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

SECOND CORINTHIANS 11:1 - REVELATION 22:21 (daily reading schedule at: www.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com)

12/1 - Paul's words in Second Corinthians chapter 11 verse 14 are some of the scariest words in Scripture for each of us to take to heart: *"Even Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light."* **Q: Do you believe these words of Paul's are true? How would you know if something that appears to be good on the surface is not really good at all?** Let us pray for discernment in this regards! Let us not ever be fooled by Satan and his disguises!

12/1 - Amazing words from Paul today in Second Corinthians chapter 11 verse 30! *"If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am."* Why would Paul say he would rather boast about things that show how weak he is? Why would Paul want to be weak in any way? Why would you or I want to be weak in any way? If you must boast, what are you boasting about these days?

12/1 - Paul's words in Second Corinthians chapter 12 verses 7 through 10 about the thorn in Paul's flesh are so powerful for each of us to consider for our lives today as well! *"But to keep me from getting puffed up, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, "My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* Biblical commentaries can basically all agree that we do not know what Paul's "thorn" was. There is some interesting speculation out there. Some think that the thorn in Paul's flesh was perhaps something that literally affected his flesh - a health issue of some sort. Some think it could have been a disease of the eyes, epilepsy, or even malaria. Whatever the thorn was, it was something that affected him very seriously. And it kept Paul humble in the midst of his incredible ministry. **Q: Why do you suppose that Paul was given a thorn in his flesh? Do you suppose you or I might have thorns in our flesh today? What might those thorns be in your life today? And why might those thorns be there? Is there anything you can learn from Paul about your thorns? Can you learn to live with the thorn in your flesh realizing that God's power in your life actually works strongest when you are weak? Do you believe that God's power can actually work through the thorn in your flesh for God's glory? Will you accept where you are weak, so that in that area of your life God will be strong?**

12/1 - Paul's words in Second Corinthians chapter 12 verses 20 and 21 were written for the church in Corinth. But, imagine if you will that these words were written to you and me today... *"For I am afraid that when I come to visit you I won't like what I find, and then you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfishness, backstabbing, gossip, conceit, and disorderly behavior. Yes, I am afraid that when I come, God will humble me again because of you. And I will have to grieve because many of you who sinned earlier have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure."* **Q: What would Paul find if he came to visit our lives today? Would he find quarreling, jealousy, outbursts, selfishness, backstabbing, gossip, conceit, or disorderly behavior? Impurity? Sexual immorality? Eagerness for lustful pleasure? Or - instead, would Paul find peace, joy, love, giving, and purity in our lives? Would we grieve Paul or make him joyful? Better yet, let us reflect upon what Jesus would find in our lives if He came back today? Would our lives grieve Jesus in any way?**

12/1 - I love Paul's words today in Second Corinthians chapter 13 verse 11! *"Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Rejoice. Change your ways. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you."* Imagine that these words were written to you. **Q: Are you rejoicing? Are you changing your ways? Are you encouraging others? Are you living in peace? Is God's love with you this very moment? Is God's peace with you now?**

12/1 - Acts 20 verse 7 is a great look at an early church service! *"On the first day of the week, we gathered to observe the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching; and since he was leaving the next day, he talked until midnight."* Paul preached until midnight? That had to have been one great sermon I am sure! Well, and yes, Paul raised to life a young man named Eutychus who fell from the window sill during his sermon if you didn't notice! Wow... that's amazing. I honestly think I've

kind of flown by this little tidbit before. Paul raised Eutychus from the dead! **Q: Have you ever heard a sermon that went long and yet was so powerful the time flew by and you didn't notice the length? Do you enjoy hearing a good sermon preached? Are you okay if it goes long?**

12/2 - Wow. Check out Paul's words in Acts 21 verse 13 after it was prophesied that he would be jailed in Jerusalem: *"But Paul said, 'Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus.'"* **Q: What about you? Are you ready to be jailed for your faith? Are you willing to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus? These are challenging questions to consider I realize. But, I think they are useful for us to ask. If we are not ready to be jailed for our faith or not willing to die for the sake of Jesus, are we truly following Jesus? Or are we just pretending?**

12/2 - Wow... tough week for Paul in today's readings. Scary how the readings end today – with the mob chanting “Kill Him! Kill Him!” Does this remind you of anyone else? Perhaps Paul's Savior? You might be asking why did Paul agree to take part in the Jewish purification ceremony in today's readings? I think you'll find the answer to this question in Paul's own words from his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 21 verses 19 through 23 – *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."* **Q: How about you in your life today? Do you make yourself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible? Do you become all things to all people so that by all possible means you might save some?**

12/3 - We get some classic Paul in today's Acts chapter 22 readings! You'll recall from yesterday's readings, the crowd in Jerusalem got riled up against Paul and the crowd was beating on Paul. Then, some Roman soldiers come to try to keep the peace and end up arresting Paul and putting him in chains. But what does Paul do? Go quietly into that good night? No way! He speaks to the Roman commander in Greek - which surprises the commander. (It is thought that Paul spoke 4 languages - Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew & Latin) And then he speaks to the crowd in Aramaic. The crowd that was just beating on him! He turns around and speaks with Love and Truth. So amazing... **Q: What do you think you or I would do in this type of situation today? Could we continue to speak Love and Truth to people that were just beating on us?** I am not so sure that I could... I pray that I could! I pray that I would..

12/3 - Today at the end of Acts 22 Paul threw out this incendiary statement that shocked the crowd: *"But the Lord said to me, 'Leave Jerusalem, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!'"* This reminds me that the Gospel today still shocks people. The Gospel is still moving forward in our world to people that we sometimes may not think "deserve" it, like this crowd didn't think the Gentiles deserved relationship with "their" God of Israel. God is bigger than we think He is. God is pursuing the whole world. Let us pray he continues to shock crowds like he did in Acts 22... It's so interesting - looking at this image below of Paul's presence and words creating chaos in a crowd and the Roman guards being there in the midst. This is so reminiscent of Jesus' final day in Jerusalem before he walked up the hill to Golgotha. **Q: Think Paul was emulating his Savior? How about you? Are you emulating your Savior? Or are you playing it safe?**

12/3 - Our readings in Acts 23 today open up with a very encouraging word to Paul from Jesus in verse 11 - *"That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, 'Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have told the people about me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome.'"* That is awesome that this occurred in the midst of all of Paul's trials and imprisonment. Jesus was there with him. **Q: How about in our lives today - think Jesus is always with us? Is there any circumstance you can find yourself in that Jesus won't be there? Is there anywhere on this earth you can go where Jesus won't be there?**

12/3 - An interesting note on Acts 23 verses 12 & 13 in today's readings - *"The next morning a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty of them."* It is believed by some scholars that these 40 men may have been part of the Zealots - the group that later led the [revolt against Rome in A.D. 66-70](#). Paul is taken to Governor Felix at the end of today's readings in Acts. Felix is in the same position that Pontius Pilate was. I find it kind of interesting that both Jesus and Paul were brought before the same-positioned Roman ruler. It reminds me of Jesus' words in John 15 verse 20 to his disciples - *"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."* If Jesus was brought before a Roman governor, it's no surprise that Paul was too. I think you and I should remember Jesus' words in

the Gospel of John as well. I know oftentimes we don't seem persecuted at all - maybe most of the time really. But, I think we need to remember, it can happen. If we are truly living our faith and truly following Jesus, persecution will come in some form or another. No servant is greater than his master... **Q: Have you ever been persecuted for your faith? Are you willing to be persecuted for your faith?**

12/4 - Today we read about Paul before the Roman Governor Felix in Acts 24. I love this image below of Paul expertly laying out his case! The close of today's readings are interesting. It seems to me that Felix has a double-edged reason for keeping Paul in prison for two years. 1. Felix enjoys talking to Paul! **Q: Why do you suppose this is? Do you suppose Felix was hearing the Truth from Paul?** I'm sure that he was... 2. Verse 27 tells us: *"And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish leaders, he left Paul in prison."* So, Felix gets to hear the Truth from Paul and hopefully keep his job by appeasing the Jewish leaders. **Sounds reasonable, right? However... it is interesting to see that he is balancing the Truth with the World. How often in our lives do we try to balance the Truth with the World?** I am afraid this is a tough balance to keep... Remember always that we are to be "in the world, but not of it." Don't let the World outweigh the Truth in your life...

12/4 - We see continued incredible wisdom displayed by Paul in today's readings in Acts 25! His appeal to Caesar may look like on first glance he was trying to save his life. Many commentators believe that Paul was actually doing this strategically to get to Rome so he could preach the Gospel in Rome! Yes, he'd be arriving in Rome as a prisoner, but, if we know Paul at all, we know that being a prisoner will not stop him from preaching the Gospel! I love this whole scenario. Paul certainly seems a bit "down and out" on the ways things are going in his life. He's been imprisoned for two years, he is barely avoiding being killed or beaten, and yet he's continuing to think of every way to preach the Gospel and advance the Kingdom of God! **Q: I wonder about this in our lives today? Are we like Paul in this regard? Are we constantly thinking of ways to preach the Gospel and advance the kingdom? My hunch is that most of us are living very nice lives - no real threat of being killed or imprisoned. And I sometimes wonder if our comfort is maybe the real enemy? Are we not focused on preaching the Gospel or advancing the Kingdom of God because we are simply too comfortable? I do think one of the devil's greatest tricks is to simply distract us. Not to get us to do evil. But to distract us. Make us too comfortable perhaps?** I don't know... I'm just so impressed with how Paul was so focused on the Gospel and building the Kingdom, in the midst of all his challenges. And I worry about why we are not so focused - and I think it might be our comfortable distractions...

12/4 - Today in Acts 26 verses 24 & 25 we read: *"At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable.""* Have you ever questioned your sanity when thinking about Christianity? :) Don't worry - I think it is okay if you have. I honestly think that Christianity is the most logical thing of all time - but, I do understand why many in the world may view Christianity as crazy. (or that maybe even we ourselves at times have thought "this is crazy") The bottom line is this - I believe every human being has faith in something. We may have faith in Jesus. Or we may have faith in a "cosmic being." Or we may have faith in crystals. Or we may have faith in atheism. (yes, I believe atheism is too a faith - in nothingness - but a faith nonetheless.) Or we may have faith in altruism or government or nature. We all have faith in something. Faith is our human nature. I believe the statistic is that 85%+ of the world's population believes in something beyond themselves. We are spiritual beings. And if then we are spiritual beings, then I think it is perfectly logical for us to seek out who our Maker truly is. And to seek out whom our Savior truly is. And to seek out what will lead us to Eternal life. I've gone through this seeking phase big time in my early life. And I do believe it was the Holy Spirit that led me to Jesus ultimately. And now, once in relationship with Jesus, I believe that Christianity is the most logical faith there is. **Q: Do you believe what Paul says to Festus in these verses? Do you believe that Christianity is true and reasonable?**

12/5 - Today in Acts 27 verses 1 & 2 we read: *"When the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of an army officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. And Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a boat whose home port was Adramyttium; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province of Asia."* In verses 10 & 11 Paul's wise advice about the storm is not heeded: *"Sirs," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on--shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and danger to our lives." But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul."* **Q: I wonder about this in our lives today - are we like the officer in charge of the prisoners and ignoring Paul's advice? Do we hear Paul's advice to us in his Epistles, and yet are we ignoring it? Are we instead paying attention to the ship's captain, or the world, rather than Paul, when a storm is indeed bearing down upon us?**

12/5 - In stark contrast to Saul in our First Chronicles readings, I love seeing Paul's leadership in action in today's readings in Acts 27! He shows big-time leadership through his encouragement in verse 22: *"But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down."* And then Paul also shows some leadership in a very simple thing, namely eating, in verses 33 & 34: *"As the darkness gave way to the early morning light, Paul begged everyone to eat. "You haven't touched food for two weeks," he said. "Please eat something now for your own good."* The best demonstration though of Paul's leadership I think was when he did what reminded me of his Savior's Last Supper in verse 35... *"Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it."* **Q: Does this action of Paul's remind you of anyone else you might know?**

12/6 - Today we finish the book of Acts! Romans begins tomorrow! Interesting segment in today's readings when Paul encounters the snake on the island of Malta. Everyone first believes that justice is being done, and that Paul will die by the snake. When he doesn't die, they then decide he is a god. Interesting... They were first cursing him, then suddenly worshipping him. **Q: I wonder if we do this in our lives too? Do we sometimes curse things one minute and then worship them the next? Do we sometimes even do this with God?** Let us pray for consistency in our lives and actions, in particular in the area of Who we worship.

12/6 - We then read in today's readings about Paul arriving in Rome and beginning to preach the Gospel just 3 days after he arrives! Paul wastes no time. He is so focused on preaching the Gospel that he makes it happen no matter what. I think we would do well to pay attention to Paul's zeal for the Gospel. **Q: Why do you suppose Paul was so zealous for the Gospel? Should we be zealous for the Gospel today like Paul was back then? Are you zealous for the Gospel today like Paul was back then?**

12/6 - Okay, in Acts chapter 28 we have a very important verse for all of us to pay attention to. Verse 28. These are Paul's last words recorded in Acts. Commentaries suggest that this verse is actually the main point of the book of Acts. So if you remember nothing else from the book of Acts, remember the book was about this: *"So I want you to realize that this salvation from God is also available to the Gentiles, and they will accept it."* Seems like such a simple verse... **Q: But do you see the weight of it? Do you believe that salvation from God is available to all? Have you accepted this salvation?**

12/6 - Today we begin Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus!

~ **Ephesians** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Rome

Date: A.D. 60 or 61

Content: Paul wrote this letter while a prisoner in Rome, his purpose being to comfort and encourage the believers in Asia Minor. He presents them with an overview of history, beginning in eternity past where God worked out his plans for the world, moving to the present where God is saving those who believe in Christ, and then to the future where all evil will be overcome. He points out that in the present there will be great conflict because our battle is with the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12), but because we are members of Christ's body, we have the power to withstand. Paul then deals with practical matters relating to living the Christian life: marriage, behavior, parents and children, and servants.

Theme: The basic idea in Ephesians is that God's eternal plan is being worked out through Christ and his body, the church. When a man believes, he is in Christ and finds salvation and safety. God had planned for this from all eternity and has given to the believer everything that he needs for his Christian life, but it is for him to avail himself of the resources at his command. Paul closes the book by describing the provision that God has made for the believer so that he may withstand the worst of Satan's attacks and when the battle is over, to be victorious. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 26)*

12/6 - There are so many amazing verses in Ephesians chapter 1 today! I love verse 18: *"I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people."* **How does this verse speak to you? Is your heart flooded with light today? Do you believe that your heart can indeed be flooded with light so that you can understand your wonderful future in Christ?** I love this imagery of our hearts being flooded with light! Let Jesus' light flood us today!

12/6 - Today in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 through 10 we read: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's*

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (NIV) **Q: Have you been saved by grace through faith? Do you believe that salvation is a gift that cannot be earned? Have you ever felt that you had to work for your salvation? What does Paul say about works related to salvation in these verses? Do you believe that you are God's very workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works? Do you believe that God has prepared good works for you to do in advance? Are you participating in God's plan for you life?**

12/7 - Wow, Paul's opening verse 1 in chapter 3 of Ephesians today reminded me that Paul literally wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus while he was in prison in Rome! *"I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus because of my preaching to you Gentiles."* I think if we keep this fact in mind, Paul's words in this letter become all that more poignant and powerful. **Q: Could you ever imagine yourself being a prisoner of Jesus because of your preaching the Word to others? I think this is something we should really consider. Would you go to jail for Jesus? Why or why not?** If you would go to jail for Jesus, then I challenge you to consider ways in your life that God may be asking to you indeed be like Paul "in chains for the Gospel" - even if you won't "literally" be going to jail any time soon. (I pray not!) Maybe those chains are that you don't spend as much time doing something that is counter-productive to the Gospel.

