



Year 5 Week 52 Day 358-366

December 23 – December 31, 2016

Daily Devotion Guide
Life Together Series: Five-Year Plan
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I. Invocation and Adoration:

“Eternal Father, as we come to the end of yet another year, our hearts are filled with gratitude because your guiding hands have never left us, even in times we did not feel your presence. We thank you for your protection of our body, soul and spirit. We thank you for your provisions both temporal and spiritual, and often so timely. We thank you for answered prayers, and we thank you for those you have yet to answer. We thank you for your friendship that transcends the most intimate among mortals as you draw close to us and speak to us through your Word. But most of all, we thank you for the giving of your Son to us on the cross that we may have eternal life. Lord Jesus, thank you for coming soon to put an end to all earthly miseries and usher us into your eternal kingdom where we shall reign with you for ever and ever. Amen.”

Reading of Proverbs 31:1-9 (Days 358-360); 31:10-31 (Days 361-366)

We shall finish the reading of the Book of Proverbs as an optional reading to transition us from worship to confession:

Read this passage a few times each day, not for the sake of Bible study, but to grasp a major thought each day and translate that thought into either adoration or confession.

II. Confession

Pause now and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you your sins and ask for forgiveness.

III. Thanksgiving

List, one by one, things for which you should give thanks.

IV. Scriptural Reflection:

This week, we shall finish the study of the book of Revelation and conclude our 5-year Bible Study Plan with the books of Galatians and Jude in the New Testament. The last week of this year covers nine days instead of the usual seven. Read slowly and reflectively the assigned passage twice at least and consider the questions below each day:

Day 358 Revelation 22:1-21

The New Jerusalem (Cont.) — 21:1-5 — as the angel continues to show John the vision of the New Jerusalem, one cannot help but see a restoration of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:

- (1) The city has a “river of life”
 - a. What is meant by the “river of life”? (7:17; 21:6; John 4:10; 7:37-38)
 - b. What does its crystal clear quality stand for? (4:6)
- (2) The city has the tree of life
 - a. What does the tree of life stand for? (2:7; Genesis 2:9; 3:22. Note that “To speak of months in reference to the fruit of it is to use human terms of time for eternity of timelessness” [Lenski, 651])
 - b. What is the use of the leaves?
 - c. Why do the nations need healing since they will not be cursed anymore (by plagues)?
- (3) The city has the throne of God and of the Lamb
 - a. Where is the throne now?
 - b. “Throne” is singular in number: what does it mean with God and the Lamb having the same throne?
 - c. Who are the servants that will serve Him? (1:3; 1 Corinthians 7:22-23)
 - d. What privileges will they have? (v.4)
- (4) No more night (v. 5)
 - a. What does night symbolize? (Romans 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:5)
 - b. Why will the night be over forever?

The Assurance of the Angelic Messenger — 22:6

- (5) Toward the end of these revelations to John, what does the angelic messenger assure John about?
- (6) Is this assurance superfluous? Why or why not?
- (7) How does this assurance affirm OT prophecies?

“Behold, I am Coming” (I) — 22:7-11

- (8) Since He is coming soon, Jesus urges us, the readers of this book of prophecies, to keep its words: what does it mean to “keep” these words of prophecies? (See also 1:3)
- (9) The angelic messenger (vv. 8-11)
 - a. Why does John repeat the mistake he made in 19:10?
 - b. What does the angel then remind him to do? (v. 10) why? (see Daniel 12:4)
 - c. How does v. 11 prepare us in approaching the End-time?

“Behold, I am Coming Soon” (II) — 22:12-17 — in the first iteration of this statement in v. 7, Jesus asks us to keep the words,

- (10) In this reiteration, Jesus assures us of His rewards: can you recall all the rewards He has promised to the Seven Churches (in chapters 2-3)?
- (11) Now, as if He is putting His signature to this book of Revelation: how does He address Himself? (v. 13) what is its significance? (see 1:8; 21:6)
- (12) A contrast of those within and without the city (vv. 14-15)
 - a. Who are those who may enter the city? (also see 7:14)
 - b. What privileges do they (we) have?
 - c. Who are those outside of the Holy City? (see also 20:15)
- (13) What does Jesus call Himself at the very end of this “revelation”? (v. 16)
- (14) What might be their significance to the consummation of God’s plan of salvation? (Isaiah 11:1, 10; Romans 1:3; Number 24:17)

The Invitation to “Come” — 22:17

- (15) Who are the ones extending this invitation?
- (16) To whom is this invitation extended?
- (17) What is this invitation about?

The Warning — 22:18-19

- (18) Why is there the need to give such a warning at this particular time?
- (19) Since this is the very end of God’s Word of Revelation, do you think such a warning applies equally to all the books of the Bible? Why or why not?
- (20) What might constitute adding or subtracting from God’s Word?

“I am Coming Soon” (III) — 22:20-21

- (21) Although these words were revealed some 2,000 years ago, and the Lord has yet to come: what does such a repetition of this statement mean?
- (22) How does John respond to Jesus’ testimony?

