



LENT 2019

Jesus on Every Page of the Bible

We know that Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of our faith. But we often forget that He can be found in every aspect of the Bible, not just the New Testament. Let's take time this Lenten Season to explore how Jesus is the one True God, and how we can see Him moving throughout History for our salvation.

The season of Lent, like Advent, is a time of reflection and preparation. We take these forty days, plus Sundays, to meditate and pray as we inch ever closer to Easter. Easter, as we know, is one of (if not the) defining moment of Christianity. Without it, Christmas is just a day in the Winter that we celebrate togetherness and peace. Jesus' resurrection at Easter is the reason that we even gather on Sundays. The fact that the person of Jesus—the Son of God and the only perfect person ever—willingly sacrificed himself to take on our sins as His own is worthy of our reflection and worship.

Over the past several years, we have taken the time to study various aspects of Jesus' ministry and various reactions to it as a Lenten devotional. We have looked at how the story of the Prodigal son informs how we see Jesus; we have looked at various songs that have been written in response to the miracle of Jesus' resurrection; we have even used pop culture references to help us frame this miracle in ways that we can wrap our heads around. Because the fact is, this is almost too big to even imagine.

You might be saying, like Han Solo in Stars Wars: A New Hope, "I don't know, I can imagine quite a lot."

You're not wrong. We are creatures given by God a unique ability to imagine and create and envision more than we might ordinarily expect. We only need to go to an art gallery to be able to see this in tangible ways.

This year, as we journey towards our celebration of Jesus' resurrection at Easter, let's take a moment to reflect that His life and resurrection were not a moment in time that magically appeared, nor was it a plan B. No, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were God's plan for us even from the moment of the Earth's inception.

The plan of our salvation was at the very heart of God from before time even began.

The Bible is one unbroken story of God's love for us, and His drive and desire to reconcile us to Him, even at the cost of dying a horrendous, painful death on a cross to wash away our sins in a river of His mercy and grace.

Let's join together as we journey towards Easter.

Day 1.

In order to truly understand how the relationship that God wants with us, we need to start at the very beginning. As Maria Von Trapp tells us, “it’s a very good place to start.” We have all likely heard or read the Genesis story. We know that God created the heavens and the Earth, and all that are in and on it in 6 days. Notice how after each day, God pronounces it ‘good.’ Not, ‘good enough,’ not ‘that’ll do,’ rather He says it’s ‘good.’

He created mankind, complete with dignity and work to do, and spends time with Adam in the Garden. ‘In the cool of the evening,’ the text tells us, God would walk with Adam and Eve, spending time with them—talking with them, having fun with them, teaching them. There was only one rule—not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Seems simple enough, right? One rule.

But Adam and Eve were tempted, and succumbed to that temptation. They had the fruit. Immediately, their connection with God was altered.

We know the story: Adam and Eve hid from God and were eventually cast out of Paradise and sin had befallen the world. We went from perfect communion with God to a strained and fractured relationship with Him; and condition that continues to this day. All the pain, frustration, loneliness, sin, and brokenness that exists today finds its root in the rebellion that happened that day in the Garden.

You could ask, “Why did God even allow Adam and Eve to rebel in the first place? Why didn’t He stop them from doing it?”

The answer to that is not simple. It can be boiled down to this though: forced love is no love at all. Love and worship must be a choice—otherwise it is nothing. We worship because we see the grace and love and mercy of God in Him, not because we are forced into it like sufferers of some sort of divine Stockholm Syndrome.

The relationship between God and man was fractured, but not eliminated. As we read later on in Genesis, God maintains the relationship, albeit with more structure than previously. There are now rites and rituals put into place that take the place of the organic relationship we had before with God—but the relationship is maintained.

Read Genesis chapters 1-3.

Take a moment to imagine the splendor of seeing the heavens and the Earth spring into existence. Imagine seeing the seas gather together and the land rise from nothingness. Imagine seeing giraffes and gerbils for the first time. Allow God to speak to you as you imagine seeing Him form Adam out of dust and clay, breathing His own breath into Adam’s lungs, seeing the clay and dust animate for the first time.

How does seeing this loving act in your imagination make you feel? Do you think any differently about creation than you did before?

Knowing that God exists in perfect community within Himself (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), and knowing that God chose to create us anyway—can you feel the weight of His love for us?

Day 2.

When we talk about how God has been present throughout history, we need to understand that how God shows up in history varies. Sometimes we can see God's hand through times that he physically moves in the story of mankind—much of Moses' life springs to mind, as well as the story of the Israelites moving from bondage and slavery to freedom and being God's people.

Other times it's subtler or more metaphoric. Such is the case of Jacob's dream of a ladder that bridged the gap between heaven and Earth.

We likely know the story of Jacob and Esau; twins born to Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob is urged to flee from his brother's murderous rage at Jacob's trickery.

As Jacob runs for his life, he gets tired (as will happen), and stops for the night. As he sleeps, Jacob has a dream of a stairway reaching from Heaven to Earth. This stairway bridges the gap between the Earthly and mundane and the divine Holy realm of God. From the top of this stairway Jacob hears the voice of the Lord calling out, reiterating the promise that He had given to Abraham (Jacob's grand-dad), that through Jacob all the people of the Earth would be blessed.

It was just a dream, you say. The result of hard running and deep exhaustion. Could be.

But whenever we read about a dream in the Bible it always has more significance than 'just a dream.' We never hear, for example, about Peter or Paul having a dream about unleavened bread doing a song and dance. No. All the dreams we read about are significant.

In this case, we can see that Jacob is hearing that God has found favor in him; but we also see something that we never have before—a literal bridge between Heaven and Earth. There's only one bridge between heaven and Earth mentioned anywhere else in the Bible—the person of Jesus.

Jacob was getting a foretaste of God's plan for mankind—not only would the Lord bless all the peoples of the Earth through Jacob's lineage—but also that He would personally bridge that gap between the Holy and the profane.

Read Genesis 28. 10-22.

We know that God has promised that Abraham's descendants would be the blessing of the whole world, we read that over and over; and we are the beneficiaries of that promise—having come to know the Lord through that line. But why does God feel the need to remind Jacob of this? And why at this point?

Have you ever needed to be reminded of the promises of God? Not told, but reminded. Maybe today you need to be reminded of the end of the Lord's promise to Jacob. He says, "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." This is an immensely profound promise—one that stands to this day. God will not leave us until He has done what He promised.

Day 3.

When we list the names of God, among those names is the Bread of Life and the Living Water. Jesus Himself says that He is the Living Water in John chapter 4 as He talks to the Samaritan woman at the well. We in the West don't often think of water as an essential need since it is so readily available. Maybe if we're camping and are left with only stream water to drink, we might think of the necessity of water to live; but mostly, we assume it will be available.

Not so for the escaping Israelite people as they ran from Egypt.

Lost in the desert, running from slavery, without water or hope for water; the Israelite people start to whine and complain. If we put ourselves in their place, we can understand this. After all, it seems that Moses and Aaron lead them from Pharaoh without a plan. It certainly seems that way to them—so much so that they start to think that it might have been better to have remained in bondage than to be free.

But God is in control.

Always.

We see in Exodus chapter 17 this scene: the Israelites are complaining about the lack of water, and come to Moses. We can imagine that Moses understands their complaint, but it seems that he has more faith in God than they do. After quarreling for some time, Moses (at the end of his rope) cries out to God, "What am I going to do with these people? They're going to kill me!" And God responds, "I'm with you. Go hit that rock over there, and I will provide water for them."

We can see in the text that God tells Moses that He will stand there before Moses.

This is not a metaphorical statement. God is present with the people. He understands their predicament. He invented humanity after all—it is no surprise to Him that people need water to survive.

God is with the people even when they are bullheadedly refusing to trust that the God who turned the Nile into a river of blood and caused frogs to rain from the sky would refuse them such a necessity as water.

Read Exodus 17. 1-7

Do I react like the Israelite people when things we need are seemingly withheld? Do I grumble and complain, openly wishing for a return to our bondage of slavery to sin? Or am I more like Moses—do I trust God to provide even when I can't see a way out.

Do I rightly see God's provision as a gift and a sign of love, or do I reject all that I know of God at the first instance of trouble?

Day 4.

As you can imagine, tracking the person of Jesus through the whole of the Bible would take more than 40 days; we couldn't even do it by looking at only one book of the Bible each day—there are 66 books after all. So, instead we'll track some of the more important instances from most of the books.

Today, we'll skip a few books ahead, and look at Deuteronomy. This book is often a little overlooked; we rarely hear a sermon based on this book. It's a book of the Law, and so we start to think, "We don't live under the Law, therefore, we can safely skip this book." And fair play to that. We often have limited time to dig into the Bible on a Sunday morning, and the dryness of the books of the Law can be a hard slog.

This does not mean that the narrative of the reconciliation of God to His people skips books of the Bible. Far from it—Jesus, and the Gospel, can be found on every page, through every age of humankind.

Take, for example, Deuteronomy 18.

There's a pretty high likelihood you have never heard a pastor use this text as anything more than a footnote in a sermon. But this passage tells us loads about how the Messiah was foretold even from Moses' time.

We read, "Moses continued, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you yourselves requested of the Lord your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, 'Don't let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.'*

"Then the Lord said to me, 'What they have said is right. I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf.'" (18. 15-19)

Do you see what's there? God speaks to His people through Moses, saying that He will send a Messiah who will bridge the gap between Heaven and Earth, who will be the direct spokesman for God, telling us all the Father's heart.

We know from our own experiences that the Messiah is Jesus, and that He did, in fact, tell us all about the Father's heart. Jesus, foretold all the way back in Deuteronomy, is that bridge between fallen mankind and Holy God. A bridge that withstands the test of all that we might try to throw at it. It cannot be shaken, nor can it be torn down. God reaches out, God has not forgotten, nor has God reneged on His promise to send a Mediator between God and man.

Read Deuteronomy 18.

Imagine the terror of the Israelite people as they lived from day to day, lost in the desert, following a pillar of fire at night and a tower of cloud during the day. Put yourself in their place for a moment. The voice of God, coming from nowhere, the pure holiness of the everlasting God living among the people. Even Isaiah, as righteous a man as we can imagine, couldn't stand to be in the presence of God in His Temple.

Now imagine the person of Jesus. Gentle, loving, kind, relatable, willing to stand in the gap for the dispossessed and broken, standing up when there's wrong in the world. Pure holiness wrapped in human skin and bone. Which is a more inviting bridge? Is it any wonder God sent His Son for us?

Day 5.

The story of Joshua and the Israelite transition from lost in the desert to coming into the Promised Land reads like a Boys adventure story. There's intrigue and spy-craft, battles and bravery, feats of daring-do, chases, and miracles. But at the center of it all is Joshua, and man that leant into God's provision and providence with all his heart.

Joshua took over leadership of the Israelite people from Moses at a young age, but God specifically chose him for this leadership position. God knew that Joshua was the right person for the job, He knew his heart was totally and irrevocably given over to Him.

We read today just before the Battle of Jericho. Sunday school kids are well versed in this battle and the unconventional tactic Joshua used to tear down the walls—silence and chaotic noise. This is a plan that could only have worked with God on their side. Chaotic noise may break down a person's defenses, but rarely does it tear down physical walls. Until it did.

We can see that God is clearly in this situation with Joshua, but that's not where we first see the person of God in this story. We first see Him a few verses before, in chapter 5 verse 13.

