

- John's phrase "No one has ever seen God" (verse 12) may read, at first, like a misplaced thought. But he went on to say, "If we love each other, God remains in us." It's like the line in Gordon Jensen's song that says, "You're the only Jesus some will ever see." As your capacity grows to take in God's love, to see yourself as loveable in God's sight, how is this changing the way you see and relate to others?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, let the people with whom I come in contact—yes, even the bored store clerk or the annoying neighbor—see you and your love in me. Amen.*

Wednesday, January 23 – Read Romans 3:19-26. Hindus believe in the law of karma.... we build up good karma through good thoughts and deeds.... Through this cycle of birth, death and rebirth...we can build up more good karma until, finally, no bad karma remains. But for Christians, the apostle Paul wrote that no one earns enough merit to deserve eternal life with God. Yet God generously accepts everyone who seeks him, based on grace, not merit (Romans 3:23, 24).

- In Philippians 3:4-9, Paul wrote about how it transformed him to accept that he was a sinner accepted through Christ's grace. Have you ever seen in someone else, or felt in yourself, a (duly modest) sense of superiority due to race, education, religious affiliation or any other force that creates division between people? How can you (and God) allow the reality of your need for God's grace to shift your view of people of other faiths?
- "Is God the God of Jews only?" Paul went on to ask in Romans 3:29 (clearly implying that the answer was "no"). "Isn't God the God of Gentiles also?" Practice plugging other labels (e.g. American, Hispanic, Christian, _____ — choose a faith tradition, etc.) into those questions, and monitor your inner responses. Ask God to help you get rid of any gratuitous feelings of arrogance this exercise shows you.

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you for offering your grace to the whole human family, including me, through Jesus. Help me to celebrate, not my own goodness, but your goodness living through me. Amen.*

Thursday, January 24 – Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Hinduism holds that our struggle is not with sin, but with ignorance. If we do bad things, even though we have God within us, it is because we do not understand. We need to gain knowledge. But, the apostle Paul believed it was important for Christians in Ephesus to understand that the significant changes in their lives (cf. Acts 19:18-20) were not something they had accomplished on their own initiative or strength. They were God's accomplishment (Greek *poema*), living out the kind of life God desired them to live.

- Today's reading said salvation "is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of." In what ways does Ephesians' language fit your life experience? Do you ever pause to realize that the good changes in your life are not solely your "accomplishment," but (even if you invest hard work in changing habits or patterns) originated in God's power at work in your life?
- To what extent have God's priorities become, not just an occasional exercise that you do when there's a special church activity, but woven into the way that you live your life? How open are you to letting God continue to shape the way you live even the "secular" parts of your life—driving, shopping, business activities, playing and watching sports, and the like?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I want to be your accomplishment, to be an example of what your spiritual craftsmanship can do in a human being. Please keep shaping and guiding me in all I do today. Amen*

Friday, January 25 – Read Hebrews 9:24-28. Hindus believe in reincarnation. This essence of God that is placed within us begins its journey as a very simple life form. Through a cycle of deaths and reincarnations we progress up the evolutionary chain. Finally, after many lives, we are set free from the cycle of death and reincarnation. Christianity does not teach reincarnation. As the letter the Hebrews said plainly, "People are destined to die once."

- Hebrews did not use the idea of "judgment" to instill fear, as too many Christian preachers have tried to do. Rather, it placed judgment in the context of the message that Christ did not need a repeated cycle to save us. He 'was offered once to take on himself the sins of many people" (verse 28). What has helped you to internalize the saving power of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, to deliver you from fear of judgment?
- The Hindu view of many cycles seems to reflect a rueful recognition that a human life seldom even approaches a high enough state to accrue all good karma. Christians agree with that but see the solution differently. The answer to our problem is not within us but beyond us. We cannot make ourselves holy and forgive our own sins. We need a Savior. Did you ever see it as up to your own goodness and effort to save yourself? If so, what changed that for you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, thank you taking the burden of my sins on yourself. Thank you that I need not fear meeting you at the end of my earthly life. Amen.*

Saturday, January 26 – Read John 14:1-6. Unlike Hindus, Christians do not believe that when this life ends (after however many cycles), we are united with the divine Brahman like a drop of water in an ocean. Rather, we have a chance to see God face-to-face, to be known and to know those who have gone before us. In John 13:36, Jesus told his disciples, "Where I am going, you can't follow me now, but you will follow later." Jesus' disciples seem to have been frightened by his talk of going away. So, he added, "Don't be troubled.... My Father's house has room to spare." He promised that he would return, and when he did his followers could always be with him. Archeologists say most homes in Galilee were small, with one room, two at most. But Jesus' comforting image of the afterlife was a huge, warm family home where God always has room to spare.

- Madeleine l'Engle's book, *A Wind in the Door*, imagined a setting in which her young hero Meg demanded to know "Where are the ones who saved me?" The answer was, "Where doesn't matter." When Thomas asked where Jesus was going, Jesus said that he was going "to the Father"—a person, not a place. He emphasized that God, the personal God, was/is completely trustworthy. Our key to being untroubled about what comes after this life is trust. Have you ever struggled with the question of "where" you or a loved one goes after death? What has helped you learn to trust that "safe with God," wherever that is and however that works, is the ultimate key that Jesus taught us to have peace?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for the assurance that there will always be room for me in your Father's house. Keep my feet steady on the path that leads to that eternal home. Amen.*