- (23) What about you? Do you genuinely look forward to His coming? Why or why not?
What difference will it make to how you might live your life?
- (24) What is the main message to you today and how may you apply it to your life?

The Book of Galatians

The traditional view (probably still held by the majority) is that the book of Galatians was written to the “territory” of Galatia settled by the Gaul around 3rd B.C. which was incorporated into a Roman province in 25 B.C. This territory includes those to the south as well, i.e. Pisidia, Lycaonia and Pamphylia etc. The Apostle Paul probably visited there on his way to Europe during his 2nd missionary tour (source: Gordon Fee’s lecture notes).

However, during Paul’s absence, “trouble-makers” and “agitators” came from Palestine, entered into the church, and claimed that Gentile believers could not true Christians without observing circumcision. They also challenged Paul’s apostleship apparently because he was not one of the twelve original apostles (and did not meet the criteria set by the Apostle Peter (Acts 1:21-22)). Presumably, the naïve Galatian Christians accepted such arguments and teachings.

Paul was compelled to write to prove his apostleship (1:1 – 2:14), to emphasize that justification is purely through faith in Christ alone rather than by the works of the Law of Moses (2:15-5:15), and to point out that the key to a godly life is still through the Spirit, not the Law of Moses.

Day 359 Galatians 1:1-24

The Defense of His Apostleship (I)

- (1) Greetings (vv. 1-5)
- a. How does Paul defend his apostleship even as he opens his letter? (v. 1; see Acts 9 especially vv. 15-16)
 - b. As he sends his presumably standard greeting, how does Paul
 - i. Remind them of the time (or age) they are in?
 - ii. How have they been saved?
- (2) Only one gospel (vv. 6-9)
- a. What is Paul astonished about? (v. 6)
 - b. Why does the turning to a different gospel amount to “deserting the one who called” them by the grace of Christ? Who is this “one”?
 - c. Twice Paul curses those who preach a different gospel:

- i. Is he being too harsh? Why or why not?
 - ii. To you what are the basic doctrines of the gospel the deviation from which constitutes a “different gospel”? (You might wish to consult the Apostles’ Creed)
- (3) Direct revelation from Christ (vv. 10-24)
 - a. What is his motive in proving his apostleship (v. 10)
 - b. In proving that his gospel message is a direct revelation from Christ, Paul reiterates his journey of being called into ministry:
 - i. What marked his life before his conversion? (vv. 13-14)
 - ii. What does Dr. Luke tell us about the immediate post-conversion period of Paul? (Acts 9:20-25)
 - iii. How does Paul fill in the gap between Acts 9:25 and 9:26 here? (vv. 15-18)
 - iv. What happened after his first short trip to Jerusalem? (vv. 19-24)
 - v. How does it jive with the accounts in Acts 9:26-30?
 - vi. What is the point Paul tries to make? (1:11-12)
 - vii. Why is it so important to him?
- (4) What is the main message to you today and how may you apply it to your life?

Day 360 Galatians 2:1-21

The Defense of His Apostleship (II)

- (1) The Jerusalem Council (vv. 1-10)
 - a. Why did Paul go the Jerusalem? (vv. 1-3)
 - b. What actually led to this revelation to go to Jerusalem? (Acts 15:1-2)
 - c. What was the specific challenge brought up at the meeting? (Acts 15:5)
 - d. How did Paul interpret their challenge? (vv. 4-5)
 - e. Who spoke up at the meeting besides Paul and Barnabas? (Acts 15:7, 13)
 - f. Who eventually made the decision to the matter? (Acts 15:22)
 - g. How did Paul view their authority (vv. 2, 6, 9)
 - h. What was different about their ministry to that of Paul? (vv. 7-9)
 - i. What was still common about their ministries? (v. 8)
 - j. How did these pillars in Jerusalem affirm Paul’s apostleship? (v. 9; Acts 15: 25-26)
 - k. What was the resolution at the Jerusalem Council? (Acts 15:28-29)
 - l. What was Paul’s version of the resolution? (v. 10)
 - m. What do you think how Paul have taken the Council’s decision?

- (2) Peter's visit to Antioch (vv. 11-16)
 - a. Since Peter was "an apostle to the Jews" (v. 8), what might be his reason for visiting Paul and Barnabas in Antioch?
 - b. Peter did eat with the Gentiles to begin with: what does this show about Peter's view of Gentile believers?
 - c. Upon seeing "certain men from James (the leader of the Jerusalem church)" Peter began to withdraw from the table of the Gentiles: why?
 - d. What impact did his action have on others? (v. 13)
 - e. How did Paul choose to confront Peter? Should he? Why or why not?
 - f. In what way did Peter "live like a Gentile"? (note that "Gentiles" in the mind of pious Jews are synonymous with "sinners")
 - g. How has Peter's action (apart from his hypocrisy) violated the message of the gospel? (vv. 15-16)
- (3) Dying to sin with Christ (vv. 17-21)
 - a. Why is Peter's action not compatible with having been justified in Christ? (vv. 17-18)
 - b. What is the relationship between having "died to the Law" (v. 19) and having been "crucified with Christ" (v. 20)
 - c. For whom do we now live and how? (vv. 20-21)
 - d. What might be the motivation for Paul to live for Christ? (v. 20b)
 - e. How has Peter's action nullified Christ's work of atonement? (v. 21)
- (4) What is the main message to you today and how may you apply it to your life?

