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Notes & Group Questions for November 1 - 30 readings (*Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below*)

**JOHN 18:1 - SECOND CORINTHIANS 10:18** (daily reading schedule at: [www.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com](http://www.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com))

11/1 - Such sad readings today. Jesus was betrayed by Judas... Judas kissed Jesus to betray Him. Seems that betrayal has been a part of our human condition for maybe all time? Well, since the Fall to be sure, which is pretty much all time for us humans... (you'll recall just after the Fall Cain murdered Abel - yet another betrayal...) **Q: Do betrayals continue today? Why do you think this is? What can free us from betraying each other? Or should I ask Whom can free us from betraying each other?**

11/1 - Today In Mark chapter 14 verses 35 & 36 we read this about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane – *“Going a little farther, Jesus fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”* What a powerful prayer here from Jesus! Jesus knows what is coming. He knows what the road to Calvary will bring. He knows that God has the power to take this suffering away from him – BUT, here’s the amazingly important piece of this prayer, which I think each of us would do well in praying in our prayers – *“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”* This is such a powerful prayer from Jesus to God. We get a glimpse here of a prayer from the Messiah to the Father – and again, I think we would do well to pray this in our prayers as well. This of course is very similar to the Lord’s Prayer, which Jesus taught in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount, when we pray – *“Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done.”* Not our will, but Thy Will be done. **Q: In your prayer life, do you model Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the Lord’s Prayer? Do you pray that not your will – but God’s perfect will – be done?**

11/1 - In Matthew chapter 26 we read about Jesus' arrest. Verses 53 & 54 stood out to me today when Jesus says: *“Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?”* After praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was prepared for what must happen now... Notice how prayer came before this confidence for Jesus of what must happen now. (and Jesus knew that he could call down angels for protection - but he knew he shouldn't) **Q: Do you model Jesus' action of praying before embarking on a significant life decision or trial? How and when do you pray when a significant decision is coming up?**

11/1 - I don't think I've really ever noticed this visit from an angel before in Luke chapter 22 verse 43 when Jesus is praying at the Mount of Olives! *“Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him.”* **Q: Why do you think Jesus needed strengthening? What can we learn from Jesus’ need of strengthening?**

11/2 - Today in Mark chapter 14 we read an amazingly powerful statement from Jesus in verses 61 & 62 - *“Then the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?” Jesus said, “I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God’s right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven.”* Wow. This is it. This is a statement that changes everything. **Q: The question for us is this - is this more than just a statement from Jesus? Do you believe this is Truth?**

11/2 - Luke chapter 22 verse 70 is powerful - *“They all shouted, “Then you claim you are the Son of God?” And Jesus replied, “You are right in saying that I am.”* Check out those last two words of Jesus' - I am. Sound familiar? Remember from Exodus 3:14 when Moses asks the burning bush who he should say sent him to free the Israelites from Egypt. And what did God reply? *“I am. Tell them that I am is sending you.”* In Luke chapter 23 verses 8 & 9 today we read: *“Herod was delighted at the opportunity to see Jesus, because he had heard about him and had been hoping for a long time to see him perform a miracle. He asked Jesus question after question, but Jesus refused to answer.”* Herod wanted a miracle “performed.” And Jesus simply stayed silent. Beautiful... **I wonder if there are moments in our life when we would do well to model Jesus here? - to stay silent in the face of a ridiculous request - or in the face of a ridiculous attack on our faith. Silence may be the perfect thing in the face of ridiculousness... Have you ever stayed silent in the face of an attack? When should we stay silent?**

11/3 - Today in John chapter 18 verse 38 we come across what many say is the most ironic question asked in all of history, as Jesus stands before Pilate: *““What is truth?” Pilate asked.”* Why is this ironic? Because Pilate asks what is

truth, when Truth is standing right before him! Jesus is Truth! And Pilate couldn't see it. Wow. . . think there are people in our world today who see Jesus so dimly, like Pilate does? I pray you and I see Jesus much more clearly, and much more as the Light! What is truth. This is a question that is still asked today of you and me. **Q: What is truth? Who is truth?**

11/3 - It is interesting in the Chronological Bible how we interweave through the 4 Gospels. In some ways it may seem repetitive - but I think repetitive is good when we're talking about the story of Jesus... we really cannot hear and meditate upon this story enough. Also, what I like is the nuances of each Gospel - or maybe things that are indeed in a few of the Gospels that somehow just stand out to me in some new way in one of the Gospels. Today is one of those days where something jumped out at me that I have not really noticed before - and that is Pilate in Mark 15 verses 9 & 10 - *"Should I give you the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked. (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.)*" It's interesting that Pilate used the term King of the Jews here - and again later in the narrative - and that he also had this term nailed to the cross. And the question I have is this - did Pilate do this simply to try and irritate the leading priests? I think this is probably the case. But, I'm looking forward to some further study on this.

11/3 - The Passion readings today are always tough... they bring home the reality of what Jesus did for each of us. Tomorrow's readings are tougher. An image of Pilate asking the crowd in Matthew 27 verse 22: *"But if I release Barabbas," Pilate asked them, "what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"* I read an interesting commentary on verse 24 today: *"Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this man. The responsibility is yours!"* Tyndale's commentary said that even though Pilate verbally said the "responsibility is yours" and even though he washed his hands - his responsibility remained. He was essentially afraid about losing his job, because there was the threat to report him to Caesar (John 19:12). Pilate was the Roman governor from AD 26-36 for Judea and Samaria. One of his main duties was to simply "keep the peace" in this outlying area of the Roman Empire - and to do "whatever was necessary" to maintain the "peace"... **Q: Have you ever tried to "keep the peace" in your life – family – job – and ended up turning your back on God? Can true peace be found in our lives apart from God?**

11/4 - Today in Luke chapter 23 verse 34 we read this when Jesus was on the cross: *"Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing.""* Tyndale's One Year Bible companion has a great commentary on this verse today, as follows - "There are **seven sayings of Jesus** uttered from the cross. They were spoken in the following order:

- 1) the word of **forgiveness**: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:24)
- 2) the word of **salvation**: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43)
- 3) the word of **affection**: "Woman, behold thy son"; "Behold thy mother." (John 19:26-27)
- 4) the word of **despair**: "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34)
- 5) the word of **physical torment**: "I thirst" (John 19:28)
- 6) the word of **triumph**: "It is finished" (John 19:30)
- 7) the word of **committal**: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

**Q: What do these 7 sayings of Jesus on the Cross mean to you? What does the Cross personally mean to you?**

11/4 - In Luke chapter 23 verse 45 we read just before Jesus died on the cross: *"The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the thick veil hanging in the Temple was torn apart."* The tearing of the veil in the Temple symbolized that men and women could now access God the Father directly through Jesus the Son. No longer was the veil needed to keep separate the Holiest of Holy place in the temple, where God dwelled in the Old Testament. No longer could only the High Priest approach God in the Temple on behalf of men and women. Jesus' death and coming resurrection signified that the veil was no longer needed. God is accessible now directly through faith in Jesus! **Q: How do you approach God through Jesus? And how often?**

11/4 - I read an interesting commentary on John 19 verse 25: *"Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene."* Zondervan's commentary says that Mary Magdalene appears in the crucifixion and resurrection narratives of all four Gospels, but outside of these narratives we only read about her in Luke 8:2-3. It is interesting to note that these are the only places in the Gospels where we find Mary Magdalene - though crucially important places in the Gospels! It is amazing to read about the actions of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two secret followers of Jesus on the Jewish council, in verses 38 through 40 - *"Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body down. When Pilate gave him permission, he came and took the body away. Nicodemus,*

the man who had come to Jesus at night, also came, bringing about seventy-five pounds of embalming ointment made from myrrh and aloes. Together they wrapped Jesus' body in a long linen cloth with the spices, as is the Jewish custom of burial." That is a beautiful scene - these 2 men. They were risking much to do this. They were risking this for Jesus. **Q: What about you and me? Would we have taken this type of risk back then? Would we take this type of risk even today? What might be a risk - for Jesus - that we could take but that we are not taking today?**

11/4 - Today in Matthew chapter 27 verse 54 we read, just after Jesus' death on the cross: "The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" Reflect on these words of the Roman officers and soldiers for a moment. **Q: Do you believe these words of the soldiers are true? If these words are true, what does this mean for our lives today? Are we really living our lives in such a way that reflects that these words are true? Or, is it possible, that sometimes we just say these words of the Roman soldiers, and then just go about our lives as business as usual? If Jesus truly is the Son of God, how then should we be living our lives this very day?**

11/5 - In Mark chapter 16 verse 6 is the key to our Christian faith: "The angel said, "Do not be so surprised. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He isn't here! He has been raised from the dead!" **Q: Do you believe this angel's proclamation? Do you truly believe that Jesus rose from the dead?**

11/5 - **Matthew 28 is one of the most important chapters of the Bible we will read this year! Jesus' resurrection is the key to the Christian faith. The resurrection is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and of Jesus' own statements. The Christian faith stands or falls on the bodily resurrection of Jesus. We can read more about this important point from Paul in [1 Corinthians 15](#).** Tyndale Publishers outlines these 5 points in their commentary today that the resurrection guarantees:

1. Jesus was truly the Son of God. ([Romans 1:4](#))
2. God the Father accepted what Jesus did at Calvary on the basis of the resurrection. ([Romans 4:25](#))
3. Jesus as our Risen Lord pleads for his people before the Father. ([Romans 8:34](#))
4. Believers have the hope of eternal life. ([1 Peter 1:3-5](#))
5. Believers will also rise and have resurrected bodies like that of Jesus. ([1 Corinthians 15:49](#), [Philippians 3:21](#), [1 John 3:2](#))

**Q: What does Jesus' resurrection mean to you personally? How does Jesus' resurrection affect how you live your life today?**

11/5 - Today we read about Jesus' glorious resurrection! Verse 18 is awesome - "Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion gives a great list today of the order of Jesus' 11 appearances after his resurrection:

1. Mary Magdalene and the other women
2. the disciples on the road to Emmaus
3. Peter
4. the ten disciples in the upper room
5. the eleven in the upper room with Thomas present (Below is an oil painting by Carravaggio from the year 1601 titled "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas")
6. the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius
7. the eleven on a mountain in Galilee
8. five hundred of the brethren
9. James
10. all of the apostles
11. those present when he ascended into heaven

**Q: What does Jesus' resurrection mean to you, personally? How has Jesus' resurrection changed your life?**

11/6 - I love Jesus' first words to all of the disciples in Luke 24 verse 36 - ""Peace be with you."" Wow... how simple - and profound - and true! Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He brings peace into our lives, minds and hearts if we will let him in. Do you believe that Jesus' words to you at this very moment might be - "Peace be with you." **Q: Will you accept the heavenly peace that can only come from Jesus? Do you know the heavenly peace that comes from Jesus?**

11/6 - John 21 is one of my favorite chapters of the Bible in so many ways! In some ways it is because of a beautiful modern day book written by the late Henri Nouwen titled "[In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership](#)",

which is based on this chapter and Jesus asking Peter 3 times if he loves him. Has anyone else read this book by Nouwen? If so, please post up reviews in the Comments section below. I know I make a lot of book recommendations on this blog over the course of a year, but if there is just 1 book you read based on my recommendations (other than the One Year Bible of course :), "In the Name of Jesus" by Henri Nouwen would be the book. In this book Henri writes about the end of his life ministry where he is a spiritual director at a L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto, working amongst mentally handicapped. It is so incredible to read about how Henri learns from what the world would see as "the least of these" and how Henri realizes in his Christian ministry throughout his life he's been fighting 3 temptations:

1. the temptation to be relevant.
2. the temptation to be spectacular.
3. the temptation to be powerful.

I could go on and on about this book, but the last thing I will say is that it is so beautiful how Henri ties his learnings in this book to Jesus and Peter's Q & A here in John 21. If you serve in any way, shape, or form in Christian ministry (or even if you don't :), please pick this book up. You will be blessed by it immensely!

11/6 - One of my absolute favorite red letter quotes from Jesus in the Gospels arrives today in John 21. Verse 12: *"Now come and have some breakfast!" Jesus said.* There is something about the simplicity and beauty and every-day-ness of this command from Jesus to the 7 disciples that I just absolutely love! **Q: Can you image Jesus saying this to you? Can you imagine Jesus making breakfast for you on the beach?**

11/6 - Okay, now onto the big question probably for many of us from today's readings is why did Jesus ask Peter 3 times if he loved him? Many commentaries call these passages "the reinstatement of Peter" - meaning that he was reinstated as the rock / confessor of the foundation of Jesus' church based on [Matthew 16:16](#). And that he needed this reinstatement after denying knowing the Lord 3 times before his crucifixion (and the then rooster crowing, as we know...). Interestingly, Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion has the following suggestions on the original Greek used when John wrote about this Q & A exchange between Jesus and Peter: "Two different Greek words are used for "love." The first two times the word *agapo*, which means devoted love, is used. When Peter refuses to use the same word, Jesus turns to the word *phileo*, which indicates the love of friendship. Peter accepts this word and admits that he loves Jesus in this way. Peter was humbler now than earlier in his life, and was making no claim to superior love (see [John 13:36-37](#))." In verse 18 Jesus says to Peter: *"The truth is, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked and go wherever you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will direct you and take you where you don't want to go."* The early church understood this as a prophecy of crucifixion. Peter would be a martyr and tradition suggests that he was crucified upside down. **Q: What are your thoughts on our readings in John today with Jesus asking Peter 3 times if he loved him? Why do you think this was asked of Peter 3 times? Was this a "reinstatement" of Peter? What are your thoughts overall on this closing chapter of John today? (Acts begins tomorrow!! :)**

11/6 - Okay, I realize this has been a long post today... but the last thing I want to point out is that I love Jesus' response to Peter when Peter asks about what will happen to John and Jesus says this is verse 22: *"Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me."* I think this is a great word from Jesus to both you and me today as well! **Q: How often do we worry about others and their relationship with the Lord? How often do we perhaps think that we are so saved, and "they" are so not...? Or how often do we wonder why someone seems like they are so blessed, and perhaps we think that we are not? Well, what does Jesus say to all of this to you and me today?** I believe he would say the same words from verse 22: "What is that to you? You follow me." Indeed, let us not worry so very much about others. But let us worry instead about ourselves simply following Jesus!

