

LIVING THE LIFE

In The 21st Century

A Collection of Devotionals and Messages by Ed Wrather to help you meet the challenge of living the Christian Life in the 21st Century.

by Ed Wrather

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To Pray For

“I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” - Matthew 17:20.

Evelyn Tucci who is 82 years old hit two holes-in-one during one round of golf at Pompano Beach, Florida. Evelyn says, *“I prayed that before I died I’d get a hole in one.”* She not only hit one hole-in-one - she hit two!

Now let us think about this for a moment. If you knew God would answer your prayer whatever you prayed what would you pray for? Would you pray for money, gold, health, power?? What is it you would place at the top of your list? Evelyn had a hole-in-one at the top of hers.

Too often we tend to view God as a genie who is there to grant our wishes. God is so much more than that! Prayer should be so much more than that as well. God is concerned about everything in our lives and wants us to talk with Him about those things. He knows the number of hairs on our head. He knows every thought that we think. He knows everything we do and say. What an awesome privilege we have to take everything to God in prayer.

You can shoot two hole-in-ones; or, you can move a mountain.



Obstacles or Opportunities?

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” - James 1:2-4.

When a local high school basketball team made it to the state playoffs the coach told his team just before they went out on the court that they would meet obstacles during the game but in those obstacles they would find opportunities. How true! Some time ago there was a 6.8 earthquake in the Seattle area with billions in damage. Many faced obstacles to simply living life as a result. But in the midst of that obstacle was an opportunity. Time and warning had been given about the need for preparation for an even more damaging quake. This earthquake originated from 50 miles down but it is now known there is a fault only five miles directly beneath the city.

Many have been laid off from their jobs, which is definitely an obstacle. Having experienced that myself three times and another time with the oil industry experiencing a bust and losing a business I know this is an obstacle. But out of those obstacles God moved me to where I am now. They were adjustments to my life, which opened new *doorways of opportunities* that would not have occurred otherwise.

Each day you will experience obstacles. As you encounter those obstacles look for the opportunities and as James would say **“count it all joy!”**



Adequate Preparation

“Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” - Ephesians 6:10-11.

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” - Ephesians 6:17-18.

Have you heard of the Republic of Lomar? It is a fictitious country said to be located between the United States and Canada. Thousands of Nigerians have been paying up to twelve dollars for a visa to the imaginary country. It appears to be a somewhat elaborate and misleading scam. The website of Lomar, www.republic-of-lomar.org, claims to be the leading virtual state in the world.

Here in the United States living in another country becomes more attractive when we hear the news of another school shooting or of a sniper shooting a young man as he was walking into school. The possibility of deadly violence at school (or anywhere - Lowes, Hobby Lobby, Wal-Mart, etc.) appears to be a reality today in the USA but it is still hard, very hard to believe!

How can you face going to school again tomorrow? We know that life goes on and school goes on and the students across this country will be expected to be in their places with bright and sunny faces tomorrow. But if I were to have to face such a thing tomorrow I believe I would want to have God on my side.

Adequate preparation for each school day should include prayer. Praying for the protection of each family member, friends, and fellow students is a necessity whether they are at school, the workplace or even at home. Preparation should also include the Word of God. **“Man does not live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).”** Intake of the Word of God is necessary to provide strength and courage to face each day. Adequate preparation should also include weekly assembling together with other believers (**Hebrews 10:25**) and the Sunday night and Wednesday night youth group meetings would most likely provide additional fortitude for the week.

Actually we don't need a visa to the Republic of Lomar what we need to do is stay here and fight the spiritual battles that need to be fought if our country is to survive. Anyone want to sign up? Commit yourself to the battle! Prepare for each week and each day spiritually.



How You Can Be Successful And Prosperous

“This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” - Joshua 1:8.

We say we know it's true but we have a hard time believing the importance of God's Word. We have seen the little sayings on church signs like:

“Dusty Bibles lead to Dirty Lives”

“A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to a person that isn't.”

George Gallup says, *“We revere the Bible, but we don't read it.”* Around 92 percent of Americans own at least one Bible with the average home having three. 20 million or more are sold each year not even including the millions that are distributed free of cost.

The Bible has become much like a well liked piece of furniture. We know it is there but we never open it up to mine the treasures it contains. According to surveys by George Gallup only four in 10 Americans know that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. A majority cannot name the four Gospels of the New Testament. Only three in 10 teenagers know why Easter is celebrated. Two-thirds of Americans believe there are few, if any, absolute principles to direct human behavior. Fewer than half can name the first book of the Bible. Six out of 10 cannot name half of the Ten Commandments. 80 percent of Christians believe the Bible says *“God helps them that help themselves.”* 12 percent of Christians think Noah's wife was Joan of Arc!