As Joshua was near Jericho, he came across a man with a sword standing in his way. As a military commander, Joshua rightly demands to know who he is seeing. The answer would astonish us even today, knowing what we know. The man tells Joshua that he is neither friend nor foe, but rather the commander of the Armies of Heaven. The text is unclear whether this man was an angel or a pre-incarnate Jesus, but the *context* leads us to believe that it is the former, not the latter, because when Joshua falls to his face in reverence, he is told that he is on holy ground. All the instances where Angels have appeared to mankind, the angel starts with 'Do not be afraid,' and never mentions that that place is holy.

How does this show us the person of Jesus in the Bible? Well, Jericho was one of the most heavily fortified places in all of the Ancient Near East. Walls thick enough for chariots to drive atop, a walled city so large it took the Israelite people a full day to walk around. God, in the figure of this man in Joshua's way, it representative of how God is with us. In the text, just after this encounter, God tells Joshua how they will defeat this city; letting us know that He is in control. A people group the size of the Israelites could not have defeated Jericho without Him. God is with us when we're up against it.

Read Joshua 5 and 6.

Has God shown up in your life in this way? I don't mean physically, necessarily, blocking your path; but rather, in a way that shows that He is aware of your coming trouble? Has He made Himself tangibly present to you in your time of need?

How did you react? Did you either physically or metaphorically fall to your face in reverence and worship, or was it overwhelming? Were you reassured or frightened? There's no right answer, but I would like you to take a moment to think about a time when you were 'face to face' with the God of the universe.

Take some time to pray today about how we react when we come up against trouble of any sort. Do we look for God, or do we look for a manmade way of confronting our problems? If we find that God is a second, or even last, resort, let's take a moment to repent of that, and pray that God will make Himself first in our lives.

Day 6.

In the days before Israel demanded a king, they were ruled by Judges. Most of the time these judges were prophets, men who spoke directly to, and heard directly from, God. One of the most famous was Sampson the strong man.

It is hard for us in our modern age, with an understanding of Kings and Parliaments and Congresses to wrap our heads around a system that went to God for law, rule, and to settle disputes. It seems very odd to us. That God Himself would be willing and interested in our day to day lives enough to put into place a system of government that relied totally on Him. Yet, He did.

The Judges were men who were fallible. They made mistakes and were sometimes taken out of their positions for failure to live upright and Godly lives. And like the Law that they were in charge of (the Ten Commandments, Levitical Law, *etc.*), they were mere shadows of what was to come.

The Law of Israel was a signpost pointing the way to God, much in the same way that the Judges were signposts for a pure and Holy Judge that would come—Jesus.

We can read the stories of the Judges, see the lives that they lead, read how they kept Israel on the narrow path and we can see in this history the glimmer of Jesus' reign and rule in the coming days. A rule and reign that would see the end of poverty and war, a rule and reign that would see those who chase after God in His presence, a rule and reign that would bring the physical Messiah to us again in all His glory and holiness.

Like the Israelites of old, we can only see glimpses of this Kingdom. We see "as through a dark glass," as Paul put it. But we can see Him break into our lives just like the people who lived under the Judges.

We see in the story of the Judges that over and again the people of Israel would stray from God, becoming more and more evil with passing generations—but God would call a Judge to rally the people back to Him. This is a pattern we see in God's people throughout the Bible. That people chase after God and then, when things seem like their good, relax their chase, and fall into sin. It raises the question, Why not chase after God all the time? Why live cyclical lives, back and forth, to and from evil and sin?

The story of the Judges tells us much, but it mostly tells us of our absolute need for a Savior.

Read the Story of Gideon. (Judges 6-8).

If there ever was a less likely candidate for hero than Gideon, you would be hard pressed to find him. An unlikely man with doubts and fears—but he listened to God with all his heart.

As you read Gideon's story, think about times where you were afraid, times when you were doubting, times when you felt that what God was asking was unreasonable.

The Bible was written for you, but not necessarily to you. We can glean wisdom and see patterns of servanthood and holiness in it that can inform how we chase after God. Judges might not be a 'Book of Wisdom,' but there is much wisdom to be found in it.

As you read, think about what wisdom God might be imparting to you through this history. How can we apply that wisdom in our lives? How might we understand God better when we see God's patience and gentleness, laced with stern reproof in Gideon's story?

Day 7.

Ruth's story is inspiring in many ways. We see God's heart for the poor and destitute, we see how God's plan is for all people, not just Israel, and we can see the base layers of Jesus' genealogy.

In that, we know that Jesus, the Messiah, would come from David's line. And we know from the end of the book that David is a direct descendent of Ruth and Boaz. This much is clear. But what we learn early on in the book of Ruth has implications for us that we cannot ignore.

We begin the book of Ruth with a quick history of her life. We learn that she is the widowed wife of one of Naomi's sons, and that she is not from Israel. This is important to us for many reasons, not least of which is this: God's love is not exclusive to Israel—others can be, and are implicitly so—brought into the plan.

Ruth, by her relationship with her mother-in-law, is exposed to God's love and plan for the world. She has learned of God's love through seeing Naomi, and loving Naomi's son; she cannot bear the thought of leaving her new family, even if it is not the one she thought she'd have when her life began.

We see, starting in verse 8, the story of Gentiles being grafted into the plan of God. This is not the first time that we see this, certainly we have seen non-Israelites marrying into the people of God, but this is one of the first times we see explicitly a person choosing to join when there were other options available.

Ruth could have returned to her people, the Moabites; she was young enough to marry again (we see this later in the book). She could have taken Naomi's advice and returned to her own tribe—yet she doesn't. In verse 16 we read what she tells her mother-in-law: "Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God."

It was Ruth's choice to leave her own people to join with the people of God.

Many of us find ourselves in the same position. We did not grow up in Christian families, and we found a relationship with one of the 'tribe.' That relationship changed us in unforgettable ways, changing how we see ourselves and how we live our lives. Through that relationship we found a new family, a new place to belong—drawn in by the love of God through our circumstances and friendships, attracted to the people of God through the evidence of God's love.

This simple decision that Ruth made changed her life in ways that she could never have imagined—certainly attaching herself to an older widowed woman to move to a place she'd never been before was not a flippant decision. It could have gone very badly. The both of them could have found themselves very poor, cast out from society for being unimportant, left to scrounge for food and shelter. Yet God used Ruth's choice to continue His plan for the salvation of the world—including those not born into the Kingdom.

Read Ruth 1.

Note that Naomi has fully adopted Ruth into her life and heart, calling her daughter—not daughter-in-law. Naomi doesn't make the distinction of degree—Ruth is her daughter, nothing more or less. How does this square with how God sees us? Are we adopted into the family of God, or are we merely accepted?

As you continue reading Ruth, should you choose to do so, you will read that Ruth was the great-grandmother of David. Can you think of a time when a decision that you made, even one as fraught with possible trouble as Ruth's to go with Naomi, was the lynchpin of a truly wonderful event in your life and that of your family?

Day 8.

In the book of Ruth we read about the grafting of our lives into the Kingdom through a choice made that came through a relationship with a member of the 'tribe' of God. We also read in Ruth about Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, who paid off a debt that Ruth and her mother-in-law could not pay—redeeming her and giving her a future. This future included a son named Obed; a man who would be the father of Jesse, who was David's father, thus including Gentiles (like most of us) into God's plan for the salvation of the world.

David, as we know, would become one of (if not the) greatest Kings of Israel. He is often described as a man after God's own heart—an archetype of how we might chase after God in our own lives. Even in his wrongdoing, David displays a tremendous amount of humility and contrition when he is confronted with his sin; a model that we would do well to emulate.

From a literary standpoint, David is also a foreshadowing of Jesus. Not just in his Kingship over Israel (although that is true), nor in the sameness of their birthplace and genealogy (also true), nor even when we compare and contrast David's time in exile with Jesus' time in the desert (true as well.) No, we see the foreshadowing of Jesus in David's life even earlier than that.

We can see Jesus modeled and foreshadowed in the classic historical tale of David and Goliath.

The story of David and Goliath has become a bit of a cliché, or shorthand, for victory over insurmountable odds. It's March Madness soon, and I can almost guarantee that someone will describe a first weekend match-up of a 16 seed versus a 1 seed as a classic David and Goliath story. Except in the basketball, the little guy will probably lose badly, and David won decisively.

David, the anointed king of Israel, and still a boy, stands up against the greatest enemy of his people—a nine-foot-tall, armored, beast of a man in one on one battle to determine the outcome of war. Yet David stood before him, small and unarmored, with only a handful of stones and a sling.

And defeated the unbeatable foe.

We see the same thing in Jesus. Not that Jesus stood before a giant, nor did He defeat one with a river rock. No Jesus stood before the greatest enemy of all—sin and death. He stood humbly before His enemy, secure in the knowledge that He was in the Father's will, and beat death; rising again on the third day to create a bridge between God and man that would not perish.

Read 1 Samuel 17.

Take a moment to pray that God will speak to you today as you meditate on this passage.

Note the similarities between David and Jesus: both are sent by their father to their battle ground. Both are facing an undefeated foe. Both, in their victories, secure peace and freedom for their people.

David is not Jesus—Jesus was perfect and the incarnate God, David was famously flawed and prone to abuse his power. Yet, we can see the glimmers of Jesus redemptive work even here, in this short story about a shepherd boy who is king.

Think for a moment about how these two kings protect and provide for their people through their leadership and sacrifice.

Day 9.

If David shows us how to chase after God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, then his son Solomon shows us how to rest in peace, safe in the wisdom of God.

Obviously, we cannot look to either man and try to copy their life beat for beat. David, for all that is true about his being a man after God's own heart, he also abused his power and status often. His son, Solomon, was not much different in that respect. Hundreds of wives, as many concubines, extravagant lifestyle, straying into idolatry and sin over and over again.

But in Solomon's wisdom we see a shadow, a pre-cursor if you will, of the rule and reign of Jesus Christ.

We know from reading First and Second Kings that Solomon was chosen as the one to build the Temple because of his peacefulness. David was too warlike and covered in blood to be the one that God would build His Temple through. And we know that God appeared to Solomon in a dream, asking what gift Solomon might want. His response pleased the Lord—he wanted wisdom to best govern and administer justice for God's people. (1 Kings 3.5-13).

Solomon's wisdom is legendary. People came from all over the Near East to seek counsel from him, and because of his God-given wisdom, he was able to administer both counsel and justice in even the thorniest of situations.

Wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel are defining characteristics of the reign and rule of the Kingdom. In this age, and indeed, Solomon's, we struggle to discern correctly, because we cannot see others' hearts. However, this will not be true in the Kingdom, where Jesus judges not by outward appearances, but by knowing the very heart of man.

Read 1 Kings 3.

If you were asked by God what gift He could give you, what would it be? Strength? Power? The ability to talk to fish? Wisdom?

Since you are not Aquaman, it seems unlikely you would choose to talk to fish, but of the others? What might your choice be?

Take a moment today to find a quiet spot to pray—away from the distractions of daily life, without your phone; just you and God. We don't have Solomon's wisdom, but we have an even greater thing—the Holy Spirit living inside us, and He has even greater wisdom than a thousand Solomons.

Pray that God would reveal Himself to you in a situation you might be going through. Perhaps you're going through a tough time at work, or with you kids, or spouse. Pray that God would give you the wisdom to navigate that situation well, in a pleasing manner to Him.