11/6 - The Great Commission at the end of Matthew chapter 28 in verses 18-20 is so important for us as followers of Jesus on Earth today: *"Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* I like that we see the Trinity in this commission - the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen! The NIV Study Bible commentary today says that Jesus' Great Commission has three steps: 1. Go 2. Baptize them. 3. Teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. I know the Great Commission encourages many to go on mission trips, which is wonderful and makes sense. However, I believe that often times the mission field many of us are called to "go" into is in our own backyards. Our own towns. Our own cities. Maybe even our own homes. Let us go where the Lord calls us to go - near or afar. Will you go? **Q: How are you participating in Jesus' Great Commission today in your life? Are you in some way helping make disciples? Are you in some way helping to**

## **baptize? Are you teaching people to obey Jesus' commands?**

11/7 - Today we begin the book of Acts! I am sad to be leaving the Gospels behind, but am definitely looking forward to reading Luke's writings in Acts. (And there is always next year to read the Gospels again! Hint... hint... :) We'll soon be introduced to Paul in Acts, and his Epistles will be coming up in the months ahead. It is always so exciting to read about the early church and its genesis. I hope you are ready for Acts! Let's go!

Author: Luke

Date: A.D. 65-70

Content: The book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke where Luke intends to show that what Jesus began on earth, he continues to do in the life of the church. The book begins with the apostles being filled with the power of God and preaching to great effect, three thousand being saved in one day (Acts 2:41). The life of the church in Jerusalem, the spread of the gospel to Samaria, the activities of the apostle Peter, and the persecution of the early Christians are then described. The focus then shifts to the apostle Paul and his missionary activity in Gentile territory. His three missionary journeys are treated in some detail, ending with Paul's trip to Rome where the book ends. Some scholars suggest that Luke intended to write a third volume that would have described Paul's release, further travels, arrest, and death.

Theme: Acts was written to show the spread of the gospel from Jewish to Gentile territory (Acts 1:8). The good news that Jesus dies and rose again could not be confined to one corner of the world, but was intended by God for all. To that end God empowered his people so that they could accomplish their task. The Holy Spirit is that empowering agent. The sovereign control of God over all things is seen in the triumph of the gospel over paganism and persecution; and although it may cost many their very lives (even Peter and Paul, whose lives are described in Acts), ultimate victory is assured through Jesus our Lord. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 23)*

11/7 - It's intriguing to note that Luke begins Acts 1:1 with "*Dear Theophilus.*" You will recall from Luke's Gospel in chapter 1 verses 3 & 4 Luke addresses the Gospel to Theophilus as well: "*Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*" So, just who is Theophilus? There is a lot of speculation on this question, and not a lot of certainty. Theophilus' name means "one who loves God." Not a bad name, eh? Some speculate that Theophilus was someone of high position and wealth, and perhaps even a Roman official. Some speculate Theophilus was actually Luke's publisher, funding his writings distribution! In whatever case, it appears that both Acts and Luke were written for Theophilus' own instruction, as well as the instruction of those whom these writings would be distributed, which includes you and me! Let us simply thank God for the unknown man Theophilus to whom Luke felt compelled to write the books of instructions for us in Acts & Luke! *Verse 8 from Jesus is basically a Cliff Notes version of the book of Acts: "But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* In chapters 1 through 7 the apostles will be witnesses in Jerusalem. Judea & Samarian in chapters 8 & 9. And then to the ends of the earth in chapters 10 through 28. Well, ends of the earth in terms of Caesarea, Rome, Greece, Antioch and Asia Minor. But, they wouldn't begin this witnessing until they are equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2. **Q: How are you living out Act 1:8 in your life? Have you received the Holy Spirit's power? How are you telling people about Jesus everywhere?**

11/7 - Today we read the incredible Acts chapter 2 where the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost! We also read in Acts 2 today about how the early church flourishes. You may hear some churches today say that they are "Acts 2:42" churches. Today we read these incredible words about the early church in verses 42 through 47 – "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*" **Q: How do these verses speak to you? Do you think this is how church today should be as well? Do you see aspects of these verses in your church today? Do you see aspects of these verses in your life today? Is your church an "Acts 2:42" church? Do you think it should be? How will you yourself help it to be an Acts 2:42 church?**

11/8 - Acts chapter 3 is a wonderful look at the power of Jesus' name and faith in Jesus as Peter heals a lame man. **Q: I am curious about how you might say or pray the name of Jesus in your life today? Do you close out your prayers in the name of Jesus? Do you do other things in your life in the name of Jesus? Do you have any stories or examples of the power of the name of Jesus that you have experienced in your life?**

11/8 - I love verse 6: *"But Peter said, "I don't have any money for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"* It is awesome to see how Peter follows up this healing with preaching at Solomon's Porch! He sees an opportunity to let others know about Jesus and he does not let this opportunity pass him by. **Q: How often in your life do you come across opportunities to let others know about Jesus? How often do you move forward with that opportunity? Or how often do you let that opportunity pass you by?**

11/8 - In our Acts readings today, I found it very interesting that Peter and John found themselves before the same 70 member Sanhedrin that Jesus found himself before when he was sentenced to death. Peter and John avoided death in this case, and Jesus' name and power was proclaimed before the high council in a powerful way. Caiaphas you'll recall from John 18:14: *"Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people."* Well, the Spirit of Jesus was once again before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin through the boldness of Peter and John! **Q: We read about the boldness of Peter and John in Acts chapter 4 today. Do you think we are called to be bold in our faith? Why? What are some ways that we should be bold in our faith? What are some ways in which you are bold in your faith today? What are some ways you want to become bolder in your faith?**

11/8 - I love reading about the early church praying and sharing their possessions after Peter and John were released! Have you ever prayed a prayer that was anything like verses 29 & 30? Wow... *"And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give your servants great boldness in their preaching. Send your healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* **Q: Think we could learn something about prayer from this early church community in Acts 4? How often do you pray with a group of people outside of a regular church service?**

11/8 - Today in Acts 5 we continue to read about the early church. It's important for us to note that Ananias and Sapphira's sin was that they acted as if they were giving 100% of the proceeds from the sale of their land to the church - when in fact they weren't - so that they would be glorified for this very generous act. The sin wasn't what percentage they were or weren't giving - but that they were acting as if they were giving 100%, which was a lie. In verse 3 we read - *"Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"* One thing of note from this verse is that Satan was active in the hearts of men and women in the early church. After Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, Satan was still on the loose. **Q: Do you believe Satan is still on the loose today tempting the hearts of men and women? Do you pray daily for God to "lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil?" Do you think this should be a daily prayer?** (maybe not in these words exactly, but they are from the Lord's Prayer, so not a bad choice of words to pray...)

11/8 - I love verse 29 in today's readings, when the apostles are yet again before the Sanhedrin: *"But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than human authority."* How powerful of a statement is this! And how often in our lives do we truly practice this? Do you obey God rather than human authority? Consistently? Verse 41 brought tears to my eyes: *"The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus."* This is an incredible thing to consider! The apostles rejoiced that they were given 39 lashes - this is no joke as we all know - because they were proclaiming Jesus. They rejoiced that God had counted them worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus! This is something that should definitely bring tears to all of our eyes. Let us pray that God also counts us worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus! **Q: Have you ever suffered dishonor for the name of Jesus in your life? Will you rejoice if indeed someday you do suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus? Is it proper for a Christian to want to actually suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus? Should we want this? Expect this? Seek this? Rejoice in this?**

11/9 - Acts 6 verse 2 is of interest to me today - *"We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program."* When I first read this, I thought, "Wait a second! What's wrong with administering a food program??" Then, upon further reflection I realized the apostles were not saying anything was wrong with administering a food program - just that they were not called to it. They were called to spend their time preaching and teaching the Word of God. Which of course is true Food in the spiritual sense. So - I think this is important for us to realize today as well. I think sometimes we might get a bit grouchy if we don't see our pastors or ministers at every single church function or event - but we have to realize they are not called to do every single thing that we, the body of the church, are called to. One of their primary roles is to preach and teach the word of God. So, they may need us to volunteer at or administer a food program while they are doing what they are called to. Each of us are important parts of the body of Christ. And each part of the body has different functions. We shouldn't get upset if one part of the body is not

doing exactly what we are doing. And yes, there are times when community & fellowship will bring us all together - which typically is worship on Sundays. Let us come together as many members but one body without complaint toward others who are called to other holy tasks! **Q: How are you serving the Body of Christ today? Are you willing to serve in ways that may be more "behind the scenes"? Are you willing to administer a food program, if that's what God calls you to do?**

11/9 - Today we read the beginning of Stephen's amazing sermon to the Sanhedrin in the Temple. You'll recall from yesterday's readings in Acts 6 verses 8 through 10 - *"Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. None of them was able to stand against the wisdom and Spirit by which Stephen spoke."* So, men began to lie about Stephen, and then we get into the sermon Stephen gives to the council today. It is clearly a great sermon today from Stephen! Today he is beginning to set the stage for his zinger closing statements. He's like a lawyer today laying out his opening arguments for the case. Unfortunately, things will not proceed well in the coming days readings for Stephen. After he concludes this speech, Stephen will soon be the first Christian martyr... **Q: What in Stephen's sermon stood out to you?**

11/9 - Stephen's great sermon to the temple council continues today! Great timing on his sermonizing in verses 46 through 50 related to the Temple Solomon built - *"David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who actually built it. However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple as good as that?' asks the Lord. 'Could you build a dwelling place for me? Didn't I make everything in heaven and earth?'"* The last 2 verses came from Isaiah chapter 66 verses 1 & 2 (as the prophet says..) Indeed it is true! We do not need a temple for God today. God does not live in a temple built by human hands. I have heard it said before - "If you are in relationship with God through his son Jesus, you are God's temple." **Q: Do you believe this is true? Do you believe that your body is a temple that God can live in?**

11/9 - Today is a sad day of readings as we read about the stoning of Stephen - the first Christian martyr. Verses 59 & 60 are incredible and reminiscent of Jesus on the cross: *"And as they stoned him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And he fell to his knees, shouting, 'Lord, don't charge them with this sin!' And with that, he died."* In verse 58 we are ominously introduced to who we now know as Paul, the author of many of the epistles in the Bible: *"The official witnesses took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul."* This laying of coats at Saul's feet may be signifying that Saul was the highest official at the stoning of Stephen and may be signifying that Saul gave permission for this stoning of Stephen to occur. Saul is Paul's Hebrew name. Paul is his Greek name. (which is a significant distinction, as Paul's ministry reaches out to the Gentiles, including the Greeks - hence going from the Hebrew name Saul to the Greek name Paul is significant) In a few chapters ahead we will learn about Saul's encounter with Jesus and how his persecution of Christians will soon take a dramatic U-turn... Take a look at the cloaked figure in the image below to the left - this looks to me to be Saul watching over the stoning of Stephen with coats laid at his feet. God has an amazing conversion for Saul coming up... **Q: What was your reaction to reading about the stoning of Stephen? Do you think you could be a Christian martyr, if called to it?**

11/10 - Wow. Acts chapter 8 verses 18 & 19 should be a warning to each of us to not lose sight of where spiritual power truly comes from - *"When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given when the apostles placed their hands upon people's heads, he offered money to buy this power. 'Let me have this power, too,' he exclaimed, 'so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!'"* Scary stuff... but I have a hunch this type of thing still happens today. People want to "buy" faith or buy spiritual power. God ain't selling it. It's a free gift. Salvation is free. It ain't for sale. I pray that each of us realizes that our faith in Jesus is a free gift. We didn't buy it. We didn't earn it. And we most definitely should not exploit our free gift of faith in any way for \$. That is scary to consider. And if we are blessed with what appears to be spiritual power in any way, I pray we realize that this power comes only from God, and not from ourselves. And if we ever happen to think that spiritual power comes from ourselves, then I am sure we will quickly learn the maxim - "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." Spiritual power goes bankrupt quick if we ever try to claim it as our own...

11/10 - Today in Acts chapter 8 we read about Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch. In verses 34 and 35, just after the eunuch has finished reading verses in Isaiah 53 about Jesus, we will read - *"The eunuch asked Phillip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else? Then Phillip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.'* I wonder about this in our lives today - do you think there are people that you know who are trying to understand who God is and what God is saying, just like this eunuch was trying to understand? Are

there people in your life who may be seeking God and Jesus? If so, will you be like Phillip was for this eunuch for these people in your life? Will you begin with wherever these people are ("that very passage"), even if they are very far from God, and begin to share with them the good news about Jesus? Yes, this story about the Ethiopian eunuch is a very quick conversion story. Not all of our stories of having conversations with others seeking God will turn out like this. In fact, I'd venture to say that many will take many months and maybe even several years. **Q: But, even if it takes a lifetime of conversations with someone about the good news of Jesus, isn't it worth it? Who in your life is God calling you to share the good news about Jesus with? Will you begin those conversations now? And, perhaps most importantly, will you begin praying for those that God has placed in your life – praying that they will come to understand who God truly is?**

11/10 - Big readings today! Saul is converted to Christianity by Jesus himself! I think this is the most powerful conversion story in all of the Bible! **Q: In your life, what was your conversion story? Do you mind sharing your testimony here with others? Perhaps it may not be as dramatic as Saul/Paul's story, but do you think it is just as special in God's eyes?**

11/10 - As I was reading Acts chapter 9 today, I thought more about Ananias than I have before. Can you imagine being Ananias and being asked to go find Saul of Tarsus? Ananias demonstrated amazing faith in today's readings. God's words to Ananias about Saul in verses 15 & 16 are powerful - and as we now know, so very true: *"But the Lord said, "Go and do what I say. For Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. And I will show him how much he must suffer for me.""* Great stuff... **Q: In your life, who might God be calling you to go visit - like he called Ananias to visit? Is there someone who is waiting for you to visit them, lay hands on them, and open up their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit?**

11/10 - Wow. Something about Acts chapter 9 verse 31 really stood out to me as we read about the early church today: *"The believers were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit."* Read this verse again. Whaddya think? The believers of the early church were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. I don't know about you, but I want to walk like that! I love that dichotomy - that balance - of walking in fear and comfort. No - don't get me wrong - I'm not talking about a fraidy-cat type of fear. But I am talking about a healthy / respectful fear - I mean, just look at the image above again of the lion and the man of God. I don't mean to bag on the man of God by any means, but I think it is safe to say that he was walking in the "fear of the Lord" when he shunned Jeroboam's invite, but then he may have not been walking in the "fear of the Lord" when accepted the old prophet's lie. **Q: And, like the old prophet in today's Kings readings, do you think that people will lie to you and me today? Will the Enemy, the Destroyer, seek to lie to us? If so, do you think there is value in walking in the "fear of the Lord" today?** While - at the same time walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. There is something about the wisdom of this verse in Acts today that I really really like. This may be one of those verses to really meditate upon. I think there is so much value in this verse for our lives... **Today - are you walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit?**

11/11 - I love it! Almost every time we see an angel visit someone the visited person is panic stricken by the angel! :) Acts 10 Verse 4 today - *"Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel."* Seriously, it's pretty consistent that people in the Bible get freaked out by angelic visitors. Probably because it's a pretty rare thing. **Q: Don't you think you'd get freaked out / scared if an angel visited you?** I am pretty sure I would. Maybe that's why angels only show up in our human world visuals when something big needs to happen. Something big happens in today's (and tomorrow's) readings with Cornelius and Peter. **Have you ever had any spiritual experiences that have freaked you out? (positive or negative)**

11/11 - Before we get to the big thing that happens today with Peter, check the remainder of verse 4: *"And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have not gone unnoticed by God!"* Hmm... **Q: Think God pays attention when we give gifts to the poor? Have you found a consistent way to give gifts to the poor?** (If not, might I suggest one avenue? World Vision. I know they do amazing work caring for and creating self-sufficiency for the poorest of the poor worldwide. I've been sponsoring children with them for the past 7 years and volunteering with them the past three years. One very powerful thing you can do with World Vision - in addition to sponsoring a child, which I think is the most impactful - is that you can literally buy things like a goat or a cow or fruit trees for the poorest of the poor worldwide. And you can buy these things for someone you know, in their honor, as a gift. Really. So, next time you are struggling with what to buy the person who has plenty of stuff a wedding gift or a birthday gift or whatever, buy a goat in their honor at World Vision! It's a beautiful thing. All you'd ever want to know about the life-changing opportunity of sponsoring a child

through World Vision is at this link - [www.WorldVision.org](http://www.WorldVision.org) - and click on [Gift Catalog link](#) for all the details on buying goats and cow and fruit trees. Thanks for considering.)

