

Well, here we are at New Year's Day once again! With the arrival of a New Year, we've completed a full year together and now begin Year Two. I've told many people—including you, I think—that in nearly 33 years of ordained ministry, I don't think I've ever routinely had as much fun as I have in this year with you! We have many opportunities to consider as God leads us forward into the future together. I look forward to what's ahead!

As we begin the New Year, one change I'm going to try to make, at least for a while, is to move my day out of the office from Monday to Friday. My goal is to so structure my day away that I can be in Winchester for a night or two most weeks, and Mondays haven't worked very well in that respect. I'll try Fridays for a bit to see if that end of the week works any better for being with Jill over there.

While I continue to welcome your visits at the office whenever that's convenient for you, I'm often out and about at hospitals, visiting, at meetings, etc., and I'll continue to maintain official "office hours" from 3-5 p.m. on Tuesdays. You can depend on finding me in the office then unless there's an unusually urgent need for me to be elsewhere (such as at the emergency room with one of you, etc.).

I was pleased to be able to introduce my friend and fraternity brother, Dr. Nik Ripken (names are pseudonyms), his wife, Ruth, and their son, Tim (an astrophysicist at Goddard Space Flight Center) to those in worship on Sunday morning. I've mentioned Nik to you before. He's probably the most amazing follower of Jesus I've ever known, and travels the world over working with Christians who are being persecuted for their faith (hence the need for pseudonyms).

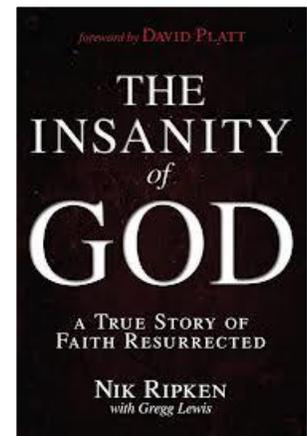
As of today, you can order Nik's new book, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* from Amazon and other online retailers. I can pretty much guarantee that it will be one of the most amazing books you've ever read, and I suspect that it will also be one of the most life-changing books you'll ever read . . . until its sequel comes out a year from now.

Also in worship on Sunday, we observed our first "Loading the Heart Drive" recognition, something we'll do on either the first or last Sunday of every year, depending on when they fall. The idea of "Loading the Heart Drive" goes like this:

If you buy a new computer, the odds are very great that you'll have to buy additional software to enable the computer to perform the functions for which you bought it. That is, you'll have to "load the hard drive."

The Bible promises to be "a lamp for your feet and a light on your path" (Psalm 119:105), and the psalmist pointed out that "*the law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple*" (Palm 19:7). Paul told Timothy that "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

While these promises are true, they are not automatic. The psalmist also wrote, "*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you*" (Psalm 119:11). The point is that while the Bible is indeed our compass for life as inspired and applied by God's Spirit, God will not "load the heart drive" for us. We have to "hide the Word in our hearts" ourselves. If we've done this



work, then God's promise to us is that God will bring to our minds those portions of Scripture we need when we need them: "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (Isaiah 30:21).

There are many ways to "hide God's Word in our hearts," and our "Loading the Heart Drive" recognition highlights two very effective ones: reading the entire Bible every year and reading some portion of the Bible every day. Some people prefer to read short passages of Scripture every day, meditating on them and perhaps memorizing them, which is a wonderful way to "Load the Heart Drive."

My own preference is to read the entire Bible every year, which I find to work well in helping me access+ what I need when teaching, counseling, or preparing sermons. There are many schedules available in books and online by which to accomplish either of these approaches. I've attached a sample resource for each method with this *Laptop*.

While we're thinking about Bible study, here are some observations from Pastor Tim Keller that you may find helpful:

"Many years ago, when I first started reading the Book of Genesis, it was very upsetting to me. Here are all these spiritual heroes—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—and look at how they treat women. They engage in polygamy, and they buy and sell their wives. It was awful to read their stories at times. But then I read Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Alter is a Jewish scholar at Berkeley whose expertise is ancient Jewish literature.

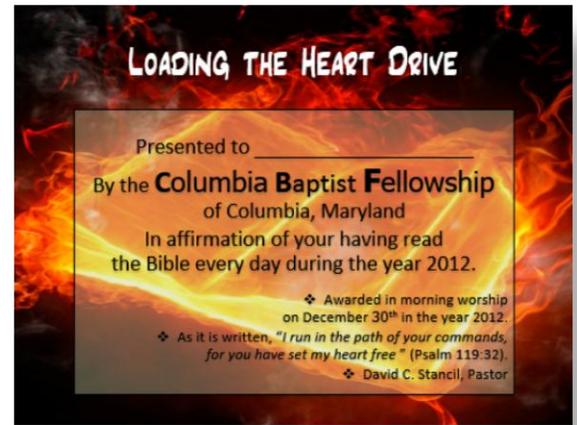
"In his book he says there are two institutions present in the Book of Genesis that were universal in ancient cultures: polygamy and primogeniture. Polygamy said a husband could have multiple wives, and primogeniture said the oldest son got everything—all the power, all the money. In other words, the oldest son basically ruled over everyone else in the family.

"Alter points out that when you read the Book of Genesis, you'll see two things. First of all, in every generation polygamy wreaks havoc. Having multiple wives is an absolute disaster—socially, culturally, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and relationally. Second, when it comes to primogeniture, in every generation God favors the younger son over the older. He favors Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. Alter says that you begin to realize what the Book of Genesis is doing—it is subverting, not supporting, those ancient institutions at every turn.

"When I read Alter's book, I then reread the Book of Genesis and loved it. And then it hit me: What if when I was younger, I had abandoned my trust in the Bible because of these accounts in Genesis? What if I had drop-kicked the Bible and the Christian faith, missing out on a personal relationship with Christ—all because I couldn't understand the behavior of the patriarchs? The lesson is simple: Be patient with the text. Consider the possibility that it might not be teaching what you think it's teaching."¹

And so we begin the journey of 2013 . . . !

Dave



¹ Tim Keller, in the sermon, "Literalism," available at www.preachingtoday.com, 5/17/10.

P.S. I want to THANK the several people who offered to help us in our moving between condos here in Columbia last month. As it turned out, nearly all of our moving had to be done either when most people were at work or at weird hours as opportunities became available to us. Jill and I appreciate your willingness to help!

P.P.S. Please also see the attachment that gives information about “A Taste of Israel,” an event sponsored by the OMI Clergy on Tuesday, January 15. I hope you’ll come!