Day 10.

We skip a little ahead. Not because the person of Jesus is not revealed in the intervening books, but because there's so much Bible to cover, and so few days to cover it in. I mean, it took John Piper over a decade to preach through the book of Romans, and I'm definitely not John Piper.

So, we jump to Job. In Job we see the person of Jesus typified in many ways: the suffering servant, the faithful son, the willingness to remain in the Father's will and worship God even when the suffering seems cruel and unmerited.

In fact, all of Job's suffering and loss was unmerited. There wasn't a single thing that Job did that warranted his life.

And yet.

And yet, Job chose to worship the Father of Heaven, even in his suffering.

This is instructive for us. Not because at the end of it all he regained all that he had lost several times over, but because he knew that God is good.

We read in Job 1. 21-22: *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I depart. The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.*

Job's first act was to worship God. In his case there was no question of God having to vindicate Himself because of sin in Job's life (Job 1.8), it was purely a question of God acting as he deemed well. Though in a matter of a day, Job had lost all his livelihood, his wealth, his health, and his family, here was a man so completely devoted to God that he could bow to God in the midst of utter devastation.

Where there is true worship, there is no complaint. Whatever God's dealings with us may be, whether they seem reasonable or unreasonable, God's ways are invariably good (Romans 8.28).

How could Job do this? He knew two unassailable facts:

God is sovereign.

God is good.

Job could worship because he knew that whatever was happening to him, it was under the sovereign hand of a good God. When lives fall apart, we're inclined to see God as not holding up His end of the bargain. We blame God for losses in our lives, when in reality they were never earned in the first place. All that we receive is through God's mercy—when it's gone it doesn't change God's character, but it might reveal ours.

Read Job 1.

When trials or losses come, we must remember the unchanging merciful God. Think about a time when you felt that God had abandoned you, had taken something from you that you missed terribly. Do you, in hindsight, see God's hand in that situation? Maybe you don't see it yet. Maybe it has been too recently for you to see it. Remember, as Job did, that God is Good, all the time.

Day 11.

The Psalms are lovely, yeah? We can come to them and be comforted that no matter how we come—tired, poor in spirit, elated with God’s blessings, searching, afraid—there is a writer that has felt the same thing. We read David’s Psalms (which often read like the Blues) and we find comfort and rest. Or we find reassuring messages that God is good, and never changes.

But we also can come to the Psalms and see that Jesus is prophesied there as well. Psalm 16 tells us about the resurrection. Psalms 22 and 69 tell us that Jesus would be hated and reviled for no cause. Psalm 110 tells us that the Messiah would be Lord over all, and seated at the right hand of God the Father.

The person of Jesus is revealed to us throughout the Psalms. His personhood and holiness splashed over thousands of lines of poetry and song. This, for creative types, is a lovely thing. If nothing else, it tells us that we have a place in the Kingdom.

But what else it does is this: it speaks to us in ways that tickle our senses in ways that prose cannot. It conjures up images and reliable feelings that a history book doesn’t, or a letter can’t. Neither is better—it’s just different. An it tells us that God is creative. If art is included in God’s Word, we can know that God values our creativity.

Psalm 2 gives us a glimpse of God’s Father heart. Many of us have, at best strained relationships with our fathers. Maybe we didn’t really know them, or perhaps they were distant or abusive. Which makes this metaphor sometimes fraught with bad images. But we can know, in the context of the entirety of the Bible that a true father, or Father, does not treat his children badly. He showers them with love and blessings, He disciplines with love, He leads them in righteousness. Psalm 23 does much the same, giving us a picture of a loving Father that leads us to peace and safety. We can run to Him when we stumble, we can come to Him when we are afraid; He will welcome us with His whole heart and gather us into His warm embrace.

Psalm 3 tells us that God is one who is so attentive to our lives that He will answer us. No other god would do that. Other gods are fickle, they change as the wind does, choosing to focus on themselves rather than their people. We need only to read Greek or Roman mythology to see this. But our God is different. He watches over us like an attentive shepherd. He listens to us when we cry out to Him. He pursues us when we stray.

There is no God like our God—none at all. The Psalms tell us this, and it resounds within us because it’s true.

Read Psalms 2 and 3.

Note the attentiveness of God, paying close attention to God’s love and mercy and righteousness.

Take a moment to pray that God would reveal that same love and attentiveness to you today; that He would answer you when you cry out, and show you mercy and grace.

Spend some time writing down times when God heard you cry out, either in fear or in worship. Can you see how God cares for you through this exercise? Can you see the hand of God comforting you in your time of need? Responding to you in your doubt? Expressing pleasure in your worship?

Day 12.

We read the Book of Proverbs sort of piecemeal at times. It's easy to read it that way—each bundle of verses is a little nugget of insight into how God wants us to live our lives, each section a sermon application. But the Proverbs that were written by Solomon are more than simply nice aphorisms or good advice, they give us true insight into who God is, and point the way to Jesus in ways that we can understand.

We were reminded yesterday that Solomon was the wisest person to walk the Earth. Asked by God in a dream what gift he would want most, Solomon pleased God by asking for wisdom. The thing about wisdom is that it is rooted in Truth—capital T. There are things that are true, and then there's Truth—and Truth only comes from God.

And because wisdom is, by definition, rooted in Truth, and Truth only comes from God—it stands that Solomon's wisdom tells us about God—it must do.

Like the Psalms, the Proverbs are written in a way that finds its way to our ears and hearts easily because they were written by a person who searched after the heart of God. Solomon, like his father before him, certainly had faults; faults that seem glaring in our eyes at times. Yet Solomon writes in a way that shows us where his heart lay, even if that same heart was burdened by sin.

Solomon's wisdom shows us how to chase after God. It shows us how to live in a way that pleases the Almighty, and allows us to learn from Solomon's mistakes so we don't have to make them as well. When we read his words we can, at times, feel the ache of sin wrenching its way past the pride and stubbornness that choked Solomon's heart. And we can feel the peace that wound its way past that ache like a gentle river in a scorched land.

We come to the Proverbs for wisdom, and wisdom is given to us through them. And in that very wisdom we read the exalting of God's eternal nature, and the foretelling of His unmerited grace.

Read Proverbs 8.

In Proverbs 8 we read of wisdom calling out on the road—calling out to those who would hear its voice; calling out the essential nature of wisdom and Truth. Without these we are lost, without these we have no hope—because it is wisdom and Truth that show us grace and mercy and every good thing.

Take a moment to ponder the parallels of Proverbs 8 with what Jesus says about Himself. See how they run, not just in tandem, but are the same thing.

Spend some time in prayer today that God will grant you the wisdom to chase after Him in a way that will cause Him to tell you, "Well done, you. Well done indeed."

Day 13.

We see Jesus all over the book of Isaiah. Most of the prophecies that we read at Christmastime come from that same book. In fact, it is hard not to see Him on display when we read Isaiah. We know about Jesus' birth from a virgin from Isaiah, We know that He would be Immanuel from him, we learn that He would be both God and man, that He would heal the sick and give sight to the blind and would set the prisoner free, that He would have a forerunner, He would be whipped and beaten, die for us, and be resurrected all from Isaiah's faithful prophesying.

Isaiah is a book that absolutely tells us about Jesus. And that would be enough.

Except Isaiah also tells us that Jesus would do all of these things—not just for the Jewish people—but also for us Gentiles.

This is amazing news for us! God knew, even before time, that we would be given an all-encompassing grace that would free us from our bondage of sin. This cannot be underscored enough—we who find ourselves 'outside the fold,' as it were are invited in to the same grace and mercy that was offered to the people of God. We are invited to join in the chase after God's face.

This is staggering to me when I sit to think about it. The very inventor of the universe knew—absolutely knew—hundreds of years before Jesus was born that this sacrifice that Isaiah talks about would cover *my* sin.

And yours.

And all who will believe in His Almighty name.

We know that God is Truth, and all that He says is True. When He tells us, through Isaiah, that He has come for us all, we can trust that with all that is within us.

Let us remind ourselves that, as Einstein said, "God does not play dice with the universe." He is in control, and nothing is made that has been made. He breathed life into us, He has graced us with His everlasting love, He has gone to the ends of the Earth to show us that love. Amen.

Read Isaiah 42. 10-13.

Find a quiet spot today. Close off all the incessant noise, turn off your phone ringer, close the door, or even just leave the radio off as you drive, and sit with God. It will be hard to do—do it anyway.

Praise God in this time. Thank Him for all that He has done for you. Thank Him for being the bridge between heaven and Earth. List His attributes out loud.

There's something about saying these things out loud that reminds us that they are real and True and worth praising God for. It is good for us to praise Him out loud, and the Scriptures often tell us to do so; even if it feels weird.

Day 14.

God has used prophets for centuries to show us who He is, why He would come, and how we should live our lives to be pleasing to Him. We read Isaiah and are overwhelmed with the evidence that God knew His plan from the start and is carrying it out on our behalf. We read Samuel and see glimpses of the Messiah on every page. We read other prophets and are able to see the glory of God and His holiness in action—and are able to see that every promise that God has made is carried out in full. We can trust God because He is trustworthy.

We come to Jeremiah, a story we are familiar with, and we see more trustworthy prophesy about the (then) coming Messiah.

Jeremiah tells us much about Jesus, confirming what Isaiah and the other prophets have told us about Him. We read that the Messiah will be wholly God and wholly man, that He would be from the line of David, and that the Messiah (Jesus) would be our righteousness.

This is a very important part of who the Messiah would be. He would not just be a political savior, as many believed, that would free the Jewish people from their bondage to the various occupying forces that enslaved them or held them down like the Babylonians or the Romans. He would do more than just heal the sick and give sight to the blind—although these would be signs that He is, in fact, the Messiah. He would be more than just a descendant of David—which given that David had many wives could have been many people.

No, the Messiah would be more than that.

When we remember that the sacrificial systems put in place by the Lord during the Mosaic Era, as well as the Law, are signposts and forerunners of how God would provide the bridge between God and man, we do well to think in terms of a pure and holy sacrifice being that bridge. And when we also remember that those sacrifices were meant, in a way, to be our righteousness in the eyes of the Lord, we can begin to see what Jeremiah is saying in chapter 23.

Because we have fallen, and are no longer righteous on our own behalf, we need to be covered by an external righteousness—the Messiah does this for us. Jeremiah tells us that the Lord Himself will be our righteousness—that the sacrificial system that was in place before under the Law will no longer suffice.

Jesus is both the Lord (we know this because He fits all the Messianic criteria), and He sacrificed Himself on our behalf, fulfilling the Law in all its parts. Jesus becomes our righteousness! We need only to believe in Him for this covering in righteousness to be true for us!

Read Jeremiah 23. 5-6

Think about what you know and what we have learned about Jesus in the Old Testament. How does Jesus fit this description?

Take a moment to pray today, praising God for His covering us in righteousness, effectively vouching for us to the Father, taking our unworthiness and replacing it with His worthiness.

Day 15.

Yesterday we saw that Jeremiah tells us that the Messiah (Jesus) would become our righteousness, allowing us to come into the Kingdom on His merit, not our own. This is an important fact about how we are saved by Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross, and it underscores our need—we cannot do this on our own.

