

Gordon Christmas Letter

(Authored by Jay.)

Greetings From Jay & Liz 2024

We hope you are well and enjoying the Christmas season. Christmas is a time when we think about family and friends, and we want you to know that we value your friendship.

Well, to be honest, 2024 wasn't a fun year. In 2023, we trotted the globe in adventures. This year, not so much. Liz broke her right foot, had a cast, then a boot, then rehab and back to work, and then it broke again. Then she did the entire recovery cycle again.



Christmas 2023

Suspensions along the way led to a bone density test that revealed Osteoporosis in some bones. The diagnosis was really challenging for us to process. Meeting some ladies at church who have battled that disease for years, yet appear to be in perfect health, was really encouraging. Liz is on a year-long regimen of monthly bone-building medication, and after that, she will be on a maintenance medication the rest of her life. At present, we're praying for the complete healing of her foot and are hopeful that she will return to normal life soon. Then, we'll just be cautious about our outdoor activities - no more skydiving, but the doctor does want her to return to work and most normal activity when possible.

Finley and More Finley - We usually begin this process by looking through our phone pictures to remind ourselves what we've done this year. It's funny that most of our favorite pictures are of our granddaughter, Finley. Friends who are grandparents warned us it would be this way. "You'll love her so much you'll wonder if you really ever loved your children." Here's a sample.



Pictures - In the left picture, Finley is helping me pick up pine cones in the front yard. In the green dress, she is proud of her Future Voter sticker! The right picture is at the Birmingham Zoo during their July week-long visit with us.

Marriage Conference - Jay spent a lot of time this year organizing a marriage conference at church. It was a big deal, with over 350 couples attending. Ray and Jani Ortlund led the conference for us over a weekend.



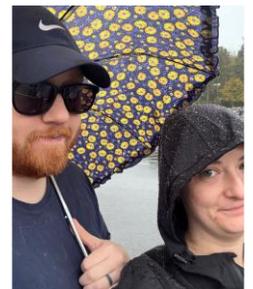
Annual Family Vacation & More - This year, we, kids and spouses, and Finley went to Tybee Island for our annual family trip. After last year's driving adventure out west, we just wanted to chill at a condo near the beach. Tybee is on the Atlantic coast near Savannah, Georgia. We loved the trip, and Emily took some great pictures, as you see on the far left. Liz and I also made a quick trip with friends to Orange Beach this fall. There's just something about sitting on the balcony enjoying the sound of waves crashing on the beach.



Emily's Travel - Emily didn't get enough of the West last year and went back with a friend, Karima, this year on the way to a concert in Las Vegas. They visited Sedona, Arizona, the Grand Canyon, Zion, and Bryce Canyon National Parks in Arizona and Utah. More great pictures.



In the Rain - And at the right, we're not sure why Emily's head is wet in that picture. She and Daniel always keep something going, and this time, they got a picture!





MLB in Birmingham – That’s right. I love major league baseball, and the first-ever regular season game in Birmingham was this summer. Rickwood Field is America’s oldest ballpark, opening in 1910, and they spent a few million on the field to get it ready for San Francisco and St. Louis to play in July. During the game, MLB celebrated the negro leagues and Rickwood history. Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, and many other famous players saw action there at some point, including 181 of the current 351 Hall of Fame players. If those walls could talk.

Fall Trip - In October, we visited some friends in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We made our obligatory visit to the Hershey Factory, and no, we didn’t buy the huge candy bar - it was just a good photo opp. Our trip included some time in the city of Jim Thorpe, that included a train ride, and in Amish Country where we saw a production of the Biblical book of Daniel at the Sight and Sound Theater. On the trip, we also visited friends in Roanoke, Virginia, along with Andy, Siena, and Finley. Seeing a Virginia Tech game was on Andy’s bucket list. The leaves were beautiful during our travels. We made it back in time for our church’s Trunk or Treat with about 4,000 kids in costume and a half-million pieces of candy.

JSU Marching Southerners – Years ago, I marched in the band at Jacksonville State University. They are likely one of the best college bands in the country and currently march around 500 members. I go see them



at least once every year, and I love football too. I found this old picture of me that someone took during warmups for a game – not in full uniform yet.

The Intern – Starting in November, I have an intern working with me. His name is Luke Long and he’s about six inches taller than I am. We are very different in other ways as well – Luke loves Gospel music and raises cattle commercially. He is only a freshman in college at Samford University but plans to be a Discipleship Pastor one day. He knows a lot because his father and grandfather are in ministry, and his grandad has been mentoring him for years. He and I have been friends since before Luke was born. We just interviewed Luke on my podcast – the Great Groups Podcast (Episode 122). Check it out at greatgroups.org.

Church & Our Group - Liz and I still lead a group on Sunday mornings at church. We enjoy our relationships with so many of them. It’s good to do life with people. I also began a second six-year term as an Elder at our church. There are 22 of us this year who help lead the church and encourage small group leaders.

Discipleship Network - Pictured to the right are two colleagues from other churches who do what I do – adult discipleship. The three of us coordinate a monthly equipping lunch for colleagues in the Birmingham metro who lead adult ministry. We are also part of a state-wide organization that hosts an annual conference in January of each year.



Emily & Daniel – Emily is still enjoying working for a company that provides tech support for businesses not large enough to have their own IT staff. Some days, one of the pets goes to work with her. Daniel works as an adjuster for Liberty Mutual Insurance. Emily and Daniel still chase after three pups—Albie, Ellie, and Sage. It’s great that they live nearby and sometimes join us for dinner.

Andy & Siena – Andy still has an epoxy flooring business and recently started a new job back in engineering with Setco, based in the Cincinnati area. He will be able to work mostly from home with some travel. Siena works as an accountant and also in preschool ministry at Seacoast Church, allowing her to place Finley in the church daycare. They have two pups - Baylor and Sheffield.



We miss seeing many of you often. Sending Christmas cards is one of our favorite Christmas traditions and a way to stay somewhat connected. We send you our love, and we value your friendship! We’d love to hear from you. Let us know how life is going and how we can pray for you.

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

The Outtakes...

GREAT GROUPS PODCAST – I'm still enjoying doing a podcast with one of my small group leaders. We're looking forward to hitting 10,000 downloads in the next few weeks. When we started, we didn't know if anyone would listen. Now, we have recorded 122 episodes. Visit GreatGroups.org to hear or see our work.