12/7 - Great teachings from Paul today about unity in the body of Christ! Chapter 4 verses 4 through 6 are beautiful - *"We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all."* **Q: Do you believe these words of Paul's? Do you believe that all of us in Christ are all one body? That we have the same Spirit? And that we have been called to the same glorious future? I like that last piece of verse 6 - God the Father is living through us all! Do you realize that God the Father, who is indeed over you, and is also literally living through you?** This is powerful to consider...

12/7 - Chapter 4 Verses 14 and 15 I think are so important for each of us to meditate upon: *"Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church."* The thing that these verses remind me of is that indeed at some point we are all "children" in our faith. When we are new to Christianity we are certainly children who need others to lead us, disciple us, and help show us the way. And I guess as I think about this, we should always be like children before God - but I don't think we should always be children before humans. Because if we remain as children before humans, then we are at risk of "forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has cleverly lied to us and make the lie sound like the truth." Has this ever happened to you? I know it has happened to me and it's scary to think about. I once heard a church pastor say that his most important job was to help his congregation become "self-feeders" when it comes to their faith. I thought this was fantastic and very wise! This pastor did not want his congregation to always rely on him and what he had to say on Sundays as their only source of spiritual food. This pastor wanted his congregation to be able to spiritually grow in other ways outside of Sunday services - through Bible study, small groups, and other spiritual disciplines. **Q: So, this may be a good time to ask - are you a "self-feeder" when it comes to your faith? Can you grow in your faith and find food for yourself spiritually outside of what you hear at church?** If you're new to the faith, I wouldn't stress about this - but think about it. I do think each of us should aim to become "self-feeders." Why? Well, if we don't then we are so reliant on the words of other people that we could be misled down wrong paths. The one thing that I think really is critical for each of us in our journeys of becoming self-feeders is reading, studying, and really meditating upon Scripture. If we can become well grounded in Scripture then we can filter through the lens of the Bible what others are telling us. It is amazing how much "spiritual stuff" or rules or rituals that I hear is so "important to practice" from others that I don't see in the Bible! In fact, as I'm typing all of this, I will also say that I sincerely hope you don't take anything I say on this blog as Truth - it's a blog trying to draw out some practicalities and questions and reflections and commentary based on the Truth, the Bible - but what I write is not the Word. As Paul writes in verse 15 today, instead of remaining forever children in our faith before people, let us *"hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church."*

12/7 - Wow. It is rare that I will copy & paste 8 verses in a row here on this blog - because you can simply read the verses by clicking on the link above. However - I think these 8 verses of Paul's in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 17 through 24 bear repeating here and warrant our re-reading and really meditating on these verses. Please take a few minutes to really reflect and pray on these verses - *"With the Lord's authority let me say this: Live no longer as the ungodly do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their closed minds are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They don't care anymore about right and wrong, and they have*

given themselves over to immoral ways. Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed. But that isn't what you were taught when you learned about Christ. Since you have heard all about him and have learned the truth that is in Jesus, throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness--righteous, holy, and true." Powerful verses above, eh? I love this teaching - there must be a spiritual renewal of our thoughts and attitudes! **Q: Has there been a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes? Is there currently a daily spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes? Or are you maybe on "cruise control" these days?** A great teaching I heard once is that "you are either moving forward or you are sliding backwards. There is no stable middle ground." I believe this to be true in our spiritual life. We are either moving forward - continually renewing our thoughts and attitudes and displaying our new nature - or we are sliding backwards. Backsliding as some may say. I pray that each of us today will really take to heart these teachings of Paul's in Ephesians. Let us throw off our old evil nature and our former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception! Let us each and every day spiritually renew our thoughts and attitudes through Christ Jesus our Lord!

12/7 - Ephesians chapter 5 is such an incredible chapter! I know I won't do it justice in this blog posting. There is so much I could dive into in nearly every verse. Actually, I will share this with you. I met with my Pastor a couple of days ago. And he shared with me that he is currently memorizing the entire book of Ephesians! I had shared with him that I'm just starting to memorize Scripture verses - and to invite you along with me on this journey at the bottom of each daily blog posting. Well, you know how Pastors are - they're always a step ahead! And my Pastor is memorizing the entire book of Ephesians... wow. He shared with me that as he's memorizing Ephesians he is amazed how some of the words and meanings of words of Scripture are coming alive to him in new ways! I believe it. **Q: I'm curious if anyone reading this today has ever memorized an entire book of the Bible? Or even a chapter? Please share if you have?** I have actually downloaded 1 Corinthians 13 onto my Blackberry and I am hoping to memorize that chapter soon! Okay, back to Ephesians chapter 5.

12/7 - Ephesians 5:1-2 touches on a theme I've been thinking a lot about lately - living a life of love! - *"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* (NIV) **Have you ever meditated on what it means to live a life of love?** I have occasionally. But I'm starting to camp out on this thought a lot more these days. I think it's in large part due to the impact 1 Corinthians 13 has had on me this past year. And it certainly fits in well with Jesus saying the 2 most important commandments are to love God and love people. But perhaps most significantly, I've been trying to live out this thought of "living a life of love" in real life a bit more these days. I definitely don't have it all figured out by a long shot! But I think living a life of love is something we should all seek. Not strive for. But seek. Or maybe "receive" is the better word. I think we can receive from Jesus the ability to live a life of love. I don't think we can get there on our own power. So, there's a lot more I could write about what I've been thinking about in regards to living a life of love. But let me at this point just encourage you to think about this concept. Living a life of love. **Q: Do you want to live a life of love? Think you can do this on your own? Or will you invite Jesus and the Holy Spirit into this process each and every day? How does [1 Corinthians 13](#) speak to you these days?**

12/8 - Ephesians chapter 5 verse 17 really stood out to me today: *"Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do."* I am wondering how often each of acts thoughtlessly? I am afraid in my case it is far too often. I can sometimes sleep-walk through my day - or even days - or even weeks... and miss the point of life completely when doing so! Paul teaches us here to try to understand what the Lord wants us to do. Why would we want to try to understand this? I think in large part so we no longer act thoughtlessly! I'm afraid we are far too often a thoughtless people in how we live our lives & how we waste so much time in our very short lives this side of heaven... **Q: How about you? Are you acting thoughtlessly at all these days? Will you seek to understand what God wants you to do? And then will you go do it and leave your thoughtless ways behind?**

12/8 - We wrap up Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus today! Ephesians chapter 6 verse 7 stood out to me today - *"Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people."* I realize the context of this verse is that Paul was writing it to slaves. However, I think this verse works very well today for any of us that work a full time job. I'm sure you've probably seen movies or TV shows that make fun of working and basically encourage folks to work as little as possible when they are on the job. I think this is a horrible idea! I had a friend tell me once that if you are acting like a slacker at one job - perhaps a job you really don't like and are trying to get out of - you'll end up acting like a slacker at your next job, even if your next job is your dream job. You'll goof up that dream job because it will be hard to break habit the habit of being a slacker... So - I think each of us would do well to take to heart Paul's words here in verse

7. Q: Are you working at your job with enthusiasm? Are you working each and every day as though you are working for the Lord? As such, are you not "stealing time" from your employer by surfing the net, socializing excessively, doing errands, arriving late, and this list could go on... If Jesus was your boss, would you act the same way at work that you do now? Well, is Jesus perhaps really your "boss" even if he isn't the one signing your pay checks per se...?

12/8 - Today we begin Paul's letter to the church in Colosse!

~ **Colossians** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Rome

Date: A.D. 60 or 61

Content: Paul wrote this letter while a prisoner in Rome to a city he had never visited. He had come to know of these believers while living in Ephesus on his second missionary journey, and now he was concerned because he had heard of some strange pagan theories that were creeping into the church. The views that were troubling the Colossians were a mixture of astrology, magic, and Judaism, which downgraded Christ to being just some sort of angel. Paul wrote to correct this error by showing that Christ is none other than God and possesses the fullness of the eternal God. Instructions follow concerning Christian living.

Theme: In this important letter of Paul's we are presented with a carefully worked-out defense of Christ's deity and glory. He is all in all and the believer has everything he needs in Christ. Paul warns that believers out not to be led astray by the foolishness and the false wisdom of men. Instructions for Christian living stress the power of God for men and the joy that believers may have by making use of all the resources that are theirs in Christ. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 27-28)*

12/8 - Colossians chapter 1 verses 15 through 17 are some of the most powerful statements in all of the Bible about Who Jesus truly is! *"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see--kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together."* **Q: Do you believe these words of Paul's are true? Do you believe that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God? Did Jesus exist before God made the Earth? Do you believe that Jesus holds all of creation together? Does Jesus hold you together?**

12/9 - I love Paul's teaching about the Christian life in Colossians chapter 1 verse 27 today! *"For this is the secret: Christ lives in you, and this is your assurance that you will share in his glory."* **Q: Were you aware of this secret? Does Christ live in you? Have you accepted Jesus into your life and your heart as your Lord and Savior so that he has your permission - your submission - for Him to live within you? Do you want Jesus to live in you? Do you have assurance that you will share in Jesus' glory for eternity?**

12/9 - Paul's teachings in Colossians chapter 2 verses 6 & 7 definitely stood out to me today: *"And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to live in obedience to him. Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him, so you will grow in faith, strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with thanksgiving for all he has done."* I absolutely love the thought of letting our roots grow down into Jesus and draw up nourishment from Jesus! Meditate on this thought for a while... I honestly haven't really ever thought about "having roots in Jesus." I mean, I certainly know Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I know Jesus lives within me. And I know the whole Chapter of John 15 about the vine & the branches has gotten me in the past to think about truly being attached to Jesus. But something about these verses from Paul about letting our roots grow down into Jesus really is profound for me today... **Q: How deep are your roots in Jesus today? Is there room for growth in your roots?** Let us grow! And let us overflow with thankfulness!

12/9 - Colossians chapter 2 verse 8 is a teaching from Paul that reminds me so much of our modern world today... *"Don't let anyone lead you astray with empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the evil powers of this world, and not from Christ."* **Q: Have you ever heard anyone in our world today offer you empty philosophy or high-sounding nonsense?** I know I have... And perhaps I've even preached it on occasion in my past too. Scary stuff. There is stuff out there today that does indeed come from human thinking - not divine thinking - and from the evil powers of this world - not from Christ. I think we need to prayerfully be so vigilant to protect ourselves from these empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense. I almost hesitate to write this... but I am feeling like I should. I

think we need to even watch out for empty philosophy and high-sounding nonsense in some churches today too. I really don't mean to be divisive to the body of Christ, the church, by saying this. But I say this for our own good - for brothers and sisters in Christ. One thing that I have seen in churches on occasion that has alarmed me is what I'll call "the cult of personality" around a pastor. Meaning, I think it can reach a point in a church where there is an unhealthy fixation on a pastor or minister. Don't get me wrong. We'll all probably have a favorite pastor or minister or priest. But let us be cautious if ever our devotion to a pastor surpasses (or gets anywhere near) our devotion to Jesus. It's then when the "cult of personality" can lead to empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense invading our hearts and minds. Maybe there is someone out there that needs to hear this... Just pray about it to Jesus if ever you feel that you are paying more attention to a pastor / priest / anybody than you are paying to Jesus. And ask Jesus what he would have you do. Perhaps it would be to move on to another church... A church where Jesus is clearly preached, worshiped, and followed. Trust me, there are multitudes of churches out there where Jesus and his work on the cross for your sins is preached. Make sure Christ and Him crucified is preached clearly at your church!

12/9 - I absolutely love the imagery Paul uses in chapter 2 verse 11 today: "*When you came to Christ, you were circumcised,*" but not by a physical procedure. It was a spiritual procedure--the cutting away of your sinful nature." The cutting away of your sinful nature! Isn't that profound to think about? It almost makes me feel 100 pounds lighter spiritually just thinking about it... Our old sinful nature was an old beast of a thing that bogged us down. Makes us slow. Makes us groggy. Keeps us foggy. But - Jesus can take the scissors of spiritual circumcision and cut away that old sinful nature! **Q: Doesn't this make you feel 100 pounds lighter to think about this? Doesn't this thought of cutting away the sinful nature make you want to never want to put on that old musty moldy deadly suit of sin ever again? Let us be free instead! Has Jesus circumcised you spiritually? Has Jesus cut away your sinful nature once and for all?** This all makes me think about butterfly coming out of its cocoon about to take flight... Let us fly!

12/9 - Colossians 3 verse 4 is so powerful and is really something each of us should reflect upon: "*And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*" Here is the thing that really stops me in my tracks when reading this verse: "Christ, who is your life." Those are 5 incredibly powerful words when put together! And I'm afraid that sometimes we don't really live our lives as if Jesus is indeed our life. He is! Or he should be... Here's the thing. I've had a lot of conversations over the years with fellow Christians about who Jesus is to them. And I've thought a lot about who Jesus is to me. And I think many of us can easily get to the point of saying, "well, yes, Jesus is my Savior." We can acknowledge that He died on the cross for our sins. He saved us. We're into salvation! But, I think sometimes it can get a bit fuzzier for us when we think about Jesus being our Lord - in addition to Jesus being our Savior. Meaning, if Jesus is our Lord, then we really need to take incredibly seriously and to heart Jesus' words and teachings in the Bible! And really allow Jesus to lead our lives. Transform our lives. Lord our lives. Well, I think this Colossians verse takes things even a step further. Maybe we're at the point where yes, Jesus is our Lord and Savior. But now, Paul here teaches us that Jesus is our very life! That's big... That's saying our life = Jesus. Jesus = our life. If you really stop to think about this and allow this into your heart you'll know how huge this is. Jesus is our life.... wow! That's very good news! Our job isn't our life. Our money isn't our life. Our health isn't our life. Even our family isn't our life - those these can all be good gifts. But none of these things are our life. Jesus is our life! **Q: Today, can you honestly say Jesus is your life? If not, will you begin to really think about this and pray about this? Is Jesus your life?**

12/9 - Verses 12 through 14 of Colossians chapter 3 are awesome! "*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*" **Q: How are you doing on each of these virtues in your life today - Compassion? Kindness? Humility? Gentleness? Patience? Forgiveness? Love? Do you think you can do each of these well using just your own will power? Or, do regularly pray to Jesus to give you these virtues within your heart and to bring them to fruition in your life? Can you allow love to lead within you? Will you allow Jesus to lead you?**

12/9 - Colossians 4:6 today is fantastic: "*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*" Let your conversation be always full of grace. **Q: How often is this true for us? Are there times when our conversation is un-graceful? Judgmental perhaps? Angry? Curt? But Grace... that's something to strive for in all of our conversations! If we are grace-full in our conversations, where does that Grace come from?**

12/10 - Today we begin Paul's letter to Philemon!

~ Philemon ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Rome

Date: A.D. 60 or 61

Content: A slave named Onesimus, who was owned by a Christian in Colosse named Philemon, had run away, ultimately making his way to Rome. Here he heard the gospel from Paul and became a believer. This letter was written by Paul to encourage Philemon to take Onesimus back, this time as more than a servant, indeed, as a Christian brother. There is a play on words in verse 11 where Paul says that now Onesimus (the word means “useful”) will in fact be Onesimus – useful both to Philemon and the ministry.