The book of Hosea underscores even further our need. In this book of the Bible, Hosea is instructed by God to marry a harlot—a woman of very ill repute, a woman who constantly runs from her loving husband to run back to her old life and her old ways before her salvation. Hosea, like God, consistently runs back out to find her, to draw her back in, to pursue her and love her back to him.

Francine Rivers' novel *Redeeming Love*, while not at all subtle in its retelling of this story, does a faithful job of underlining the persistent and all-encompassing love of Hosea towards his prostitute wife.

But Hosea's story is not just a romance stuck in the Bible for added drama—God's love is enough, we don't need more than that to see the love that God has for us. Rather, Hosea can be looked at as a metaphor for God's relationship with us—in fact the book tells us outright that Hosea's relationship with Gomer is representative of His relationship with us.

Unfortunately, we are not the hero. We are the prostitute wife.

We run to God when things are bad, and run from Him when we feel better and things are going well. Yet God, in His mercy, continues to chase us, ever loving us, even when we desert Him for our own devices. Hosea is more than a romantic love story of a long-suffering husband to his adulterous wife; it is a mirror to our own relationship with God.

The Bible is written **for** us, but not necessarily **to** us—which means that while not everything is a one to one analogy, we can see God's heart, nature, wisdom, and love for us in everything that we read in it. Hosea's story is specifically aimed at the Israelites and their consistent turning away from God to the gods of the people they lived near. The Israelite people would turn to God at times, and when things seemed to be going well, would get spiritually distracted by the 'good life' offered by other, perhaps more tangible, things. Reading Hosea's story reminds us that God loves us even though we stray, and will—like the shepherd who left the ninety-nine to chase the one—chase after us as well.

Read Hosea 1-3.

How does this story relate to you? You may never have 'stepped out' on God in the same sort of way that Israel, or its cypher Gomer, did, but there are times when we sin—when we stray from what we know is right—to chase after things that we know aren't good for us. Take a moment to ask God to bring back those memories, as painful as they may be.

Don't dwell on those memories—they have no power over you anymore. Rather, take the time to praise God that He chased after you and brought you home, no matter how many times He needed to do so, and loved you despite your running away. Know that God, even more than Hosea, will always chase after the one He loves to bring them home—that's you.

Day 16.

It was either St. Augustine or Bob the Tomato that said, “Jonah was a prophet, but he never really got it.” Whichever it was, he was wise; because Jonah was a prophet that never really understood his purpose.

Sunday School for most of us has turned this story into a wonderful little story about how Jonah spent 3 days in the belly of a fish, and re-found his dedication to God. Which is true in a way—after 3 days enjoying the sights and smells of the inside of a large fish’s stomach, Jonah did go to Nineveh and tell the people there about God.

The problem was that Jonah was rooting for the Ninevites to reject the message so that God would wipe them out.

Jonah’s story tells us a couple of things about Jesus:

1. Jonah’s time in the belly of a large fish is a sort of foreshadowing of the 3 days that Jesus would spend in the grave paying for our sins.
2. God, in the person of Jesus, is unwilling that any should go without hearing the saving news of the Gospel—or in this case, the proto-Gospel.

For an Israelite prophet, the Ninevites were the worst of the worst. Evil, underhanded, murderous, probably stinky—you name it, they did it. They were the enemy of Israel, and Jonah was unhappy and scared to go there to tell them about God’s judgement on them. So, he ran in the opposite direction. This much the Sunday School story tells us.

Jonah went to Nineveh with the hope that the Ninevites would reject his message from God, and then would be destroyed. That was what Jonah wanted, but he knew that God is a gracious God—Jonah was reluctant to go, but that didn’t mean that he didn’t know his God’s merciful nature.

God uses the story of Jonah to tell us something about grace. We (and everyone else in the world), like the Ninevites, have done nothing that could earn us salvation. Our salvation is the product of God’s grace—we were afforded the opportunity to hear the Gospel, and believed—like the Ninevites—and therefore our past misdeeds were erased. Thank the Lord for that!

Read Jonah 4.

The book of Jonah tells us much about God’s heart for the world. Jonah was unhappy to go to Nineveh because he knew that God would be merciful to them—a fact that Jonah’s heart hated. And, as we find in chapter 4, Jonah was very unhappy with the fact that the Ninevites accepted God’s mercy—so much so that he says that he would rather die than to see the Ninevites saved.

It raises the question: Do we act the same? Do we harbor enough hatred in our hearts to rather see a people destroyed than to see them come to God? It’s a hard question, and requires that we look hard at our lives and actions concerning the lost. But God is a God who wants to see all the world come to Him. As we go about our business today, think about who God would like you to show His mercy and grace to—they might accept it.

Day 17.

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus comes from such a small town? We can start to understand the idea that Jesus wasn't born to an aristocratic family, or come from power or wealth; we can even understand why Jesus was born in such an unusual way when we place His life and early circumstances against the idea of the Kingdom's upside-down nature. The Servant-King leads from beside us, not in front like a war-like king, or from behind like a strategist king—but beside us, loving us and helping us from a place of nearness and intimacy.

But Jesus' birthplace was not an accident. It wasn't a product of a random census that nobody saw coming. Jesus could be from David's line without being from the same hometown in the same way that I was not born in the same place as my ancestors. But the prophet Micah makes it clear that even such a small town as Bethlehem holds an important place in the birth of the Messiah.

From a metaphoric standpoint, this tells us that there is nothing too small to be used by God. David was a shepherd, and forgotten by his family when Samuel came to town. Those river stones that David used to defeat Goliath? Small enough to fit in the palm of the hand. The poor man who gave two pennies at the Temple was lauded by Jesus for giving so much of what he had—the size of the offering is nothing compared to the heart behind it. Size means very little in the Kingdom. The King of Kings was born next to sheep and oxen in a small town almost forgotten by the world.

But in a more literal sense Jesus' birthplace tells us a ton about how God does not allow randomness to steer history. Micah 5.2 tells us that even in Micah's time, God knew that His Son would be born in Bethlehem. And even more—that the Messiah would be God incarnate. It was written even before time the text tells us.

The ruler of Israel would be one whose origins were from the distant past. The future King would be older than the hills—this can only mean God incarnate. That's the only thing it could mean. Which also means that history was leading to that very moment when Mary and Joseph rocked up to Bethlehem for the Roman census, and God came to us in the person of Jesus.

There are no little things in the Kingdom and no coincidences.

Read Micah 5.2.

We know that God has everything in His control. As the song says, "He has the whole world in His hand." We see in Micah that even such a small detail as the town in which the Messiah would be born was foretold. We have seen throughout the Old Testament that God has a plan for the salvation of mankind, that it is not random happenstance and recovery that has driven history.

Have you seen this in your life? That God has a plan for you? Can you trace the hand of God through your life to bring you to Him?

Take a moment to write out your story, focusing on how God has moved in your life to bring you to today. If such a relatively insignificant detail of Jesus' hometown was foretold, can you see how everything that has happened in your life was also known by God from beyond time itself?

Day 18.

If you are like me, you've probably heard very few sermons on Habakkuk. It's an easy book to overlook—it's heavy in tone and subject matter, difficult to read because of its form, and seemingly only about the past.

But!

Here's the thing about prophetic books—they often work on more than one level. As we have read earlier, the Bible is written **for** us, but not necessarily **to** us. Habakkuk's prophetic poetry and song are certainly of his age—i.e. they deal with issues that were happening at the time. But they are also about the future—even events that are future to us.

One of the ways that we can know that the Bible is trustworthy is that it agrees with itself. There are no, as we might say today, continuity errors. God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. So, when we read about Habakkuk's vision of God's judgement, and we see that it agrees with the Apostle John's vision in Revelation, we can know that these two events are true and rightly related to us.

It is never easy to talk about visions and prophetic writing—the images that are presented are often too foreign to our understanding, and are also often metaphoric or use images that make sense in a different cultural setting or time.

If we look at Habakkuk 3, we see parallels between his day and our future. In Habakkuk 3. 3, He starts with a 'theophany' (which is just a fancy word for an 'appearance of God') saying 'God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran.' This is followed by the first of three 'selahs' in the chapter. So, let's do a 'selah'. Let's stop, pause, and think about this. Where was Teman? Where is Mount Paran? Had God come from there before? Will He come from there in the future? Was Habakkuk revealing this because it was something that had happened in the past, the future, or both? So many questions... so few answers (so far!).

Let's fill in some blanks. Teman was a large city in Edom, very close to Petra. God is said to have come from here in the past but will do so again in the future. The important aspect for us is the future coming of Jesus Christ from Edom at His return. From here He shall come in great glory. Habakkuk, like the apostle John in Revelation 1. 16, can only relate this glory to the power of the sun shining in all its strength.

It is easy to read things like this and get quite scared. The end of time is a difficult thing to get excited about. But one thing is certain—God is in control, and has been moving for all of eternity to bring us to Him so that we can live forever in the Kingdom!

Read Habakkuk 3.

The imagery in this chapter is hard to read—whole peoples in distress and anguish, questioning God, violent images; it's enough to make us all a little nervous. We might choose to skip this book if it were up to us. But as we read, we see this: God answers Habakkuk. Despite Habakkuk's questioning, his irritation, his doubt, God answers Habakkuk. This is an amazing thing. There is no logical reason that the inventor of maroon should answer Habakkuk, yet He does.

Take some time today to ponder the fact that God loves us so much that He would take note of our questions and answer them. Praise God that He does.

Day 19.

We rightly call Jesus King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but He is more than that.

Messiah, Immanuel, Prince of Peace, Everlasting God, Almighty, Wonderful Counsellor—the list goes on. He is also the Great High Priest that sits at the right hand of the Father, mediating between God and man as the book of Hebrews tells us.

The book of Zechariah tells us this as well.

Prophetically describing the Messiah, Zechariah tells us about ‘the Branch’ that will spread out and build the Temple. Samuel uses this imagery of the branch to describe the Messiah as well, so the context tells us who Zechariah is talking about.

Verse 12 of chapter 6 says this: “Here is the man called the Branch. He will spread out from where he is and build the Temple of the Lord.”

One of the ways we can test prophesy is that it squares with Scripture as well as if it has come true or not.

Given that Samuel refers to the Branch as the Messiah, and that the people mentioned in this chapter are from the line of David (as is Jesus), we can safely say that this squares with Scripture.

We can also test it by asking if this has come true.

In addition to being a Prophetic book, Zechariah is also a historical one—the things that take place in Zechariah happened—it is a matter of historical fact. In addition to this, we also know that the Branch (the Messiah) has spread from where he was, and we are His temple.

These things let us know that Zechariah is not full of hot air, but rather speaking true prophesy.

What this means to us is this: we have a great High Priest that sits on His throne and advocates for us! In the Old Testament the High Priest spoke for the people to God on their behalf—Jesus does the same thing for us. This is not a little thing, it is everything! Without the sacrifices made by the High Priest, the people were lost to their sin. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross paid once and for all for our sin so we are no longer in debt to His righteousness—He is our righteousness.

Read Zechariah 6. 9-15.

Meditate on the imagery of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father, advocating for us as the High Priests of old did. Think about what it means that God Himself sees us through the lens of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Spend some time today praying and thanking God for His provision of an infallible and loving High Priest in the person of Jesus.

Day 20.