Thomas Reeves a University of Wisconsin Historian says, *“Christianity in modern America is, in large part, innocuous. It tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, a zeal for souls, a fear as well as love of God. There is little guilt and no punishment, and the payoff in heaven is virtually certain.”*

We know the problem but how do we change? For me it began with a commitment to read God's Word each day. It grew from there to a commitment to read through the Bible each year. From those earlier commitments, study and memorization of the Bible have flowed. Where do you find the time to do this? According to Tyndale House Publishers 64 percent do not read because they say they are too busy. An amazing thing will happen if you give time to reading and studying the Bible. You will not actually lose that time. God always gives us supernatural energy to seek Him. We will see that the time used to seek God is given to us many times over through a quality of life that we have never experienced before. **“For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”**



Hearing And Doing

“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” - Hebrews 4:7.

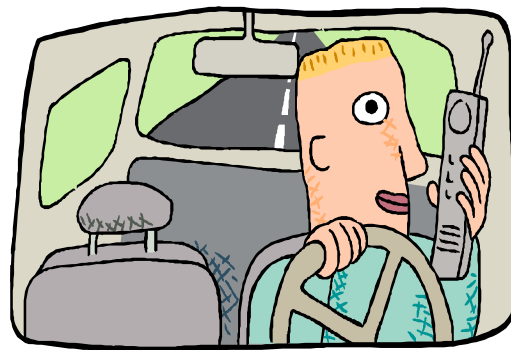
“Do not quench the Spirit.” - I Thessalonians 5:19.

It does not matter whether you are at the grocery store, at church, at Wal-Mart or wherever you will see and hear people talking on cell phones. Even at funerals you will now sometimes hear the sound of a ringing cell phone! For some this is just added convenience making life more pleasant and enjoyable. For others it is a major irritation. For those who are irritated there is a new device which promises to relieve them. This device is able to block cell phones from receiving signals within a designated area where it is used. With this device a store, school, or church could be cell phone free. But it is not yet available in the United States.

Spiritually many are free of hearing God's Voice. God is speaking but they have learned how to tune Him out. They simply harden their hearts and refuse to hear what God wants to say to them. Some come to church every Sunday and read their Bibles every day but still do not hear God speak because of their hard hearts.

Others have a different spiritual problem because they have no trouble hearing what God says. So if they hear what is the problem? The problem is that they refuse to do what God says. They **“quench”** the Spirit.

I believe God is saying to many today *“please listen for I am speaking to your heart and here's what I want you to do....”* Are you listening? Did you hear? Will you obey?



Hitting the Target

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” - II Timothy 2:15.

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.” - II Timothy 3:14.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work.” - II Timothy 3:16-17.

Did you get your free taco? I didn't either! The Taco Bell fast food restaurant chain promised to give a free taco to everyone living in the US. Just one little thing had to happen before you could actually munch on your free taco. What was that? Well, the 150-ton Mir space station had to hit a 40-by-40 foot floating target Taco Bell had placed in the South Pacific. Just one small little detail like finding a needle in a haystack, or a lake in the desert, or ... you get the picture. We didn't receive our free Tacos but Taco Bell hit the bulls eye with all the free advertising they received.

It was ludicrous to think that Mir would actually hit that 40-by-40 foot floating target (It missed it.). Many who claim to be Christians have about as much of a chance to grow spiritually as Mir did to hit that target. It is ludicrous to think that you will grow spiritually when you never do any of the things necessary for spiritual growth. Spiritual growth does not just happen. The apostle Paul makes that very clear to Timothy using words like **“diligent”**, **“present yourself”**, **“worker”**, and **“must continue”**.

To grow spiritually we must take full advantage of the resources of God (**Philippians 4:19**). We must be diligent in taking full advantage of God's Word through reading, study, memorization, and meditation. We have the awesome, wondrous privilege to approach the throne of God in prayer. We must not neglect so great a privilege. We have been instructed to assemble together with other believers that we may be **provoked unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25)**.

We can hit the target of spiritual growth if we will become workmen and women who are not ashamed!



The Best Laid Plans....

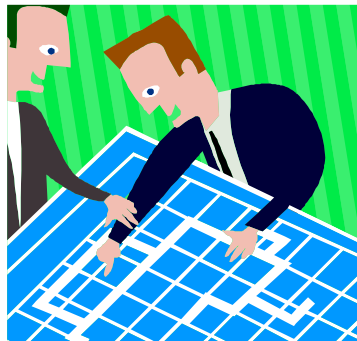
“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down to the Pit; we shall find all kinds of precious possessions, we shall fill our houses with spoil; cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse’ - My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they make hast to shed blood. Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird; but they lie in wait for their own blood, they lurk secretly for their own lives. so are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners.” - Proverbs 1:10-19.