Theme: This short book is quite important in many ways. Two things stand out. First, we see the way in which the gospel worked. No one is beyond the reach of God. If anyone will trust in Jesus, he will become a new person. Second, the ancient barriers of class hatred are being broken down by the gospel – Philemon and Onesimus are now Christian brothers. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers “The One Year Bible Companion” pp. 30-31*)

12/10 - Verse 4 stands out to me in Philemon today - *“I always thank God when I pray for you, Philemon...”* **Q: How often do we tell our family or friends that we thank God for them? How often do we tell them that we pray for them? How often do we actually do both of these things?**

12/10 - Today we begin Paul's letter to the church in Philippi!

~ Philippians ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Rome

Date: A.D. 61

Content: Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome to some very dear friends in Philippi as a response to their sending some money to him in order to meet his needs. He begins by expressing his confidence in them and then describes some of the problems he faces in Rome. Whether he will die or not he does not know, but if death does come, he will rejoice in the presence of Christ. If he remains, he will continue to serve God by serving the churches. The example of Christ's humility is set before the Philippians as an example to follow. False teachings are to be vigorously rejected. Two quarreling sisters are admonished to make up and all believers are admonished to set high ideals for themselves because God will supply all that one needs in life.

Theme: In this very personal letter of Paul the theme of rejoicing may be seen throughout. If one lives, he may rejoice because God loves him. Christ died for him, and all things are given to him by God for his life. If one dies, then he may rejoice by being in Christ's presence forevermore. This does not mean that Christians will have no problems, however. Even as Jesus had to endure the cross, so we must be ready to follow that example of submission to God, if it must be. But we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:2) and should live with that thought constantly before us. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers “The One Year Bible Companion” p. 27*)

12/10 - In Philippians 1:21 today we read Paul's powerful words of: *“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”* **Q: How does this verse speak to you? Is this verse true for you? How so?**

12/10 - Our readings in Philippians chapter 2 today have some powerful verses on imitating Jesus' humility. In verses 3 & 4 we read: *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* **Q: Are you doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vanity in your life today? Are you humble? Do you consider others better than yourself? Do you look to the interests of others?** I realize these can be hard teachings to put into practice – in fact, it seems almost impossible in our modern world. But, let us remember that indeed all things are possible with Jesus Christ in our lives and hearts. Let us not give up on imitating Jesus' humility in our lives today. I pray each of us is becoming more like Jesus in some small or significant way each and every day. Don't stop the transformation process. Don't quench the Spirit. Let God change you.

12/11 - Philippians chapter 3 verse 3 is a great teaching from Paul - *“For we who worship God in the Spirit are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us.”* **Q: How do you worship God? Do you worship in the Spirit? Do you put no confidence in your own human efforts? Do you today boast to others about what Jesus Christ has done for you?**

12/11 - Great teachings from Paul today in Philippians chapter 3! Verses 7 through 9 are so very true - *“I once thought all*

these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him." **Q: How do these words of Paul's speak to you? Have you ever valued & loved "things" in your life more than your relationship with Jesus? Can you now look back and realize that those things - love of power, money, prestige, or material goods, etc. - are worthless because of what Jesus Christ has done for you on the cross? Can you now see that love of those things is garbage - garbage that can prevent you from growing closer to Jesus if you do not throw it out? Is there any garbage in your life today that you should be throwing out...?**

12/11 - Today we also read Paul's amazing teachings in verses 12 through 14 - *"I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven."* **Q: How about you? Are you all that you should be? Are you focusing all of your energies on reaching the end of the race and receiving the prize for which God is calling you? Are you forgetting the past? Are you looking forward to what lies ahead? Are you looking forward to heaven? In this race called life, is your focus on heaven as your prize?**

12/11 - Wow... so many great teachings from Paul here today as we close out his letter to the church in Philippi! Paul's letter to the church in Colosse begins in our readings tomorrow! I love Philippians chapter 4 verse 4 today - *"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again--rejoice!"* **Q: How does this verse speak to you? Are you full of joy in the Lord right now? Are you always full of joy in the Lord? Why or why not? Do you think Paul's teaching here is correct - should we always be full of joy in the Lord? Let us rejoice!**

12/11 - Chapter 4 Verses 6 & 7 are so very powerful for each of us to truly learn and put into practice in our lives today! *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."* **Q: Do you worry? Why does Paul tell us not to worry about anything? What did Jesus say to us about worrying in the Sermon on the Mount? What does Paul tell us to do instead of worrying? Pray. This is a powerful powerful thought! Think about this the next time you catch yourself worrying. You know that when you worry you are wasting energy and time. So, why not follow Paul's simple instructions here - when you catch yourself worrying, start praying. Really. Don't give one more minute or one more ounce of your energy to worrying. When you find yourself worrying, get down on your knees and pray! Tell God what you need - AND thank him for all he has done. Sure, it may be tough to thank God at your moment of worrying, but you should do so, in addition to telling him what you need. We should always thank God. And then... here's the beauty.... you will experience God's peace! His peace will guard your heart and mind as you live in Jesus! Let us each stop worrying and start praying! Actually... while I'm already down this path, think about this. **Do you think that you spend more time each day worrying or praying? Really, think about this. How many minutes a day would you say that you worry? And how many minutes a day would you say you pray?** My hunch is that worrying takes up far more minutes for most of us... Look at how we are wasting precious time on worrying! We don't have that kind of time... Let us pray!**

12/11 - And finally Philippians chapter 4 verses 8 and 9 are so beautiful: *"And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you."* **Q: What type of things do you think about typically? Do you typically think about what is true and honorable and right? Do you often think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable? Do you think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise? Or are you filling your mind with other thoughts? Thoughts that, like worry, are a complete waste of your precious time here on this earth? Will you instead put into practice Paul's teachings - and the teachings you have received this year from the One Year Bible - and allow the peace of God to be with you?**

12/12 - Today we begin the book of James!

~ James ~

Author: James

Place: Uncertain

Date: A.D. 45-49

Content: The book of James was written to Jewish Christians in order to provide them with some practical instructions in the Christian life. It contains many short proverbial sayings and reflects in a remarkable way the teachings of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. The problems addressed show the kind of difficulties that were troubling the church. We read of pride, discrimination, greed, lust, hypocrisy, worldliness, and backbiting. James writes to correct these evils by showing that faith without works is dead; that is, mere profession of faith is not enough. True faith will issue forth in a good life as surely as a good tree bears good fruit and not thistles.

Theme: James stresses the need for Christian living both to show the reality of one's inner faith and to show the world that the Gospel does in fact change lives. If a person says he is a Christian but is no different than when he was an unbeliever, what benefit has there been either for him or for the needy world? But in fact the Gospel does change lives and if we will commit ourselves to Jesus, we will find that from our living faith will flow living deeds of love and kindness. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 31-32)

12/12 - Today in James chapter 1 verses 2 – 4 we read: "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*" **Q: Are you facing a trial of some kind in your life today? Do you see the wisdom in considering this trial pure joy? Do you think it is possible that this trial will develop perseverance in your life? Maturity? Completeness? Will you persevere in this trial? Will you persevere with pure joy?**

12/12 - I like verse 17 today - "*Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows.*" Think about this for a bit - God is a God of no shadows. Pure light. Unchanging. No shadows. I like that thought of no shadows a lot... Of course, this means we can't hide out in God's shadows either! :) Praise God for his unchanging, un-shadowed & pure Light! And verse 18 is an awesome closing to the James readings today - "*In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession.*" Congratulations to you for diving into God's true Word today - the Bible! Please continue to accept the gift of God's true word by reading the Bible each day.... this will bless and change your life immensely. **Q: Do you realize that you are God's choice possession? Do you realize that you are a child of God? How does this affect how you live?**

12/12 - James' verses today again are all so powerful... I am enjoying this book immensely. Chapter 1 Verse 27 is a great reminder to care for the poor amongst us - "*Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.*" **Q: Are you caring for those in their time of trouble? Are you refusing to let the world corrupt us? Do you care for orphans and widows?**

12/12 - James chapter 2 verse 17 is a famous one - "*So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.*" Or, paraphrased, faith without works is dead. It's important of course to remember that works alone do not save us - only faith does through the grace of God. But, works naturally come through that saving faith. They are a natural by-product and demonstrate that we have a true and living faith. **Q: How does this verse stand out to you? What does it mean to your faith life?**

12/12 - James chapter 2 today continues in the strong words about good deeds accompanying a living faith. James' arguments are summed up in verse 26: "*Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.*" Another very interesting verse in this chapter that always jumps out at me is verse 19 - "*Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror!*" I had someone once tell me that they believed in God - but that they realized that so do the demons. The difference of course is that the demons are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, as are those who have faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. **Q: Still, a bit of a scary verse to think about, no?** Not necessarily for our own lives, perhaps, but maybe for others we know. Let us pray that we and others we know not only know God, but know Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit!

12/12 - James 3 verses 9 and 10 are powerful reminders on the danger of what can come out of our mouths: "*Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!*" How true is this... Reminds me of the old saying of being "two-faced". Or maybe having a forked-tongue? The key here to how we can control the tongue I believe is answered in verse 13 - "*If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise!*" If we can focus on wisdom and what's going on inside our hearts and minds, we won't have

to worry about what comes out of the mouth! **Q: How do you control your tongue?**

12/13 - James chapter 4 continues to just level me... This book is phenomenal. I need to read this book more than just once a year when I come around to it in the One Year Bible. The verse today that just made me set the Bible down for a minute and reflect was verse 4: *"You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God."* That is some heavy duty language... it pierced me in reading it today. **Q: Am I a friend of the world? Am I trying to be a friend of the world? Per this verse, where does this pursuit of the world put me with my relationship with God? Am I an "adulterer", in the sense of my relationship with God and the world?** (now, please keep in mind, I'm a huge fan and believer of grace... but sometimes we need to let verses like this really sink in. We need to reflect. And respond if need be... and let Jesus save us and heal us if need be...)

12/13 - And verse 8 is so true as well: *"Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you."* Another one to put into memory - and practice each day. **Q: Have you drawn close to God this very day? And has God drawn close to you?** Verse 14 I think is so helpful for us to remember - and to give Thanks for each day we have: *"How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog--it's here a little while, then it's gone."* Life is short. Every day is indeed a blessing and an opportunity to love and know God more. Please take advantage of each and every day God gives you. Diving into his Word each day through the One Year Bible is one amazing thing you can do every day. As is prayer of course!

12/13 - Today we wrap up the book of James. This has been such a powerful book for me to read these past few days! I am convicted and challenged by this book, which is wonderful. Today in chapter 5, verse 5 stands out: *"This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment."* This reminds me of the scene at the end of the movie "Schindler's List" where Oscar Schindler breaks down crying when the war is over - and after he has saved so many lives - and yet he cries out - "This gold pin - this pin could have saved a life! This car.... could have saved 10 lives!" **Q: This scene - and this verse - makes me ask myself if I am using my finances wisely? Am I investing in others? Are my luxuries taking away from other's very lives? Am I accumulating treasure when I could have been serving others?** I cannot encourage you enough to watch this scene in Schindler's List again if you haven't seen it in a while. Every time I watch this scene something happens to my heart that only God can explain... it changes me...

12/13 - Verse 9 stands out: *"Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you."* This is such a great reminder of Jesus' call to not judge others! Don't grumble about others. **Q: How often do we grumble about others? Are we grumbling about someone currently? Is this a healthy practice?** By the way, I have been bad about grumbling about others recently - in fact, I almost got sideswiped on a freeway recently by a guy who was not paying attention to where he was going. In all honesty, I have no idea how we avoided not hitting each other, but for the grace of God. I was so shook up by the near miss I was "grumbling" big time about this guy's carelessness. Interestingly and thankfully I was not cussing at him nor giving him bad gestures, but I was grumbling in my heart about how not smart I thought he was - and I immediately caught myself and asked God to forgive me for this sin. And I believe He did. Let us not grumble in our hearts about others. It is a sin.

12/13 - The first half of verse 16 is so true - *"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* **Q: Is there someone in your life you can confess your sins to? Someone you can ask to pray for you? Do you believe this practice will heal you of that sin?**

12/13 - And the last half of verse 16 also is amazing to remember - *"The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results."* **Q: Are you praying for others? Earnestly? Do you believe prayer has great power and that God listens and can bring about wonderful results?**

12/13 - This week we begin Paul's first and second letters to Timothy! These are very powerful letters to read because Paul wrote them toward the end of his life. Paul's second letter to Timothy was likely the last letter he ever wrote. Some call this letter Paul's "last will and testament." Please pay close attention to Paul's teachings in these letters this next week. We cannot hear the teachings in these letters often enough!

~ **First Timothy** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Uncertain

Date: A.D. 64

Content: This letter was written by Paul near the end of his life and he addressed it to his associate Timothy, whom he had left in Ephesus to correct some problems in the church. By this time problems had arisen concerning doctrine, church practice, church government, and various aspects of Christian living. Paul wrote to instruct Timothy concerning these matters so that the church would function properly. He also wrote to encourage Timothy so that he would not become weary in his Christian life, but would live wholly to the glory of God. There are some specific regulations given for the ordination of church officers as well.

Theme: The importance of right belief and right behavior form the theme of this book. Paul stresses that we must know the truth and defend it against the false doctrines that arise. We must also be very careful to live lives that are consistent with the truth so that Satan will not get an advantage over the people of God. The importance of dedicated and pure-hearted men to lead the church is also stressed. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 29*)

12/13 - First and Second Timothy and Titus are considered to be "The Pastoral Letters" because they provide instruction about the care of churches. We have some powerful teachings from Paul today in First Timothy chapter 1. One very interesting thing to note is that Paul uses the clause "This is a trustworthy saying" in verse 15. What's interesting about this is that this clause is found nowhere else in the New Testament except for its use 5 times in the Pastoral Letters to identify an important teaching. So, here is the important teaching in verse 15: *"This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'"* **Q: What do you think about this teaching?** So simple a teaching at first glance, and yet of course so profound in its meaning! I like how Paul starts off this letter to Timothy with a lot of humility.

12/13 - 1 Timothy 2 starts off with yet another reminder to pray for others... I love and need this type of reminder in verses 1 and 2... often! *"I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks. Pray this way for kings and all others who are in authority, so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity."* This is powerful. Pray for all people. Make requests for them. Plead God's mercy upon them. Give thanks. Pray for those leading our government. I think these verses are very appropriate during a time of local and national elections coming up. Pray for all of the candidates. Make requests for them. Plead God's mercy upon them. Give thanks. Pray. The other thing these opening two verses remind me of is to "Pray the News." I think often times we read about all of the bad news in the world and maybe feel a bit helpless or hopeless in the midst of it all. However, I strongly believe that God has blessed us with the ability to "Pray the News." Pray for earthquake victims, the people starving and dying in other parts of the world, the person who was in a car crash in your town, etc. etc. Pray for them. Make requests for them. Plead God's mercy upon them. Give thanks. **Q: Will you join me in "Praying the News" each day? Will you join me in praying for our politicians?**

12/13 - I realize that Paul's instructions for women in today's readings can be controversial. This is one of those days that if you have the Tyndale Publishers One Year Bible Companion to please read the 3 questions & answers for today. All 3 relate to these instructions of Paul's. Basically, the instructions for women in today's readings can either be interpreted as being: 1. historically conditioned - instructions just for the women of the church in Ephesus at that time and place or 2. universal and timeless instructions. Honestly, different Christian denominations interpret these verses different ways - but probably along one of the two lines above for the most part. The One Year Bible Companion does a great job of going down these 2 paths, with some detail placed on why the instructions could be being historically conditioned because of the Ephesian church having a unique case of prevalent false teachings. Overall, know that Paul did not forbid women from ever teaching or being active in church life. Priscilla taught Apollos, a great preacher from Acts. Phoebe worked in the church (see Romans 16:1). Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Eudia and Syntyche were all women who were the Lord's workers in the New Testament as well (see Romans 16:6, 12 and Philippians 4:2). If you want to dive into further study on 1 Timothy 2:15 today: *"But women will be saved through childbearing..."* please check out an in depth look at this verse on [bible.org at this link](#). **Q: What is your reaction to Paul's instructions for women from today's readings?**

12/14 - Paul's teachings in 1 Timothy 3 gives some great rules and regulations for leaders in a church. It all makes a lot of sense. I would encourage anyone who has interest in leading in your church - or if you are currently leading in your church - to prayerfully read through these. **How are you doing on these? Are there some areas in your life discussed here that need redeeming?** One of my favorite verses in all of these is verse 5 - *"For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?"* **How very true is that? How are you doing in managing your own household?**

12/14 - Verse 16 today beautifully demonstrates Jesus' divinity and his humanity!