Malachi is the last of the Old Testament Prophets and the last voice we read before the first coming of the Lord, with roughly 400 years between them. That's 400 years where the people of God had no word from God, 400 years where God was seemingly silent. Certainly, there were the scrolls of God's Word to read, study, and understand—and there were absolutely people who did just that. But after centuries of God's people hearing regularly from Him, it must have been a shock to suddenly hear nothing.

Malachi is a short book, only 4 chapters long, but it holds both reassurance and warning in equal measure. Chapter 3, in particular, warns the people of what happens when they treat God with a dismissive attitude. When serving God becomes a chore to be done rather than a lifestyle to be lived and cherished, He gets righteously angry with us.

Yet, God is a steadfastly merciful God, abounding in love and grace. Chapter 3 verse 6 tells us outright that the reason that God hasn't wiped out the people of Israel is because He has made a promise to them. Israel has been taking God's commands very lightly—effectively treating God in an Objectivist manner. They say, "What have we gained from serving God?" treating God like a magical being who rewards with material blessing rather than worshiping God for who He is.

Despite the fact that the people of God hear no word from Him between Malachi and Jesus' birth does not mean that Malachi doesn't give them a final set of signs to watch for.

If we read the book of Malachi, we see that the book ends with two promises:

1. That for those who fear the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with Healing in His wings.
2. God is sending a messenger to precede the Messiah's coming (with the spirit of Elijah)

We know from our reading of the Gospel that preceding Jesus was His cousin John the Baptist—a prophet in the spirit of Elijah—who paved the way for our Lord. Further, we know that when Jesus announced Himself and His ministry at the Temple, He read from Isaiah's prophesy that the Messiah will come to heal the sick and set the captive free—the Sun of Righteousness does indeed rise with healing in His wings.

Read Malachi 3 and 4.

Through the 4 chapters of Malachi we read the reasons that God is going silent—the people of God are cheating each other and God, the Priests are offering defiled sacrifices and given un-Godly spiritual guidance, evilness has been lifted up as good and pleasing to God—the list seems endless, and touches upon every area of sin that is imaginable. None are exempt.

Malachi was speaking to the Israelite people, and not specifically to us—but that doesn't excuse us from hearing God's words of anger and rebuke. The same things that God points out as shameful and detestable in His sight in the Jewish people are things that we also do with regularity—in spirit if not in actual fact.

Take 10 minutes today to search your heart for the kinds of practices that God specifically points out as despicable to Him. Repent of those thoughts and actions. Pray that God will keep you cognizant of His path for each and every one of us as we chase after His face.

Day 21.

We have spent the past 20 days in the Old Testament looking, if ever so briefly, at how God is evident even from before time and how His plan for our salvation (Jesus) was in place and foretold. In the Old Testament, God is often mistaken for an entirely different God—a diffident and fickle God; hopefully we can see after the past 20 days that this is not true. Hopefully, we can see that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow rather than a God who changes as the wind blows.

A God like that would be an entirely useless God and not worth the worship we give to Him. But we can see, through the prophecies, archetypes, and instances where He shows up in person (if not incarnate), that Jesus is present from the beginning of time, and is at work drawing us to Him.

In the New Testament this is easier to see, it is (after all) where Jesus is born of a virgin, grows up sin-less, and goes to a brutal death for our salvation. The Old Testament shows us that we cannot do this on our own--the sacrifices, fickle nature of humankind shown in the people of Israel, even the Law all point to our inability to span the chasm between God's holiness and our own sinful nature.

Today, let's take a breather.

We raced through the Old Testament, highlighting some of the times where Jesus was evident in history and reminding ourselves of the times where our fallen nature has been a roadblock to our ability to see our Savior for who He is. The Old Testament underscores our need and points the way to Jesus. Various righteous men and women played a part in showing us these things—telling us what to look for, typifying how we should live in service to God, putting God's people back on track when they (and we) have gone astray.

All of these instances where God's immense interest in us remind us that our God is a personal and intimate God. There is no reason outside of His nature that God should be as involved in the lives of humankind—none whatsoever. Yet He is.

We have a God who showed Himself to Moses through a crack in a mountain, who humored Gideon's childish testing, who talked to us through the prophets, who personally rescued His people in their times of trial, and revealed Himself in as many ways as there are people written about in the Old Testament.

We serve and worship a God who cares for us—not so He can get something from us, as we often care for others—but because it is His nature to do so. There is no one like our God. No One.

Today, find a quiet place. Maybe during your lunch hour, maybe get up a little early and grab a coffee and sit under a tree in a park, maybe after the kids are in bed—but find a quiet spot to pray.

List out the attributes of God that you were reminded of during our whirlwind run through the Old Testament. Put that piece of paper (or memo on your phone) where you can see it often. There are times when we will get discouraged—times when we don't remember who God is, and doubt that He is as good as we know. This note to yourself will help to keep you reminded of God's love for you in the times when you can't feel it to be true. We serve and worship a God who split a sea for His people, provided food and water in the desert, and repeatedly showed His love for us in myriad ways.

He is worth worshiping.

Day 22.

When we read the Gospels, it is easy to see the hand of God in the lives of those who were around Him. We see Jesus interacting with the Disciples, we see Him talking with the ordinary people, we see Him reproofing those who got the wrong end of the stick—whether through long errant practice or because of personal and political gain.

Even John the Baptist—foretold in Malachi—had some misunderstanding of who Jesus was, and they were related to each other! But notice the (usually) gentle way that Jesus corrects those who misunderstand. We see this pretty readily in Matthew chapter 9.

Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, comes to Jesus and asks Him a question of practice; asking Him why He and His Disciples don't do the things that either the Pharisees or the regular people do—like fasting. This seems to be a relevant question—after all, John had spent his life preparing for or actually telling the people that the Messiah was coming, and he believed that Jesus was that Messiah. But head knowledge is no the same as heart knowledge, and years of religious practice (even practice that seems good) can get in the way of true and heartfelt worship.

Jesus responds kindly, but with a perceived edge; almost as if He is a little exasperated with John—who at this point has seen the Holy Spirit descend like dove onto Jesus and heard a voice from the Heavens explicitly calling Jesus the Son of God.

Jesus tells John (and I am paraphrasing), 'When the honored guest of a party comes, you enjoy the party. And furthermore, relying on old practice when there is a new and perfect solution only causes problems, even makes the old problems worse.'

The Messiah has come, there's no need to keep looking for Him—He's here!

Fasting and other preparatory religious practice—like the Pharisees practiced—are redundant when the Messiah has come. It is better to spend that time in worship than to spend that time in preparation. We can't fix ourselves enough to be worthy of God's grace—that's the point of grace—it is unmerited.

Read Matthew 9.

Throughout this chapter the evidence is ample and clear that Jesus is the Messiah. He does all the things that has been prophesied about the Messiah, He heals the sick, proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom, He teaches and corrects. But, like every paradigm shift in the history of Earth, it takes some people longer to grasp the implications of the sea change than others.

In this chapter we see people struggling to understand the shift from 'Let's keep a weather eye out for the Messiah,' to 'The Messiah has arrived.'

Take a moment to imagine yourself in this chapter. We can tell ourselves that we would have immediately recognized Jesus as the Messiah because we know that He is. But note the gentle way that Jesus talks to those who are truly seeking Him. Does He chastise them into an embarrassed silence, or does He lovingly explain the way things have changed? How does this (or, how will this) affect the way that you interact with people with whom you are talking to about God?

Day 23.

We've probably all heard the phrase 'The Upside-Down Kingdom' in relation to Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God. The phrases coiner—Donald Kraybill—explains that the Kingdom's power structure is opposite of the power structure of the world. In the world power flows down—the most powerful are those who have money, strength, and prestige. However, in the Kingdom of God that is all flipped on its head. If you want to lead—you must serve. To be first, you must become last. To show the way, you must be present in the day to day rather than issuing orders from on high.

This is a hard concept to truly live out—power structures are the same today as they were two thousand years ago—so we have a hard time seeing in real time this structure being modeled.

Yet, this is how God has created the Kingdom. He created it as an opposite and better structure than the fallen way of the world. And this way is modeled perfectly in the life of Jesus.

Many in first century Israel, as well as today, dismissed Jesus because He was the opposite of what they expected. He wasn't a military leader sent from God to show brute strength and overthrow the Roman Empire. He wasn't rich, He flaunt His power, He wasn't flashy; rather He flowed God's lead, quietly healed those who came to Him in faith, and had no place to call His home.

We do well when we throw away the paradigms of Earthly power structures and chase after God.

Those that would lead us should serve both God foremost, and us secondly. Chasing after God is the more important thing—by doing so we are changed into something more resembling God's calling on our lives. Jesus was able to resist the call of the world's power structures because He chased after God—not in spite of it.

The explanation of the structure of the Kingdom of God was brought about by James and John asked Jesus for places of prestige in the Kingdom. Even John, the beloved one, wasn't immune to wanting power and authority. Yet, as he and the others spent more time with Jesus, they learned more about how God has designed us to function in His economy—and became leaders who served.

It took time—and it take time for us as well to learn this—but in the end God used them to build the Kingdom.

We would do well to learn from their mistakes.

Read Mark 10. 35-45.

Take a moment today to compare and contrast the two competing power structures—the world's v. the Kingdom of God's. How do they compare—do they compare?

Christian means Christ-like, or chasing after Christ. Where can we ask for God to change us to be more like Him? How are we best able to chase after Him?

Today, pray that God will reveal in your life a place where you can better serve Him by serving others.

Day 24.

Luke is an interesting Gospel to read. If we add up all the pages of the New Testament, Luke's pages outnumber even Paul's. Which is pretty amazing. But what is also interesting is that Luke tends to focus more on things that the other Gospel writers don't.

Perhaps this is because Luke wasn't from the same place as the others, perhaps it is because Luke was a Gentile writer (although, there is some debate on this issue), maybe even because Luke was writing to a different audience than the others—it's hard to say. But what we do know is that Luke wrote wonderfully clearly and insightfully about Jesus.

Luke's insightfulness starts early in his Gospel with the story of Simeon. Simeon was a devout and righteous man who, like most Jewish people, was waiting on the Messiah with all his heart. God, through the Holy Spirit, had specifically told Simeon, that he would live to see the Messiah born. For a righteous and devout man, this would have been wonderful news indeed—to see the savior of his people within his own lifetime.

One day, God lead Simeon to the Temple. Coincidentally (wink, wink, nudge, nudge), that was the day that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to be presented to the Lord. Instantly, Simeon knew that this was the Messiah. He didn't need to see miracles, he didn't need to hear the marvelous stories about Jesus—He was still an infant in arms at this point—Simeon simply knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Messiah.

And further, Simeon knew—despite what he was probably taught about the nature of the Messiah's salvation plan—that Jesus was to be a Savior of all people, not just the Jewish ones. We read his proclamation after seeing and holding Jesus:

***“Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.***

³⁰I have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared for all people.

***³²He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!”***

“I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared to all people. This is amazing news, and confirmation, even before Jesus' ministry had even started, that this baby was the Messiah who had come to save the world.

Read Luke 2. 21-40.

The timeline that Luke gives us tells us that the encounter with Simeon in the Temple happens roughly 8-10 days after Jesus' birth, as Jesus was a firstborn and a son, and therefore was required by Mosaic Law to be presented before the Lord. So, Mary and Joseph had all the confirmation that they could have wanted—there was a choir of angels at their son's birth after all, and a crowd of shepherds rocked up to where they were staying to see Him.