Day 361 Galatians 3:1-29

After His defense of his apostleship, Paul now confronts the Galatians about their continuous reliance on the Law of Moses

The Work of the Holy Spirit 3:1-5

- (1) 3:4 alludes to the suffering of the Galatian believers: for what have the first-century believers suffered?
- (2) By what did they receive the Holy Spirit in the first place?
- (3) What is the goal of believers after conversion?
- (4) How should we achieve our goal (of sanctification)
 - a. By our own effort? Or
 - b. By the Holy Spirit?
- (5) Is Paul justified in calling the Galatians fools? Why or why not?

The Example of Abraham's Faith — 3:6-9

- (6) When did God credit Abraham with righteousness? (v. 6; Genesis 16:1-6)
- (7) When did Abraham and his family observe circumcision? (see Genesis 17:9ff)
- (8) What is the implication of this promise “All nations will be blessed through you (Abraham)” have to do with the justification of the Gentiles? (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18)
- (9) How do Gentiles become the children of Abraham? (vv. 7, 9)

The Law Cannot Justify — 3:10-14

- (10) Since the Law of Moses does say that “The man who does these things (i.e. the Law) will live by them” (v. 12; Leviticus 18:5), why then does Paul say that “all who rely on observing the law are under a curse”? (v. 10; Deuteronomy 27:26; James 2:10)
- (11) How did Christ take the curse of law from us? (v. 13; Deuteronomy 21:23)
- (12) How can we receive His redemption and the promised Holy Spirit? (vv. 11b, 14b; Habakkuk 2:4)

The Covenant and the Law — 3:15-25 (Note that the following discussion by Paul is based on God's promise to Abraham and his “seed” in Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 24:7)

- (13) Why does Paul have to point out that the promises were spoken to Abraham's seed in the singular? (v. 16)
- (14) When was the Law of Moses introduced? (v. 17)
- (15) If a human covenant cannot be set aside (v. 15), can the Law set aside God's covenant?
- (16) The purpose of the Law of Moses (vv. 19-25)
 - a. Why was the Law “added”? (v. 19)
 - b. Before the coming of the seed, what was the condition of the whole world (including us)? (vv. 22, 23)
 - c. Now that the seed, Christ has come, what has happened to the promise? (vv. 22b, 25)
 - d. What, therefore, is the function of the law? (vv. 24, 25: note the original Greek words in both verses are that of guardianship of a child)
 - e. In what way is Christ the “mediator” of the Law? (v. 20)

More than Abraham's Children — 3:26-29

- (17) Why are we who believe “sons of God”? (vv. 26-27)
- (18) Why is there no more difference between Jews and Gentiles in Christ? (vv. 28-29)
- (19) What is the message to you today? How may you apply it to your life?

Day 362**Galatians 4:1-20**

In the last chapter, Paul was using the analogy of guardianship (in the original language) to explain the purpose and function of the Law of Moses (3:23-25), and now he further elaborates on this analogy:

The Law is the Guardian — 4:1-7

- (1) What is the role of the Law as the guardian? (v. 2)
- (2) Who were we under the Law? (v. 1)
- (3) What kind of slave were we? (v. 3)
- (4) When did our status change? (vv. 4-5)
- (5) What role does the Holy Spirit play in our attaining the status of sonship? (v. 6)
- (6) As sons, what are we heirs to? (v. 7; 3:29)

Slaves No More — 4:8-11

- (7) To whom were we slaves to formerly? (v. 8)
- (8) The opposite of slaves should be children, and yet Paul says we now know God, or rather are known by God (v. 9)
 - a. What is meant by “Knowing God”?
 - b. What is meant by being “known by God”?
- (9) Slaves of another kind: (vv. 9b-11)
 - a. Why does Paul call the observing of special days etc. weak and miserable principles?
 - b. Why does Paul call such observance slavery?

Paul’s Appeal — 4:12-20

- (10) What does Paul ask the Galatians to become? Why? (v. 12)
- (11) Based on what does Paul make his passionate appeal? (vv. 13-15; note that we are not sure what illness is Paul talking about)
- (12) What seems to have changed? Why? (vv. 16-17)
- (13) How does Paul liken his pain to? (vv. 19-20)
- (14) What is the most important message to you and how may you apply it to your life?