*"Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith:
Christ appeared in the flesh
and was shown to be righteous by the Spirit.
He was seen by angels
and was announced to the nations.
He was believed on in the world
and was taken up into heaven."*

Q: Do you believe in everything written above? When is the last time you meditated upon the fact that Jesus ascended into heaven? I heard a Pastor recently say that he thinks the Ascension is one of the most overlooked facts of Jesus' life in the church today. Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the Father's right hand! This is very good news for us indeed!

12/14 - Today in 1 Timothy 4:7-8 we will read: *"Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."* **Q: How are you doing on training yourself to be godly? Do you believe this is something you can be trained in? Are you practicing spiritual disciplines on a regular basis?** Spiritual disciplines might include: prayer, journaling, quiet time, fasting, retreats, Sabbaths, reading the Bible :), to name a few.

12/14 - First Timothy 5:8 is a powerful teaching from Paul today: *"But those who won't care for their own relatives, especially those living in the same household, have denied what we believe. Such people are worse than unbelievers."* This is such a great reminder to care for our parents as they get older! I have seen some family members and friends do this for their parents - and uncles and other relatives - and it is such a blessing to see in action. This reminds me of the commandment of "Honor your father & mother." What a blessed way to honor your father and mother by caring for them when they are older!

12/14 - First Timothy 5:24 is so important: *"Remember, the sins of some people are obvious, leading them to certain judgment. But there are others whose sins will not be revealed until later."* There is so much I could say about this verse. First and foremost, I think each of us needs to consider this verse in our own lives. **Q: Are there sins in our life that no one else knows about? Do you think that God knows about these secret sins? Do you think those secret sins will indeed eventually be revealed?** I recently heard Dennis Prager (radio talk show host) talking about secrets. And basically he made the point that none of us should have secrets in our life because if we do those secrets will not "keep" - they'll spoil us inside and, worst case, someday they could explode in horrendous ways. Prager made the comment that someone in our life needs to know absolutely everything in our life. (not that everyone in our life needs to know everything - but at least one person does) He ranked this in order of who he thought should know everything about us: 1. your spouse 2. a good trusted friend. 3. a clergy or professional counselor. It was interesting that Prager did make the point that he didn't think that your child(ren) need to know absolutely everything - but someone does... Obviously, we all know that God knows everything about us. But, I think there is so much truth in that one of the key ways to rid ourselves of a secret sin is to bring it out of the dark and into the Light by sharing that secret with someone else. And if it's a continuing sin, ask that person for help and accountability. Let us not wait until we meet the Lord face to face for us to rid ourselves of the rotten burden of secrets! Let us shine a Light on the secrets now for healing & peace!

12/14 - Today we wrap up First Timothy! Second Timothy begins tomorrow! First Timothy chapter 6 today is full of great wisdom. Verse 7: *"Yet true religion with contentment is great wealth."* Are you seeking true religion? What is true religion? I think Paul gives some great hints to us in verses 11-14: *"Run from all these evil things, and follow what is right and good. Pursue a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight for what we believe. Hold tightly to the eternal life that God has given you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses. And I command you before God, who gives life to all, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a good testimony before Pontius Pilate, that you obey his commands with all purity."* **Q: Are you holding tightly to the eternal life that God has given you?** Hold tight!

12/14 - Verse 10 is powerful today - *"For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows."* It is important to note that the "love of money" is the root of all kinds of evil. Not money in and of itself - that's not the root of evil. But the *love of money*... this is a great distinction and a great truth. **Do you love money? If so, should you be worried about this? If we love money, might we wander from the faith and pierce ourselves with many sorrows?**

12/15 - Today we begin Paul's letter to Titus!

~ **Titus** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Uncertain

Date: A.D. 64 or 65

Content: Paul addressed this letter to an earlier associate of his whom he had left on the island of Crete to help strengthen the churches there. Titus' task was to ordain elders and to instruct the believers in the basic doctrines of the faith. It was necessary for Paul to go into some detail regarding the qualifications for the office of elder, and to give instructions for others in the church as well. During the course of these instructions, Paul touches upon the problems that face the servant of God and how these problems may be met.

Theme: The need for proper Christian living in the midst of the evil of the world is stressed by Paul in this letter. Around us we see the hostility and corruption of the world, but we must show by our lives what the grace of God can do. Such a life will have an impact, whereas mere words will do little or nothing. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 30*)

12/15 - The first two verses of this letter start so wonderfully! *"This letter is from Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to bring faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives. This truth gives them the confidence of eternal life, which God promised them before the world began--and he cannot lie."* **Q: Do you believe everything in these two verses? Does the Truth give us the confidence of eternal life? Is this a promise of God's that you've accepted? Do you believe Paul's teaching here that God cannot lie? Do you know that Jesus cannot lie?**

12/15 - The next few verses are great instructions for whom should be elders in churches. A portion of verse 8 really stands out to me: *"He must enjoy having guests in his home."* What a great verse! This really shows the importance of hospitality. **Q: Do you enjoy having guests in your home? When people invite you to be guests in their home, do you understand how incredible of an invitation this truly is? Do you allow them to share their hospitality with you?**

12/15 - Titus chapter 2 today is full of great wisdom from Paul! Please let these verses sink in. Verse 14 stands out: *"He (Jesus) gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing what is right."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus gave his life to free you from every kind of sin? To cleanse you? And to make you his very own? Are you totally committed to doing what is right? Has Jesus' life, death and resurrection freed you from sin?**

12/15 - In Titus 2:11 we read: *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people."* **Q: Do you believe this? What does God's grace mean to you? How have you experienced God's grace in your life? Has God's grace brought salvation to your life?**

12/15 - The first couple verses of Titus chapter 3 are interesting to me - *"Remind your people to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not speak evil of anyone, and they must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone."* Paul is reminding the church at that time to submit to governmental authority - to be obedient. And to do what is good. This reminds me of Jesus saying in the Gospels - *"give to Caesar what is Caesar's. And to God what is God."* So, there does certainly seem to be a call to be good citizens of the communities we live in - as we strive to be good citizens of the kingdom of God simultaneously. **Q: Do you think these two can happen simultaneously? Or are there points where there may be a conflict between our obedience to God and obedience to the world's civil laws & governments?**

12/15 - Today we begin Paul's second letter to Timothy, which was likely the last letter Paul ever wrote. Some call this letter Paul's "last will and testament!"

~ **Second Timothy** ~

Author: Paul the apostle

Place: Probably Rome

Date: A.D. 66 or 67

Content: This letter was probably the last letter that Paul ever wrote, and he addressed it to his former associate Timothy. It is a personal letter that expresses Paul's deepest feelings and the assurance that though his earthly life might end, God had eternal life waiting for him in heaven. Paul also reflects upon the faithfulness of God (who led him through his entire

life) and upon the coming desperate days when men would depart from the truth, refusing to acknowledge God as Lord. He exhorts Timothy to stand firm in the face of the coming persecutions.

Theme: The sovereign control of God over all things is the basic theme of this book. Although distress has come and will continue to increase, God is in control and those who trust him will have nothing to fear. Paul also adds his own testimony of faith, describing how he fought for the truth and will be rewarded by God in the end. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 29-30*)

12/15 - Second Timothy chapter 1 verse 6 is a very important teaching of Paul's that each of us should consider in our own lives: *"This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you."* Do you notice that Paul says "fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you"? What does this say to you? This says to me that when God gives us spiritual gifts, they don't typically come in full bloom all at once! The gifts are given, and then we are to partner with the Spirit of God in fanning the embers of the spiritual gifts into full flames! This is really powerful to think about. I think sometimes we think that once we're saved, that's it. We're done. We've got all we need and there's nothing more to do except wait for heaven. Well... I think once we're saved the spiritual adventure really begins! God's gives us spiritual gifts. He gives us Kingdom work to do on this side of heaven! **Q: Do you believe that you have spiritual gifts? Do you know what they are? If not, do you suppose that perhaps your spiritual gifts are currently embers and now is the time for you to "fan into flames the spiritual gifts God gave you"?** Let us fan the flames folks!

12/16 - 2 Timothy 2, verse 9 has a great verse for us One Year Bible readers! :) *"But the word of God cannot be chained."* Amen! Well, I suppose in theory one individual Bible could be chained (as you sadly see below), but not all Bibles. God's living and active Word overall cannot be chained! 2 Tim 2 is a great chapter today... just jam packed with wisdom. Verse 4 stands out: *"And as Christ's soldier, do not let yourself become tied up in the affairs of this life, for then you cannot satisfy the one who has enlisted you in his army."* **Q: How often do we become tied up in affairs of this life.... ? Every day? Every hour? More often than that... ? If we are constantly "distracted" by the affairs of this life, do we lose sight of Jesus? Do we distract ourselves so much so that we can't serve Jesus well?**

12/16 - Verse 21 is a great verse today: *"If you keep yourself pure, you will be a utensil God can use for his purpose. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work."* **Q: Will you keep yourself pure? Have you ever realized that you are indeed a utensil for God's use? :**

12/16 - Second Timothy chapter 2 verse 22 is so very true: *"Run from anything that stimulates youthful lust."* Notice that first word - Run. Flee. Go the other way. U-turn. Don't hang around. Run. **Q: Do you run from things that stimulate lust in your life? Do you really Run? How fast?**

12/16 - Verse 22 continues on with some encouraging words - *"Follow anything that makes you want to do right. Pursue faith and love and peace, and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts."* I like that - pursue faith. Pursue love. Pursue peace. And - "enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." **Q: I do pray you have some relationships like this in your life?** They can provide you such great rest and rejuvenation. A small group in your church may be a great way to find these types of relationships if you don't have them currently. Community can be messy & tough & scary at times - but it's so worth it! Please pursue community with other believers. And please do continue to have relationships with others who may not be believers in your life too. Be cautious in that sometimes those old relationships can bring us down or pull us back to old habits if we are not careful. That is why we most definitely need to have a community of those who call on the Lord in our lives as well. In community, let us pursue faith! Pursue love! Pursue peace! With pure hearts!

12/16 - 2 Timothy 3:1-5 are 5 powerful verses that deserve to be meditated upon by each of us: *"You should also know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control; they will be cruel and have no interest in what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. You must stay away from people like that."* **Q: How do these teachings of Paul resonate with you? Do you see parallels in today's modern world with these teachings? Are there some people in your life today that you should literally stay away from?**

12/16 - Okay, and then verses 16 and 17 just make One Year Bible bloggers like myself smile.... :) *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do."* **Q: Do you believe these verses to be true? Do you believe that Scripture is inspired by God? And useful to teach us what is true? And make us realize what is wrong in our lives? Is God's Word fully equipping you for every good thing God wants you to do?**

12/16 - Second Timothy chapter 4 verses 3 & 4 give a good warning for each of us today: *"For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths."* **Do we do this? Do we "look for" or "shop around for" teachers that we really like? Teachers that may only tell us what we want to hear? That may not challenge us with Truth? That may offer strange myths?**

12/17 - Today we begin the book of Hebrews! What a wonderful book. I read somewhere that this book is a "letter of encouragement." I do pray this book will encourage you. There is so much in this one! The author of the book of Hebrews is unknown. For many centuries, it was thought to be Paul. However, around the time of the Reformation it was thought that this letter was not from Paul, because the writing style is so different from his other letters - and because in all of his other letters, he identifies himself as the writer of the letter. Some now think that either Barnabas or Apollos were two of the potential writers of this letter. It was likely written before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70, because the temple is referred to as if it still exists in this letter. What I love about Hebrews is the multitudes of references back to Old Testament scriptures. As you read through Hebrews, I would encourage you to take note of how many OT scriptures this book is referring back to.

~ Hebrews ~

Author: Uncertain

Place: Uncertain

Date: A.D. 60-69

Content: This important letter was written to Jewish Christians who were perhaps thinking of returning to their old ways in Judaism. It was designed to show that now because Christ has come, there remains nothing in Judaism for the believer. The time of fulfillment has arrived and it would be futile to return to the old life which was inherently inferior to the new life found in the Gospel. This is justified by showing that in every way Christ is better – he is superior to angels, to Moses, and to the Old Testament priest. He mediates a better covenant and offers a better sacrifice. The life of faith that the Christian lives is also better than the old life, proof of this coming from the lives of Old Testament saints who showed the way by their lives of faith.

Theme: The overall superiority of Christ and the Christian life is the central theme of this book. Other religious systems have value, no doubt, but they cannot compare with the work that God has done in Christ. Not even Judaism, which has the Old Testament, can compare, great as it was. Christ is the very essence of God, who did God's work on earth by dying for our sins. What God requires of us now is trust in him. If we have faith then we have entered into the promises of God – fullness of life now and eternal life to come. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 31)*

12/17 - In Hebrews chapter 1, the first 3 verses set the stage incredibly well for this book - *"Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he made the universe and everything in it. The Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly. He sustains the universe by the mighty power of his command. After he died to cleanse us from the stain of sin, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God of heaven."* Wow... great stuff. We have indeed been reading recently about God speaking through Jeremiah in our One Year Bible readings. And here we are reminded that God is now speaking to us through Jesus. **Q: How do these 3 verses above speak to your heart? Has Jesus cleansed you from the stain of sin?**

12/17 - Hebrews chapter 2 starts strong with the first verse: *"So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it."* This is powerful. We must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we'll drift away from it. My thoughts here are that listening carefully in this sense also means listening often to the truth. Or reading often of the truth. Reading the Bible often. Say, every day? :) I think our human nature is such that we'll oftentimes hear something and it goes in one ear and out the other. We need repetition. We need a routine. We need the truth. Please don't drift away from it! **Q: What's your routine to stay close to God and not drift away?**

12/17 - Verse 12 is beautiful: *"I will declare the wonder of your name to my brothers and sisters."* Here Jesus calls those who believe in Him his "brothers and sisters." What a great thing! To be brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ! And in the gospels Jesus also calls those who believe in Him his "friends." This is incredible to consider. **Q: Who better is there to be your brother and your friend than Jesus?**

12/17 - And verse 18 is a great reminder that *"Since he himself has gone through suffering and temptation, he is able to help us when we are being tempted."* We all will go through temptations in this life. Don't feel bad if you are "tempted." Jesus himself was tempted by the devil in the gospels. The problem comes when we give into temptation and commit the sin. However, when in the midst of temptation, this verse reminds us to turn our minds to Jesus when we are being tempted - and he will help us! He has been there - he has been tempted. Another great tool to combat temptation is bringing Scripture to mind. In fact - this is exactly what Jesus did with the devil in the desert. Each temptation the devil threw at Jesus, Jesus combated with Scripture. What a holy sword Scripture is in the midst of temptation! To help us in the midst of temptation, memorizing Scripture regularly is a very wise practice. **Q: Do you memorize Scripture? Do you think it would help you in the midst of temptation?**

12/17 - Hebrews chapter 3 today is a great look at the lives of Moses and Jesus. The text today doesn't really dive into this point, but something I heard recently that is worth remembering - Moses introduced to Israel the Old Covenant (testament) via the Ten Commandments and laws. Whereas, Jesus ushers in the New Covenant to Israel and all of the world. So, this chapter goes into why Jesus is greater than Moses. Probably this Old Cov v. New Cov point alone would prove this to be true - but, obviously Jesus is also God in the flesh. Moses was simply a man. (albeit a great man in many ways!) Today in Hebrews 3:13 we read: *"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."* **Q: When was the last time you encouraged someone in their walk of faith? Will you encourage someone today? How does encouragement help us avoid sin's deceitfulness? Do you realize that sin is indeed deceitful? (sin sells you nothing but lies) Do you realize that sin can harden your heart?** Do you realize that one of the best ways to be free of the bondage of sin and a hardened heart is through encouragement of others in your church community? Sin is too strong for us to battle on our own. We need Jesus. We need each other. We need to be actively involved in a church community each week. Don't attempt to make a go of this life alone. . . it's far too risky.