Simeon's reaction to seeing the Messiah is similar to how we might have felt when we first met Jesus. Do these feelings match up to yours, or has it gotten old and safe for you? Do you still marvel at the Messiah and His work in your life, or is it similar to a great meal you had last week—a fond memory, but one that doesn't have much affect on how you live each day?

Day 25.

John's Gospel is possibly the most theological of the four Gospels that we read. He starts his Gospel, not with a genealogy, or with a miraculous tale, but with the very beginning of time. "In the beginning," John says, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word **was** God." (emphasis mine).

It should come as no surprise, then, that throughout John's Gospel he makes an airtight case that Jesus was not only the Messiah, but also God (the hypostatic union laid out in plain words).

C.S. Lewis makes the case that Jesus was either Lord, Liar, or Lunatic—He was either who He said He was, delusional about who He was, or absolutely deranged. Lewis also makes this argument in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* concerning Lucy's adventures in Narnia, by the way if you should want an easy primer on this argument.

John makes the same case in his Gospel—proving over and over that Jesus was neither Liar nor Lunatic, but rather the sent Messiah and God himself in the person of Jesus. It is impossible to deny John's case unless you choose to—he lays it out clearly and with authority. Granted, John doesn't need to work very hard, since he was right; and Jesus Himself makes the argument in chapter 8.

By using language that would have been completely clear to His audience, Jesus answers His accusers with the phrase, "Before Abraham was even born, I AM."

In English this doesn't make grammatical sense, we don't have a verb tense that covers all time in the present; but that is what Jesus says—no matter *when* you are talking about His claim is true. In other words, Jesus is God incarnate; not just gifted with God's power, not a placeholder, not claiming a position He doesn't own.

This takes some time to wrap our heads around.

God, in His wisdom and grace, didn't send a functionary to bridge the gap between Heaven and Earth—He came Himself. This, among other things, is what sets Christianity apart. In other religions a person can work their way to heaven, or a better next life, or it doesn't matter at all; but, in Jesus, we see that God cares so much about us that He left His home in Heaven to rescue us personally.

Read John 8. 31-59.

This section of Scripture is pretty dense. It lays out several truths about Jesus and humanity that are difficult to understand and accept—yet they ring with truth. Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are deluded about where their faith lies, and points them to Himself by telling them point-blank that He is God.

That had to have been shocking to hear. We know, with the benefit of hindsight and the work of others to unpack things, that Jesus wasn't telling porkie pies (lies), and we know from reading the Bible that He wasn't insane—leaving only one option of the Lewisian triad.

How does hearing the Jesus **was** at all times in history and before change how you see Him? Does it change how you see Him? Does it change how you read the Bible knowing that Jesus was present through its entirety?

Day 26.

Let's linger today in John's Gospel. John lays out the Truth of salvation in such a powerful way that it is hard not to want to stay and listen to what he brings us by way of his writing. John may not be the easiest of the Gospels to read because of the deeply theological way that he writes, but he does lay out Jesus' plan for our salvation from A-Z in a way that can be understood.

In chapter 8, Jesus describes Himself as 'I AM,' a phrase that would have been familiar to the Pharisees as a sort of code for 'I am God.' This phrase would have been etched on the hearts of those who studied the scriptures as what God called Himself to Moses from the burning bush, Abraham heard God refer to Himself in the same way—it can only be said of God, nothing else in all of creation simply IS, HAS BEEN, and always WILL BE. Everything aside from God has been created, including the angelic realm, and has a beginning—God does not. He simply IS.

So, for Jesus to have said it to describe Himself would have been scandalous to the Pharisees. But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to further expand on His claim to be God incarnate.

For a devout Jewish person in 1st century Israel, the only route to salvation was through the Messiah. Often, the interpretation of Messiah would get skewed, be it skewed towards politics or military might or supernatural intervention in favor of the Jewish people; but that salvation for the devout Jewish person was always through the Messiah.

Therefore, in John 14, when Jesus tells His disciples that He is the way, the truth, and the life it should resonate with us (and them) that this is further proof, should proof be needed at this point, that Jesus is the Messiah come for the salvation of the world.

It seems that the disciples, like so many of us at one time or another, have taken 1+1 and gotten 17. Despite having been around Jesus for as long as they have, they failed to understand this truth about Jesus. Perhaps it was because they had preconceived ideas about what the Messiah would be and do—like the Pharisees and other religious leaders of the time. Or maybe they saw Jesus as one of them, and therefore didn't grasp the idea that a man could also be God. It's hard to say.

But we do see the gentleness and grace the God extends to us when we don't understand in action here. Jesus could have told Thomas off for his failure to grasp that Jesus and the Father are one. He could have written the disciples off wholesale for their lack of understanding.

But He doesn't. He explains it again, and again, and again—each time with grace and mercy till they get it. And once they got it, they turned the world up-side down.

Read John 14. 1-14.

Many of us are like the disciples—slow on the draw when it comes to understanding the nature of Jesus' claims. Others are like Zacchaeus—we immediately get it and throw ourselves into God's calling with repentance and a plea for mercy. How was it for you? Were you slow to get it, or did it immediately turn you around, or are there implications of all of this that trip you up?

How does the Disciple's experience affect how you tell others about Jesus? Are you patient, knowing it can be hard to understand, or do you get impatient and write other people off for not getting it immediately?

Day 27.

The men and women who followed Jesus, heard His words and understood them turned the world on its ear. We read the stories of how they spread the Good News of the Gospel throughout the world in Luke's *Book of Acts*. We read of how the church took to heart all that Jesus said, and were imbued with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, how they were emboldened to speak truth to authority and tell people of the salvation found in Jesus Christ.

It can read like an exciting adventure—breathless wonder and miracles and thousands of people brought to a saving knowledge of God's love in a single day. It's nearly impossible not to get excited by how God moved through those who chased after Him. Knowing that He does the same things today makes it more exciting.

But, like every gripping adventure, there is potential danger associated with telling people the truth of the Good News—even truth that is older than time, like the Gospel.

We read in Acts not only about the successes of the early church, but also of the dangers.

In Acts 7 we read about Stephen, the first martyr of the faith.

If ever there was a succinct summary of the stubbornness of people to resist God's grace, Stephen lays it all out here. He tells us how God has always kept His promises, how mankind resists God's grace, how even when God is present people will ignore that presence. He ends his final words with a sort of resignation that he lives within a long line of people who are persecuted for telling the Truth. The tension between mankind's nature towards sin and God's forgiveness is palpable in chapter 7.

Stephen tells those who are about to stone him that, if they would only open their eyes, they could see God's grace—God is willing to forgive them regardless of the fact that they have put their preconceived notions before the plain truth set before them.

Stephen proclaims the Kingdom even to the end. He never gives up telling people about God's grace and love and mercy and compassion. Like Paul and Silas and Peter and others after him, Stephen rejoices in God's goodness and holiness even in the direst of situations—situations where we might choose to shut it rather than lose our lives.

Such is the power of God's love on those who truly believe and worship Him.

Read Acts 7.

As Stephen is being stoned to death, he prays that God would forgive the people for their actions. Being pelted with rocks until you die is not an easy death, it's going to hurt terribly at the very least. We can see that Stephen truly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and was willing to die for that very faith.

It's a heavy question, but, is your faith that strong that you would be willing to suffer that much for it? Or is your faith rooted in the relative safety of where we live, and the knowledge that you are unlikely to be bludgeoned to death for it?

The question is nearly impossible to answer since we don't have a practical way to test it—but today, pray that God will strengthen your faith so that you can stand up in the face of danger knowing that God is for you.

Day 28.

We first become aware of Paul in Scripture at the end of chapter 7 of Acts, but we don't know who he becomes until later. Who he is, is crucial to our own calling into the fold of God. It is Paul's calling to reach the Gentile people that was the spark that lit the fire that reached most of us, and that cannot be understated.

We see Paul's work all over the New Testament, he wrote many of the books that form the core of much of our learning about the way that we should live in light of God's mercy.

Paul lays out in logical prose so much of what we know about how to live that we can get lost. What Paul tells us is rooted in two cultural understandings—a Jewish one, and a Hellenistic one. While many of the writers of the New Testament had contact with Gentiles, they were mostly from Israel. Paul, on the other hand, was not from Israel. So, we can see the two cultural understandings at work in Paul's writing—he has an intimate grasp of both worlds.

In his letter to the Romans, we see Paul intersect these two worlds in a way that leaves no doubt that he knew what he was talking about. In chapter 9 we see Paul's intimate knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and his deep understanding of their implications. Quoting Hosea and Isaiah, Paul makes the iron-clad case that we Gentiles are grafted into the promise God made to Abraham. And while his logic makes perfect sense, it is also anchored in a personal knowledge of what Grace is and how it works.

We read: 'What does all this mean? Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God's standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place. But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God **by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him**. They stumbled over the great rock in their path.' (emphasis mine).

This is the absolute core of our salvation—we trust in Him rather than structures and Law to bridge the gap between Heaven and Earth. There is no other way than by trusting in His grace; He didn't need to do it—He's God, after all. He could have done anything He wanted to, including forgoing the gift of choice in the Garden.

God knows that forced love is no love at all—we choose to worship in response to His love, freely accepted, a gift of grace and mercy.

Read Romans 9.

Paul's logically laid out argument in this chapter is reassuring. Its basis in Hebrew scripture lays the groundwork for it, and its conclusion leaves no doubt as to its implications for us.

Take time today to praise God that His love and mercy and grace are so evident, so brilliant, that they were laid out in plain sight for centuries. Our inclusion in God's grace is not an accident or an afterthought—it is the very heart of God for all people.

Day 29.

1 Corinthians. Wow, such a powerful book on living like Christ. We read Paul's words in this book and we are challenged to our core. It sets our expectations on their heads, this book does. It never ceases to amaze me how much I have to learn when I read it.

And then we get to chapter 9.

This chapter can be confusing—it seems to advocate for a sort of situational ethics approach to the Christian life. 'When living with Jews, I act like a Jew. When living with Gentiles, I act like a Gentile,' and so forth. But a careful reading shows us something opposite to that.

In verse 19 we start to see his argument. It does not, as you might think on first reading, advocate for a duality of life, where depending on social situations you become a different person. Rather, it tells us that situational awareness is imperative to a wholistic Gospel centered ministry. Paul uses his dual citizenship to expound on this idea.

His Jewish roots allow him to highlight the person of Jesus as the Messiah. This wouldn't work with a Gentile group—they don't have the same history of looking out for a Savior, so he emphasizes other things.

The missionary Hudson Taylor did much the same thing, modeling a Pauline ministry in China.

Taylor, like Paul before him, knew that there was no need for a transfer station, if you will, on the path to salvation. Many people before him in missions to China would try to make the Chinese into Westerners before they would tell them about Christ. Paul fought against the same thing—people trying to make Gentiles Jewish before they could be Christians.

Taylor understood that there need be no middle stop—the Grace of God is big enough to be evident no matter where you might start. It is the job of the Christian to learn, and understand, how best to make the Gospel clear to those being talked to—a job Paul was well suited for. He understood that God is wholly other to our concepts of culture. Just like you wouldn't shout ancient Greek at someone and expect them to understand you, you root your examples of God's grace in what the person knows, and move from there, trusting in God to show the way.

Read 1 Corinthians 9. 19-23.