11/11 - Okay, back to today's readings and the big happenings. I think Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion answers the question well of "What was the meaning of the vision Peter saw?" as follows: "According to Jewish law, certain foods were forbidden to be eaten ([see Leviticus 11](#)). The food laws made it difficult for Jews to eat with Gentiles without risking defilement. In fact, the Gentiles themselves were often seen as 'unclean.' Peter's vision meant that he should not look upon the Gentiles as inferior people whom God would not redeem. Before having the vision, Peter would have thought that a Roman officer could not accept Christ. Afterward, he understood that it was his responsibility to go with the messengers into a Gentile home and tell Cornelius the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ."

11/11 - Acts 10 verses 25 & 26 stood out to me today - *"As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell to the floor before him in worship. But Peter pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm a human being like you!"* This reminds me that this type of stuff can still happen today. I am afraid that sometimes we can end up worshiping people today, instead of worshiping God. And I'm afraid that this can oftentimes happen in the context of our churches. I have to say that I have seen what almost looks like worship of Pastors at churches. And that ain't a good thing... Pastors are human beings just like us! Yes, they are called to a very high standard in Paul's letter to Timothy, which we'll read later this year. But Pastors are not God. They are not divine. They should not be worshiped. Yes, they can help lead us in worship of God in great ways and with great messages. But let us make sure we are directing our worship at the true Rock and Light and Author of All who will never fail us and never let us down - God. So, stand up before your pastor. Pastors are humans just like us...  
Q: Why do you think we sometimes place our pastors on pedestals? Have you ever made this mistake?

11/11 - Peter's words in verses 34 - 36 are so powerful and are a huge turning point in the Gospel beginning to be preached to the Gentiles (non-Jews) - *"I see very clearly that God doesn't show partiality. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. I'm sure you have heard about the Good News for the people of Israel--that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."* **Q: Do you believe that God does not show partiality? Do you believe that in every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right? Do you believe there is peace with God through Jesus? Do you know this peace?**

11/11 - I love how Peter answers his "critics" in Acts chapter 11 today. He simply tells them the story of what happened. And through this plain and simple act of telling his story truthfully we get to verse 18 - *"When the others heard this, all their objections were answered and they began praising God. They said, "God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of turning from sin and receiving eternal life.""* **Q: And this makes me wonder about our lives today. How do we answer our "critics" when it comes to our faith? Is it possible that we can answer our critics simply by telling our story? Just like Peter simply answered his critics with his story? Is it possible that our story of how God reached out and changed our lives could be very effective in winning hearts and minds for Jesus? I think sometimes we underestimate the power of simply telling our story. It is our story - and after we tell it, how can anyone really criticize it? Or argue with it? It is our story. Let us tell it. And let us tell our story often and with great love. I believe God can work wonders when we simply tell our stories...**

11/11 - There is a lot going on in today's Acts readings as Peter is freed from jail by an angel! I love Acts 12 verse 5 in this chapter as Peter was put in jail - *"But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him."* **Q: Who are you praying for very earnestly these days? Do you think that prayer changes things? How is your prayer life this very day?**

11/12 - Wow. It is fun to read about Paul's first missionary journey! A very cool thing to note about today's readings is that Paul started his missionary journey not after an extensive planning session / retreat / etc. (all our modern day stuff of what we have to do before embarking on something...) No! Paul started his missionary journey after a time of worship & fasting and being filled with the Holy Spirit! The Spirit moved and thus Paul moved! It was that simple. **Q: Think we can learn something from this in our lives today? Are you listening to the Spirit's prompting in your life today? What is the Spirit prompting you to do? Will you do it?** Check out Acts 13 verses 2 and 3 that show all it took for Paul to begin his missionary journey: *"One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work I have for them." So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way."*

11/12 - Acts 13 is a great sermon from Paul today! Really... this is about as good as it gets for a solid Gospel

presentation. Go Paul. I love how he starts off in verse 16: *"So Paul stood, lifted his hand to quiet them, and started speaking. "People of Israel," he said, "and you devout Gentiles who fear the God of Israel, listen to me."* You'll note that Paul delivers this message to both Jews and Gentiles - he is preaching the Gospel for the world! **Q: Are you really listening to Paul's message to you in today's readings in Acts? What are you learning from the book of Acts?**

11/12 - Great readings today about how Paul and Barnabas' ministry to the Gentiles was growing! Verse 52 is awesome: *"And the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."* **Q: Are you filled with joy? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? How does this joy & the Spirit manifest itself in your life?**

11/12 - Do you see the depth and strength and love of Paul's faith in Acts 14 verses 19 & 20 - *"Now some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and turned the crowds into a murderous mob. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, apparently dead. But as the believers stood around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe."* Paul is stoned and then gets back up and keeps going forward in his ministry for God! Next thing you know he is praying and fasting for elders in churches - after nearly getting stoned to death! I want a faith like that... Also, it is wonderful to read in today's readings how Paul and Barnabas tear their garments because they are so distressed that people were worshiping them as if they were gods! **Would we react so quickly to stop people from worshipping us today I wonder... ?**

11/13 - Today we begin Paul's letter to the church in Galatia!

~ **Galatians** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Unknown

Date: A.D. 48 or 49

Content: Paul had preached to the inhabitants of Galatia on his first missionary journey (Act 13:14-14:23). Shortly after his departure, a group of Jewish believers arrived to insist that the Gentile Christians submit to the laws of Moses in order to be saved. Paul writes to combat this error by showing that Abraham, who lived over four hundred years before the giving of the law, was saved by faith in the gospel – so how could it be argued that the law could either save a man or make a believer in Christ more perfect? Paul couples this with a vigorous defense of himself as an apostle and with a discussion of how a Christian ought to live.

Theme: Paul energetically defends the truth of the gospel, which is that man is saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ and nothing else. Any other teaching is a perversion of the truth of God (Galatians 1:7). We are made right in the sight of God by faith (Galatians 2:16) and become the people of God (sons of Abraham) in the same way, by faith (Galatians 3:7). Because we are free in Christ, we must never allow anyone to drag us back to the idea of working for our salvation, but must live out of the gospel. This involves submission to the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:16) and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Galatians 5:14). (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 25-26*)

11/13 - Wow. I have to share with you that Paul's words in Galatians chapter 1 verse 1 stopped me in my tracks today when reading them: *"This letter is from Paul, an apostle. I was not appointed by any group or by human authority. My call is from Jesus Christ himself and from God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead."* The thing that struck me about this was Paul saying that he was not appointed by any group or by human authority to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. His call was from Jesus Himself! And this just made me think about our modern world today, where I am afraid that sometimes we will only maybe do bold things in our life for the Gospel - for the Kingdom of God - if we feel like we have been appointed by some group or by some human authority to do it. When, in fact the important thing is if we have been called by Jesus to do it! I hope humbly here I can share with you that there are probably a ton of reasons of why I "shouldn't" be leading an online Bible study like this one. I don't have a Seminary degree. I am not an ordained minister or pastor. Yes, I have been in a Bible study before, and I do a lot of studying each day for this ministry. But - no group or human authority has appointed me to do this. I have just done it because I do feel very called to it! And I share this with you not to pat myself on the back, but to encourage you. Maybe you've never been to Seminary. Maybe you're not an ordained minister or pastor. Maybe you've never done \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_. (fill in your blanks) **Q: But, maybe God is calling you to do something bold for his Kingdom, and the question becomes when will you do it? When will you stop relying on an old excuse of not being appointed by a group or human authority to do it?** If God is calling you to something, please, please, do it! Our time is short. Your time is now. The water is fine. Please, dive in!

11/13 - We have great readings today in Galatians chapter 2 as Paul confronts Peter! I think this is a powerful lesson for us to learn. It is okay - in fact good - to confront other Christians when they are out of line. We should do so in the spirit

of love. Speak the truth in love to our brothers and sisters who step out of line. But let us not be too meek in this area and let somebody we love slide by because we're too scared to say anything. Is there anybody in your life today that you are being led by God to speak the truth in love to? (there is someone in my life I'm being led to do this... and I confess that I have been dragging my feet...) Let us learn today from the example of Paul confronting Peter! I have to tell you, for some reason the parenthetical point from Paul in verse 6 today really stood out to me - *"(By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.)"* This is really a profound thing for each of us to realize! No one is above you! No one is below you! God has no favorites! I really really love thinking about this. This means we should respect all, but fear none. God is the only one we should fear. You, your pastor, your president, the homeless person on the street corner are no more or no less favored by God comparatively. God has no favorites! And - if God has no favorites, what do you think this should mean to us. **Q: Should we have favorites? Should we give more respect to those who we think are in better social standing than others? Should we love the pastor more than the homeless person? Should we love the celebrity over the waiter? This really is something for us to think about... Paul said people's reputation as great leaders made NO difference to him. Should people's reputations in our world today make any difference to us?**

11/13 - Paul's message in Galatians chapter 3 verses 6 through 9 is very good news to the 1st century Gentiles and to you and me today too! *"In the same way, "Abraham believed God, so God declared him righteous because of his faith." The real children of Abraham, then, are all those who put their faith in God. What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would accept the Gentiles, too, on the basis of their faith. God promised this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." And so it is: All who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith."* **Q: Do you believe that you can share in the same blessing Abraham received? How? Are you a spiritual descendent of Abraham? Why? What do Paul's words "faith in Christ" mean to you? Is this all very good news to you?**

11/13 - Today in Galatians chapter 3 verses 10 and 11 we read: *"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith.""* **Q: What is Paul saying here? Why would those who rely on observing the law be under a curse? Do you rely on the law?**

11/14 - I love Paul's teachings today in Galatians chapter 4 verses 3 through 7! *"And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were slaves to the spiritual powers of this world. But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because you Gentiles have become his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and now you can call God your dear Father. Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you."* **Do you believe these teachings of Paul's to be true? Are you a child of God? Has God sent the Spirit of Jesus into your heart? Do you today call God your dear Father? Do you believe that everything God has belongs to you because you are his child?**

11/14 - Galatians chapter 5 is a great teaching on our freedom in Christ! Verse 1 is so very powerful: *"So Christ has really set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law."* **Q: Has Jesus set you free? Has He set you free from the slavery of sin? Has He set you free from the slavery of the law? If you are not yet free, today will you hand over the controls of your life to Jesus and let Him once and for all set you free!**

11/14 - I also love verses 5 & 6 - *"But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive everything promised to us who are right with God through faith. For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love."* I like that thought of eagerly waiting to receive everything promised to us who are right with God through faith. **Q: How are you eagerly waiting for everything promised? How do you have the hope of glory?** And then the last sentence of what is important is powerful - faith expressing itself in love! Not faith expressing itself in hate.... Faith expressing itself in love. **How is your faith expressing itself in love?** This reminds me of the old song - "They will know we are Christians by our love. By our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love." Amen!