Day 363**Galatians 4: 21 – 5:12**

Getting Rid of the Slave Woman — 4:21-31 — Paul now uses Hagar and Sarah and their respective sons as an illustration of the superiority of promise over the Law (see Genesis 21:8ff)

- (1) How does Paul point out who Hagar and Sarah were respectively (v. 22)
- (2) What was the difference between the births of their sons respectively? (v. 23)
- (3) What does Paul liken the birth of Hagar's son to? (vv. 24-25)
- (4) What does Paul liken Sarah and her son to? (vv. 26-28)
- (5) What happened when Hagar's son, Ishmael persecuted Sarah's son Isaac? (vv. 29-30; see Genesis 21:8ff)
- (6) What is the implication of this analogy to us? (v. 31)

Freedom in Christ — 5:1-6 — Paul goes on to speak about the exercise of our freedom in Christ

- (7) What has Christ set us free from? (v. 1; see Roman 6:6-7)
- (8) Can this freedom be extended or applied to freedom from the slavery of the Law? Why or why not?
- (9) What does the continued observance of circumcision signify? (v. 4a)
- (10) What is the implication of such observance? (v. 3)
- (11) What does such observance do to Christ's redemptive work? (vv. 2, 4b)
- (12) How do we gain righteousness through Christ? (vv. 5-6)
- (13) Why is circumcision irrelevant in gaining righteousness?
- (14) Why is faith necessarily expressed in love? What does it mean? (v. 6)

The Agitators — 5:7-12

- (15) What have the agitators done to the Galatian believers? (v. 7)
- (16) How harmful is their persuasion? (vv. 8-9)
- (17) How will God deal with them? (v. 10)
- (18) Why does Paul refuse to preach circumcision anymore? (v. 11)
- (19) What is the message to you today and how may you apply it to your life?

Day 364 Galatians 5:13 – 6:5

Throughout Paul's affirmation that righteousness does not come through the observance of the Law, but through faith in Christ, he has repeatedly and prominently highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit in the process (3:2, 3, 5, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:5). Now, he urges the Galatian believers to live out the reality of their lives in the Spirit. 5:13-15 and 6:1-5 act as an "inclusio" with their emphasis on "each other", sandwiching the section that contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. As a result, we shall first consider the "inclusio".

“Each Other” (I) — 5:13-15

- (1) Since we have been credited with righteousness through our faith in Christ and are no longer under the slavery of the Law, how may such a wonderful truth be abused? (v. 13) Why?
- (2) Paul sums up the essence of the Law:
 - a. Since we are no longer under the Law, has the Law then been abolished? (see Jesus’ comment in Matthew 5:17-18)
 - b. How can loving one another sum up (the original word can also mean fulfill) the entire law? (see Matthew 22:37-40)
 - c. How does the church in Galatia act in opposition to this “sum” of the Law? (5:15)

“Each Other” (II) — 6:1-5 — How to love our neighbor as ourselves:

- (3) Why does Paul seem to address these words to those “who are spiritual”? (v. 1)
- (4) When someone in the church is caught in a sin, what normally do people in the church do?
- (5) What does Paul ask us to do?
- (6) In seeking to restore a wayward believer:
 - a. Why does Paul ask us to be gentle?
 - b. Why does Paul also warn us to be careful?
- (7) In 5:14, Paul says that loving each other fulfills the “entire Law”, now in 6:2, what practical expression does he draw our attention to?
- (8) In 6:3-6, Paul shows us our basic problem in mistreating each other:
 - a. Why do we tend to think too much of ourselves? How can we overcome this sin? (v. 4)
 - b. If we honestly test and examine ourselves, what “pride” can we take in ourselves?
 - c. If we often boast of someone (not out of humility, but out of envy), what’s wrong with us? What will this lead to?
- (9) The “burdens” in v. 2 refer to very heavy loads; the “load” in v. 5 is like a traveler’s pack (Fung, p.291):
 - a. What kind of burden needs to be shared?
 - b. What kind of load do we need to carry on our own?

Works of the Flesh versus Fruit of the Spirit — 5:16-26

- (10) We know the conflict between our natural desires and those of the Spirit within us:
 - a. How can we overcome our flesh? (vv. 16, 18)
 - b. How then can we “live by the Spirit” and be “led by the Spirit”? (see John 15:5)

(11) Works of the flesh (vv. 19-21): Paul highlights 15 vices that can be grouped into four categories:

- a. Immoral works: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery (or lewdness)
- b. False gods: idolatry, witchcraft
- c. Relational: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition (or rivalries), dissensions, factions and envy
- d. Lacking self-control: drunkenness, orgies

Since Paul is addressing believers, honestly examine yourself and highlight those to which you are most vulnerable.

(12) Fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-25): these nine virtues can be grouped into three categories.

- a. Why does Paul use a singular to refer to the “fruit” of the Spirit?
- b. Since all nine virtues can be seen in the life of our Lord Jesus, let’s consider each by asking two questions:
 - i. How does our Lord exhibit this virtue or character?
 - ii. How may I express it in my life?