12/17 - Verse 15 is repeated twice in today's readings, so it probably is something important for us to remember - *"But never forget the warning: "Today you must listen to his voice. Don't harden your hearts against him as Israel did when they rebelled.""* **Q: Are you listening to God's voice? How is the soil of your heart toward God? Will you let him plant new life within you? Will you let him pull the weeds that need to be pulled?**

12/17 - Hebrews chapter 4 verse 12 of course makes a One Year Bible blogger's heart happy :) - *"For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are."* **Q: Do you believe that the Word of God is full of power? Not just power, but Living power? Does it cut deep into your innermost thoughts and desires - and expose the condition of your heart? Does the Bible expose you for who you really are? Do you believe that the Word of God can do this? Will you let the Word of God do this?**

12/18 - Hebrews chapter 5 verse 10 today tells us this about Jesus: *"And God designated him to be a High Priest in the line of Melchizedek."* Who is Melchizedek? He first appeared in Scripture in Genesis 14:18-20: *"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."* Melchizedek was clearly important, as Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And Christ is a "High Priest in the line of Melchizedek." The thing to keep in mind is that most Bible scholars do not believe that Melchizedek was literally Christ. So, for us today, it's fine history to know. But, Christ is our High Priest, as this chapter of Hebrews makes clear. Verses 11 - 14 today are a great reminder that as Christians we must learn to become "self-feeders." We can't rely only on pastors and teachers and mentors to provide us with spiritual nourishment. We must learn to grow our relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit through our own study and prayer as well. I submit that the One Year Bible is one great way to feed yourself spiritually daily! **Q: How else are you feeding yourself spiritually these days?**

12/18 - Hebrews Chapter 6 verse 1 definitely stood out today: *"So let us stop going over the basics of Christianity again*

and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start all over again with the importance of turning away from evil deeds and placing our faith in God." I think sometimes we can get too caught up on the basics of Christianity and then never really grow in our faith. I do believe God is calling us first and foremost to come into relationship with Him through faith in his son Jesus. But, after that, let us grow! Let us no longer conform to our worldly ways and passions, even though we now have faith in Jesus. Let us become saints. Let us love and serve God, other people, and the poor more and more with each passing day. Let us go on and become mature in our understanding! Let us move forward from always being "disciples" to becoming "apostles." **Q: How is your spiritual growth these days? Are you growing? Do you want to grow?**

12/18 - Hebrews Chapter 7 is fascinating! It's basically an argument for why Jesus is our High Priest today - even though he is not from the tribe of Levi - the tribe of priests. Instead, the author of Hebrews argues that Jesus is immortal and is a priest in the line of Melchizedek. Most commentators I have read have said that Jesus is not Melchizedek nor vice versa. Basically, the author is making the case for the New Covenant - New Testament - that the Levitical priesthood line is completed by Jesus who is instituting a new covenant with Jesus as our High Priest. We need no other. We can go directly to God through Jesus. **Q: Do you believe this? Do you practice this? Do you pray in Jesus' name?** The name of our High Priest in heaven!

12/18 - Hebrews chapter 7 verse 27 teaches us today: *"Jesus does not need to offer sacrifices every day like the other high priests. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people."* I hadn't really thought a lot about this before. In the Old Testament the Levitical priests had to offer sacrifices first for their own sins - and then they would be clean / pure enough to offer sacrifices for others sins. The good news of course in the New Testament and in this chapter is that we now have the perfectly clean and pure High Priest of Jesus Christ - who does not need to purify himself first! He never sinned. **Q: Will you take your sins to Jesus, your High Priest?**

12/19 - Hebrews chapter 8 is awesome in that it dives into some verses we read recently in the book of Jeremiah about the new covenant! Verse 3 stands out: *"And since every high priest is required to offer gifts and sacrifices, our High Priest must make an offering, too."* What was the offering Christ made for our sins? Verse 13 stands out too: *"When God speaks of a new covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and ready to be put aside."* Something I learned recently - the old / first covenant referred to in this chapter is the "Sinaitic" covenant and not the Abrahamic covenant - the difference being not the promise to Abraham that his descendants will outnumber the stars in the sky and God will be our God and we his people (the Abrahamic covenant) - but the "Sinaitic" covenant are the laws given to Moses on Mt. Sinai and in the desert for how the Israelites were to live - including how priests would make sacrifices for sin. The Abrahamic covenant still stands today - the Sinaitic covenant is now out of date and ready to be put aside because it was completed by the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Our High Priest who offered His life for our lives. **Q: How is Jesus your High Priest these days?**

12/19 - Hebrews chapter 9 is a fairly brief reading today on the Old Covenant rules for approaching God. We also read today about the ark of the covenant. One thing that stands out in my mind when reading this chapter today is that just after Jesus dies on the cross there is an earthquake, which shakes the Temple in Jerusalem where the Most Holy Place was located at the time of Jesus' death. The curtain separating the Most Holy Place from the rest of the Temple is torn in two. This is incredible imagery that shows that no longer is the Most Holy Place and an earthly high priest the only way to God. Jesus has torn that veil in two and Jesus is our new and eternal High Priest ushering in the New Covenant!

12/19 - Hebrews chapter 9 verses 27 & 28 today teaches us: *"And just as it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died only once as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people."* This stands in stark contrast to the old covenant where the High Priest had to atone for the people's sins over and over and over again. With faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven all at once - for eternity - and Christ does not need to forgive us of our sins over and over and over again. Faith in Christ is the one and only thing that matters. **Q: Do you believe this?**

12/19 - Hebrews chapter 10 is powerful today! I did come across a great learning, which I hadn't really picked up before. In verse 9 we read this about Jesus: *"He cancels the first covenant in order to establish the second."* At first glance you might think, wow, the old / first covenant is over. Things like the Ten Commandments don't matter anymore. Well, not so fast! Tyndale's One Year Bible companion tells us that this verse refers to the doing away (canceling) of the system of sacrifices contained in the **ceremonial** law. However, this does not mean canceling / eliminating God's **moral** law (the Ten Commandments). Only through faith in Christ we can fulfill the moral law, as Jesus lives in us. **Q: Good to know, eh? I'd never really picked up this distinction before of Jesus canceling the ceremonial law but not the moral**

law. Do you see this distinction? As I've done some more reading on this, I realize this is a bit of a contentious point for many Christians. Check out this great overview of the Mosaic Law in light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection - including a disagreement on my point above about the moral law - [at bible.org at this link](#).

12/19 - Hebrews chapter 10 today is amazing! In verse 22 we read: *"Let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water."* Great stuff! The last few words of this verse remind me of the blessing of Baptism - as an outward sign of our inner transformation and faith in Christ. **Verse 24** is just pure joy & goodness: *"Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds."* Outbursts of love & good deeds indeed! Who are you encouraging these days to outbursts of love and good deeds? Can you think of some ways to do this? And **verse 25** reminds me of the importance of finding a church community to do life with together: *"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near."* Do you meet together with others in a local church? Have you found a small group, community group, or prayer group that you can spend some quality time with outside of regular church services? A group where you can encourage, warn, and pray for each other? **Verse 26** and the following verses are strong reminders of the one option we have for our faith - the one true God to follow: *"Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received a full knowledge of the truth, there is no other sacrifice that will cover these sins."* **Q: Is there another sacrifice besides Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that will cover our sins?**

12/20 - Today we read Hebrews Chapter 11, which is a great reflection of the faith of our spiritual ancestors in the Old Testament! Some call this chapter the "Hall of Faith" - as in the Hall of Fame. :) I would encourage you to read this chapter entirely today - and again tomorrow in its entirety. Chapter 11 opens with this critically important verse for us to memorize and take to heart: *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* **Q: Are you sure of what you hope for? Are you certain of what you do not see? As you read through this chapter, do you see the value in the faith of our spiritual ancestors? In what area of your life might God be calling you to step forward in faith?**

12/20 - Verses 13 through 16 I think are four of the most amazing verses we've read in Hebrews and I think each of us should really meditate on what these verses might mean in our lives today: *"All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."* **Q: What do you think of these verses? If these heroes of our faith died still believing what God promised them - even though they did not receive what was promised here on earth - do you think that perhaps you and I should always be faithful in our lives to God no matter what we may think we're not "receiving" here on earth? If we're not receiving perfect health. If we're not receiving a perfect job. If we're not receiving a perfect family. If we're not receiving a perfect mental state. If not, if not, if not.... will we still believe what God promised us? Will we still believe that God is not ashamed to be called our God? Will we still believe that God has prepared a heavenly city for us? Let us believe!**

12/20 - Hebrews 11 verses 25 & 26 today tell us so much about the character and faith of Moses! *"He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of the Messiah than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the great reward that God would give him."* **Q: Do these verses speak to us today as well? Will we share in the oppression of God's people? Or do we enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin? Do we suffer for the sake of Jesus? Or would we prefer to chill out and hang out with our luxuries in life? Do we look ahead to the great reward that God promises? Will we pursue the character and faith of Moses in our own lives today?**

12/20 - Hebrews chapter 11 verses today finish out this chapter on "faith" strongly! Please take a minute to re-read this entire chapter 11 if you can. It is an amazing chapter of our spiritual ancestor's faith. **Q: How does reading about our spiritual ancestor's faith speak into your life today? Are their areas of your life where you can better live with faith? Can you turn over your fears and anxieties to God, in faith? Knowing, in faith, God will ultimately provide and thus there is nothing to fear or worry about today?**

12/20 - Hebrews 11 verse 38 stands out to me today: *"They were too good for this world."* I think it is helpful to remember

that this current world is not our ultimate eternal home. It is temporary. We're called to be saints and love others in this world. But, we should not become too attached to it or what it offers. God has a better home for us in mind at the end of our race - our journey through this life. This verse says that our spiritual ancestors were too good for this world - and hence, many of them suffered. But they suffered knowing it was temporary. Impermanent. I don't think that this verse should make us conceited or arrogant in any way - being "too good" for this world - but hopefully it helps us realize that this life is not necessarily going to be easy in this world if we are truly living in faith.... In fact, sometimes I wonder that if our life is really easy if we are really living our faith? I just hope we never get complacent and chill out and relax because "we are so saved".... There is a dying world out there that needs us! **Q: How are you truly living your life in faith these days?**

12/20 - Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 is phenomenal to think about - *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress."* I think sometimes we think that we are doing this Christian walk / faith thing alone. We think we are in this alone - just us & God. I think this verse helps remind us that there is a huge crowd of witnesses that are in this with us. I like to think of this cloud of witnesses cheering us on in our walk! They are rooting for us! **Q: So - in light of knowing we have these saints rooting for us, doesn't it make sense that we should strip away sin that hinders our walk? Is there sin your life that is hindering your walk? Will you allow Jesus to strip it away so that the cloud of witnesses can continue to cheer you on toward the finish line? How do we run this race toward the finish line well? I think verse 2 tells us how - "We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish." Are your eyes on Jesus? Constantly? Does your faith depend solely on Jesus? Is your faith as fresh today as when you first came to faith in Jesus? Verse 3 is a powerful reflection of Jesus' passion.... "Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don't become weary and give up." Think about what Jesus endured at the hands of the Roman guards. Think about Jesus' resolve. He was running the race toward the finish line. Can reflecting on Jesus' passion help us resist becoming weary and giving up? How often do you reflect on Jesus' passion? Verses 5 & 6 quote Proverbs 3:11-12 and the following verses then go into explaining this wisdom of this Proverb - "My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children." Do you believe this proverb to be true? Is the Lord perhaps disciplining you in some way today? Are you accepting or ignoring the discipline? Do you believe that the Lord disciplines those he loves? And that this "divine discipline" is ultimately good for you and everyone you come in contact with in your life?**

12/20 - Hebrews chapter 12 verse 14 starts out strong with: *"Try to live in peace with everyone, and seek to live a clean and holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord."* I love this! If we seek to live in peace with everyone and live a clean and holy life people around us will see the Lord. This is very powerful to think about... You've probably heard this said before: "You may be the only Bible anyone ever reads". Or "you may be the only Jesus anyone ever meets." (not you being Jesus of course, but Christ within you shining through you!) **Q: Are you living in peace with everyone? Are you seeking to live a clean and holy life? Are others seeing the Lord in you? Are others reading the Bible through you?**

12/20 - Verse 28 stands out to me today: *"Since we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be destroyed, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe."* This is an interesting phrasing - worship God with holy fear and awe. It reminds me a lot of a lyric in Chris Tomlin's single, "Indescribable." He sings - "humbly we fall to our knees and say, "you are amazing God!" That one word "humbly" jumped out at me in this song. **Q: It seems to me that there should be some reverence, holy fear, awe, and humility as we worship God? And maybe not just take worship and our relationship for God lightly? But be thankful for the opportunity to worship God? Just some questions... Because then verse 29 tells us "For our God is a consuming fire."**

12/21 - We wrap up the book of Hebrews today! Hebrews chapter 13 verse 2 has always stood out to me - *"Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!"* Powerful eh? When we show hospitality to strangers, we may be entertaining angels! Something to definitely keep in mind... Verse 7 I think is a great reminder for each of us to rejoice in and show some appreciation for those that helped bring us to faith and to study the Bible - *"Remember your leaders who first taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and trust the Lord as they do."* **Q: Is there someone right now that this verse makes you think of? Can you send them a card or a quick email of encouragement to thank them for the impact they have had on your spiritual life? Verse 8 is infamous and powerful and please memorize this one: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday,**

today, and forever." **This is an easy verse to memorize, yes?** Say it with me. Hebrews 13:8 - "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Yep, I think you got it. :)

12/21 - Today we begin the Apostle Peter's first epistle!

~ **First Peter** ~

Author: Peter the apostle

Place: Uncertain, perhaps Rome

Date: A.D. 63 or 64

Content: The apostle Peter wrote this letter near the end of his life to comfort and encourage the Jewish Christians who were living in Asia Minor. He points out that suffering is part of the Christian life and that God has an imperishable reward reserved for those who trust him. In case any were thinking of returning to Judaism to escape from persecution, Peter points out that the church is now the chosen nation and the priesthood of God. Hence any thoughts of returning to Judaism were futile. Peter then presents the example of Christ who suffered and admonished the believers to be prepared for the same experience.