Paul ends his exhortation to speak plainly in ways that people can understand with the admonition to obey God first and foremost. This is perhaps the most important part of this whole section of Scripture. Paul is telling us that while he may ignore the cultural expectation of Jewish Law (which is only a signpost to God), he is not ignoring God's law, i.e. the Gospel.

We live in a time and age where it seems that culture is more fractured than it might have been when you were growing up. We all probably know someone who lives differently than us, and holds on tight to that cultural identity.

Take a moment to think about how you might find common ground with them in order to show them the way of God.

Day 30.

As we have read and seen through the Old and New Testaments, God's plan for the salvation of the world has always been in place and has never changed.

We who are not Jewish have been grafted into the promise God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His grace has always been for all the people of the world—not just a select few, we need only believe Him and accept His mercy and forgiveness.

This is the beating heart of the Gospel—that all who come to Him are accepted and forgiven, washed in His blood and made clean. Ephesians 2. 14 makes this clear. There are no first- or second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God, we are one people made whole through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. There may be newer and older citizens in the Kingdom, but there is no class division—those who came later are just as much citizens as those who came earlier.

Much of what Paul wrote to the Ephesians was to sort out their problems. In fact, much of Paul's writing was for that same purpose. So evidently, the Ephesians were either insecure about their place in the Kingdom, or were told they were 'less than.'

You may be feeling the same way—that you are 'less than,' in the Kingdom. Perhaps you feel insecure that you don't have a place, that you are not welcome, that you are inferior.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

You are a child of God, loved into salvation, welcomed into the Kingdom by a Father that ran out to meet you while you were still far away.

You are loved by God, redeemed and made whole through His sacrifice on the cross.

Read Ephesians 2. 11-22

Rest in the promise and reassurance of the Word today.

Simply rest.

Day 31.

The most important question that anyone can ask and explore is 'Who is Jesus Christ?' So much rides on knowing the answer to that question. Jesus Himself, when he walked on this earth turned to His disciples one day and said 'Who do you say I am?' It is a critical question.

Now the church at Colossae was coming under attack from different groups. You had what would later become known as Gnosticism and one of their beliefs was that Jesus was not God but was Himself a created being. So, it doesn't matter if it is 2000 years ago or today – the enemy, if he is to be successful, always tries to undermine the foundation. And that foundation is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Some read the gospels and are drawn to Jesus but aren't too sure about Yahweh/Jehovah from the Old Testament. Some (though misguided) see Jesus as gracious and kind, but see the God of the Old Testament as more judgmental and harsher. It is of course a false impression for **Jesus is God**. And He sometimes had a hard time even getting His disciples to grasp that He is God in the flesh. One example is from the book of John where Jesus said to the disciples:

“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’ Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus answered: ‘Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.’” (John 14. 7-11)

So, we no longer need to be in any confusion. He, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God. “He who has seen me, has seen the Father,” Jesus said. He was, and is, God in the flesh!

That is the true wonder of God. That a man, though fallen, desperately wicked and an enemy of God, could, through the work of the cross and the shed blood of Jesus, be reconciled to God and be found holy, without blemish and free from accusation! Spurgeon said, “Creation and providence are but the whisper of His power, but redemption is its music, and praise is the echo which shall yet fill His temple.”

Read Colossians 1. 15-23.

Take a moment to ask yourself the important question—Who is Jesus? It is easy to fall into the trap that so many have fallen into, saying that Jesus was a good teacher, a moral philosopher, an example for us—but then dismissing His Godhead. Given what has been said about Him in the Bible, He cannot be just any of those things—He must either be insane or Lord. There is no other way for it to be.

Spend some time today in prayer, asking God to reinforce your faith in Him, so that when these questions rise up in conversation—which they inevitably will—you have a ready answer for the hope that is in you.

Day 32.

Each Sunday, we recite our ‘Seed Verse,’ 1 Thessalonians 2.8, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you, not only the Gospel of God, but our lives as well.”

We say it almost every Sunday, not because it’s hard to remember, but rather, because we need reminded of it as often as possible. Humans are fickle and forgetful. We need only to look at the way that the Israelites acted in their sojourn in the desert to see this. Not very long after God split a sea in two so that they could escape the Egyptians on dry land, they were complaining to Moses that he had led them from their ‘safe’ slavery into a truly dangerous freedom. The appearance of miracles is no guarantee that people will remember who God is. These things happen to us today as well. We pray that God will provide when we are at our ropes end, and when He does, we rationalize it to such an extent that we convince ourselves that it was us, and not God, who provided.

We can talk ourselves into thinking slavery is good if God’s provision makes us think about how we aren’t God.

God’s provision of grace to us—His redemption of our lives and His sacrifice on the cross—is so immense and so exciting that we cannot help but tell others. We sing ‘Go Tell it on the Mountain’ every Christmastime, but do we live like that in March? Or are we more likely to talk to others about how Indiana has a terrible team this year, or how Duke couldn’t possibly lose the tournament? (not that either of these things isn’t true.)

As we know, every word in the Bible is meant for our edification and is an example to us. Paul knew this.

It isn’t enough to tell someone how God has changed our lives—we must show it as well, which is best done in community with others. We best show God’s grace by showing how we live our lives in respect to that grace being lavished on us. We as Christians are marked as different; we have been called out as a royal priesthood, a community of saints, that is meant to change the world, living our lives in such a way that God is glorified and made famous in all the land.

This is our calling on Earth—to spread the Good News to every tribe, nation, and person until the Lord returns, or we’re called home to heaven.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2. 1-12.

Take a moment today to think about how you first saw Jesus modelled. Was it your parents? An older person at church? A co-worker?

Each of these types of people existed in your community—they not only shared space with you, they also modelled Christ to you. You were able to see Christ’s light in them, sometimes only from afar, but more often in close proximity. Do not underestimate how God is using you in the same way. Live blameless lives so that God is seen clearly in you, that others might also come to know Him and His saving grace.

Day 33.

1 Timothy 2 can be a difficult chapter, causing all kinds of controversy through the ages. But one thing is absolutely clear—Paul lays out Jesus’ role as the one Mediator between God and mankind explicitly.

If we remember back to the system of worship found in the Mosaic Law, we will remember that the High Priest would, once a year, make a specific sacrifice for the atonement of the sins of the entire people. It needed to be done over and over again because we sin over and over again. A perfect, unblemished lamb was brought for sacrifice. This lamb was the atonement of sin for the people.

You may remember the Ray Boltz song, *Behold the Lamb*. In that song, as a man and his son are in Jerusalem for the Passover sacrifice, the father is dragooned by the Roman guard to carry Jesus’ cross up Golgotha.

As he returns to his son, he is asked where the lamb for sacrifice is. He responds by pointing to Jesus, and saying, “there He is.”

The Priest, during the Passover, served as the Mediator (or go-between) between God and man. His role was to stand in the gap, offering a sacrifice that would cover the sins of the people. This role was essential to the covenant between God and His people.

In Jesus the Christ, we have an ongoing perfect sacrificial lamb that takes away the sin of the world who now sits at the right hand of God the Father, mediating on our behalf for our salvation. The resurrected Jesus is our atonement and speaks on our behalf! This is not just a good thing—it is the greatest thing!

Through our belief in Jesus we have constant access to God the Father because of Jesus’ perfect and sinless life. There is no one else who could fill that role. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament points the way to Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

And He does this, not just for a specific people group, but for all people groups. His mercy never ends, has no boundaries, is never in short supply. The whole of the Bible witnesses His grace to us, spilling out over the pages and into our hearts.

Jesus sits in Heaven, waiting His return, speaking on our behalf to God the Father.

Wow.

Read 1 Timothy 2. 1-7

Knowing that God answers prayer, and that we are called to pray for everyone; take a piece of paper and write out 5 names that you will commit to pray for. Pick people who you know need Jesus’ love shown to them, and commit to praying that God will use you to show them that love. Jesus sits in Heaven mediating between God and us for this sort of purpose. God will use you to show your picks His love and grace.

Reflect on the miracle that God, the inventor of otters and oranges, listens to you when you pray.

Day 34.

Have you ever heard the phrase, “so Heavenly minded that they were no Earthly good?”

Being Heavenly minded sounds like a good thing, right? To live with you head so full of God and His will that it pours out of you like a leaky bucket? That doesn’t sound so bad.

But that’s not what the phrase means. No, it means that you are so concerned with the things of the next life that you stop doing anything that we are called to do here on Earth.

It is commendable to be concerned with how God has called us to be; and Paul tells us that we should train ourselves in such a way that when the spiritual rubber meets the road, that we automatically respond in a way that is pleasing to God. For us to be unconcerned in regards to how we are supposed to be changed by the Holy Spirit is, in itself, concerning.

Jesus said that we should live in this world as wise as serpents and as gentle as a dove. I admit that I never really understood this turn of phrase—I understand the sentiment, but culturally snakes aren’t exactly something we aspire to be like. No one ever called you a snake and meant it as a good thing. But, in Titus, Paul echoes this sentiment in a slightly different phrasing. He tells us that in this world we should, “wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed.”

While these two turns of phrase are different, they mean effectively the same thing. They mean that we should live in such a way that the wisdom, righteousness, and holiness of God shines in us and informs how we act in the world. The world has fallen, but God has overcome that fallen-ness.

In this passage, Paul is talking about many different ways in which God’s holiness should shine in our lives, even when the circumstances are grim. By living, not cloistered away, but out-loud (as they used to say), with God in mind and on our hearts—people will see Him living in us.

It is not easy to do—that’s absolutely true. It is easier to go along to get along in this world knowing that there is a better one to come; yet, to do so would be to hide the light of the world under a basket. We are called to shine out, to be a beacon for the everlasting Kingdom, we cannot do that without living with the hope of Christ informing our very lives.

Read Titus 2. 11-15.

Many of us have lived, or are living, with dual personas, a public one and a private one. I don’t mean like an introvert who is, by nature of their work, required to be more outgoing in public spaces than they would prefer, and then retreat into a quiet little ball when they return home. No, I mean that there are some people who, in private settings are devout and spiritual, but in public settings adopt a rougher, worldlier attitude. Their interior and exterior lives are at odds with one another, with the supposed interior changes made by the Holy Spirit making us more Christlike never emerging—living like a half-changed butterfly.

Both Jesus and Paul are encouraging us to use that internal change to make a difference in the world—to utilize that internal change to show the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

Are your public and private lives separate, or are they in concert with one another—witnessing to the world who Jesus is?

Day 35.

With all apologies to Rodgers and Hammerstein, “How do you solve a problem like Philemon?”

On its face, this book is a short memo-like letter to Philemon asking him to be kind to his slave who is returning. And to our ears, this sounds bad. Leaving aside the fact that American chattel slavery and slavery in the Ancient Near East were different things entirely, freedom is certainly a better lot than slavery.

We could be reading that Paul is asking his friend and co-worker in Christ to free Onesimus from his bondage—but that’s not what Paul asks. He asks that Philemon would be kind to Onesimus, and to take into consideration that he has found the Lord in his running.

But if we look closer at the meaning in the text, we see some very interesting things.

1. We read an appeal to Philemon’s Christianity—that he would allow grace to overshadow his legal rights.
2. We see that Onesimus’ status as an earthly slave is not a barrier to his adoption into the family of God.
3. And, perhaps most importantly, we see a lived-out metaphor for Christ’s actions on the cross on our behalf.