Inherent in Christ:

- Love (Galatians 2:20)
- Joy (John 16:24; 17:13)
- Peace (John 14:27; 16:33)

Extending to sinners:

- Patience (1 Timothy 1:16)
- Kindness (Luke 6:35)
- Goodness (Matthew 5:45; 7:11)

In the face of trials

- Faithfulness (Hebrews 2:17; 2 Timothy 2:13)
- Gentleness or meekness (Matthew 11:29; Isaiah 53:7)
- Self-control (Matthew 27: 41-44)

(13) As Paul ends this section:

- a. Why does he say, “Against such things there is no law”? (v. 23) Is he insinuating that the Galatians are selective in their choice to obey the Law?
- b. Why does he end by talking about “each other” again? (v. 26)

(14) What is the main message to you today and how may you apply it to your life?

Day 365

Galatians 6:6-18

While Paul now ends his letter with what seems to be miscellaneous exhortations, the attack on circumcision is still unmistakable.

“Love Your Neighbor” (Cont.) — 6:6

- (1) While the periscope on loving each other seems to have concluded (in 6:5), what does Paul add in this respect as a last word? (v. 6)
- (2) Why?

Reaping What We Sow — 6:7-10

- (3) In the previous chapter (5:19-21), what has Paul warned us about regarding the serious consequence of yielding to our sinful nature? (5:21)
- (4) What does he now warn us again in this respect? (6:7, 8a)
- (5) In urging us to sow to please the Spirit (vv. 8b-10), Paul reminds us that we shall reap eternal life:
 - a. Isn't that a fact for all true believers? (see John 3:16; 6:47)
 - b. What does this reminder seek to do?
- (6) What might be the harvest, apart from eternal life, that we will reap if we do not become weary in doing good? (v. 9; Luke 6:35; Ephesians 6:8; 1 Peter 2:12)
- (7) What might be the things that might cause us to be weary, especially in doing good to “those who belong to the family of believers”? (v. 10)

The Folly of Circumcision—6: 11-16

- (8) Paul's letters are usually scribed by secretaries, why does he choose to pen this letter by his own hand? (v. 11)
- (9) While Paul wants to impress them with his own handwriting
 - a. What do those “agitators” seek to do with their “good impression”? (v. 12a)
 - b. By teaching circumcision, how do these false teachers avoid persecution for the cross of Christ? (v. 12b)
 - c. How does Paul point out the hypocrisy of these false teachers? (v. 13)
 - d. What kind of boasting can these false teachers make concerning the preaching of circumcision?
 - e. What is the only thing that Paul boasts about? Why? (v. 14)
 - f. As far as the Galatian believers are concerned, what should be the most important thing to them? (v. 15; see 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Final Greetings — 6:16-18

- (10) This final greeting is special in that

- a. Paul extends it to those who follow this rule (the word is the English word for “Canon”: what is he referring to? Why does he call it a “rule”? (see the immediately preceding verse — v.15)
 - b. Why would he also address the “Israel of God”? Does it carry any special meaning in light of the main message in this letter?
- (11) V. 17 indicates that Paul has been plagued by troubles:
- a. Can you recall what he has been defending in this letter?
 - b. What are the “marks of Jesus” that he bears in his “body” that should stop people from attacking him? (v. 17; see 2 Corinthians 11:23-30)
- (12) As we come to the end of this very passionate letter, can you recall three things that have spoken to you most?
- (13) How may you apply them to your life?

Day 366 Jude

The book of Jude is a rather unique one in that it cites from the Assumption of Moses (ca. AD 20) and the book of Enoch (1st century BC), both belonging to the corpus of Jewish Pseudepigraphy, but the book itself was accepted into the Canon quite early by the Christian Church. A good part of the book appears in part or whole in 2 Peter (Jude 3-19; 2 Peter 2:1-3:10).

The author is the earthly half-brother of our Lord Jesus (Matthew 13:55), and he writes passionately against the false teachers with a sense of great urgency, and the recipients are likely the churches of Asia Minor, those to whom 2 Peter was also directed before AD 70.

Greetings — 1-2

- (1) Why does he not call himself the brother of Jesus, and instead the brother of James? (Mark 6:3)
- (2) How does Jude call the recipients of his letter?
- (3) What would your life be like if you have “mercy, peace and love in abundance”?

The Problems Facing the Church — 3-16

- (4) What is the purpose of his writing? (v. 3)
- (5) Godless men have secretly slipped into the church (v. 4)
 - a. Changing God’s grace into a license for immorality: what does it mean?
 - b. They deny Jesus Christ: why does such a sin amount to denying Christ?
 - c. Can you think of contemporary examples of this?
- (6) Examples of God’s judgment (vv. 5-7)