Theme: The theme of First Peter is triumph through suffering. Early Christians lived difficult lives, often paying for their faith with their lives, but this letter shows us that it is worth it, no matter what the price. God knows all that is occurring and in his eternal plan will work everything out for the best. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 32*)

12/21 - 1 Peter 1:4-6 are powerful verses: *"For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while."* These verses tie in nicely with the Ezekiel 44:28 comments above, no? :) **Q: Are we truly glad about this priceless inheritance? Do we believe there is a priceless inheritance for us in heaven? Do we understand that we may have to endure many trials in this life before receiving this inheritance? Will you endure the many trials that will come your way, knowing that God's inheritance is awaiting you through His grace and your faith in Christ?**

12/21 - Verse 8 is a beautiful thought about Jesus and our relationship with him - *"You love him even though you have never seen him."* **Q: Even though you have never seen Jesus, do you love Him?**

12/21 - 1 Peter 2 verse 2 is awesome! *"You must crave pure spiritual milk so that you can grow into the fullness of your salvation. Cry out for this nourishment as a baby cries for milk, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness."* **Q: Do you crave pure spiritual milk? What is pure spiritual milk? Could it be the Word of God, the Bible? Do you believe the Bible can help you grow into the fullness of your salvation? Do you cry out for this nourishment? Do you drink deeply of this nourishment? Daily?**

12/22 - 1 Peter 2 Verse 5 is beautiful imagery: *"And now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are God's holy priests, who offer the spiritual sacrifices that please him because of Jesus Christ."* **Q: Do you believe that you are a living stone in God's spiritual temple? Do you believe you are a holy priest of God? If realizing that you are a holy priest of God is something new for you, how might this change how you live your life?**

12/22 - Today in First Peter chapter 1 verse 15 we read: *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy.""* **Q: Do you believe that God is holy? Do you believe that you are called to be holy? Is this a goal in your life – to be holy? What are some ways you can move forward on this goal of being holy? Have you moved forward in holiness in this year? Will you continue to move forward in holiness next year? What are some specific areas of your life that God is calling you to holiness in during this coming year?**

12/22 - 1 Peter 2 verse 11 is powerful - *"So I warn you to keep away from evil desires because they fight against your very souls."* **Q: Do you believe evil desires fight against your soul? If so, will you keep away from evil desires? Will you not entertain those desires anymore?**

12/22 - Verse 24 today about Jesus is so strong - *"He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds!"* **Q: Are you dead to sin? Are you living for what is right? Do you believe you have been healed by Jesus' wounds? Will you accept this**

healing? Will you kneel down at the foot of the cross and be healed?

12/22 - 1 Peter 3 verse 13 is definitely something for each of us to consider - *"Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good?"* I think this is very true. **If you are "eager" to do good, who will want to harm you?** Well, true, maybe someone who becomes jealous or who is just plain having a bad day... but generally speaking, I think we can avoid a lot of troubles in our life if we stay focused - no, eager - to do good. All the time. **Q: Are you eager to do good?**

12/22 - Suffering. Not something we like to think about - much less experience... 1 Peter 4 verses 1 & 2 are well worth letting sink in a bit - *"So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you are willing to suffer for Christ, you have decided to stop sinning. And you won't spend the rest of your life chasing after evil desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God."* **Q: Do you believe these verses to be true? Are you ready to suffer for Christ? Have you decided to stop sinning? Are you anxious to do the will of God and abandon chasing evil desires? Do you believe this is the Way?**

12/22 - In First Peter chapter 5 verse 8 today we receive a stern warning we all must heed: *"Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith."* **Q: Do you believe the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion? Will you take a firm stand against him? How will you do this?** Memorizing scripture on a regular basis I believe is one very effective tool in this battle. As is reading and studying the Bible each and every day. I actually was sitting in the waiting room of a doctor's office recently and I picked up a Christian magazine that had an article on how to fight temptation. This article basically said to "know thyself" - know what and where your weaknesses / temptations are. Then, after taking this inventory, memorize a scripture verse or two that you can easily bring to mind when you find yourself in one of those times of weakness / temptation. And to cling to that scripture verse for all its worth. I haven't personally tried this yet, but I think I will. I do think that we can cling to scripture like a life preserver in our moments of weakness / temptation. Let us not ever forget that on this side of heaven the devil is out there prowling...

12/23 - Today we read the book of Second Peter! This is another great letter from Peter to the early Christian church written in approximately 65 to 68 A.D., just before Peter was martyred during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero. 1 Peter was more of a letter of encouragement to early Christians who were facing suffering, whereas 2 Peter is written to dispel false teachings within early Christianity.

~ Second Peter ~

Author: Peter the apostle

Place: Uncertain, perhaps Rome

Date: A.D. 67

Content: This letter was written by Peter shortly before his death and deals with the problems that the church would face after his departure. He encourages the believers to continue in their spiritual growth, realizing the truth of the Christian gospel. It does not consist of fable but fact. He warns them of false teachers who would destroy the truth by exalting their own ideas over those of the church. Finally, he points out that Christ will return some day to destroy the old order of this world; as a result, we ought not to become too attached to it.

Theme: Second Peter is a call to steadfastness in the midst of numerous pressures to drift from the truth. The world is seeking to undo the work of God, but we must resist all such pressure by living godly lives, believing the truth, enduring persecution, trusting God, and looking for Christ's return. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 33*)

12/23 - 2 Peter 1 verse 3 brings up a couple of good questions we should ask ourselves - *"As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life."* **Q: Do you want to know Jesus better? How will you do this? (hint - reading the Bible daily is one great way...) How else? Do you want to live a godly life? What does a godly life look like? Do you believe Jesus' divine power gives you everything you need to live a godly life?**

12/23 - Second Peter chapter 2 is a strong one that looks at the danger of false teachers - both in the Old Testament times through false prophets and also in the early church during the 1st century. I have to confess that as I read this chapter I think of some current books and movies and teachers in our modern world that I am afraid apply to the warnings of this chapter. **Q: Do you believe that there are false teachers also in our world today? Teachers that distort the Gospel message? Teachers that steer people away from Truth and into Darkness? Teachers that are in it for the money?**

12/23 - Verses 2 & 3 warn us that: *"Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of them, Christ and his true way will be slandered. In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money."* Commentaries suggest that at the time Peter wrote this letter the shameful immorality was primarily sexual sin. The false teachers were allowing / encouraging people to basically do what they want sexually. They taught that there is no theological or spiritual or personal damage that will come with sexual do-whatever-you-wantness... (okay, that's not in the Bible - I made that up). **Q: Do we see this type of teaching today? Is this type of teaching true? Is it false? Is it shameful? Do you believe that sex can be damaging to you outside of the proper context of marriage?** Verse 19 warns again: *"They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves to sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you."* **What controls you? Is it purely love for God and his ways, which is great. Or is it something else...? Something that is dangerous and leads down a slippery slope... ? Will you instead pursue God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the True Freedom that only They can give you?** Please please be watchful of wolves in sheep's clothing. The Enemy comes in sheep's clothing to lie, steal, and kill. The lies may be attractive on the surface, but the core of the lie is deadly to you. Please cling to Jesus and God's Word, the Holy Bible, above all else.

12/23 - Today we finish the letter of Second Peter! Again, I have been so blessed reading through this letter this year. It's always a good thing to read a letter from a guy that Jesus said this about in Matthew 16:18 - *"And I tell you that you are Peter [which means rock], and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [or hell] will not overcome it."* **Q: Do you believe that the gates of hell will not overcome the church of Jesus Christ?** (church - that's us. You and me and him and her. The body of Christ. Not the buildings...)

12/23 - Verse 3 is a reminder to us all: *"First, I want to remind you that in the last days there will be scoffers who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing they desire."* Keep in mind that we live in the last days - everything post-Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven is last days. So, in the time of Peter and the early church there were scoffers who laughed at the truth and did every evil thing they desire. **Q: Is this still happening today?**

12/23 - Verse 9 is helpful in knowing why Jesus has not yet returned: *"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent."* He is giving more time for everyone to repent! **Q: Will we repent?**

12/23 - Verses 15 & 16 are very interesting. They are basically Peter giving praise to Paul's writing: *"This is just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him-- Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do the other parts of Scripture."* **Q: Have you ever found Paul's writing hard to understand?** I know many of my friend's have. And I have too on occasion. But, there is so much going on in Paul's letters that need to be looked at contextually and in depth. Overall, Paul's letter's have been such a blessing to me personally, and I look forward to reading them and studying them again next year with you! :)

12/24 - We start First John today! First John was written by one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John son of Zebedee - who also wrote the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. First John was written between 85 and 95 A.D. when John was in Ephesus (in modern day Turkey) late in his life. The purpose of this letter was in large part to dispel Gnosticism, which was a twisting of Christianity - it basically meant salvation through knowledge (gnosis is Greek for knowledge).

~ **First John** ~

Author: John the apostle

Place: Uncertain, probably Ephesus

Date: A.D. 85-95

Content: This very personal letter was written by the apostle John in his old age to believers who were very dear to him. He addresses them as his little children and gives them practical instructions for Christian living. He begins by stressing Jesus' incarnation and builds his commands upon the truth that those who know Jesus know the Father as well. Those who do not know Jesus do not know the Father, nor do they know the love of the Father. Christians, however, have experienced the love of God in their lives, for God is love, and have no need to fear either in this life or in the life to come.

Theme: John stresses the basic truths of the Christian faith in this letter in order to comfort and encourage his children in the faith. The themes of love, forgiveness, fellowship, victory over sin, assurance, purity, and eternal life are woven together in a marvelous document that shines with the light of God in the darkness of the world. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 33*)

12/24 - First John starts out strong right out of the gates in verse 1 and is very similar to the beginning of the Gospel of

John: *"The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus Christ has existed from the very beginning of time with God the Father? Do you believe that Jesus is the Word of life?**

12/24 - And verse 5 is a message to us from Jesus via John: *"This is the message he has given us to announce to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him at all."* I love this. A month or so ago in this blog I reflected on God being a God of no shadows. All light. I love that thought. **Q: Do you believe God is light? And that there is no darkness, no shadows, in Him at all?**

12/24 - And in verses 8 & 9 we read: *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* **Q: Do you claim to be without sin? Do you confess your sins regularly and ask for forgiveness from God? Do you believe that God is faithful and just and will forgive you? And not just forgive you but purify you from your confessed sins? And heal you from your confessed sins?** Let us not deceive ourselves any longer. Let us allow the Truth to fully live in our hearts. Let us confess our sins, be forgiven, and be purified from all unrighteousness. Are you with me on this?

12/24 - First John chapter 2 is full of tons of wisdom today! Verses 5 & 6 are so strong: *"But those who obey God's word really do love him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did."* **Q: Do we realize that obeying God's Word, the Bible, demonstrates our love for God? Do we live our lives as Jesus did? Do we really love God? Do we obey God's Word?**

12/24 - Verse 9 certainly gives us much to consider in our lives: *"If anyone says, 'I am living in the light,' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness."* **Q: Are you living in the light?**

12/24 - Verses 15, 16 & 17 are worth looking at. Bible commentaries suggest that the "world" in these verses is not the created world or people - but the world of sin, which is the dominion of Satan. *"Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever."* **Q: Are we doing the will of God in our lives? Do you want to live with God forever? Do you continually pray to God to deliver you from lust & pride?**

12/24 - First John 2 verse 27 stood out to me today: *"But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you all things, and what he teaches is true--it is not a lie. So continue in what he has taught you, and continue to live in Christ."* After we come to believe in Christ as Savior of the World - through his life, death on the cross for our sins, and resurrection - we are then blessed with the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit. And indeed the Holy Spirit will come to live within us. **Q: Do you believe that the Holy Spirit within you can teach you all things? Teach you what is true? Will you continue in what the Holy Spirit has taught you? Will you live in Christ?**

12/24 - First John 3 verse 1 is encouraging: *"See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are!"* **Q: Do you know that our heavenly Father loves you? Do you know that you are a child of God?**

12/24 - First John chapter 3 verse 9 is powerful in today's readings! *"Those who have been born into God's family do not sin, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they have been born of God."* Keep in mind that this does not mean that as a Christian you won't stop sinning completely and be perfect. However, you will be in the process of being sanctified and your life will be shown as someone who is compelled to do what is right, because God is in you, versus having a life that shows you are compelled to sin, if you were without God. But, this verse is still great for believers to reflect upon - we do not want to sin anymore and we're in the process of sinning less and less through sanctification - until the day we are in heaven with Christ when indeed we will never sin again. **Q: Do you realize this is your eternal purpose?**

12/24 - Today in First John chapter 3 verse 16 we read: *"We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters."* This is a powerful verse for us to reflect

on. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He gave up his life so that we may have eternal life with the Father through faith in him. Jesus' giving up his life for you and me is real love. **Q: How might we be able to show real love toward others? How might we be able to give up our lives for others? Not necessarily are we being called to death on a cross - but how about a figurative death in our lives on how we invest our time, energy, & passions? Is it possible that our indulgence in luxury goods and how we waste precious time could cost the very lives of someone else in need somewhere in the world? Can we give up our "life", our luxury goods, and our wasting of time so that we can show real love for others? Will we? Will we follow Jesus in the giving up of our own life for the sake of others?**

12/24 - First John chapter 4 verse 1 starts us off with quite a warning today: *"Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world."* The interesting thing about this verse for me today is the implication to "see if the spirit they have comes from God." Meaning, that the spirit some have come from the opposite of God - the devil. A bit scary to think about this and realize this. But, it's true. There is good and evil in the world, and good and evil spirits influencing people. It's better if we realize this. It is a fallen world. **Q: Do you believe this verse to be true? Do you believe there is both good - and evil - in the world? Do you believe there are many false prophets in the world?**

12/25 - 1 John 4 Verses 7 through 21 are incredible verses on LOVE! A fun Bible fact for you here - the word love appears 43 times in First John overall - and 32 times in the short section of 4:7 through 5:3. We're in the Christian love section here! :) Certainly verses 9 & 10 here are well worth each of us reflecting upon: *"God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."* **Do you believe these verses to be true? Do these verses maybe remind you of a similar verse John wrote in his Gospel? John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** It is awesome that we have these verses to reflect upon - along with Daniel chapter 12 verse 2 above. **Q: See any ties between these verses from the Old & New Testaments regarding eternal life?**

12/25 - We finish the book of First John today! What a great book it has been for me this year. I hope it has been a blessing for you as well. Verses 3 & 4 in 1 John chapter 5 are powerful: *"Loving God means keeping his commandments, and really, that isn't difficult. For every child of God defeats this evil world by trusting Christ to give the victory."* **Q: Do you love God by keeping his commandments? Do you trust Jesus to give you the victory over evil in this world? Does your trust in Jesus make keeping God's commandments not difficult?**

12/25 - Verses 14 & 15 are good reflections on how we should pray - and that we should pray: *"And we can be confident that he will listen to us whenever we ask him for anything in line with his will. And if we know he is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that he will give us what we ask for."* **Q: Do you pray confidently, asking God for things that are in line with his will? Do you know that God is listening to your prayers? Are you sure that he will give you what you ask for, if it is in line with his will?**

12/25 - And verse 21 is a powerful end to this book of 1 John: *"Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts."* **Q: Is there anything in your life that might take the place of God in your heart? Will you turn this idol over to God? Will you keep away from this idol? Will you allow God to take the primary place in your heart and your mind?**

12/25 - Today we read through the very short letter of Second John! This letter, like First John, was written by one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John son of Zebedee - who also wrote the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. This letter was essentially written to continue to dispel Gnosticism, which was a twisting of Christianity - it basically meant salvation through knowledge (gnosis is Greek for knowledge). Gnostic teachers were traveling throughout the land at the time this letter was written, and this letter warns people to not encourage this false teaching in any way.