11/14 - I love Paul's teaching in Galatians 5 verses 22 & 23 today - *"But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* It is incredible I think for each of us to really meditate on this question - does the Holy Spirit control your life? I think so often - even after coming to faith in Christ - we still try to hold onto the controls of our life! I know I do. And yet, when I

finally realize that I should instead "let go, and let God", my life gets 100 times easier. I don't stress and worry about things any more. When I let myself be controlled by the Holy Spirit I finally realize that this is where true LIFE is at! It's not in hanging on so tightly to the steering wheel... Then, as we truly let the Holy Spirit control our lives, we begin to see amazing fruits being born in us! **Q: Do you see these fruits in your life today? Love? Joy? Peace? Patience? Kindness? Goodness? Faithfulness? Gentleness? Self-control? How are you doing on letting the Holy Spirit control your life these days? Who is holding on to your steering wheel - you or the Holy Spirit? Will you now let go of that steering wheel? Will you "let go, and let God." Will you let the fruits of the Spirit fully grow in your life?**

11/14 - We finish up Paul's letter to the Galatians today. We read some powerful teachings in Galatians chapter 6 today. I love verse 1: "*Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.*" This is such a great teaching. And one that I have a hunch we do not follow often enough... **Q: When was the last time you gently and humbly helped someone who is overcome by sin get back on the right track?** I know for me that it has not been recently. And I know I've missed some opportunities in this regard. The last sentence in this verse is powerful and reminds me that we need to be particularly careful around sexual sin I think - to make sure we don't fall into the same temptation ourselves. One important note for all of us is to not discuss with someone of the opposite sex their struggles with sexual sin! It is foolish to do so I believe. Men can discuss and counsel men in the area of sexual sin. And women, women. But I think it is just way too risky for men to discuss or counsel women in the area of sexual sin - and vice versa. I think we just open ourselves up potentially to temptation if we do this. I'm sure there are exceptions to this, but generally speaking, don't go into a discussion on personal sexual sin struggles with someone of the opposite sex! **While I'm on the topic here of sexual sin, does anyone have any good book recommendations for anyone who struggles in this area?** A good book on this topic is Josh Harris' "[Sex is Not the Problem \(Lust Is\): Sexual Purity in a Lust-Saturated World.](#)"

11/14 - Peter's teaching at The Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 verse 11 is one of the most important verses that all of us should really meditate upon and know and believe: "*We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the special favor of the Lord Jesus.*" **Q: Do you believe Peter here? Do you believe this to be true? Does this simple message of this little button below ring true to you?**

11/15- In Acts 15 today we read about Paul not wanting to bring along John Mark on the next missionary journey. Good news is that Paul and Mark were eventually reunited in missionary efforts. Some speculate that it was because Barnabas went with Mark at this juncture, Barnabas' patient encouragement helped Mark's eventual effective ministry. In fact, John Mark is the very same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark! **Q: How's that for encouragement changing the world?? Is there anyone in your life today who you think could be a great worker for God's kingdom with some encouragement? Will you be like Barnabas was for John Mark and work with and encourage that person?**

11/15 - Today in Acts 16 we read about Paul's 2nd missionary journey, which took place around AD 49-52. Great readings about the conversion of Lydia of Philippi today! She was a business woman and a Gentile (like Cornelius) who loved God. And the Lord opened her heart and she believed! Praise God for his continual ministry of opening people's hearts to the Gospel. **Q: Has your heart been opened like Lydia's was opened?**

11/15 - Today in Acts 16 we will read about the earthquake that comes while Paul and Silas are imprisoned! As a trembling jailer comes to Paul and Silas we will read this in verses 30 through 34 – "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.*" This is a wonderful look at how many of us become and grow as Christians! We first hear the Good News of how Jesus came to this earth fully human and fully God – how he lived a sinless life and died on the cross for our sins – and how he rose from the dead and will come again. Then, through God's grace, we believe! We simply believe. From there we learn more about God from others and through studying his Word, the Bible – we can call this discipleship. Then comes a decision to be baptized – to publicly profess our faith in Jesus as our Savior. Then comes living a joyful life of community with others. Now – yes – this is a very abbreviated example of how one becomes and grows as a Christian. :) And our various denominations will probably put the order of how all this happens in various ways. **Q: But, can you see similarities in your own faith journey with the jailer's conversion, baptism, and growth as a Christian? Do you remember first hearing the**

**Good News of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? Do you remember the day you first Believed? Do you remember learning more about the Word, the Bible? (hopefully you'll remember this year's One Year Bible journey! :) Do you remember being baptized (or maybe you'll have photos or stories from your younger years)? Do you now joyfully live life in community with other Christians through your local church? If you haven't yet experienced all of these things, will you pray to God asking him for the experiences He has planned for you? And, when others in your life come to you like the jailer, asking "What must I do to be saved?" are you prepared to give them the joyful answer?**

11/15 - Great reading about Paul's travels and preaching in Acts 17 today! I absolutely love the quote in verse 6 where the Jewish leaders of Thessalonica say: *"Paul and Silas have turned the rest of the world upside down, and now they are here disturbing our city," they shouted.* **Q: Have you ever heard that the Kingdom of God is an "upside down" kingdom? That the values of the Kingdom of God are upside down compared to worldly values? Paul and Silas turned the world upside down. How are you turning the world upside down in your life today?**

11/16 - Today in Acts 17 verses 22 & 23 we read - *"Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."* Paul then went on to introduce to the Greeks our personal Creator, in contrast with their views of pantheistic Stoicism. **Q: Are there people in your life today that are perhaps like the Greeks Paul was speaking to? People who are religious but do not yet know our personal Creator? Are there people in your life who are seeking the Unknown God? Will you begin conversations with these people that God has placed in your life and let them know about the living God that you know and love? Will you let them know, as Paul let the Greeks know in verse 28 - *"For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."*?**

11/16 - Today we begin Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica!

~ **First Thessalonians** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Corinth

Date: A.D. 50 or 51

Content: On Paul's second missionary journey he visited Thessalonica but was forced to flee because of the intense persecutions that arose there (see [Acts 17:1-9](#)). After making his way to Athens and finally to Corinth, Paul heard from Timothy, whom he had sent to inquire about the Thessalonians, that they were standing fast in spite of their suffering. Paul wrote this letter to comfort and encourage the young believers in the Lord. He also wrote to confirm their faith in the basic doctrines of the church concerning God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, Christian living, but especially concerning Jesus' second coming. Apparently because some believers had died, the remaining Christians were concerned lest the believing dead miss out on the resurrection. Paul writes to assure them that the dead in Christ rise first.

Theme: Paul comforts the persecuted believers with the assurance that God is with us and has assured us of ultimate victory. The final victory will occur at Jesus' return, when the Lord himself shall descend from heaven and gather us to himself, ever to be with him. In the light of this we should bear up under persecution, living lives that are godly and above reproach. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 28*)

11/16 - Today in First Thessalonians 1:5 we read: *"For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message."* This is a great reminder that while we are out and about in the world being salt and light, we're not just out there on our own. The Holy Spirit is doing work concurrently in other people's hearts. And indeed, the Holy Spirit is doing the true work of salvation, not us. I do like that Paul wrote that "the way we lived" was further proof of the truth. Christians are called to be in the world, but not of it. And I do think people pay attention to how we live. **Q: How are we living our lives today? Are we living a life of love? Are we compassionate? Are we caring? Are we serving the poor? Or - are we bought into consumerism? Are we selfish? Are we serving ourselves? Does the way we spend our money and time look different from how the culture says we should be spending our money and time? Are we giving to our church? Are we worshiping God at a church once a week? Are we praying frequently? How are you living your life today? If someone took a look at your life would it be abundantly clear that you are following Jesus?**

11/16 - The First Thessalonians readings today are nice! I found chapter 2 verse 18 to be an interesting verse: *"We wanted very much to come, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us."* I think this is an important reminder that Satan can indeed prevent good work from taking place in our lives. Through prayer, reading the Word, and obedience we can avoid some attacks. But, they will still come while we are in this world. I would just encourage you to keep in mind that Satan is real. Don't dwell on this, but realize it is true. And that by growing your relationship with Jesus & God, I do believe great protection can come over you - but keep in mind that even a person as close to the Lord as Paul was prevented by Satan from doing some things Paul wanted to do. **Q: How is your prayer life today? Do you pray to God to protect you and keep you from Satan and all his tricks and lies and temptations?** Let us be prayer warriors for not only ourselves, but also for others in our lives! **Do you consider yourself to be a prayer warrior? Would you like to be a prayer warrior? What is stopping you from being a prayer warrior?** All it takes is prayer...

11/16 - The First Thessalonians verses today are great teachings on living to please God and the hope of the resurrection. A verse from 1 Thessalonians 5:2 that I actual use fairly frequently is: *"the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night."* I confess that I don't get too into predicting "end times" scenarios. Pre-trib, post-trib, etc. I know many good friends who are into all of this. I guess I just come back to this verse about the day of the Lord coming unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. I think this also applies to each of our own lives. We don't know how many years we have - hopefully many. But, you just don't know. And I don't really dwell or worry about it. The end of our lives will likely come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. And if we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we do not need to fear the day of the Lord! **Q: Do you think about the day of the Lord often?**

11/16 - In First Thessalonians 4:3-5 today we read this teaching of Paul's: *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust."* **Q: Are these verses contrary in any way to what you might see in our culture today? Are these verses contrary to any way that you might live your life? Do you see the value in this teaching of Paul's? Is the lust / sexual immorality that our culture sells full of life or emptiness? Is this teaching of Paul's full of life or emptiness? Are you controlling your own body in a way that is holy and honorable? What does Paul mean when he says it is God's will that you should be sanctified? Do you want God to sanctify you? Will you participate in the sanctification process with God? Will you avoid sexual immorality?**

11/17 - Today we wrap up Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians! There is a lot of good letter-closing advice in these today's reading's. To make sure this advice gets heard throughout the church in Thessalonica Paul commands in chapter 5 verse 27: *"I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sisters."* **Q: Think this letter got read to everyone? :)**

11/17 - Verses 12 & 13 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and warn you against all that is wrong. Think highly of them and give them your wholehearted love because of their work."* This verse ties in perfectly to Clergy Appreciation Month! Did you know that October is Clergy Appreciation Month? I don't know who started this trend, but I like it! **Q: Hopefully this month you can take 15 minutes to write a letter or send a card of encouragement to your pastor or clergy? How do you encourage your clergy?** I encourage you to encourage your pastor this October! :) And please try to remember to do this in October of each year. More details about how you can participate in clergy appreciation month are on this website link: <http://parsonage.org/cam/index.cfm>

11/17 - More verses from today's readings that stood out -

Verse 16 - *"Always be joyful."* How's joy doing in your life these days?

Verse 17- *"Keep on praying."* And prayer?

Verse 11 - *"So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing."* I like this. It reminds me that we have the opportunity to encourage people that we come in contact with each day. Spread some love. **Q: How are you doing on being encouraging to others each day?**

11/17 - Today we begin Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica!

~ **Second Thessalonians** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Corinth

Date: A.D. 51

Content: Either Paul's first letter or a forged letter purporting to be from him had disturbed the Thessalonians concerning

the second coming of Jesus. Perhaps adding to the confusion was the continued persecution that they were enduring. Paul writes to assure the believers that Jesus will certainly return to comfort the believers and to punish those who are troubling them. He also tells them that the great Day of Judgment (the Day of the Lord) will not take them by surprise but will be preceded by a series of events. In the light of Jesus' sure return, Christians are to live above reproach.

Theme: Throughout this short letter the promise of God's victory over evil is stressed. Believers may suffer now, but God has planned comfort and reward for them. For those who refuse to obey God, however, there will be distress and judgment. Paul also stresses the need for living in such a way that God is honored. Some people at Thessalonica may have stopped working because they believed Christ would return soon. This does not honor God and Paul says concerning it, "He who does not work shall not eat." (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 28-29*)

11/17 - Paul's encouragement during times of persecution is powerful in chapter 1 verse 5 today: *"But God will use this persecution to show his justice. For he will make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering."* If there is persecution in your life today, I hope this verse is encouraging to you. It reminds me of the old adage - "it builds character." I know this is tough to realize in the midst of persecution - that God is working in the midst of it to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom. Your suffering is for His Kingdom. You are not suffering alone. **Q: Have your sufferings ever had blessings in disguises?**

11/17 - Second Thessalonians chapter 2 is a good look at the 2nd coming of Jesus. Verse 7 is interesting - *"For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it back steps out of the way."* Seems that this is alluding to sin and the temptation to sin that pursues people in our world today. The lawlessness is at work - secretly - and will remain secret until it comes out in the open in the form of the anti-christ? Again, I'm not big into end times stuff. But, clearly, there will come the day of Jesus' return. And the Bible is preparing believers for what to expect and to know that God is bigger than whatever evil comes in those days. God is bigger!

11/17 - Second Thessalonians chapter 3 is a nice closing chapter to this 2nd letter of Paul's! The first few verses remind us of the need to pray. Pray for those doing the Lord's work! **How are you doing in praying for your pastors, your church, other ministries you support?** Paul then goes into an exhortation for proper living. These verses remind me of the importance of work in our lives. We are not called to be blissful aestheticians - but called to work. Paul worked hard during his time of ministry. He was at times a "tentmaker" - making a living during the day and preaching and conducting ministry in the evenings and weekends. **Q: How are you doing with work these days? Are you giving your all, your 100% for the hours you are at work? No matter where you are working - are you working as if you were working for God?**

11/17 - Today's readings in Acts 18 are important in that Paul is beginning his work of building the church in Corinth through his ministry! We of course are very familiar now with Paul's letters of 1st and 2nd Corinthians - today we get a glimpse of how Paul's relationship with the city of Corinth began. Verses 9 through 11 let us clearly know that the Lord was very involved in Paul's ministry in Corinth: *"One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent! For I am with you, and no one will harm you because many people here in this city belong to me." So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God."* Per Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion today: "Corinth was the political and commercial center of Greece, surpassing Athens in importance. It had a reputation for great wickedness and immorality. A temple to Aphrodite - goddess of love and war - had been built on the large hill behind the city." **Q: How are you involved in helping to build or support the church today? What are some ways that God has called you to love and serve your local church? How about the global church?**

11/18 - Today in our readings in Acts, we are introduced to Apollos! Apollos loved God, but initially he didn't fully understand that Jesus gave believers the gift of the Holy Spirit. Apollos understood repentance of sins very well - that was the "baptism of John (The Baptist)" that he preached. Repent from sins and be baptized was Apollos' message, without a strong teaching of the gift of the Holy Spirit after belief in Christ. Well, Priscilla and Aquila more fully explained the Gospel and then Paul introduced the Holy Spirit to believers who were initially taught by Apollos before he learned the full Gospel. A good overview of "Who was Apollos?" is at biblequestions.org [at this link](#). I love that they say at this link, "Apollos was teachable." Inferring that you and I should be teachable too when it comes to our faith! **Q: Are you teachable? Or do you know it all? ;)**

11/18 - Wow - strong readings today in Acts 19 verses 13 to 16 about the power of Jesus' name - and how to incorrectly try to "use" his name too - *"A team of Jews who were traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits tried to use the*

name of the Lord Jesus. The incantation they used was this: "I command you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. But when they tried it on a man possessed by an evil spirit, the spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul. But who are you?" And he leaped on them and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and badly injured." Jesus' name is the name above all other names - but we should never try to "use" Jesus' name as an incantation or spell. We can call upon Jesus believing that he and his power will be there with us. But we should not call upon Jesus' name as if His name was "magic" in some way. It is holy. It is not magic. **Q: When is the last time you called on Jesus' name? How has calling on the holy name of Jesus ever changed a situation in your life?**

11/18 - Today we begin Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth!