- a. The people of Exodus in the wilderness (v. 5):
 - i. What was their sin?
 - ii. What judgment did they face? (Numbers 14:29, 33)
 - b. The fallen angels (v. 6):
 - i. What was their sin? (see 2 Peter 2:4)
 - ii. What judgment have they suffered?
 - c. Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7)
 - i. What were their sins?
 - ii. What judgment did they face? (Genesis 19:23ff)
 - iii. In this particular case, what does their judgment exemplify?
- (7) Marks of the godless men (vv. 8-10)
- a. What are their marks? (v. 8)
 - b. The sin of slandering (vv. 9-10)
 - i. How unrestrained are their slanders?
 - ii. By contrast, how did the archangel Michael demonstrate in his restraint and why? (Jude is quoting from the Assumption of Moses)
- (8) Analogies of their wickedness (vv. 11-13)
- a. Biblical precedents (v. 11)
 - i. The way of Cain: what exactly is the way of Cain? (Genesis 4:6-8; 1 John 3:12)
 - ii. The error of Balaam: what is his error? (Numbers 22-23; see comment in Deuteronomy 23:4)
 - iii. The rebellion of Korah: why did Korah and his people meet with such a horrible judgment of being swallowed by the earth? (Numbers 16:1-3, 31-35)
 - b. Analogies of their wickedness (vv. 12-13): what does each of the analogies seek to highlight:
 - i. Blemishes at love feasts?
 - ii. Shepherds who feed only themselves?
 - iii. Clouds without rain?
 - iv. Trees without fruit?
 - v. Wild waves?
- (9) Their coming judgment (vv. 14-16)
- a. What fate will they face? (Jude is citing from the book of Enoch)
 - b. What kinds of wickedness are highlighted?

- c. Given all of the above (from v. 4 onwards), can you describe in your own words who these false teachers are?

Call to Persevere — 17-23

- (10) What have the apostles foretold about the “last times”? (vv.17-18; see 2 Timothy 3:1ff; 2 Peter 3:3)
- (11) What will their impact be on the church? (v. 19)
- (12) Are they true believers? (v. 19b)
- (13) How then shall we live in these “last times”? (vv. 20-21)
- (14) How should we deal with those who are weak in faith? (v. 22)

The Doxology — 24

- (15) Use this doxology to end your time of devotion (see section VII).
- (16) What is the main message to you today and how may you apply it to your life?

V. Meditative Reflection

Day 358 Paradise Restored At Last!

“On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing fruit twelve corps of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2)

“Throughout chapter 21 John has been using the imagery of a magnificent city to describe the people of God in the glorious and eternal age to come. While the first five verses of chapter 22 continue that description, they also portray the eternal state as Eden restored, thus ‘book-ending’ the Christian Bible. In Genesis we were introduced to the tree of life planted in the middle of the garden (Gen 2:9). To eat of its fruit was to live forever (Gen 3:22); as a consequence of Adam’s sin, therefore, the first couple were banished from the garden to work the ground cursed with thorns and thistles (Gen 3:17-18). Now in Revelation we see redeemed humanity back in the garden, able to eat the bountiful fruit of the tree of life (22:1-2). The curse has been removed (cf. 22:3 with Gen 3:14-24), and God’s people are again privileged to ‘see His face’ (cf. 22:4 with Gen 3:8) and serve Him. No greater good or more joyous truth could be imagined than eternal fellowship with God and the Lamb! Truly, the unimaginable blessings of Eden have been restored...

In divine providence, our Bible ends with the ultimate restoration of the original creation. Paul teaches that although the creation is currently in bondage to decay, it nevertheless eagerly awaits the time when it will be liberated from this bondage. This will take place when the children of God are brought into the glorious future prepared for them (Rom 8:19-21). Although sin has marred the history of the human race, God has, through the redemption wrought by his Son, set into motion a new humanity. In the present age He rules the hearts of all who have turned to Him in faith: in the age to come that reign will find its full completion. Sin will be forever removed and the design of Eden will be totally realized. The book of Revelation is the final chapter in God’s eternal plan for his children. It portrays in imagery of the most evocative kind the glorious future of all who resist the mark of the beast and turn in believing faith to the Lamb. It brings us full circle to the original desires of God in his creation of all that is.” (NICNT, 398, 401)

Day 359 Paul's Defense of His Apostleship

“I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:12)

As a young Christian, I was deeply troubled by the Paul that I read in the Acts of the Apostles and some of his arguments in favor of his apostleship. I thought he was arrogant and saw himself above all other apostles. It was not until I had the opportunity of reading all his epistles, reading of all his sufferings for Christ and his tears of love for his own race and other believers, I then have come not only to accept him but respect him.

I have also come to see how he was put between a rock and a hard place basically by the words of Peter.

Before Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles somehow felt the need to fill Judas' place based on the prophecy in Psalm 69:25 (Acts 1:20). Peter's understanding was certainly correct, except that he took on the task of filling Judas' vacancy themselves and laid down the following criteria:

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1:21-22)

Unfortunately, Paul did not meet any of the above criteria. And thus he basically spent a good part of his ministry defending his apostleship as one “sent not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead,” (Galatians 1:1)

It is an important reminder to us that sometimes our noble and spiritual notions might actually hurt the cause of God's Kingdom if done presumptuously.

Day 360 Prisoners No More

“If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.” (Galatians 2:18-19)

On the surface, Paul's direct and open confrontation against Peter seemed a bit harsh, after all Peter was basically the “chief apostle” at the time. But it was exactly because of who Peter was that Paul had no choice but to confront him in the open. In fact, Peter's action had already influenced Barnabas to follow his hypocrisy.

However, it is more than hypocrisy that is at stake, it is the whole gospel, “for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.” (2:21).

