



What's the single thing I'll remember about 2021 nationally? It's the comment someone made about being "so glad to have 2020 (Pandemic year) behind us. Well, at least for five days." That was said on the day of the Capitol riots. // I've really struggled to get a Christmas letter out the last couple of years. During the year, I decided to go ahead and write one for 2019 and 2020, but we never mailed them. One of the reasons I do them is that now they've sort of become a nice little family history. I plan to put the old ones online at GordonPlace.com.

Where We Are. We are in the Birmingham area, where Jay serves as Minister of Adults and Small Groups at The Church at Brook Hills. We completed the construction of some new space at church last year, but with the Pandemic raging it was quite a while before people filled it. People said we were brave. We were just too far along to back out! Andy and Siena are in Mount Pleasant, SC (Charleston area), where Andy works for SKF as an engineer, and Siena is an accountant. Emily and Daniel are here in Chelsea. Daniel now works as an insurance adjuster for Liberty Mutual, and Emily has begun a houseplant business. Liz and I celebrated 36 years of marriage in July.

Best Trip: Circle Tour Around Lake Superior. Okay, we'd stayed home long enough. Liz went with me to catch #28 on my bucket list of MLB ballpark cities, Minneapolis. We decided to make a week of it and drive around Lake Superior, which took us through Wisconsin, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and into Ontario. Travel to Canada by US citizens had just opened, so we had to creatively schedule a COVID test. In Wisconsin, we visited my first cousin, Sheri, whom we had not seen since college days. Along the circle tour we enjoyed light houses, scenic views, waterfalls and hikes, and wildlife. One of the favorite pictures I've ever taken was on Pebble Beach in Marathon, Ontario (pictured at right).

Second Annual Family Beach Trip. Several years ago, we talked to the kids about doing an annual trip each May to Orange Beach. Our first was five years ago, and the second was this year. So, maybe it's not "annual". I was honored to be able to baptize Siena in the gulf on the trip. She has been a believer for years but desired to be baptized by immersion.

The Chosen. A few weeks before family vacation Liz and I discovered The Chosen. It's a video series, "the first-ever multi-season TV show about the life of Jesus. It was created outside of the Hollywood system, so you can watch it by downloading the free VidAngel app. You can watch on YouTube, but many commercials and commentary are added there. On vacation, we enjoyed watching again and introducing it to our kids. The writers of The Chosen add to the story of the Bible in such a way as to fill out the otherwise short story of the Bible, but in a way that enhances the story. They also provide background that would have been known to first-century readers but not to us. The series really impacted me, and I highly recommend it as well as reading the story first-hand from God's Word. I'll post a link at GordonPlace.com for you. Speaking of something impactful, also check out the song *He is Worthy*, by Andrew Peterson.

International Missions Begins Again for Liz. In July, Liz took her first trip back to South America in quite a while. It wasn't like her usual trips yet, but the team encouraged pastors in Ecuador and equipped them for trauma counseling as that country experienced much more devastation from the Pandemic than we did here in the US. A number of people felt sorry for me and invited me over for dinner while she was gone. That was a blessing and may contribute to the next paragraph...

Weight Loss for Jay. For about ten reasons, the final two being elevated blood pressure and reading "obese" on the BMI index from my doctor report, I decided it was time to work on my health. Having run into a few people on the Optavia diet, I decided to try that a few months. Between August and November, I lost 30 pounds despite some cheating along the way, and I need to lose 8-10 more to hit the 165 my doctor recommends.



Sports: Braves Win World Series! I'm a really big Braves fan, so seeing them win the World Series was really exciting. We made a couple of Braves games this year, once with Andy. The picture to the right happened at church as we hosted a Trunk or Treat. We all dressed up and decorated cars. As the Braves were playing the Astros later that night, it was cool to see one of my Small Group Leaders representing the opposition. // **Alabama** somehow showed up to defeat Georgia in the SEC Championship. I admit it was totally unexpected here. I picked Georgia to win 41-14, but Bama won 41-24.



Work Opportunities for Liz. Having lost one of her two jobs with e3 Partners due to ministry funding issues brought on by the Pandemic, Liz was looking for some ways to help the family budget. She began some part-time jobs in both babysitting and in-home elder care.



Losing Good Friends to COVID. It was painful for us to lose Bobby Culpepper and Scotty Vines in the last year. They were both a big part of our lives when we lived in Alabaster and afterward, and their loss is felt. It was good to spend a little time with Lillian Culpepper in Mobile in October.

Tornados & Our Small Group Members. Liz and I host a Small Group in our home on Sunday nights. In 2021, the properties of two separate group families were hit by two separate tornado events in January and March. One home was totaled and the other just experienced loss of outbuildings and 100 trees! We decided your odds weren't good if you were a member of our group!



Sunday Morning Small Group. We co-lead an on-campus small group. It was an exciting year as several new people became part of our group, and they fit right in. See the picture to the right from a lunch after church at The Fish Market. We have a good blend of couples and singles, parents of teens and empty nesters.

Podcast, Training, and Conference Leading. I enjoy opportunities to speak at other churches to help train their Small Group Leaders and this year saw several opportunities. The most fun trip was to Niceville, Florida, and Liz and I tacked on some vacation time. I also taught a virtual conference for BACE, an national organization for Discipleship Pastors. The Great Groups Podcast is just shy of Episode #50. One of my Small Group Leaders co-hosts the podcast that we use to encourage and equip other leaders. In Episode 46, we interviewed Liz and my co-host's wife, Wendy. We're excited to have had over 3,500 downloads.



Wedding Day Flashback Picture. This year I digitized all our old videos with a professional company, but this picture is just one taken with my phone of a scrapbook photo. Look at that black hair. Liz hasn't changed much. When Emily was eight years old, she saw a picture from this day on the wall and said, "Momma, who's that in the picture with you?" She knew her dad had gray hair, no mustache, and was much heavier than at 155 pounds. // And a few years later, during a group meeting, some friend's kids were over with their parents. We were talking about what year we were born. Liz said, "I was born in '61." One of the kids asked, "18... or 19...?" Ouch.



Groups Car Tag. Last year for Christmas I put a novelty tag on my Christmas wish list and Andy came through for me. So now my white Nissan Altima sports a license plate that says "Groups". (Picture on front page.)

You Have Blessed Our Lives!

Sending Christmas cards & letters is one of our favorite Christmas traditions. You are among the friends who mean so much to us. Even though we might not get to spend time with you throughout the year, we value your friendship! We'd love to hear from you as well, so please stay in touch as we pray for one another through good times and bad!

May the joy of knowing Christ be yours this Christmas season!