*First Corinthians*

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Ephesus

Date: A.D. 55

Content: Paul had established a church in the Greek city of Corinth on his second missionary journey (see Acts 18:1-8), but things had gone very badly after his departure. He felt it necessary to write them concerning the many problems that had arisen. They were challenging his apostleship, abusing the Lord's Supper, wondering about eating meat sacrificed to idols, going to court against one another, condoning immorality, denying the resurrection, arguing about marriage – to name a few of the problems. Paul felt that he had to deal with the situation, lest everything in Corinth fall to pieces. As Paul more or less systematically goes through these problems, he touches upon many of the fundamental teachings of the faith.

Theme: Paul's major purpose in writing this letter was to correct some glaring abuses in the church at Corinth, showing the importance of how we live. It is not enough to say that we are Christians; we must also act like Christians. Not to do so is to bring dishonor upon the name of Christ. Paul also stresses the all-sufficiency of Christ for the believer. In Christ we are made pure, holy, and acceptable to God. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 24-25*)

11/18 - Today in First Corinthians 1 verse 18 we read – *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* What does this verse say to you? Does it speak to you in any way? What is the message of the cross? What does the message of the cross mean to you personally? Is it foolishness? Or, is it the power of God? I don't know what it is about this verse, but it really is so powerful for me. I think that it brings the Gospel message back to the central point in time in history – Jesus on the cross. And what Jesus did on the cross changed everything. Jesus changed history. The power of the cross is such that Jesus continues to change things this very moment. He is changing you. He is changing me. **Q: To us who are being saved, is the message of the cross literally the power of God? Do you meditate upon the cross regularly and meditate upon what the message of the cross truly is? Are you sharing the message of the cross with others in your life?**

11/18 - This may be a somewhat of a controversial reflection here, but I'd like to put it out for discussion. Please feel free to let me know your thoughts in the Comments section of the blog. Today's readings in First Corinthians made me think about all of our various Christian church denominations that we have in our world today. In our readings today, some followed Paul. Some followed Apollos. Some followed Peter. And in our churches today, some follow Calvin. Some follow Wesley. Some follow Knox. And so on. **Q" And I guess I just wonder would the church today look any differently today if we simply all followed Jesus?** I don't mean to knock denominations here per se. I myself go to a church affiliated with a denomination. I just pray that each of us could look beyond our denominations and look fully toward Jesus. And that we come to realize that no matter what our denominations, we are brothers and sisters through faith in our Lord Jesus. We inherit eternal life through God's grace and our faith in Jesus. We all - no matter our denomination - are "the church" through our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. As Paul teaches us in First Corinthians 3:21-23 - *"So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."*

11/19 - Allright... so Paul has a little bit of scolding for the church in Corinth in our readings today! Perhaps we would do well to listen to some of this scolding today too? Verse 5 is powerful for us to consider: *"So be careful not to jump to conclusions before the Lord returns as to whether or not someone is faithful. When the Lord comes, he will bring our deepest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. And then God will give to everyone whatever praise is due."* I think far too often we ourselves try to judge others - saying that someone is wholly righteous or that someone is a doomed

sinner. Neither this excessive praise nor condemnation is ours to give. It is only for God. God is the judge. We are not. So be careful not to jump to conclusions about someone else... If you blinked, you just might have missed verse 20 today - *"For the Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk; it is living by God's power."* Great stuff! I am afraid that sometimes we do indeed reduce the Kingdom of God and living out our faith to just fancy talk. We sometimes talk a lot, but we do not practice what we preach. **Q: Rather than focusing on our fancy talk, how about if we simply live by God's power? Have you ever struggled with fancy talk - either speaking it yourself or hearing it from others? Should actions speak louder than words?**

11/19 - Wow... there is a lot going on in Paul's words in First Corinthians chapter 5 today. The first half of verse 6 stands out: *"How terrible that you should boast about your spirituality, and yet you let this sort of thing go on."* This is such a trap I think for many of us - boasting about our spirituality. It is a very dangerous trap too. **Q: Why do you suppose Paul would say this is a terrible thing to boast about your spirituality?** I think it is because when you boast about your spirituality, you have lost humility and you have in a sense put yourself in the place of God. You've elevated yourself too high. And Jesus says we are to be humble. Here comes a tangent - :) - I was listening to talk radio recently and I heard some guy talking about Kabala - the Jewish mysticism religion that is very popular these days - particularly with some Hollywood celebrities. Well, I won't say that this guy was boasting about his spirituality... but maybe he was. :) The great thing I thought was then a guy studying to be a rabbi called in and basically went off on this guy. The caller said that this guy was far too confident and boastful in his discussions of who God is and how God works. And the caller said that he had studied the Torah for all of his life and he still considered himself only a student. I wish I could remember his exact words - but he said something along the lines that "one will always be a student of the Torah. Never its master." Something like that. I loved it! It was so humble and true. And I think you and I would do well to realize that we will always be students of the Bible - never its master. And we need to realize how terrible it truly is for us to boast about our spirituality in any way - either publicly or in our own minds.

11/19 - The second half of verse 6 is powerful for us to consider as well - *"Don't you realize that if even one person is allowed to go on sinning, soon all will be affected?"* This is so true. Sin is an infection that will infect others. Or, another way to look at this - when we sin we are affecting / infecting others. Nobody sins in a vacuum. It affects the whole community. It affects everyone you know in some way. Paul goes on later in this chapter to say in verse 12 - *"It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your job to judge those inside the church who are sinning in these ways."* Paul really has what will appear to our modern ears to be some strong / harsh words for Christians who sin in the ways listed in verse 11 - *"What I meant was that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a Christian yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler."* I think there is truth in his words - but we need to walk a fine line. There are people who are Christian who do struggle with sin - sin that indeed will infect / affect others. And I think we are absolutely called to speak the truth in love into those Christians lives to point out their sin and encourage them to repentance. But... I think there does come a point where we may have to realize that someone simply will not or does not want to repent of their sin. And then it may be time to prayerfully follow Paul's words about avoiding and removing that type of person from your church. **Q: How / when do we draw the line of speaking the truth in love to a Christian stuck in sin? And when do we avoid and/or remove them from our churches? Is this too harsh? Are Paul's words too harsh? Even if they are harsh, are they true? That might be the big question to ask - do you think there is Truth in Paul's words today in First Corinthians chapter 5?**

11/19 - Today in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 we will read: *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside their body, but you who sins sexually sins against your own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."* These are powerful verses. And verses that seem to fly in the face of much of what we are sold in today's culture. Reflect on these verses. **Q: Do you believe that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Do you believe that you are not your own? Do you realize that you were bought at a price by Jesus on the cross? If you see sexual immorality heading your way, do you flee from it? Will you flee from it? What are the consequences if you do not flee from sexual immorality? Do you believe that sexual immorality is a sin you commit against your very own body? (self-abuse, if you will – though, I strongly believe others around you suffer from this sin against your own body as well. Nobody sins in a vacuum. It affects everyone we interact with. It affects everyone in our community. Think that sin is a selfish act?) Do you realize that when you sin sexually, you are sinning against a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells? Will you flee from sexual immorality? Please - literally - flee from it.**

11/19 - Today we read 1 Corinthians Chapter 7. This has been a very powerful chapter of the Bible for much of my

spiritual journey. For a period of about 7 years I felt the call to "singleness" through this chapter through much prayer and reflection. I think the call to singleness for some of us may be just for a season, or it could be for many seasons. At the same time, just as valuable is the call to marriage and family life for many of us in this chapter as well. These are some powerful verses. Some say it is best just to consider these verses in "context" of the Corinthian church two thousand years ago. However, I do believe there is value in this chapter's verses for our lives as well. **How does First Corinthians chapter 7 speak to you and your life today? Have you ever felt the call to singleness for a season?**

11/19 - First Corinthians chapter 7 verses 32 through 34 are intriguing words from Paul: *"An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him. But a married man can't do that so well. He has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided."* I see his logic of these words - and these words have often rung so very true in my own life. But, I also see the blessing of the family. Of marriage. Of being part of a Holy Family. Obviously each of us came into this world because of the union of a woman and man. There are a billion reasons of why marriage is important - why the family is important. It produces people like us! :) Unfortunately in our world today I am afraid the concept of the "Holy Family" is not so strong. Family can turn into a negative word for many people, instead of the holy word it should be. All this to say - I believe many of us are called to family life - to marriage and to kids. But I also believe that some of us are called to singleness. I really do. And I do believe being called to singleness is truly a blessing - just as being called to marriage is a blessing as well. **Have you spent much time in your life discerning whether God has called you to singleness or to marriage?** I think it's worth reflecting upon periodically - but not to stress out about. It's better to ultimately remember Paul's words in verses 29 through 33: *"The time that remains is very short, so husbands should not let marriage be their major concern. Happiness or sadness or wealth should not keep anyone from doing God's work. Those in frequent contact with the things of the world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them, for this world and all it contains will pass away. In everything you do, I want you to be free from the concerns of this life."* **Q: Whether you are single or married, do you believe these preceding verses are true for you? What does it mean to you that "the time that remains is very short"? How might this affect how you live your life?**

11/20 - Paul's teachings today about food sacrificed to idols in First Corinthians chapter 8 should be considered along with chapter 10 verses 14 through 22. In particular check out 10:19-21 - *"Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons."* Food sacrificed to idols was a major issue for Christians in Corinth to consider, so they wrote Paul asking about this issue. Paul in chapter 8 hones in on the point that even though it may mean nothing to eat meat sacrificed to idols - which are nothing - it may mean a lot to some and cause some to stumble. Then in chapter 10 Paul hones in on the point that sacrifices to idols are really sacrifices to demons. This all makes me think about here today. As Christians, in our freedom in Christ many things are permissible. But not all things are beneficial - to ourselves or to others that see us participating in some activities. **Q: So, are there any areas of your life where perhaps you are participating in worldly activities that really don't mean anything - they're okay in our freedom - but that perhaps could cause others to stumble in some way? Or, perhaps those activities could even cause you to stumble if you're not careful? Will you leave these activities by the wayside? Related to that activity, would you be willing to say as Paul did in First Corinthians chapter 8 verse 13: "So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble."**

11/20 - First Corinthians chapter 9 is an amazing look at Paul's passion for the Gospel! I think in this chapter Paul makes a very strong case for why we should support our local church. Verse 10 says - *"Just as farm workers who plow fields and thresh the grain expect a share of the harvest, Christian workers should be paid by those they serve."* Our pastors, priests, ministers deserve our support. Our local church deserves our support through our tithes. It is interesting in today's readings that Paul first lays out the case for "sharing our harvest" with Christian workers. But - Paul refuses this payment because he says in verse 12 - *"Yet we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than put an obstacle in the way of the Good News about Christ."* That is powerful! Paul is not asking for nor expecting nor demanding payment or anything from those he serves, simply because he does not want to put up any obstacle in the way of the Gospel. Incredible. But again, remember this is the apostle Paul we are reading about here - your local church needs your tithe. **Q: How is your tithing to your church going these days? Are you consistently tithing to your church? Will you pray about what God would have you tithe to your church and other ministries and nonprofits?**

11/20 - These are some of my favorite teachings of Paul's today in First Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 through 27! *"Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified."* The amazing thing about these words is that they are timeless. Paul wrote these words nearly 2,000 years ago and they still ring so true today. We still run races today. We still have athletes. We still win prizes. We still have boxers. I think so often in our world today we hear people in business or other fields use sports analogies. Well, here is Paul using a sports analogy for faith! :) I love it. Please take a moment to re-read these verses above again. Meditate for a few moments on the words. **Q: What do they say to you? Do you believe you are in a race for an eternal prize? Do you want the eternal prize? Are you disciplining your very life with purpose in your every step? How are you running the race today? Are you running to win?**

11/20 - First Corinthians 10 today ends in verses 12 and 13 with some powerful words of warning and encouragement that each of us should always remember - particularly in our darkest hours - *"If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin. But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it."* **Q: Do you believe that you should always be careful to not fall into sin? Particularly if you feel you are "standing strong?" Do you realize that temptations will come into your life? But, most importantly, do you realize that God will show you a way out of the temptations, so you will not give into them? Will you pray fervently to God and Jesus to show you the way out when temptation comes your way?**

11/20 - Great great unselfish words from Paul today in First Corinthians 10 verses 31 through 33! *"Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, you must do all for the glory of God. Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. That is the plan I follow, too. I try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what I like or what is best for me, but what is best for them so they may be saved."* How powerful is that? Paul states that he doesn't just do what is best for him - what is most comfortable for him - but he does what is best for others so that they may be saved! Beautiful. I am afraid that all too often we get "comfortably numb" in our lives and basically end up looking out for our own needs and desires and wants - even if we love Jesus. We become a bit lazy in our Christianity. We need to remember that there is a world out there that is dying. Literally. Dying. They need the love, healing, grace, peace, and salvation of Jesus in their lives! We must accept some level of discomfort in our own lives so that others may be saved. **Q: How about you today? Are you allowing there to be some discomfort in your life so that others may be saved? Are you being discomfited by sacrificially giving to your church and to ministries that serve the poor? Are you being discomfited by volunteering on a very regular basis? Are you being discomfited by supporting a missionary? Are you comfortable with being discomfited so that others may be saved? Will you bend over backwards for others so that they may be saved?**

11/21 - Okay, so I suppose today's readings might get some folks a bit upset with Paul... I think it is important to keep in mind that these writings in First Corinthians 11 were directed to the church in Corinth. And Paul is basically saying in this chapter that we need to be sensitive to the culture we are in. Meaning, in 1st century Corinth men with long hair typically were prostitutes in pagan temples, so Paul says in this chapter it's a disgrace for a man to have long hair. Which it was in the culture and time of Corinth when this was written. Same thing with women with short hair at this culture and time in Corinth - it was a sign of prostitution. So, Paul says keep it long. I know it can seem a bit tricky to figure out when the Bible should be taken literally word for word and when we need to consider context. I would say that generally speaking, we need to consider context - context of one verse to the verse before and after. Context to the chapter. Context to the book. Context to the Bible. And context to the time and place that a particular book was written. However, don't let context mislead you into thinking that the Bible is not God's Holy Word - that the Bible is not Truth. For it is both. The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is Truth. And Paul's words in today's chapter essentially get at the Truth that believers should look and behave in ways that are honorable within their own culture - so that they (and we) will be believable witnesses for Jesus Christ. I love verses 11 & 12 in today's readings - *"But in relationships among the Lord's people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. For although the first woman came from man, all men have been born from women ever since, and everything comes from God."* It's pretty hard to argue with this. We are all dependent upon each other. The Body of Christ is a community of believers. Men and women are not independent. We are dependent and interdependent on each other. And things do not come from men or women - everything comes from God. Great stuff. **Q: How does First Corinthians 11 stand out to you? What can we learn**