Paul, in particular, had been imprisoned by the Law of Moses for the longest time, thinking that righteousness could only be gained by strict observance of the law. As Christ revealed Himself to him directly (1:12, 16), and he learned the only way to salvation is “not by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (2:16), he has gained complete freedom from the law in Christ. Why would a prisoner who has been freed seek to go back to his prison?

Therefore, as Peter sought to comply with Jewish traditions in not associating with Gentiles, Paul would not have any of this nonsense and “opposed him to this face” (2:11). But Paul’s complete forsaking of the law is more than theological. It is true that his strong theological message can be coined as “Grace + anything cancels out Grace!” (Fee), but his motive for living out a crucified life with Christ is because “He loved me and gave Himself for me” (2:20).

Are you living out a crucified life with Christ? What is your motive?

Day 361 The Work of the Spirit Through and Through

“Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3)

I believe most Christians understand that salvation is certainly by grace through faith alone as Paul makes it plain in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.”

However, when it comes to the journey of faith after conversion, i.e. the pursuit of sanctification, many Christians are still trying to achieve this goal by our own effort. I was like this for a long period of time after my conversion. I was trying to use the discipline of daily devotion, continual painful struggles with sins, especially lusts, and all kinds of abstinence to achieve sanctification. These efforts, in themselves, are in fact good and helpful, but since I was trying hard by my own effort, I had become miserable and depressed and I felt more like a loser not a conqueror most of the time. Gradually, God has shown me that:

Daily devotion or any kind of prayer and meditative discipline is never a means to sanctification. It is meant to draw us close to the Lord and cultivate our love relationship with Him. We draw close to Him daily; we are willing to spend hours in solitude for the sake of loving Him, not for attaining any spiritual status or benefits.

Our struggle with sin is a reflection of our life in the Spirit. As we walk in the light of the Spirit who dwells within us, we cannot help but be shown all kinds of darkness and sins in our life. The lack of peace that comes from grieving the Spirit will compel us to come before Christ to confess and receive complete forgiveness over and over again (1 John 1:9). But, the overcoming of such sins is still by the power of the Spirit and not by our own effort. The overcoming power of the Spirit will come as we are gradually transformed more and more into Christ's likeness.

Our resolve to stay away from any temptation is made out of our prudence not to allow Satan to have any foothold in our lives (Ephesians 4:27) — not out of reluctance or a sense of loss, but out of a loving desire to please the One who loves us so much and had given Himself for us (Galatians 2:20).

Such a life in the Spirit is one of joy and not misery; one of victory and not defeat.

Day 362 Known by God

“But now that you know God — or rather are known by God....” (Galatians 4:9)

We understand that the word “know” in the Bible carries a much deeper meaning than the secular use of this word.

To know, in the secular sense, refers to the attaining of knowledge in the rational sense. But in the Bible, in addition to the gaining of objective knowledge, to know is necessarily also an experiential and subjective knowledge, without which there is no genuine knowledge.

Genesis 4:1 is a case in point. The Bible says, “Adam knew his wife Eve and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.” NIV correctly translate that “Adam laid with his wife...” This is the true meaning of knowing in the Bible — an intimate encounter that leads to genuine knowledge of the other person.

As a result, when Paul says that when we by faith in Jesus Christ have become the sons of God (3:26), we now “know God” (4:9), it is not just an objective knowledge we gain “about” God, we have come to have a “personal encounter” with Him and thus have established a relationship with Him — He is our *Abba Father* (4:6).

However, Paul is quick to add that, “or rather (we) are known by God” (4:9). Not that we do not know God, we do; but it is far more precious that we are known by God. It is one thing that we claim we know someone, it is quite another for the other person to say that they know us. It is one thing for us to say that we know, say, Queen Elizabeth, it is quite another for the Queen to say, “Oh yes, I know him (or her)”. And for God to say that He knows us, it affirms not only that we do belong to Him, but also that our relationship with Him is no ordinary relationship, but a most intimate one — one that can be comparable to that described in Genesis 4:1. What a privilege! What a mystery!

Day 363 We are All One in Christ

“But what does Scripture say? ‘Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.’” (Galatians 4:30)

As Paul uses Hagar and Sarah as an analogy for the slavery under the Law, and the freedom under the promise (4:21ff), I cannot help but recall how I felt when I read their story in Genesis (chapters 16 & 21 in particular). I felt that it was so unfair to Hagar and Ishmael because they did not really have any choice. It was basically Abraham’s own doing, or rather, Sarah’s own doing.