~ **Second John** ~

Author: John the apostle

Place: Uncertain, probably Ephesus

Date: A.D. 85-95

Content: This short letter was written either to a Christian woman whom John knew or to a church personified as a woman. In any case, it was written to encourage true Christian love and to warn against the deceivers who were coming into the world. John charges the believers not to participate in their evil, but to stand for the truth no matter what that cost.

Theme: The need for Christians to be alert and diligent when it comes to false doctrine is the theme of this letter. We must be aware that false doctrine exists and we must be ready to deal with it, if confronted. All the while, however, we must live out the love of God in our lives. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 34)

12/25 - Verses 5 & 6 certainly stand out in this short letter: "And now I want to urge you, dear lady, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we had from the beginning. Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning." **Q: Are you loving others frequently & consistently in your life? Do you demonstrate love for others consistently? Do you love God's commands? Do you love others as Jesus loved you?**

12/25 - Today we also start and finish the book of Third John! Yes, it is quite a lengthy letter... :) This letter, like the 2 before it were written by the disciple John in about 85 to 95 A.D. The purpose of this letter is actually somewhat the opposite of the purpose of Second John. In Second John - see yesterday's post below - we learned that John was warning against providing hospitality to traveling false teachers. In Third John, John is asking Gaius to show hospitality to traveling teachers - but teachers that are teaching the truth. The unfortunate aspect of today's letter is that there is a bit of a dictator leading the local church named Diotrephes who is not welcoming in traveling teachers who teach the truth - the Gospel. So, I think we can learn from Second John & Third John that hospitality is obviously a very good thing - though, we should exercise caution with hospitality when there is danger of propagating a false teaching.

~ **Third John** ~

Author: John the apostle

Place: Uncertain, probably Ephesus

Date: A.D. 85-95

Content: This short letter is a personal note from John the apostle to his friend Gaius, encouraging him to support the traveling evangelists who are preaching the truth. He warns Gaius against such men as Diotrephes who refuse to help in spreading the gospel and commends others, such as Demetrius, for helping.

Theme: Christians are to support one another in the work of Christ. Not to do so is the work of Satan, who seeks to destroy the believers. John stresses that all believers are bound together as Christians and should work for the common good of all. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 34)

12/25 - Verse 11 stands out in this letter, following John's writing about Diotrephes behavior - "Dear friend, don't let this bad example influence you. Follow only what is good. Remember that those who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God." **Q: Do we have examples of good and bad leaders in our life? Do we follow only the example of the good? Do you believe following the example of people doing good is proof that we are children of God?**

12/26 - Today we start and finish the book of Jude!

~ **Jude** ~

Author: Jude, a brother of Jesus

Place: Uncertain

Date: A.D. 65-70

Content: It is not known to whom this letter was addressed, but the problem that Jude confronts is very clear. Jude is urging the believers to stand firm against some false teachers and the false doctrine that they bring. In a lengthy passage Jude gives examples of judgment in the past that God visited upon sin, as well as a devastating description of the evil lives of those false teachers. Jude closes with an exhortation to the Christians to stand fast in the power of God who will keep us from falling.

Theme: The danger of false doctrine and the need for constant vigilance by the church is the theme of this book. Jude admonishes us to examine what people say and the kind of lives that they live so that we may approve what is pleasing in the sight of God. We may call upon God to help in this with full assurance that he will hear and answer our prayer. (Above commentary is from "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 34-35)

12/26 - The letter of Jude carries forward some of the themes in John's letter's we've recently read about false teachers. This letter was written in about 65 A.D. From Jude & John, it seems like there were obviously some issues of false teachers back in the early church. People that twisted the truth of who Jesus was. I read a commentary today which said the twisted truths back then were basically these: 1. Jesus was not divine. He was just a man who was infused with the divinity of "the Christ" when he was Baptized in the Jordan, but that the divine nature left him before he died on the cross. (this would be a huge issue for theology... it ain't true folks...) and 2. Once you believe in Christ and your sins are

forgiven, then you have a license to do whatever you want in life. You're home free. Feel free to be as immoral as you want. (again not true of course...). Early Gnosticism was a part of the problem with these lines of thinking. The early Gnostics basically believed that anything of matter/material/flesh was bad, and anything of the spirit was good. Hence, their belief that Jesus really couldn't have been a man and God at the same time - and that once they were saved/ believed in Christ, then their sins were forgiven in the spiritual realm, so they could do whatever the heck they wanted. They veered way off the path of Truth... All this to say - it is so easy for theology to get twisted around. It happened back in the early church as we see in Jude's letter today, and in John's previous letters. And it happens today. Something I heard recently that I liked and that I believe is so true. The Gospel is not complicated. It's simple. If you want the straightforward simple truth of the gospel, head for the Gospel of John in the New Testament and everything you basically need to know is there. That's it. We don't need to complicate things so much that we get ourselves caught up in ideas that basically create barriers to our relationship with God. God who loves us so much and wants to be in relationship with us... we have a good way of complicating this very simple love relationship! :)

12/26 - Verse 24 is so wonderful at the end of Jude's letter today:- *"And now, all glory to God, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and who will bring you into his glorious presence innocent of sin and with great joy."* Great joy indeed I believe can only be found through our relationship with God! There are other temporary happinesses we experience in life. But great joy... that's God.

12/26 - Today we start the book of Revelation! I have to confess that I have been a bit nervous about blogging through the book of Revelation. But here goes nothing! :) Revelation has been called "The Revelation of John", but really this book is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". It is believed that the apostle John wrote this book. He also wrote the Gospel of John and the letters of First, Second, and Third John. There was some dispute about the apostle John writing this book in the third century by a bishop named Dionysius - as he thought the writing style of this book was so different from the Gospel of John & his letters. But most do believe that the apostle John did indeed write the book of Revelation on the Island of Patmos, off the coast of Ephesus, or modern-day Turkey. It is said that one of the major purposes of this book, written in circa 95 A.D., was to encourage Christians to resist the Roman empire's demands of emperor worship. The other important thing to note is the Revelation is apocalyptic literature, which means that its writing is highly symbolic. There are basically 4 lines of thinking on how to interpret the book of Revelation, which I think are helpful to consider before diving into this book. I am editing these comments below from bible.org at this link: [Please check out this link](#) for more details on these 4 points below and the book of Revelation overall - these comments were edited on bible.org from M. C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*.

"(1) The **preterist** approach believes that "Revelation is simply a sketch of the conditions of the empire in the first century."

(2) The **historicist** view (or continuous-historicist view) "contends that Revelation is a symbolic presentation of the entire course of the history of the church from the close of the first century to the end of time."

(3) The **futurist** approach usually argues that "all of the visions from Revelation 4:1 to the end of the book are yet to be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and following the second advent of Christ."

(4) In the **idealist** approach, "the Revelation represents the eternal conflict of good and evil which persists in every age, although here it may have particular application to the period of the church."

12/26 - Into the readings today... Chapter 1 verse 8 certainly stands out in today's readings, as we hear from Jesus himself: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega--the beginning and the end," says the Lord God. "I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come, the Almighty One."* I like that - the Alpha & Omega. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus is the beginning and end of all things. Jesus is God. In verses 17 & 18 today we hear this similar theme from Jesus again to John: *"Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave."* It is awesome that Jesus uses the term Living One here. This is very similar to Old Testament verses we hear about God being a Living God. Jesus is also truly Living today in our lives. **Q: Do you believe Jesus is the Alpha & Omega? The Living One?**

12/26 - Revelation chapter 2 begins our journey of Jesus' messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor! (modern day Turkey). Depending on what type of Bible you read, you might notice that **ALL of the words in chapter 2 in today's readings are highlighted red** - meaning, we are hearing directly from Jesus in these verses, so it's good to pay attention here! :) The beginning of Revelation 2 verse 2 stands out to me today - *"I know all the things you do."* Short and simple.... **Q: Do you suppose this is true about Jesus and your life? Do you think Jesus knows all of the things you do? Even every single thing that you think?**

12/26 - Verse 7 certainly stands out today as well from Jesus: *"Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God."* The tree of life takes us back to the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve ended up eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge - which gave them the knowledge of good and evil. God then banished them from the Garden before they could eat from the tree of life and live eternally. The tree of life represents eternal life, and as we see in this verse it is offered to all who are victorious. **Q: What does it mean to be victorious? Do you want to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God? Will you listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying?**

12/26 - Verse 17 is intriguing! *"Everyone who is victorious will eat of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it."* The second sentence is very intriguing to me - a white stone will be given with a new name upon it. I need to do some more research on what exactly this means. If anyone has thoughts on the white stone / new name, please share.

12/26 - Revelation chapter 2 verse 19 is awesome as Jesus says: *"I know all the things you do--your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things."* **Q: How are you doing in these areas in your life? Are you focusing on love, faith, service and patience? Are you constantly improving in these areas in your life?**

12/27 - Revelation chapter 3 verse 3 is powerful from Jesus: *"Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly and turn to me again."* My thought here is that sometimes we are so on fire for our faith in Jesus and God – particularly when we first believe. And then this fire and initial strong faith begins to wane over time. And to a degree, this is okay. We will not be on the "mountaintop" all of the time – we must traverse through the valleys as well. **Q: But, if perhaps we've been camped out in the valleys for a bit too long now, is it possible that we might need to go back to what we heard and believed at first? Might we need to hold to these first beliefs more firmly? And turn to Jesus again? This Advent and Christmas season, will you return to Jesus once again? Will you return to the Manger in Bethlehem?**

12/27 - Today in Revelation chapter 3 we read about The Message to the Church in Philadelphia and Laodicea. Verse 8 today is powerful, from Jesus: *"I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can shut."* Jesus has opened the door for us to enter God's kingdom through faith in him. No one can keep us from entering through this open door - besides ourselves. **Q: Will you walk through the door Jesus has opened for you?**

12/27 - Verses 15 and 16 are convicting words from Jesus! *"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth!"* **Q: Are you hot or cold in your faith for God these days? Or maybe lukewarm? Will you live now and tomorrow with only a hot faith in God? Hot Tamales Hot? :)**

12/27 - Verse 20 is beautiful from Jesus: *"Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends."* As we read above - the door to entering into the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus is open and no one can shut it - except maybe we will shut the door ourselves in our own lives. **Q: If you have shut the door, is it possible that you hear Jesus knocking on the door? Is it possible Jesus is calling to you from the other side of the door you have shut? Will you open it? Do you want to share a meal with Jesus as friends?**

12/27 - Revelation chapter 4 today is an amazing chapter, where we get a great glimpse of worship in heaven! Verses 1 & 2 are an awesome start to this chapter with John first seeing an open door in heaven and then being instantly in the Spirit! *"Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.' And instantly I was in the Spirit."* Verse 3 stands out today with a great glimpse of God's glory - *"The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones--jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow."* You'll note that there is not a clear description of God, as he is often described as dwelling in an "unapproachable light". But I think the gemstones and the emerald rainbow are pretty good starters for envisioning God's glory... **Q: Can you imagine seeing God face to face some day? Does this make your heart leap with excitement and joy?**

12/27 - Verse 4 stood out in today's readings as well: *"Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads."* It is said that these 24 thrones represent both the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus. Thus, representing all righteous and redeemed men and women before and after Jesus' life. Verses 6 & 7 will remind us of the seraphs in Isaiah and the cherubim in Ezekiel - *"In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. The first of these living beings had the form of a lion; the second looked like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth had the form of an eagle with wings spread out as though in flight."* These creatures are said to represent aspects of the attributes of God. The lion representing majesty & power. The ox representing faithfulness. The human representing intelligence. And the eagle representing sovereignty. Verses 10 & 11 is a beautiful look at elders worshiping God! *"The twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one who lives forever and ever. And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created."* **Q: Imagine yourself in heaven with a crown of some sort. Will you lay down your crown before the throne of God and worship God in this same manner? Do you believe that God is worthy to receive all glory, and honor, and power? Do you believe that it was for God's pleasure that everything exists and was created?**

12/27 - Revelation 5 is another beautiful chapter looking at worship in heaven! And in this chapter we see the worship of Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb, who opens the scroll. It is interesting that Jesus is described first as the Lion of Judah in verse 5 and then as a Lamb in verse 6. This demonstrates both Jesus' authority and power (lion) and Jesus' submission to God's will (lamb). Verse 9 is certainly powerful in today's readings: *"And they sang a new song with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were killed, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus' blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation? How do people accept this gift - this ransom? Are the stakes high enough that we should accept this ransom?**

12/27 - And verse 12 is powerful: *"And they sang in a mighty chorus: "The Lamb is worthy--the Lamb who was killed. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."* **Q: Do you believe that Jesus is worthy to receive power? And riches? And wisdom? And honor? And glory? And blessing? Will you give these things to Jesus in your life today?**

12/27 - Revelation chapter 6 begins the first of 3 seven-part judgments with the opening of the seals on the scroll! The seven trumpets in chapters 8 & 9 and the seven bowls in chapter 16 are the remaining two. The unsealing of the seals on the scroll by Jesus in this chapter sets in motion events that will bring about the end of human history. Verse 12 today tells us: *"I watched as the Lamb broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became as dark as black cloth, and the moon became as red as blood."* The imagery of the four horsemen in this chapter comes from Zechariah chapter 1 verses 8-17 and chapter 6 verse 1-6. In chapter 1 of Zechariah verses 8-10 we read: *"During the night I had a vision--and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses. I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are." Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth.""* This is a good example of how John is utilizing a lot of imagery for the book of Revelation from the Old Testament. And of course it is a great example of how the Old Testament is fulfilled by the New Testament. A portion of verse 8 should be noted about the 4 horsemen: *"They were given authority over one-fourth of the earth."* Some commentaries have noted that this demonstrates that even in the end of days, God is continuing to show compassion. He only allows the four horsemen to do their work over 1/4th of the earth, giving everyone in the other 3/4ths of the earth an opportunity to repent and turn to Jesus.

12/28 - Revelation chapter 7 verse 3 in today's reading tells us: *"Wait! Don't hurt the land or the sea or the trees until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants."* Commentaries suggest that the seal represents the name of God being stamped on the foreheads of his followers - to protect them from the coming judgments. This imagery is very similar to Ezekiel 9:4 - *"Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."* Verse 4 tells us: *"And I heard how many were marked with the seal of God. There were 144,000 who were sealed from all the tribes of Israel."* Some interpret this to mean 144,000 descendents of the actual Jewish tribes during the time of tribulation. Others interpret this passage to be symbolic of all the faithful believers who live during the time of tribulation. Verse 12 is very powerful in that it has 7 attributes of God: *"Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and forever."* **Q: Will you attribute to God - Blessing? Glory? Wisdom? Thanksgiving? Honor? Power? Strength?**

Forever....?