## from this chapter?

11/21 - Wow.. great verses from Paul today! I think most of us will recognize these words, or slight variations, as to how the Lord's Supper happens at many churches today. It is beautiful to come across these words in verses 23 through 26 in the context of Paul's overall letter to the Corinthians. It reminds me of how the Lord's Supper comes upon us at church in the midst of our often busy / distracted lives. We so need to hear these words and so need to receive the Lord's Supper: *"For this is what the Lord himself said, and I pass it on to you just as I received it. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and you, sealed by the shedding of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again."* **Q: How is the Lord's Supper experience for you these days? Do you consciously take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Jesus? Do you consciously realize when you participate in the Lord's Supper you are announcing Jesus' death until he comes again?**

11/21 - Paul's teachings in verses in 27 through 29 are something for us to take note of: *"So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup unworthily, not honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself."* **Q: How do these verses speak to you? Do you examine yourself before participating in the Lord's Supper?**

11/21 - First Corinthians 12 is once again another amazing chapter in this book! Spiritual Gifts and the Body of Christ... it gets no better! I love verses 4 through 7: *"Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church."* **Q: If you are a believer in Jesus as your Lord, do you believe that a spiritual gift has been given to you? Do you know what your spiritual gift is? Are you using your spiritual gift as a means of helping the entire church?** (I think my spiritual gift is a gift that Paul did not write about in this chapter - the gift of blogging! :)

11/21 - I love Paul's discourse on the Body of Christ. Verse 26 stands out: *"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad."* This makes me wonder about the Body of Christ in our world today. **Q: Do you think that there are Christians in our world today who are suffering? Who are starving? Who are being persecuted? Who are dying of AIDS? And... if there are Christians - part of the Body of Christ just as we are part of the Body of Christ - who are suffering, are we sharing in the suffering with them in any way, shape, or form? If we are not, are we ignoring part of our Body? As Casting Crowns put it in their big hit Christian song - "If we are the Body, why aren't His hands healing? Why is His love not showing them there is a Way?" Why?**

11/21 - Today in First Corinthians chapter 13 we will read verses that you have likely heard many times at many weddings. It is the "Love" chapter of the Bible. This chapter goes way beyond just romantic or marital love – it gets at how we live our very lives each and every moment in relationship to all of creation. In verses 1 through 3 we read: *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."* **Q: How do these verses speak to you? Do you notice the juxtaposition of the concept of love and the concept of nothingness? Do you see that without love there is nothing? Do you believe that if we live our lives without love, we are nothing? Even if we have amazing spiritual gifts. Even if we have faith that can move mountains. Even if we give away all of our possessions to the poor. If we do not have love, we are nothing. We gain nothing. We give nothing. Do you see how important love is in our lives? Do you see that we must live each and every day from a starting point of love? Why do you suppose Paul spends this entire chapter telling us about the importance of love? Do you think that God is love and wants us to be love as well?** I love (pun intended :) how this chapter ends: *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."* Amen and amen.

11/22 - First Corinthians chapter 14 is an interesting chapter. I personally have not spoken in tongues - nor heard it as far as I know. But, I do know many people that have both spoken in tongues and heard it and have heard interpretations. I do think Paul makes it clear in this chapter that both speaking in tongues and prophecy are gifts. I do think we do well to

pay attention to Paul's conclusion to today's readings in verses 15 through 17: *"Well then, what shall I do? I will do both. I will pray in the spirit, and I will pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will sing in words I understand. For if you praise God only in the spirit, how can those who don't understand you praise God along with you? How can they join you in giving thanks when they don't understand what you are saying? You will be giving thanks very nicely, no doubt, but it doesn't help the other people present."* Bible.org's commentary on speaking in tongues is [at this link](#). **Q: What are your thoughts on speaking in tongues and prophecy in the church these days?**

11/22 - The One Year Bible Companion book dives into the question "Does 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 mean that women should not speak in church services today?" I encourage you to pick up this book, as it is invaluable in going through the One Year Bible and covers great questions like this. I will share with you a little bit of their answer on this today - "Women have much to contribute and can participate in worship services. In the Corinthian culture, women were not allowed to confront men in public. Apparently some of the women who had become Christians thought that their Christian freedom gave them the right to question men in public worship. This was causing division in the church. Paul was asking the women not to flaunt their Christian freedom during worship. The purpose of Paul's words was to promote unity, not to teach about women's role in the church." Thank you Tyndale for this Q & A. **Q: What are your thoughts/experiences with women's roles in church services today?**

11/22 - We read beautifully true words from Paul today in First Corinthians chapter 15 verses 3 & 4: *"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me--that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said."* And then there are some interesting words from Paul in verses 17 through 19: *"And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ have perished! And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world."* He immediately follows up these verses with this statement in verse 20: *"But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again."* This is quite a chapter from Paul about the Resurrection of Jesus and the Resurrection of the dead! **Q: I think the key question we each need to ask ourselves is: do you believe that Jesus was born on this earth 2,000 years ago, is the Son of God, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for your sins, and on the third day rose from the dead? This is the question on which all of Christianity - and your personal faith in Jesus - hinges. So, what say you?**

11/22 - In verses 5 through 8 today six resurrection appearances of Jesus' are mentioned. Below is a full list of Jesus' resurrection appearances from Zondervan's NIV Study Bible:

1. The empty tomb (not an appearance per se - but no body was in the tomb - the first indication of the resurrection)
2. To Mary Magdalene in the garden
3. To the other women
4. To two people going to Emmaus
5. To Peter
6. To the ten disciples in the upper room
7. To the 11 disciples in the upper room (including Thomas this time - see painting below)
8. To seven disciples fishing on the Sea of Galilee
9. To the 11 disciples on a mountain
10. To more than 500
11. To James
12. To the disciples at His ascension
13. To Paul on the road to Damascus

**Q: What does the Resurrection mean to you personally?**

11/22 - Today in First Corinthians chapter 15 verses 42 through 44 and 49 we read: *"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. . . And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."* **Q: Have you thought much about heaven? Have you considered life after death? Do you believe that there will be a resurrection of the dead? Do you believe that your body will be raised imperishable? That your body will be raised in glory? In power? Do you believe that there is a spiritual body, just like we now know our earthly body? Are you looking forward to bearing the likeness of Jesus in heaven?**

11/23 - We wrap up Paul's first letter to the Corinthians today! What an amazing book! I have been blessed immensely by it this year. I hope you have too? I like Paul's instructions to the church in Corinth in chapter 16 verses 1 through 3 today: *"Now about the money being collected for the Christians in Jerusalem: You should follow the same procedures I gave to the churches in Galatia. On every Lord's Day, each of you should put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned and save it for this offering. Don't wait until I get there and then try to collect it all at once."* I love this last sentence! It made me smile. Paul knows how us humans are - back then and now - we like to procrastinate! We like to do things at the last minute if we can. Well, I concur with Paul that our giving to our churches should be a regular thing. With each pay check we should "put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned." Really, as I think about it, giving of money to our churches with each paycheck is an act of worship. We are worshiping God with our finances. Let us not wait to give to our churches. Let us give faithfully and regularly with each paycheck God blesses us with! **Q: How is your giving going these days? Do you joyfully give?**

11/23 - Sad stuff that Demetrius stirs up the Ephesians against Paul for one primary reason - his pocketbook. Paul's preaching of the one true living God was cutting into D's profits of handmade gods. And so D called on patriotism and loyalty to Artemis to go against Paul's truthful teaching. **Q: I wonder if we in our lives today ever choose our finances over God? Have you ever chosen finances over God? How does this play into your giving/tithing?** An interesting note from today's readings is that the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World". Jesus obviously is the One wonder of the entire world - ever ancient, ever new.

11/23 - Today we begin the book of Romans! What a great book we have coming up! We've been reading about Paul's missionary journeys, the storm at sea, and being in chains for the Gospel in Acts. Now get ready to read and study some of Paul's teachings first-hand! Some commentaries say that the book of Romans is a "Bible within the Bible." And others: "The most profound book in existence." Personally, I think we need to obviously consider all 66 books of the Bible to be the Bible and the entirety of the Bible to be the most profound book in existence. But, yes, Romans is a profound book of the Bible no doubt! Martin Luther said this about Romans: "It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes." Not a bad quote for us to jump into the book of Romans this week! Let's go!

## **Romans**

Author: Paul

Place: Corinth

Date: A.D. 57/58

Content: Paul was in Corinth on his third missionary journey and was planning to go to Rome, but had never been there before. This letter was written to introduce himself to the church and to summarize his theological teachings. For the latter reason, it is the most systematically organized letter of Paul. He begins by showing the universal sin of man. Neither Gentile nor Jew has any legitimate claim upon God because sin has invalidated any appeal. But God in his mercy stepped in, while we were still sinners, and opened the way back to himself (Romans 5:8). From this may come a victorious Christian life. Paul then deals with the place of the Jews in God's plan (Romans 9-11), concluding with a series of ethical exhortations.

Theme: The righteousness of God, his righteous dealings with the world, and the righteous plan of salvation are the focus of this book. God is seen to be the great and holy God of the universe who cannot relax his laws because they are based upon his nature. But consistent with those laws, he devised a plan of salvation for Jews and Gentiles alike that sent his Son down from heaven to die for the sins of the world. Now anyone who trusts in Jesus will be saved (Romans 10:9) and be given the power of God over sin in his life. From God and his love nothing can separate the believer. (Romans 8:38-39) *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 24)*

More commentary on Romans is at these 3 links –

[http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=843](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=843)

[http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=1153](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1153)

[http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=1165](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1165)

Bob Deffinbaugh says at this link directly above – "If you can reason your way through Romans, you will have the Gospel under your belt. . . . As you begin this study, I would challenge you to review the Book of Romans often in your mind, seeking to trace its argument from the very first chapter to wherever your study has brought you. It is my hope that you will then seek to apply what you have learned in your own life, and to share the message of the Gospel it contains with those who are lost and without hope, apart from the faith this Epistle describes and defines. May God bless you in your study of this portion of His Word."

11/23 - How powerfully strong are Paul's words in Romans chapter 1 verses 16 & 17 today! In fact, the NIV Study Bible's commentary says that these two verses are the theme of the entire book of Romans: *"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes--Jews first and also Gentiles. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life.""* **Q: Do you believe these two verses to be true? Are you not ashamed of the Good News about Jesus Christ? Do you believe that God makes us right in his sight by faith?**

11/23 - Wow... Paul's writings today in Romans are such a true and stern warning about the dangers of sin. I really can't imagine how sin can be written about much more truthfully. Verse 21 is a strong warning: *"Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused."* I do believe that this is such an accurate description of what sin does to our minds - it makes our minds dark and confused! Things can get so fuzzy and hazy in our mind due to unchecked sin that we can even get to the point of where we do not realize we are sinning. How sad to live life knowing God, but not worshiping him or even giving him thanks. And then to come up with wacky ideas of what God is like.... **Q: ever hear any wacky ideas about God out there? :**) The result is that people's minds become dark and confused because of sin... sad. Let us live our lives so that we share the Light of the Gospel of Jesus in the dark places in the world.

11/23 - Today's readings in Romans chapter 1 verses 18 through 32 consist of Paul describing the sin of the Gentiles, which is probably most of us. In chapters 2 & 3 Paul will describe the sin of the Jews. So, these chapters set the stage that all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God - Gentile and Jew alike. Yep, that covers each of us. An interesting thing to note from today's readings is that Paul writes about **"general"** revelation - meaning, God is revealed to all people in all times generally through nature. In addition to general revelation, there is also **"specific"** revelation - God is specifically revealed to us through his Word and his son Jesus. But, as Paul writes today, general revelation is enough for all people to not have any excuse to not believe in God and to continue on in our sin. And yet, sin we do... Thank God for sending us the specific revelation each of us knows about - and hopefully we each personally know - God's own son Jesus!

11/24 - Again... wow.. Paul's writings in Romans are so convicting and true. So many verses in today's readings bring out so much. One verse that stood out to me was 16 in chapter 2 - *"The day will surely come when God, by Jesus Christ, will judge everyone's secret life. This is my message."* This is powerful to consider. **Q: Do you have a secret life? Do you realize that Jesus will judge your secret life? So, really, is there such a thing as a secret life after all? It will all surely come out into the Light and be judged. Do you have skeletons in your closet? Will you confess those skeletons/sins to God right now and repent of them immediately?**

11/24 - Paul's writings in Romans 3 verses 7 & 8 today are so powerful for us to remember always: *"But," some might still argue, "how can God judge and condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory?" If you follow that kind of thinking, however, you might as well say that the more we sin the better it is! Those who say such things deserve to be condemned, yet some slander me by saying this is what I preach!"* Have you ever thought in any way along the lines of "well, it doesn't really matter if I sin?" This is such risky thinking. Let me highly encourage you to read the Bible to see what it says about sin and in particular these early chapters in Romans. **Q: In reading these chapters in Romans do you see the risk, and really the stupidity, in continuing in unchecked sin?**

11/24 - Today in Romans chapter 3 verses 22 through 24 we read – *"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* Please take a moment to re-read these verses and meditate upon them. **Q: How do they speak to you? Do you believe that humans are righteous on our own? (One way to consider this is to imagine what a city would look like without a police force, for example – think we would just naturally be good and kind and righteous to each other? Or might there be crime and maybe even anarchy and survival of the fittest – ala Lord of the Flies. . . ) Do you believe God is righteous? Do you believe we can be made righteous before God through faith in Jesus? Have you sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? Are you justified freely by God's grace and through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ?**

11/24 - I want to focus a bit more on verse 24 because I think this is one of the most important concepts for us to

understand: we "*are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*" Justified. That's an important word to understand! Per the NIV Study Bible, Paul uses the Greek verb for justified 27 times, mostly in the letters of Romans and Galatians. The term describes what happens when people believe in Jesus as their Savior. God declares them to not be guilty and credits (or imputes) righteousness to them. Jesus' righteousness is credited to believers as their own, with a few key characteristics that we read in verse 24 (look at this verse above again): 1. It is freely given as a gift, 2. by God's grace, 3. through the redemptive act of Jesus on the Cross, where He paid the price for our sins and redeemed us, 4. and through faith. Got all this? :) **Q: Have you been justified with the free gift of grace and faith through Christ's redemption? If not, today will you dive into the river of everlasting justification through faith in our Lord Jesus?** Please jump into the river of faith!

