Monday, October 24 – Read John 12:23-27, 18:33, 36-38. Facing the cross, Jesus spoke about the guiding purpose that gave his life focus and clarity. He knew the reason he'd been born, the reason for the choices he had made. So he and Pilate, the Roman procurator, were like two people talking past each other. Pilate was, literally, down-to-earth—"So you are a king?" he asked. But this earth didn't bind Jesus' thinking. "I am a king," he said, "but my kingdom is not of this world." For Pilate, that was baffling. He may have thought, "What other world than this is there?" Jesus lived for a reason: to bear witness to truth, and do whatever it took to save the world. That led him to the cross. But he also said, "Whoever serves me must follow me." What does it mean for you to "fall into the earth and die" in our time and place, where physical persecution and death aren't likely to be involved? How does this shape your daily approach to life? Like many today, when Jesus spoke of testifying to the truth, Pilate asked, "What is truth?" He seemed to cynically imply that no one knows. Yet Jesus said, "The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth." What do you believe was the core truth Jesus came to testify to? Do you believe it was truth? Can you believe it without falling into pride or looking down on other people?

Tuesday, October 25 – Read Matthew 5:3-12. Scholar William Barclay noted that the verb translated "taught" in Matthew 5:2 meant, in the original Greek, "repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: 'This is what he used to teach them.'"1 Jesus didn't just teach this once—he taught it regularly (and still does, thanks to Matthew's gospel). It quickly becomes clear that he had a startlingly different view of what a good life looks like. The Common English Bible renders verses 3-11 as "happy are," not the more familiar "blessed are." Jesus would have used an Aramaic phrase that carried the sense of a supreme gift from God, a joy that does not rely on good circumstances or fortune. Scholar N. T. Wright said, "In our world, still, most people think wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, the peacemakers."2 Which of Jesus' statements ring truest for you? Are there any of them of which you feel, "I sure wish I had that"? The Message paraphrases verse 8 as "You're blessed when you get your inside world— your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world." What are some of the major influences that have helped to put your inside world right? In what ways do you "see" differently now than you used to?

Wednesday, October 26 – Read Genesis 15:1, 5-6, 13-15; 25:8. We might be tempted to think, "Of course Abraham was content—everything in his life had worked out well." Not actually—God promised him a land, but when he died he was still a nomad. God promised that he'd become a great nation, but when he died that hope rested in his one son Isaac (cf. Hebrews 11:9-10, 13). Genesis 15:6 provided the key to Abraham's good life—he "trusted the Lord." And that was enough. What are some ways your life has been better because of choices your grandparents or other people who lived before you made (e.g. someone who set up a scholarship program that helped you)? Do you believe they could have felt a sense of contentment and satisfaction about those choices, even if they did not specifically get to see you benefit from them? Are there ways in which you need to trust God because you do not see particular promises or life directions "paying off" immediately? What opportunities do you have to invest time, energy or material goods in ways that will help others in the future, even if you are not around to collect the award(s) or hear their gratitude expressed?

Thursday, October 27 – Read Galatians 5:16-23. In Roman times (and today) some people think the outcomes and qualities Paul listed in Galatians 5:19-21 are part of a good life, either as "fun" or as side-effects of the pursuit of "fun." But the apostle sketched a different vision, saying "you shouldn't do whatever you want to do." He vividly contrasted a Spirit-powered life with the negative outcomes produced when we live solely to satisfy our selfish desires, and left no doubt which life he believed is better. With gentle irony (and deep seriousness) Paul followed his list of the fruit of the Spirit with the phrase "There is no law against things like this." Why would anyone make a law against qualities that make life so much better? When have you let go of your own agenda, and found that God had given you something better, deeper and more freeing than what you thought you wanted? In The Message, verse 16 says "My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit." Have you found freedom from some of the areas that result from doing whatever you want, from living as though you were your own God? Can you list areas where the Spirit has animated and motivated you to a better way of life?

Friday, October 28 – Read Acts 20:17-24. Does living a "good life" mean avoiding danger? Not always. Paul and his colleagues were travelling to Jerusalem to deliver an offering from the Gentile Christians of Greece to help their suffering companions in the faith there. He told the elders of the church in Ephesus that he was sure arrest and prison awaited him in Jerusalem. Yet he concluded his witness about how he lived with a sense of well-being and "success" by saying, "Nothing, not even my life, is more important than completing my mission." Think of a time when you gave up something you valued to help someone else (e.g. money, your time, your caring attention to someone who was hurting, etc.). Then recall a time when you pursued an item that you prized solely for yourself. Reflect on how the two experiences affected you. How lasting was the joy and well-being, the sense of a good life, in each case? Do you have a life mission? If you're like many people, your first thought may be, "No—I really don't." But Paul's words can help nearly all of us begin to locate that "mission" (even if we haven't consciously chosen it). Of what would you say "Nothing is more important than _____"? As the answer to that comes into focus, prayerfully consider whether it better fits God's definition of a good life, or that of the society around us. Ask God to help you make any needed course corrections.