12/28 - Revelation chapter 8 transitions from the breaking of the seals on the scroll to the trumpets! In Old Testament times trumpets represented the announcement of important events or times of war. Here we will see plagues that are more devastating than the seals, but not as devastating as the bowls to come in Revelation chapter 16. The eagle in this chapter represents swiftness and destruction. When the eagle speaks of "all who belong to this world" in verse 13, it is referring to people who are not in relationship with God. Verses 3 & 4 in this chapter today are beautiful: *"Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great quantity of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people, to be offered on the gold altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of the saints, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out."* I love that analogy of the incense mixing with the prayers of the saints. **Q: Do you believe that your prayers reach God's altar in heaven?**

12/28 - Revelation chapter 9 brings forth the 5th and 6th trumpet plagues at the end times! A note on the star in verse 1 - this is likely an angel that descends from heaven with the key from Jesus to open the abyss. The fierce demonic locusts in today's readings are intense. You will recall that very recently we read about locusts in a similar fashion in the Old Testament in [Joel chapter 1 through chapter 2 verse 11](#). Verses 20 & 21 in this chapter stand out: *"But the people who did not die in these plagues still refused to turn from their evil deeds. They continued to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood--idols that neither see nor hear nor walk! And they did not repent of their murders or their witchcraft or their immorality or their thefts."* Even in the midst of such destruction and horror, many people do not repent. **Q: Is it possible that we receive much less severe signs in our own life today to repent, and we ignore them? Why do we ignore the signs? Is this wise?**

12/28 - Revelation chapter 10 brings forth the angel and the little scroll! Note that this scroll is not the same as the scroll in Revelation chapter 5, verse 1. This first scroll contains a revelation of judgments against evil, whereas this little scroll's contents are not disclosed - though, it may contain a judgment as well. You will recall from our readings of Ezekiel earlier this winter that, similar to John in this chapter, Ezekiel was instructed in a vision to eat a scroll that was sweet to taste but contained judgments against Israel. From Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 3 you'll recall: *"Then he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."*

12/28 - Revelation Chapter 10 Verse 1 in today's readings has some cool stuff going on in it - *"Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, surrounded by a cloud, with a rainbow over his head. His face shone like the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire."* The angel being surrounded by a cloud recalls God speaking to Peter James and John on the mountain of the Transfiguration in Matthew chapter 17 verse 5 - *"While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'"* The rainbow over the angel's head recalls God's promise to Noah after the flood to never destroy the earth by water again, as we see in Genesis chapter 9 verses 15 & 16 - *"I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."* And the angels feet being like pillars of fire recalls the pillars of fire and cloud that guided and protected the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, as we see in Exodus chapter 13 verses 21 & 22 *"By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people."*

12/29 - Today in Revelation chapter 11 we read about the Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet bringing the third terror! The two witnesses in today's reading are modeled after Moses and Elijah. They may be representing two actual believers who will be martyred or they may be symbolic of all testifying believers in the final days. In verse 11:7 we have the first mention of the beast in the book of Revelation - the enemy that comes from the bottomless pit and wages war in the hearts and lives of men and women. In verse 11:8 allowing dead bodies to lie out in the street is a major violation of decency. In verse 15 things begin to shift in big ways as we read: *"Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: 'The whole world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.'"* **Q: Is the whole world now part of the kingdom of God? What are some examples of why or why not?**

12/29 - In Revelation chapter 12 today we read about the Woman and the Dragon! The woman is representative of the believing Messianic community and the twelve stars represent Israel's twelve tribes. The red dragon is Satan. In verse 5

we read about Jesus: *"She gave birth to a boy who was to rule all nations with an iron rod. And the child was snatched away from the dragon and was caught up to God and to his throne."* The "caught up" part of this verse is representative of Jesus' ascension into heaven. In verse 7 we read about Michael the Archangel, who we recently read about in the book of Daniel chapter 12 verse 1 when Daniel is prophesying about the end times: *"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people-everyone whose name is found written in the book-will be delivered."* In the remainder of the chapter we see a war in the spiritual realm, with Satan becoming alarmed that his time is short and increasingly angry at those who love God. Verse 10 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, 'It has happened at last--the salvation and power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ!'"* What a great proclamation! **Q: Are you looking forward to the salvation and power and kingdom of God? And do you believe in the authority of Jesus Christ?**

12/29 - Okay, I know I'm doing some serious hermeneutics stretching above today in the Zechariah readings... I'll try to get back to some exegesis here in Revelation chapter 13! Today we read about the beast that comes out of the sea and the beast that comes out of the earth. This is a pretty intense chapter that ends in the infamous number of the beast, 666. One thing I learned from reading Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion book today is that the 3 sixes could represent the unholy trinity of Satan - which is comprised of Satan, the first beast, and the false prophet coming up in Revelation chapter 13. Also, the number 666 was probably applied to the emperor Nero, whose Greek letters in his name represent numbers that total 666, by John's 1st century readers. The other way to look at this number is that each of the numbers fall short of the holy numbering of 777 - which represents complete perfection. In verse 1 we read: *"And written on each head were names that blasphemed God."* Back in the Roman empire many emperors assumed titles of deity and require worship of them, which would obviously be blasphemous to God. An example was the [emperor Domitian](#) (AD 51-96) required people to address him as Dominus et Deus, which means "our lord and our god".

12/29 - Verses 13 - 15 should be warning to us to not fall for false signs and wonders that do not come from God... as we read about the beast from the earth - *"He did astounding miracles, such as making fire flash down to earth from heaven while everyone was watching. And with all the miracles he was allowed to perform on behalf of the first beast, he deceived all the people who belong to this world. He ordered the people of the world to make a great statue of the first beast, who was fatally wounded and then came back to life. He was permitted to give life to this statue so that it could speak. Then the statue commanded that anyone refusing to worship it must die."* The danger of these above verses can best be demonstrated by Deuteronomy chapter 13 verses 1 through 4 - *"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him."* **Q: How do these 2 sets of verses - from Revelation and Deuteronomy - speak to you? Are there possibly even false signs and wonders and false idols in our world today which draw our attention away from loving God with all of our heart and soul? Will you hold fast to God?**

12/29 - Today in Revelation chapter 14 we read about Jesus (the Lamb) and all believers (the 144,000) in the heavenly Jerusalem (Mount Zion). I love verses 4 and 5 in this chapter: *"For they are spiritually undefiled, pure as virgins, following the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been purchased from among the people on the earth as a special offering to God and to the Lamb. No falsehood can be charged against them; they are blameless."* **Q: Are these 2 verses attractive to you? Do you want to be like this someday in heaven? Spiritually undefiled? Pure? Following Jesus wherever he goes? Blameless?**

12/29 - We then read about the Three Angels and In verse 8 we read: *"Then another angel followed him through the skies, shouting, 'Babylon is fallen--that great city is fallen--because she seduced the nations of the world and made them drink the wine of her passionate immorality.'"* Babylon, as we know from our recent readings in the Old Testament, such as Daniel, was in ancient Mesopotamia and the commercial, political, and religious center of a world empire led by Nebuchadnezzar. Some commentators believe that John is writing about Rome here when he says Babylon - and that John uses the term Babylon because it would be too dangerous for him to say Rome. Some others believe this reference to Babylon refers to the time of the antichrist in the end days, and represents the corrupt political and religious systems of the world in the end times. Verse 12 is likely referring to the end times, but it does make me think about the persecuted Christians in our world today - *"Let this encourage God's holy people to endure persecution patiently and remain firm to the end, obeying his commands and trusting in Jesus."* There are thousands, if not millions, of Christians in our world

today who suffer for their belief in Christ. They are persecuted. Today. **Q: How can we encourage these holy people of God who are enduring persecution today? Prayer is certainly one thing we can do, as a starter. Have you heard of the International Day of the Persecuted Church? [Please visit their website by clicking on this link - and then click on the links on their home page to check out some great ministries that are serving the needs of the Persecuted Church.](#)** Thank you for considering praying and getting involved in the Persecuted Church.

12/30 - Today in Revelation chapter 17 we read about the woman and the beast. **Q: How have our readings in Revelation about the beast affected your faith or outlook on end times? Do you believe these writings in Revelation are true?**

12/30 - In Revelation chapter 18 today we read about the fall of Babylon. This is one of those chapters in Revelation that can be interpreted in many ways by many different people - **with the overriding question and interpretation revolving around who is Babylon that John is referring to here?** Most commentaries that I have read suggest that John is referring to the Roman empire of the 1st century in this chapter. Much of Revelation is eschatological - end times prophecy - and some commentaries suggest that this chapter is too. But it seems that most commentaries look at this chapter as a prophecy toward the fall of the Roman empire - an empire that in John's time was a "cult of emperor worship". An empire that John wrote about here to warn the early Christian churches to be on guard against because it stood against God and His people. However - other commentaries do consider Babylon in this chapter to represent the political and religious system of the world in general under the rule of the antichrist. And some others see this chapter to be about a literal Babylon in Mesopotamia that is rebuilt and restored in the end times. **Q: What is your take on Babylon? What does Babylon represent?** Since we're nearing the end of the book of Revelation, and in particular because of the questions this chapter 18 can bring up, this is probably a good time for me to re-post this information below about the book of Revelation - same info I posted up when we started Revelation chapter 1 on December 9th. There are basically 4 lines of thinking on how to interpret the book of Revelation, which I think are helpful to consider before diving into this book. I am editing these comments below from bible.org at this link: [Please check out this link](#) for more details on these 4 points below and the book of Revelation overall - these comments were edited on bible.org from M. C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*.

"(1) The **preterist** approach believes that "Revelation is simply a sketch of the conditions of the empire in the first century."

(2) The **historicist** view (or continuous-historicist view) "contends that Revelation is a symbolic presentation of the entire course of the history of the church from the close of the first century to the end of time."

(3) The **futurist** approach usually argues that "all of the visions from Revelation 4:1 to the end of the book are yet to be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and following the second advent of Christ."

(4) In the **idealist** approach, "the Revelation represents the eternal conflict of good and evil which persists in every age, although here it may have particular application to the period of the church."

12/31 - Revelation chapter 19 verses 7 through 9 discuss the wedding feast of the Lamb (Jesus) in powerful language: *"Let us be glad and rejoice and honor him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. She is permitted to wear the finest white linen."* (Fine linen represents the good deeds done by the people of God.) And the angel said, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." And he added, "These are true words that come from God." The wedding feast of the Lamb is the end of human history - the judgment of the wicked and the wedding of the Lamb and his bride, the church. **Q: Are you looking forward to the wedding feast of the lamb? Do you want to be there? Do you believe the words - blessed are those who are invited to the feast? Have you accepted the Invitation?**

12/31 - Revelation chapter 19 utilizes the Hebrew for Hallelujah! four times in the first six verses - but it is interesting to note that Hallelujah is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Though, certainly we are reading Hallelujah frequently now in the Psalms! (such as today's Psalm 147). The Hallelujah's in this chapter, along with verse 16 in today's readings - *"On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords."* - reminded me of Handel's Messiah. **Q: How has Handel's Messiah been part of your life? Does it affect your faith in any way?** The rider on the white horse in chapter 19 is not the rider of the white horse from earlier in the book of Revelation, chapter 6 verse 2. The rider in this chapter is Jesus, returning as Warrior-Messiah-King. It's interesting to note that many of the Jewish faith in the 1st century were looking for their Messiah to come as Warrior-Messiah-King, and thus they rejected Jesus as Messiah, who came then as the Suffering Servant. However, it is powerful for us to keep in mind that Jesus is indeed coming again - and when he returns it won't be in his previous role as the Suffering Servant. That debt has been paid. Jesus will return as Warrior-Messiah-King!

12/31 - In Revelation chapter 20 today we read about the Millennial Reign of Christ! There are 3 basic beliefs in the 1,000 years described in this chapter: 1. *Amillennialism* (means we're in a figurative 1,000 years now) describes the present reign of Jesus in heaven, along with deceased believers and currently living believers - all of which will be followed by Jesus' second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and Jesus' reign over the new earth eternally. 2. *Premillennialism* (means Jesus will come before a literal 1,000 years) also believes in the present reign of Jesus in heaven that is moving toward a time when Jesus returns again, the first resurrection occurs, and there will be a reign of Jesus on the current earth as we know it for 1,000 years. Then will come the final general resurrection, the final judgment, and then the eternal kingdom on the new earth. 3. *Postmillennialism* (means Jesus will come after a literal 1,000 years) believes that the entire world as we currently know it will be converted to Christianity and this will bring a millennium of peace - then to be followed by Jesus' second coming, the general resurrection, final judgment, and the eternal kingdom. Hopefully this makes some sort of sense on these three views? :) I read a commentary that said the key to remember with all 3 of these views is that they are simply timing differences. In all 3 views, Jesus returns again. Jesus reigns. Forever.

12/31 - Verses 11-12 get into Judgment, which is obviously quite a topic to attempt to cover in a daily blog... :) *"And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in the books, according to what they had done."* So... I am going to defer to someone much smarter than me on this one, and HIGHLY encourage you to read Lehman Strauss's article entitled ["The Future Judgment of the Believer" at bible.org at this link](#). **I encourage you to check this link out if you'd like a glimpse toward what happens after we pass on from this life** - including a very interesting look at 5 crowns that can be given / received! Actually, if you are really interested in learning more about what happens after we die, Mr. Strauss at bible.org has a great 10 part series called "Death and Afterward" [at this link](#). **Q: Are you looking forward to your future judgment? On what - or should I say Whom - will you rest your case?**

12/31 - Revelation chapter 21 is definitely one of my favorite chapters in the Bible! It is what our very hearts long for! Today we read a wonderful glimpse of the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God. Certainly verses 3 and 4 are powerful for us to reflect upon: *"I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever."* **Q: Are you looking forward to that day when God will be among his people? When he will remove all sorrows and pains?**

12/31 - And verses 23-25 are so beautiful to meditate upon: *"And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations of the earth will walk in its light, and the rulers of the world will come and bring their glory to it. Its gates never close at the end of day because there is no night."* **Q: Are you looking forward to this everlasting light? The light that can come only from God and Jesus, the Lamb?**

12/31 - Today we finish the book of Revelation with a glorious chapter describing the New Jerusalem in heaven, and with a clear reminder that Jesus is coming again! Chapter 22 verses 1 & 2 are so beautiful: *"And the angel showed me a pure river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, coursing down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations."* This river combines the elements of the river in the Garden of Eden - see [Genesis 2:8-14](#) - and the river flowing from the temple in Ezekiel's vision - see [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#). I love this idea of this "river of life". There are so many beautiful allusions to God and grace being like water or a river in the Bible - particularly in the Psalms. A river that heals us. I love this. There is a great song by Steven Curtis Chapman about diving into the river. I think it's called "Dive" on his Speechless CD. This song of his reminds me so much of these verses. One of his lyrics goes something like: "The River's deep, the river's wide, the river's water is ALIVE! So sink or swim, I'm diving in!" **Q: Do you want to dive into this holy river of God? Do you want to be healed and purified by it's waters? Will you dive in?**

12/31 - Verse 8 is powerful for us to reflect upon, where we see an angel speaking to John after he fell to worship the angel: *"No, don't worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you and your brothers the prophets, as well as all who obey what is written in this scroll. Worship God!"* **Q: My thought here is that do we sometimes worship other people in our life? And does this worship of other people ultimately take away from our worship of God?** Meaning, I

think it might sometimes be tempting for us to "worship" our pastors or ministers or spiritual mentors. **But, should we do this?** I think we would do well to remember that these people in our life are simply servants of God, like this angel. They are not God. We are called to give our hearts and minds and souls and worship to God and God only.

12/31 - Verse 20 (almost) closes out the book of Revelation with these words: "*Come, Lord Jesus!*" **Q: Are these three words a prayer of your heart? Should they be?** It's only recently that I started praying these words from my heart, and it is an amazing thing to truly pray and truly desire. Come Lord Jesus!

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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