11/24 - We have great writings by Paul today in Romans how we are declared righteous before God! Chapter 4 Verse 4 is powerful - "*When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work.*" Our right relationship with Jesus is a gift. We do not work to earn it. It is given to us as a gift. Our right relationship with God is not because of our work - but because of Jesus' work on our behalf on the cross. **Q: Have you accepted the gift? If not, will you accept Jesus' invitation to receive this free gift today?**

11/24 - Paul's writings about Abraham's faith are wonderful in today's readings. Verses 9 & 10 stands out: "*Well, what about Abraham? We have been saying he was declared righteous by God because of his faith. But how did his faith help him? Was he declared righteous only after he had been circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? The answer is that God accepted him first, and then he was circumcised later!*" These verses are an example of Abraham being accepted into a right relationship with God through faith - not works (circumcision in this case). I do believe our good works are desired and appreciated by God - he wants us to ultimately live holy & loving lives where we love God and love people. But, faith in Jesus and acceptance by God comes first, then our good works for the Kingdom come as fruits of our faith. Abraham was an example of this as we read in verse 3 - "*For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous."*"

11/25 - Wow. Romans 5 verses 1 & 2 are so true: "*Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.*" It is important to note that these verses are talking about more than just a "sense of peace." They are talking about literal "peace with God"! Peace with God is gifted to us through faith in Jesus' life, death and resurrection to redeem us from the depravity and consequences of our sin. **Q: Have you experienced literal peace with God?** I know that we do not always "sense the peace" with God - but I do not think it leaves us once we've entered into an eternal right relationship with Jesus. I think we can certainly distract ourselves enough or make ourselves worried or frantic enough that we might think the peace is gone. But eternal peace doesn't ever leave us. I do think we need to take time to connect with and rediscover Christ's peace within us each and every day. Reading, prayer and meditation on Scripture are great ways to do this. I have also found getting outdoors and taking a walk in nature helps me connect with Christ's peace again. **Q: What are other ways that you connect with Christ's peace within you?**

11/25 - Verses 3 through 5 are incredible today as well: "*We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us--they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*" Note that these verses are not saying to rejoice "because" of problems and trials (that would be morbid), but that we can still rejoice even "when we run into" the problems and trials. It is often difficult for us to remember to rejoice when problems and trials come our way - but please do remember these words of Paul in Romans about rejoicing during a time of trial. Remember our readings in Acts? Paul was ridiculed, beaten, jailed and shipwrecked - and yet, he never gave into a defeatist attitude. He kept preaching God's love! If anyone knows about trials and problems, it is Paul. And he tells us to rejoice through problems and trials because in this we learn to endure. I love that Paul says that character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation! And that this expectation will not disappoint! **Q: Do you believe this? Do you have a confident expectation of salvation?**

11/25 - Wow... I don't know what it is about Romans this year, but it is speaking to me like never before. For those of you that have gone through the Bible multiple times, you probably know how this is. One year a book will kinda sorta speak to you - God's Word always does. And then the next year a book will just blow you away with its wisdom. Romans is one of

those books for me this year... Paul's words in Romans 5 verses 6 through 8 today spoke to me right away: *"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."* This is so powerful to think about. Jesus died for us sinners. Think about how selfless this is. **Q: Would you die for someone right now? Perhaps your family or maybe someone who is especially good, as this Psalm says. But would you die for a liar, a thief, a cheat, or a hopeless addict?** Maybe so... but probably not. Jesus came for us. He died for us. Us thieves. Us liars. Us cheat. Us addicts. He came to save us! **Have you been saved by Jesus?**

11/25 - We are now called friends of God as Paul tells us in verse 11: *"So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God--all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God."* **Q: Do you rejoice in knowing that you are a friend of God? If someone were to look at how you interact with others and how you spend your time and your days, would they know that you are a friend of God? Do you often spend quality time with God like you would with any other friend? Do you think spending time with God is more valuable than anything else you could do in this world?**

11/25 - Today in Romans chapter 6 verses 17 & 18 we read: *"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."* **Q: Do you believe that you were ever a slave to sin? Is it possible that you are still a slave to sin now? How can you be freed from being a slave to sin? Or, better yet, Who do you think can free you from being a slave to sin? Are you wholeheartedly obeying the teaching to which you have been entrusted? Where can you consistently find the teaching to which you have been entrusted? Do you consider yourself a slave to righteousness? Do you like the idea of being a slave to righteousness?**

11/25 - Great writings by Paul in Romans 7 today about the Law! I love how he wraps up today's readings in verses 12 & 13 by saying: *"But still, the law itself is holy and right and good. But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my doom? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commandment for its own evil purposes."* Great theology in this chapter today! Indeed - the law itself is holy and right and good. But, we couldn't keep the law and sin tempted us to break the law. And thanks to Jesus, Paul tells us in verse 6 today: *"But now we have been released from the law, for we died with Christ, and we are no longer captive to its power. Now we can really serve God, not in the old way by obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way, by the Spirit."* We now serve God by the Spirit! We are free indeed! **Q: How are you living your life in the Spirit? How do you recognize the Spirit in your life today?**

11/25 - Romans chapter 7 today has some amazing teachings about struggling with sin. I imagine that all of us at one point or another have concurred with Paul - and remember this is the apostle Paul writing this! - in verses 15 through 17: *"I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things."* These verses get at Original Sin in a big way. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Sin can live inside of us and make us do evil things that we hate doing. What do you suppose - or Whom do you suppose - frees us from this bondage to sin? Jesus. Yes, Jesus frees us. How? He paid the penalty on the cross for our sins. And he gives us the free gift of salvation and the Holy Spirit to free us from the bondage of sin. Take a look at these verses again above from Paul. **Q: Is sin living inside of you making you do things you hate? Do you want to be free from this slavery to sin? Will you pray to accept Jesus as your savior today and allow him to free you from you bondage to sin?** Please do. It's the best decision you will ever make. Please spend a few minutes prayerfully at this website - <http://needhim.org/>

11/25 - Wow... I love Paul's writings today in Romans 8 verses 12 through 14! *"So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."* **Q: How do these verses speak to you? Can you imagine that these words were written for you and your life today? Do you believe that you have no obligation whatsoever to do what sin urges you to do? Are you led in your life today by the Spirit of God?**

11/26 - Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion has a very interesting Q & A today on Romans 8 verses 24-25: *"Now that we are saved, we eagerly look forward to this freedom. For if you already have something, you don't need to hope for it."*

*But if we look forward to something we don't have yet, we must wait patiently and confidently.*" Tyndale's commentary says: "In Romans, Paul presents the idea that salvation is past, present, and future. It is past because we were saved the moment we believed in Jesus Christ as Savior; our new life (eternal life) begins at that moment. And it is present because we are being saved. But at the same time, we have not yet fully received all the benefits and blessings of salvation that will be ours when Christ's new kingdom is completely established. That's our future salvation." This is pretty amazing to consider that our salvation is past, present and future! **Q: Do you appreciate being saved from your past? Are you living fully for God in the present? Are you waiting patiently and confidently for the future?**

11/26 - Today in Romans chapter 8 verses 27 through 29 we read these famous words of Paul's: "*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" **Q: Do you believe that we are more than conquerors through our relationship with Jesus? Does it encourage you to know this? Are you living your life in such a way that truly reflects that you know that you are more than a conqueror? Do you believe that there is absolutely nothing in this world that can separate you from the love of God because of your relationship with Jesus as your Lord and Savior?**

11/26 - Powerful readings from Paul today in Romans chapter 9! In verse 5 we read one of the clearest statements in the New Testament about the deity of Jesus! "*Their ancestors were great people of God, and Christ himself was a Jew as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.*" Paul says here that Jesus is God! **Q: So, what say you? Is Jesus God?**

11/26 - A portion of verse 6 made me think about Christians today: "*Not everyone born into a Jewish family is truly a Jew!*" **Do you think that everyone born into a Christian family today is truly a Christian?** I know our various denominations will have various degrees / times / ceremonies that will mark becoming a Christian. But I think many of us would agree that just because you are born into a Christian family doesn't mean that you are necessarily Christian. Meaning, I think there has to come a time in each of our lives where we consciously believe in faith that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. We need to own our faith at some point - not just be a "cultural" Christian because that's what our family and friends are. I believe at some point in our life we need to enter into relationship with God through his son Jesus through faith. Let us pray for our friends and family members who are perhaps currently "cultural" Christians. Let us pray that they will enter into a loving and growing relationship with God through Jesus. Side note - I was prayed into the Kingdom by some amazing friends! (thanks Chad & Becky & Becky & others!) It is true. Prayer for your friends and family is powerful. Please pray for them tonight... **Q: Who are you praying for today to become a Christian?**

11/26 - In Romans chapter 10 verse 1 today, Paul reminded me of the modern-day ministry called [Jews for Jesus](#): "*Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is that the Jewish people might be saved.*" Paul was certainly a Jew for Jesus! **Q: How about you - are you a Gentile for Jesus? Or perhaps you are also a Jew for Jesus? Whoever you are - are you for Jesus?**

11/26 - Without a doubt, Romans chapter 10 verses 9 & 10 are the most important verses some of us will read this year and really take to heart: "*For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.*" **Q: Do you believe these verses to be true? Have you prayed these verses with your heart and your mouth to God? If not, will you today?**

11/26 - Romans 10 verses 14 & 15 are a powerful call to share the Gospel with a world that so desperately needs it! "*But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*" **Q: Are you bringing good news to people in your life? Do you realize that you do not necessarily need to go abroad to share the Gospel with people who really have probably never heard it before? Yeah, sure, maybe in our hometowns people have heard the name Jesus. But have they really heard about the love and life and forgiveness and healing that Jesus offers? Do they really know who Jesus truly is? How will they know unless you tell them? Will you utilize the gift of your beautiful feet?**

11/27 - Paul bursts out in some great praise and worship of God today in Romans 11 verses 33 through 36: *"Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? And who could ever give him so much that he would have to pay it back? For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen."* Great stuff! I love that second to last full sentence that tells us that everything is intended for God's glory. So true. And yet so easy for us to forget. You my friend are intended for God's glory! It is a beautiful truth to consider. **Q: Are you living your life fully for God's glory? Are there any areas of your life that would not be seen as giving glory to God? Will you let those un-glorious aspects of your life go? Will you walk fully in the LIGHT of God's glory?**

11/27 - Wow! Could Romans chapter 12 be one of the most powerful chapters in the Bible?? I love this chapter... Please take a moment to re-read this chapter if you can. Verses 1 through 3 have been so powerful for me personally since the early days of my Christian walk - *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* I really don't know what commentary I could add to these words of Paul's. I love the thought of our bodies being living sacrifices to God. (There is of course the old joke that the only problem with a living sacrifice is that it tends to crawl off the altar... :) And the warning to not conform any longer to the pattern of this world is so so so true.... and we all know it. But I find myself still falling prey to the pattern of this world. Its temptations do not cease. But! We can be transformed by the renewing of our minds to test and approve what God's will is. Through a loving and growing relationship with Jesus, we can overcome the temptations and the death this world will offer us all too frequently. **Q: In view of God's mercy, will you offer your body today as God as a living sacrifice? How will you do this?**

11/27 - Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion has a great overview of three historical interpretations of how Christians are to submit to the government per Paul's writings in Romans chapter 13 verse 1 today: "1. Some Christians believe the state is so corrupt that Christians should have as little to do with it as possible. 2. Others believe that God has given the state authority in certain areas and the church authority in others. Christians can be loyal to both and can work for either. They should not however confuse the two. 3. Still others believe that Christians have a responsibility to make the state better. They can do this politically by electing high-principled leaders. None of these 3 views advocate rebelling against or refusing to obey the government's laws or regulations unless those laws clearly require you to violate the moral standards revealed by God." Bible.org's commentary on this subject titled **"The Christian and Civil Government"** is [at this link](#). I lean toward a mix of #2 and #3 these days. I think there is much value in Christians paying attention to local and national and international governments, and getting involved. **Q: How are you involved in your local and national government?**

11/27 - How incredibly powerful are Paul's words in Romans 13 verses 8 through 10 - *"Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law. For the commandments against adultery and murder and stealing and coveting--and any other commandment--are all summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to anyone, so love satisfies all of God's requirements."* Wow... great stuff. Love satisfies all of God's requirements. **Q: Do you believe this to be true? What type of love do you think Paul is talking about here? A passive love? An active love? Who is the last person you paid the debt of love to? Who is the next person you will pay the debt of love to? Will you pay the debt of love to somebody in your life each and every day?**

11/27 - Paul's writings in Roman's chapter 14 about the dangers of criticizing and judging others are powerful! I love verses 12 & 13: *"Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God. So don't condemn each other anymore. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian's path."* Wow... that is something for each of us to consider. That we ourselves can actually put obstacles in another Christian's path toward God! **Q: Do you think that you have ever done this in your life?** I do think that I have. Never intentionally. But, when I have stopped loving and serving others and instead began judging and criticizing others, I do believe I have placed obstacles in other people's paths! Not to mention my own path! Let us pray that we are not obstacles to others by judging and criticizing...