However, as much as Sarah was the “free woman” and Isaac the “promised seed”, and Hagar and her son were driven out by Abraham, two things were made clear:

- Hagar and Ishmael, while driven out from the home of Abraham, had not been driven out of God’s presence. God saw them and heard their cry (Genesis 21:17). The fact that they could survive in the wilderness was a testimony of God’s miraculous and loving protection (Genesis 21:20); and
- Just as we can all become Abraham’s seed and heirs of God’s promise to Abraham by faith (Galatians 3:29), both Hagar and Ishmael could inherit the same promise spiritually by faith. While we do not know what Hagar’s and Ishmael’s spiritual conditions were in this respect, we know for certain that many of their descendants have become Abraham’s seed and heirs to God’s promise as many Christians are of Arab descent and have put their trust in Jesus Christ in the last two thousand years. Indeed, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:28-29)

Day 364

Life in the Spirit

“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” (Galatians 5:16, 18)

I am sure we all agree with the above statement by Paul in that if we walk by the Spirit and be led by Him, we will not fall into sin and we will bear the fruit of the Spirit as well. However, the big question is “how”?

The Lord Jesus has already provided the answer in John 15, especially in v.5:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

And He goes on to add that we are also meant to remain in His “words” (v. 7) and His “love” (v. 9).

It does not take a genius to know that if we do not spend time with Him often, we cannot “remain” in Him, and the path to remain in Him is obviously through prayers and the meditating of His words (Psalm 1:2-3). In other words, if we do not maintain a regular and meaningful devotional life, there is not a chance that we can bear the fruit of the Spirit which has to be an outflow of our intimate communion with Him.

What about remaining in His love?

Jesus’ answer is also very simple, and that is to obey His command to “love each other as I have loved you” (v. 12). In other words, it is only through loving each other in Christ that we can remain in His love, because the source of our love necessarily comes from Him since it is He who loved us first (1 John 4:19). Thus “if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:12).

If we fail to love each other in Christ, we do not remain in Christ’s love; we do not live in the Spirit, no matter how much time we spend in prayers and meditations. This explains why Paul sandwiches the section on the “Fruit of the Spirit” by the two passages of 5:13-15 and 6:1-5 — both passages deal with loving each other in Christ.

Day 365

The Letter to the Galatians

“Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” (Galatians 6:17)

Martin Luther once said of this letter to the Galatians: “The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle; I have betrothed myself to it; it is my wife...” and Gordon Fee is right in saying that for both Paul and Luther, “the life or death of genuine Christianity rested on the full acceptance of the argument of this letter” (Fee, Lecture Notes).

Indeed, “a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ...because by observing the law no one will be justified” (2:16). This is the crux of Paul’s argument in this epistle; this is the crux of the Reformation that took place 500 years ago.

However, I am deeply touched not so much by the passionate argument of Paul, but by his passionate love for Jesus which undoubtedly has “compelled” him (2 Corinthians 5:14) to rebuke or even curse those “agitators” who are preaching a gospel of circumcision which is a “different gospel — which is really no gospel at all” (1:6-7). The harsher his words are, the more passionate I can feel his love for Christ is.

But this is not just a theological treatise, as important as it is for all times, Paul’s goal is also a practical one — that we may truly love one another in Christ as a church. As a result, he goes on to say that, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (5:6). In other words, Paul is saying that even if you 100% agree with my argument that “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (6:15), if you do not love one another genuinely, it is not a genuine faith; you are not a new creation!

Day 366 Time to Stand Strong

“I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.” (Jude 3)

“The insightful words of Eugene Peterson in his introduction to the book of Jude (The Message, page 604) deserve our undivided attention: ‘Our spiritual communities are as susceptible to disease as our physical bodies. But it is easier to detect whatever is wrong in our stomachs and lungs than in our worship and witness. When our physical bodies are sick or damaged, the pain calls our attention to it, and we do something quick. But a dangerous, even deadly, virus in our spiritual communities can go undetected for a long time.’

Drawing on that word picture, just as we need accurate and honest physicians to diagnose our physical condition when we’re sick, we need

diagnosticians to examine us spiritually. Jude's letter is precisely that — an accurate and forthright diagnosis we dare not ignore.

In light of that, the time has come for you and for me to look deep within and ask ourselves some penetrating questions. As we evaluate our willingness to stand with Jude in contending for the faith, I wonder if his words cut into our hearts. I wonder if, in the process of these last number of years (or maybe even months), there has begun to be an erosion in your faith, maybe a slow, almost imperceptible hardening of your heart, a weakening of your commitment, a loosening of your lifestyle. How's the quantity and quality of your time with God in prayer and fellowship and in the Word? How teachable is your spirit, how contrite is your heart? How are you doing in showing mercy and caring for the hurting? Is your thought pattern a wholesome one? Do you still cultivate a heart for God? I say those things to myself, as well. As we honestly appraise our lives, may the words of Jude burn within us with a renewed intensity: 'I ...urge you to contend for the faith' (verse 3). Are we doing that?" (The Living Insight Study Bible, 1388)

VI. A Time for Silence

You have meditated much with your intellectual faculty today. Now have a moment of silence (the length is up to you, 5 or even 30 minutes), and ask God quietly, “Lord, is there any important message from you today that I might -have missed? Show me, your servant is listening?”

VII. Supplication

Use the following chart to cover people and ministries that you want to remember before the Lord, apart from praying for yourself:

	Your family	Other people	Church Ministries	Other Ministries	City & World	Others
Sunday						
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						

VII. Benediction/Doxology

“To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.” (Jude 24-25)