At the end of this very short letter, we read Paul’s request to charge anything that Onesimus owes to Philemon to Paul himself. Surely this could be simply generosity, but it seems much deeper.

As we have said before, the Bible is written **for** us, but not necessarily **to** us. This is never clearer than in this book. We personally don’t have a slave called Onesimus, so Paul isn’t talking to us, not exactly anyway. Paul is demonstrating Christ-like love towards both Philemon and Onesimus, and further, he is living out Christ’s payment for our sins in a practical way—a way that would make sense to both of these men.

To live like Christ does not come cheap. We have legal rights, but in the service of God we may need to lay them down for the advancement of the Kingdom. We may incur monetary cost. We may need to humble ourselves to ask for help in times of trouble.

We don’t know that Philemon granted Paul’s request. He may have chosen to stand on his rights as Onesimus’ master, or refused to take him back—we don’t know. We do know, however, that Paul trusted his brother in God’s family to do what was right, and to treat his runaway slave as one of the family.

Read Philemon.

Living out our lives following the example of Jesus Christ is hard. It requires us to often cede our pride in ways that others will see as soft and weak.

And yet.

And yet, we are often placed in a position that calls us to show Christ’s mercy in practical ways.

Can you think of a time when you were faced with the decision to either show God’s mercy or stand on your rights? What did you decide? Circumstances vary, so if you chose your rights, it may have been the correct decision; but what did God teach you through the situation?

Day 36.

One of my favorite movies of all time is *Chariots of Fire*. (You can hear the musical theme in your head right now, can't you?) It's the story of Eric Liddell, a Scottish missionary and track athlete who was faced with the nearly impossible decision to run on Sunday or to hold to his conviction that Sunday is the Sabbath, and not run this race he had been training his whole life for.

You may know the story—in the end, he is offered the option to run an entirely different race—a longer one—instead of his specialty. He wins gold at the 1924 Olympics.

I bring this up not because of the way that God uses Eric during this time to show His nature to all who were ever around Eric, but because whenever I read Hebrews 12, that score runs through my head—encouraging me to run the race set before me, regardless of the seeming difficulty.

To use the cliché, the Christian life is not a sprint, it is a marathon. It goes on longer than you can imagine when you are young. It requires endurance and strength and an ability to stick to it when things seem dire and untenable. Yet, we have been given strength and endurance and the ability to rest in the one who has given us all these things—Jesus Christ our Lord.

In 1924, Eric Liddell had trained for the 100-meter sprint—and ended up competing in the 400-meter sprint, winning the gold medal. He credited his faith in God for the ability to do it at all.

Our race is more metaphorical—we're not getting into the starting blocks and literally racing through life. Yet the similarities abound between Eric's race in 1924 and our lives chasing after God.

Perhaps you are in that part of the race where everything hurts and you just want to be done and home. Some races are like that—they seem impossible and the best part is not having to run anymore. I've had more than a few races like that. If your life seems like that, please find someone to talk to—there is, after all, a great cloud of witnesses who are cheering you on—and we want to be a part of that cloud.

Let us set our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, the one who gives us the ability and strength to chase after Him even in the roughest part of the race.

Read Hebrews 12. 1-13.

Eric Liddell's life is perhaps not germane to your everyday existence. Very few of us are Olympic caliber athletes, after all. But it can be instructive for us. In the movie, Eric tells his sister, "I know God made me for China; but He also made me *fast*. And when I run, I feel His pleasure flowing through me."

It was his faith in God and the encouragement of those surrounding him that helped Eric Liddell to overcome the obstacles he faced.

We too have faith in a God that has offered His very self to us, and people cheering us on from the stands. The race is tough, but we know the One who has overcome it already.

Take 10 minutes today, maybe on your commute, maybe before work, maybe after dinner instead of going back to work, and close your eyes, asking that God would speak to you an encouragement. That He would show you in a specific way how much He loves you and wants you to come to Him.

Day 37.

A few days ago, we celebrated Palm Sunday and tomorrow we will mark the Last Supper. This week is a whirlwind of emotion. From the ecstasy of Jesus coming into Jerusalem to the uncertainty of Saturday.

To me, this brings to mind St James' admonition to seek God in prayer.

We read in James 5 about the power of prayer, how we are to pray and praise not only in the good times or the bad, but at all times.

It is easy to praise God in the wonderful times—Palm Sunday, and Jesus Triumphant entry into the City of David brings spontaneous praise to our lips. But what about Friday? Are we as willing to praise Him then? When all seems lost, can we be confident in our knowledge that He uses all things for the good of the Kingdom?

James reminds us that at the very center of our communication with God lies prayer. Prayer emboldens our faith and strengthens us for the work ahead. It draws us closer to Jesus in ways that are hard to overstate. Prayer is effective in our walk with God. It is not a quickly tossed up few words in our rush to eat delicious tacos, or when we want to find a parking spot close to the door of the mall, but rather the line of communication between Heaven and Earth.

It was prayer that kept Job buoyed in his trials, it was prayer that allowed Elijah to show the power of God to the people. It was prayer that gave peace and succor to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We often treat prayer as a last resort—a sort of Hail Mary (pardon the pun) when things are going badly. But those heroes of the faith that we look to for inspiration and illumination didn't see prayer that way—they knew, rightly, that prayer to the one true God is never wasted, it is the very blood in the veins of the righteous.

Read James 5. 13-18.

There is no shame in admitting a shortcoming in our lives with God. The problem is when we know the areas where we fall short and refuse to ask for forgiveness and move towards a closer walk with God.

Perhaps you find prayer difficult—maybe you have been convinced that it is silly to talk to a God you can't see or audibly hear. Maybe you find that kind of intimate conversation with the inventor of carrots and camels difficult to face.

Perhaps you have no difficulty with praying. The time you spend with Jesus one on one is like communing with friend as friend (to paraphrase Fanny Crosby). In times of trouble, a plea for help comes from you as easily as praise does in times of great joy.

Regardless of where you find yourself in this spectrum—we all can spend more time in communication with God.

Take 5 minutes today to sit with God. Just 5.

In that time today, ask that He would strengthen your faith and prayer life so that He would become your first port of call, rather than an afterthought.

Day 38.

Today is Maundy Thursday, the day where, traditionally, we mark the Last Supper. It is certainly not a 'happy' occasion, but it is important.

It's important for many reasons, but the Last Supper gives us insight into the very nature of God.

During the Last Supper, we see Jesus—the very person of God—humble Himself to such a position as to wash His Disciples feet. In the Ancient Near East this job would have been allocated to the most junior of servants. It might have been done by a more senior servant as a show of understanding of the importance of the guest—but the host would never have stooped so low as to wash the dirt off of the feet of his company. Tradition and cultural considerations would never have allowed it.

But we see Jesus humble Himself in the sight of His Disciples to do this menial task.

This must have had some impact on Peter—who characteristically doesn't quite grasp things right away. We see him remonstrate to Jesus that He should not lower Himself to that state—and when rebuked, swing to the other extreme, telling Jesus that if He would wash his feet, Jesus should wash Peter's whole self.

Peter is a man of extremes—his pendulum swings wide as it were.

But, as always, Peter seems to eventually grasp Jesus' intention at a deep level because we see in 1 Peter 5.6 that he understands the importance of humility at last.

For a man like Peter—and indeed, many of us—this is not an easy lesson. We are more apt to break than bend in submission to anyone, including God. But Peter has learned that humility in service to God is no hardship. It is the nature of service itself. Earlier in this Epistle, Peter acknowledges that we humble ourselves not for reward, as he might have thought earlier in his life, but out of eagerness to serve God.

We see this humility in service to God later that evening, after Supper has ended, and they adjourn to the Garden. Jesus, if he had His druthers, would choose to not go to the cross, but knowing that it is necessary for Him to do so, accepts God's will. For the sake of the world Jesus humbled Himself to an act that would make anyone think twice.

As we chase after God, we should be reminded that humility of service sometimes means laying down our preference in order that others might be saved.

Read 1 Peter 5. 1-11.

I had a friend that had a chair that he said only the humble could sit in. The joke was that if you sat in it, you weren't humble enough to sit there, but if you didn't sit there you proved you were, in fact humble enough to use the chair. The problem was that it was the most comfortable chair in the house. (yes, I sat in it—it was a leather wingback, and lovely).

Humility cannot be earned—then it would become a point of pride. But humility is a by-product of serving the King of Kings. If we model our lives as closely as we can on Jesus, that humility comes naturally.

Arrogance and pride deter people from God, but humble service in His name draws people to Him.

Pray today that God will give you the ability to humbly serve in the Kingdom without expectation of reward.

Day 39.

Good Friday.

From a certain perspective, there is very little that is Good about this Friday.

Mary lost her son.

The Disciples lost their leader.

The crowds that followed Him lost their hope.

Even those who knew Him best couldn't understand why He needed to die such a brutal and humiliating death on a criminal's cross.

It was, for many at the time, a truly horrible day.

But it was necessary.

The Law and the Prophets tell us a story, a story that ends in a cliffhanger of sorts. The Law and the Prophets tell us, unequivocally, that we cannot bridge the gap between our sinfulness and God's holiness on our own. No matter how closely we adhere to the Law, no matter how well we live in the light of His pre-incarnate revelation, we cannot overcome our sin.

The priests made sacrifices every year to bridge that gap—and every year they needed to do it again.

But here...

Here we see the perfect sacrifice, a wholly (and holy) unblemished lamb, offered up for the eradication of our sins, a perfect Jacob's ladder, and the fulfillment of the Law for our salvation.

There has never been a more important event, save what comes in three days, in the history of the world.

It is definitely Good.

Read 1 John 2. 1-6.

Today, simply reflect and meditate on the Goodness of this Friday in light of 1 John 2. 1-2.

Day 40.

On the church calendar, Saturday of Holy Week is an in-between space. Jesus has gone to the cross yesterday, and tomorrow, with its glory and miraculous nature has yet to come.

We simply wait.

We wait in mourning and in anticipation.

We mourn with the realm of Heaven at the loss of Jesus, and we wait in anticipation knowing what is coming.

This Saturday is a yearly reminder of sorts of the waiting we experience every day of our lives until Jesus returns.

We mourn for the lost, and those who will be lost, that they chose through explicit or implicit denial of Jesus. We mourn for the lost time without Jesus physically with us. We mourn for ways that we have grieved His Holy nature by our sinful and stubborn ways.

And we wait in great anticipation for His glorious return! We sit on tenterhooks knowing that He will come again as He promised—riding on a cloud of glory.

He is the Alpha and Omega, and can be found on every page of the Bible that He inspired through the Holy Spirit for hundreds of writers over several hundreds of years.

He is the Genesis and the Revelation of our lives and the Beginning and End of creation.

We wait with bated breath, knowing that He will rise from the grave, and also inherently feeling the tension of those men and women who saw this all happen with their own eyes.

How many people were physically touched by Jesus during His ministry—how many healed of disease and brokenness—who saw Jesus die? They could scarcely have credited His resurrection.

They might not have known, but we do.

But today, we wait.

Read Revelation 1. 1-8.

Sit in peace. Know that Jesus is Lord, that he is the Alpha and Omega, that He has come and will come again.

Allow your heart to feel the tension between Friday and Sunday, knowing that it will be resolved in magnificent fashion come tomorrow.

Sit and wait.

Day 41.

He Is Risen!

Risen Indeed!

Happy Easter!