11/28 - Romans 15 verses 2 and 3 definitely give us much to think about: *"We should please others. If we do what helps them, we will build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn't please himself."* That's a bit of a counter-intuitive statement

compared to what our culture preaches. We should please others? I think our culture would say instead, "We should please ourselves! It's all about you! You are #1!" and so on. This is the beauty of the Gospel. It is counter-cultural in so many beautiful ways. It's the great revolution. It turns the world upside down. The last shall be first. Blessed are the peacemakers. Rejoice when you are persecuted. We should please others. **Q: So, are you living your life to please others? Are you doing what helps them? Are you building them up in the Lord?**

11/28 - Paul's words in Romans 15 verse 30 stood out to me today - "*Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Do this because of your love for me, given to you by the Holy Spirit.*" The thing that stood out to me in these verses is Paul's encouragement to his brothers and sisters in Christ in Rome to pray for him. Not only to pray for him - but to "join me in my struggle." That is pretty powerful to consider. That we can actually join someone in their struggle - in their work for the Kingdom of God - by praying for them! And I'll be honest - I do not do this enough. I rarely join my pastors and family and friends and spiritual mentors in their struggle by praying to God for them. I rarely join my missionary friends in their struggle by praying for them. I rarely join my brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted in other countries for being Christian by praying for them. I simply do not pray for others enough. And in not doing so, I honestly think I am missing out on something powerful. I am missing out on joining them in their struggle for the Kingdom of God! My selfishness in not praying for others doing Kingdom work in this world is my loss. But - this actually sounds selfish - "my missing out - my loss." Sometimes I guess I try to trick myself into doing something good (praying for others) by attaching a selfish reason (so I won't miss out). The truth here is that our pastors and priests and missionaries and spiritual mentors need us to take up the struggle with them by praying to God for them. Even Paul needed this prayer coverage - and he asked for it! I am afraid that too often our pastors and priests and missionaries and others doing God's work may not ask us for our prayers. But they need them! **Q: So - are you regularly praying for others in your life who are in ministry? Are you joining them in their struggle? Will you begin today / tonight by praying for someone in your life that you know who is in ministry? Will you take up the struggle with them?**

11/28 - We finish up Romans today! Romans has been a powerful book for me to read and study this year. I hope it has been for you as well? I love the closing words in this book today from Paul in Romans 16 verses 25 through 27: "*God is able to make you strong, just as the Good News says. It is the message about Jesus Christ and his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they might believe and obey Christ. To God, who alone is wise, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen.*" **Q: Do you believe that God is able to make you strong? Are there areas of your life currently where you feel weak? Will you turn these areas over to God completely, so that he can strengthen you?** To God, who indeed alone is wise, be the glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

11/28 - Today we begin Paul's Second Letter to the church in Corinth! Corinth was a city known in the 1st century for its wealth and lust. It was a trade center with thousands of sailors who disembarked there. Its pagan temples encouraged the practice of sexual immorality along with idol worship. Thus, this was not an easy place for the early church! But clearly a place where the church was so needed! Below is a map of where Corinth is in Greece - it is about 48 miles west of Athens.

### ~ **Second Corinthians** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Ephesus

Date: A.D. 57

Content: Paul's earlier letter to the Corinthians had not settled all of the problems. It had some good effect upon them but much more remained to be done. In particular, Paul had to settle the problem concerning his own authority. Deep suspicions had been aroused concerning him, for what reasons we do not fully understand. But in great anguish Paul writes to reestablish his own apostolic authority. He also attempts to deal with some more practical matters, like supporting the poor believers elsewhere.

Theme: Triumph over adversity is seen throughout this letter. It is a very personal one, written by one who loved his people but had been deeply wronged by them. As Paul catalogs the experiences of his life and the nature of the Christian ministry, it is possible to see the grace of God at work bringing good from evil. Satan is active, seeking to destroy God's work, but God is greater still, establishing those who trust in him. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 25*)

11/28 - I love that Paul calls Jesus the "Divine Yes" in today's readings in Second Corinthians chapter 1 verse 19 in the NLT! Here are verses 18 through 20 in the NIV - "*But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and*

"No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." Amen! **Q: Do you realize that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises in the Old Testament? The Law pointed to Jesus in the OT and the Law is fulfilled in Jesus. The sacrificial system pointed to Jesus in the OT and the sacrificial is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is indeed the Divine Yes! In your life each and every day, is Jesus your Divine Yes?**

11/29 - I absolutely love and appreciate Paul's words today in Second Corinthians chapter 2 verses 14 through 16: *"But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those being saved and by those perishing. To those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume."* What great imagery! Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God! I love it. It does get sad - but true - in verse 16 when Paul says that to those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. **Why do you suppose this is?** I think it because when someone is living their life completely enslaved to sin and they encounter the light - the fragrance - of the Gospel, they either will embrace it or push it away. Unfortunately I am afraid some folks - perhaps even us in our past - are so enslaved to sin that the sin literally makes us fear / flee from the light and fragrance of the Gospel. Unfortunately sin can ensnare someone such that the Gospel is the fragrance of death and gloom because that is where the sin is leading someone who is enslaved to it - to death and gloom. Sad... and this reminds us of how urgent it is for us to pray for others who are enslaved to sin. Let us pray the fragrance of the Gospel and the grace of God will turn them back toward the Savior of the World who can free them forever - Jesus Christ. **Q: Jesus - is there a name more fragrant to you?**

11/29 - I love Paul's words in Second Corinthians verse: *"Clearly, you are a letter from Christ prepared by us. It is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on stone, but on human hearts."* That is a great concept! **We are living letters from Jesus sent out to the world! Have you ever thought of yourself as a letter from Jesus?** I have not, but I like it! It's also interesting to realize that the Spirit living within us as Christians professes and gives witness to the glory of God oftentimes without us even realizing it. I heard a quote once that said something like, "Who you are is so strong that I cannot hear a word you are saying." Basically this quote means that the inherent nature of who we are overshadows our very words. It's more important than our words - people notice our inherent nature! Be it good or be it not so good... So, if the Spirit of Jesus is within us I do believe that the Holy Spirit gives witness and gives glory to God to others that we come in contact with - even if we don't say a word! This is the letter that we are from Christ to the world. The letter that is written on our hearts. And of course there is St. Francis of Assisi who said: "Preach the Gospel at all times - use words only when necessary." Again, the Spirit of Jesus within us preaches the Gospel to the world even without us consciously saying words. Don't get me wrong - sometimes words are exactly what are needed. But oftentimes our very presence through the Spirit of Jesus living within us is more than enough. So, let us go forth into our world this week as living letters from Jesus to a hurting and dying world that so needs the Good News of the Gospel! **How are you like a letter from Jesus to others in your life today?**

11/29 - I love Second Corinthians chapter 4 verse 1 today. In fact, if there is nothing else you remember from today's readings I hope you will remember the last 4 words of this verse always - *"And so, since God in his mercy has given us this wonderful ministry, we never give up."* We never give up. That is powerful for each of us to remember. Why? Because we will have good and bad days. Days when we are happy. Days when we might be feeling sad. And there will be days when we make mistakes. When we will stumble. When we will fall. But you know what has often gotten me through days like those? This simple prayer or statement or something that fortunately comes into my mind - "I'm not giving up!" We shouldn't say this as justification for our falling short of God's plan for our life. But, when we do fall short, I have found it helpful. Or, if I haven't fallen short, but bad stuff is happening to me, I say it. And I don't say it just to myself - as if my own will power will get me through the tough times. I say it to God. I say it really as a prayer. I say it almost as a statement against the devil, who would love nothing more than for us to give up. The devil would love it if we stumbled and stayed on the ground. If we decided this Christianity thing was just not for us. But you know what - don't give up! When times are tough. When you stumble, pray it to God - "I'm not giving up." Tell it to yourself. We're not giving up! We're never giving up.... **Q: How have you learned to persevere in your life and never give up? Do you still need to learn to never give up in some areas of your life?**

11/29 - Verse 7 today is indeed a wonderful reminder that we humans are but jars of clay - *"But this precious treasure--this light and power that now shine within us--is held in perishable containers, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone*

*can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own."* We really do have very fragile bodies. They are wonderful! But they are fragile. They break. They will die. As one writer puts it, "our condition is terminal." And it's true. This side of heaven, our bodies will eventually wear out. But - as Paul tells us in this verse - there is light and power that shines within us when we are in relationship with Jesus! The Holy Spirit indwells our earthen vessels. Our jars of clay. And hopefully we and others recognize that the glory within us is not our own. It is of God. And it is a glory that is available to anyone. Free of charge. It is grace and it beckons us to receive God's glory in our jars of clay so that we will live eternally in heavenly bodies. But for now, we are simply in the hands of the Potter... **Q: How do you see God's light and power shining within you? Especially in your "jar of clay" body, how do you see God's power shine?**

11/29 - Paul's words in Second Corinthians chapter 4 verses 16 through 18 are incredible for each of us to take to heart: *"That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever."* I don't know about you, but I confess that I all too often get caught up in the troubles we can see right now. I forget about the joys to come that will last forever. It's sad when I forget about the joys to come. There is so much hurt and disaster in our world that I am afraid all too often I focus only on these negative things and forget that this is a world where bad things happen. Through our faith and relationship with Jesus we will one day be in heaven where there will be no more tears. No more crying. No more suffering. But, this side of heaven, we will suffer. Each of our bodies will deteriorate and these earthly bodies will die. But, as Paul says in these verses above, though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day! I pray this is the case for you. I pray this is the case for me. **Q: Are you experiencing renewal in your spirit every day? How? Why?** Let us pray for renewal!

11/29 - Today in Second Corinthians chapter 5 verses 17 and 18 we read – *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."* How do these 2 verses speak to you? I have a hunch that you have probably heard the first of these 2 verses before? (Michael W. Smith has a child reciting this verse at the beginning of one of his Worship albums.) I find it interesting to consider the first verse – being a new creation – along with the second verse – because God reconciled us through Jesus. I absolutely love the first verse. If we confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, we are indeed a new creation. Our old self has gone and the new self has come. And why do we receive this amazing gift? Because the Creator of All has reconciled his Creation (us) to himself through Jesus and the ministry of reconciliation. We have been reconciled to God! This is a powerful thought to consider. It is a joyful thought! It is also a thought that should make us realize that there was a time in our life when we were not reconciled with God. And it should make us realize that there are people in this world right now whom we know who are hurting and are not reconciled with God. **Q: Are you reconciled with God through Jesus? Do you rejoice frequently in the Spirit and in prayers of thanksgiving that you are a new creation? Are you working and praying for reconciliation for your family and friends and others God has brought into your life? Do you believe that they want to leave their old self behind and become a new creation?**

11/29 - I love Paul's opening words in Second Corinthians chapter 6 verses 1 and 2 today, as he quotes from the prophet Isaiah - *"As God's partners, we beg you not to reject this marvelous message of God's great kindness. For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you." Indeed, God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation."* **Q: How does this verse speak to you? What does it mean to you? Do you believe that God is ready to help you right now? Do you believe that today is the day of salvation?**

11/30 - Second Corinthians chapter 7 verse 1 today is powerful - *"Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God."* **Q: How does this verse speak to you? What promises do we have as followers of Jesus Christ? In light of these promises, should we cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body? And cleanse ourselves of everything that can defile our spirit? Are you living your life in such a way that you are moving toward complete purity? Do you believe that the Cross of Jesus Christ purifies you? What does the Cross of Jesus ultimately purify you for?**

11/30 - Second Corinthians chapter 7 verses 9 & 10 teaches us a great lesson - *"It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow."* **Q: Do you believe that God can use sorrow for**

**redemptive purposes? Do you believe there is such a thing as godly sorrow? Can sorrow turn us away from sin and toward salvation? Have you ever experienced such a sorrow?** I know that I have. There have been times in my life in the past where I was pursuing the false glamour of sin. And that pursuit of sin delivered great sorrow. But, thanks be to God for that sorrow! It was a godly sorrow that turned me away from sin and toward God's salvation. So, if you are experiencing sorrow in your life right now, or when you do, please seek God in the midst of the sorrow. Perhaps the sorrow was not caused by your sin, as it was in my case. But perhaps God can still use that sorrow ultimately for his redemptive purposes.

11/30 - Second Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9 today is one of those verses that can really make you think about how blessed you truly are and why through Jesus: *"You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich."* I imagine that most of us reading this blog right now are living pretty nice lives overall. In most respects it may be fair to call us "rich." Many of us have rich lives in terms of where we live, our spiritual freedoms, and other freedoms. And why do we have these riches in our lives today? Because Jesus, the Son of God, came to this earth and made himself poor for our sakes. Jesus was born in a manger. He lived his life "homeless" in many ways. He was sinless, but yet died a criminal's death by execution on a cross. Jesus was very rich in heaven. But yet, because of his love and kindness, he made himself poor and died on a cross for us, so that we would be "rich." **Q: And now, realizing this, how are we utilizing our riches? Are we demonstrating love and kindness to others like Jesus did to us? Are we investing our lives - lives that were given to us by God and saved by Jesus - for Kingdom purposes? Are you living your life as if you are literally working for God in all that you do?**

11/30 - Second Corinthians chapter 8 verse 23 stood out to me today - *"If anyone asks about Titus, say that he is my partner who works with me to help you. And these brothers are representatives of the churches. They are splendid examples of those who bring glory to Christ."* I like that last sentence a lot. I believe each of us are called to be splendid examples of those who bring glory to Jesus! **Q: How is your example these days? How are you bringing glory to Jesus in your life these days?**

11/30 - Today in Second Corinthians chapter 9 verses 6 through 8 we read these words of Paul's - *"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."* Great verses! A lot of ground is covered in these verses. **Q: Do you believe that we reap what we sow? What are you sowing? What have you decided in your heart to give? Do you give without reluctance? Do you give without compulsion? Are you a cheerful giver? Do you realize that God graciously gives you all that you need so that you will participate in good works? Are you participating in God's grace that he is freely giving to you?**

11/30 - Wow... I love Paul's words to the church in Second Corinthians chapter 10 verses 3 through 5: *"We are human, but we don't wage war with human plans and methods. We use God's mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil's strongholds. With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas, and we teach them to obey Christ."* This is incredibly powerful for us to realize. We are human. God is God. We are not God. But, good news is that we have access to God's "weapons" through our relationship with his son Jesus. And trust me. In this fallen world, we need God's weapons. We need his strength. We need his grace. We need his forgiveness. We need his miracles. We need his Son. These are the only ways that we will knock down the Devil's strongholds in our lives and in others lives. How do we access God's mighty weapons? My personal opinion is that prayer is one of the best things we can do in this regards. I don't know about you, but I do not pray enough. However, just lately I've been praying a bit more, and I'll tell you, God has moved! Prayer is such a beautiful mystery. We need it like the air we breathe. Please pray. Other ways to access God's mighty weapons are certainly reading and studying God's Word daily, investing in a church community at least weekly (even more is better via small groups, etc.), and confessing and repenting and fleeing from sin. Then, with God's weapons we are called to introduce others to who God is and teach them to obey Christ. **Q: How are you accessing God's mighty weapons these days? Are you praying? Are you reading and studying the Bible daily? Are you investing in a church community weekly? Are you confessing and repenting and fleeing from sin? Or are you relying on your human plans and methods to make it through the day? Are you relying on worldly weapons? Will you seek instead God's mighty weapons?**

**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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