from the Spirit's convicting work, people can never see themselves as sinners." Wow. This is powerful to reflect upon. **Q: Did you ever have a time in your life that you did not see yourself as a sinner? Was this time before you experienced the Holy Spirit? Do you believe this to be true - that many in our world today cannot see themselves as sinners, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit and Jesus?** This I think should demonstrate to us who is truly doing conversion work in our world - not us, but Jesus and the Spirit. We cannot convert anyone on our own human power. The Holy Spirit must enter the room...

10/31 - John 17 is such an amazing chapter... this is Jesus praying! So powerful. I honestly am at a loss for words on this chapter. I could probably try to write something about each and every verse. But, maybe what makes the most sense is for you to re-read this chapter again. **Q: Do you see Jesus praying for you in this chapter? What does it mean to you that Jesus prayed for you?**

Group discussions:

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

Each group is encouraged to close in prayer.

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

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

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