He did not intend for everything to work out the way it did. Everything had gone well for the burglar. He had broke into the house undetected even with the residents at home. He was able to do his work and only when he was fleeing did the residents know a burglar had been in their home. This Malaysian burglar had thought of everything except he left the keys to his car in the house he had just burglarized! He then went back to the house and asked the residents to give him his keys and pleaded that they not call the police. Of course, they refused and the burglar left behind his car, car keys, and his burglar tools. He smashed the windshield of his own car and removed the tag trying to hide his identity but officials believe they will be able to identify him through the car’s serial number.

What the burglar did not know was that he, as the writer of proverbs notes, was **“lying (lie) in wait for his (their) own blood.”** The fact of life is that when we prey on other people, when we **steal, kill and destroy**, we are actually attacking ourselves. When we prey on others we are yielding to the temptation of and following the devil (**John 10:10a**).

We can avoid and we can resist laying a trap for ourselves by heeding God’s wisdom. **“For scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you (Proverbs 1:22b-23).”**

Have sinners been enticing you? Have you been thinking about doing something you know is wrong? Don’t do it! Heed God’s wisdom!



Growing Up

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” - Luke 2:52.

The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, a study by Harvard University, has found that *“religiously active people are more likely to be viewed as good citizens and have a more diverse circle of friends than their non-religious neighbors.”* Seventy-one percent of those surveyed were found to trust people at church, which compares to 52 percent, who would trust their co-workers.



As we look at the life of Jesus we see the good citizenship, the trustworthiness in his development. From age 12 to the beginning of Jesus' ministry there is silence about the events of His life. However, **Luke 2:52** really is a summary of what we can surmise about this time period. Jesus was trained to be a carpenter by his stepfather, Joseph. Most likely Joseph died during this time and Jesus became the head of the household being the oldest of the children. Humanly, Jesus was a hardworking, responsible, trustworthy and wise individual and was growing more so all the time.

If we are to follow the example of our Lord, we too will be hardworking, responsible, trustworthy, and wise. Let us as Jesus did **“increase (increased) in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”**



Finding Rest And Peace

“There is no peace,’ says the Lord, ‘for the wicked.’” - Isaiah 48:22.

“But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’” - Isaiah 57:20-21.

“Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are the thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.” - Isaiah 59:7.

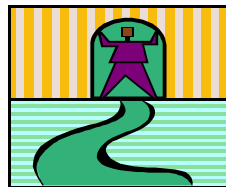
“The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.” - Isaiah 59:8.

A new study is out which has found that 40% of Americans are having trouble staying awake on the job (Most likely at school as well). That could be a major problem for those in some occupations, such as: truck drivers, pilots, air traffic controllers, police officers, fire fighters and many others. Those who receive the recommended eight hours of sleep per day are in the minority.



Sleep is important but the quality of that sleep is much more important. Some close their eyes at night but receive very little rest whether they sleep four hours or twelve. It is hard to sleep when the day you just went through is going through your mind over and over again. It is hard to sleep when the problems of tomorrow are heavy upon your heart and mind.

The fastest way to develop a sleep problem is to travel down one of those **“crooked paths”** Isaiah talks about. It may not be the **“shedding of innocent blood”** but it could be that sin of omission of not doing what you know you should have done. Or it may be something somewhere in between.



How can you make your paths straight? How can you have peace and rest? Jesus says, **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28).”**

Deception

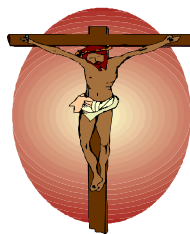
“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” - Galatians 5:19-21.

As Paul says it should be evident to us that these things should not be a part of any Christian's life. It should not be but sorcery or witchcraft has increased the deception level over the past few years. A well-known children's book leads the list of deceptions. What possible harm could come from such a thing? What harm is there in a little sorcery? The people of Uganda are beginning to understand the depth of the harm from sorcery aka witchcraft. Trumpet World Missions John Mulinde says, *“One of Uganda's main troubles is the widespread use of magic in all its forms. The population knew that the ceremonies involved blood and even human sacrifice, and that women and children were regularly sexually abused, but there had been no clear proof. We began to pray that God would take away the evil, and reveal the truth about the occult practices.”*



Underneath the deception, the people of Uganda are finding just how ugly sorcery really is. Among the things that were revealed Mulinde says were that *“five human skulls were found in a witch doctor's house, and two more were caught just as they were about to ritually murder a 16-year-old girl.”* Mulinde goes on to say, *“there was a national outcry, and people recognized that serious occult practices are in no way harmless hobbies, but that which God describes them as: idolatry and satanic.”*

Do not be deceived because these things are indeed not *“harmless hobbies.”* Instead let us **“who are Christ's”** as the apostle Paul says, **“crucify (ied) the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).”**



Real Beauty

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.” - Psalm 43:5.

“Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” - Proverbs 31:30.

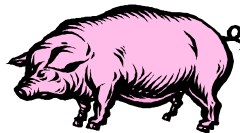
“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.” - Proverbs 31:10.

“As a ring of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.” - Proverbs 11:22.

Juliana Borges has been crowned *“Miss Brazil.”* In order to make it to the top of the beauty queens in her country she has had plastic surgery four times and 19 smaller procedures. She has had liposuction and changes have been made to her chin, nose, ears, and bust. Of the 27 finalists in the Miss Brazil pageant one third have had plastic surgery. Juliana says, *“Plastic surgery made me more beautiful and gave me confidence in myself and the perfect measurements that won me this title.”*

In Uzbekistan there is a different kind of beauty contest. In their first national beauty contest swimming suits have been banned. In this contest the contestants in addition to their beauty will be judged on their inner beauty. It will be their moral values on womanhood and motherhood on which they will also be judged. An 18-year old woman from Samarkand says the contest will be *“a great opportunity for me to show my talent and to show my...maybe my prettiness.”*

There is a beauty that is only skin deep. A shallow beauty can in fact be ugly and repulsive. **“A lovely woman who lacks discretion”** the Bible says is like **“a ring of gold in a swine’s snout.”** Now how ugly and repulsive is that! What is a swine’s snout used for? It is used to dig in the dirt, muck, mire, mud, and swill. A gold ring in a swine’s snout would be disgusting.



But then there is the beauty of holiness. An inner beauty that makes an individual glow with attractiveness beyond anything plastic surgeons could ever duplicate. There is the beauty of the flesh which would be like the enchantments of Pharaoh's sorcerers (**Exodus 7:11**). Then there is the supernatural beauty of holiness which is like the miracles of God which swallowed up the false enchantments of the sorcerers (**Exodus 7:12**). Finally there were miracles which the sorcerers could not even attempt to duplicate (**Exodus 8:18-19**) and that is like the beauty of holiness. Nipping and tucking and beauty treatments cannot duplicate spiritual beauty. For those with this kind of beauty God is the **“help of their (my) countenance.”** This kind of beauty is worth **“far above rubies.”**

Priceless

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” - Genesis 1:27.

“Your hands have made me and fashioned me.” - Psalm 119:73.

“Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.” - Isaiah 43:7.

There was an auction in London on July 10, 2001 of a sheet paper that is pinkish in color and measures only eight by twelve centimeters, which is about the size of a postcard. It brought more than five million dollars when it was auctioned. Why so much? Because it is a sketch, a work of art by Leonardo da Vinci and it was sketched in preparation for da Vinci's first great work, *The Adoration of the Magi*. It is priceless even though someone will buy it for several million dollars. It is priceless because it is an irreplaceable work of art. If this small little piece of paper were to be destroyed it could never be replaced.



What is the value of a soul? What is the value of a human life? Far more than the five million to be paid for da Vinci's work. Because every human being that has ever lived, is living, or will be living is a masterpiece created by the greatest artist of all, God Himself. You are priceless! You are irreplaceable! You were created in the image of God for His glory.

You are completely unique and each day you live is a completely unique day. We are still being formed and shaped by the hands of our Creator. As Isaiah says **“we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand (Isaiah 64:8).”** Allow the Creator, the master artisan, God Himself to shape and mold you this day. Because you and this day are priceless!

Deceived

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. - John 8:44.

In Ann Arbor, Michigan a tow truck driver was called to tow away an apparently abandoned and illegally parked car. He was very much surprised to hear a voice shouting as a 19-year-old woman pounded on the trunk lid. The woman was okay but said that her 25-year-old boyfriend had tricked her into getting into the trunk of the car about four hours before the tow truck driver arrived. Her boyfriend had told her that he was picking up several friends and needed the room in the car. But when she wanted out he would not let her out. Her boyfriend was arrested for kidnapping.

Even though it sounded strange she wanted to believe the one that she loved. She was deceived. There are many more like her boyfriend and their spiritual father is the devil. Jesus says they are liars and murderers. They follow after the devil who comes **“to steal, and to kill, and to destroy (John 10:10a)** and who **“walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8).”**



We resist the followers of the devil in the same way that we resist the devil. In **I Peter 5:9** we are told **“resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”** In **James 4:7-8** we are told **“therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”** In **Revelation 12:11** we are told **“and they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”**

If you have been deceived don't give up! Cleanse your hands, purify your hearts (**I John 1:9**), resist, be steadfast, submit to and draw near to God. God loves you and cares so very much about you. Jesus came that you might have life and that you would have it more abundantly (**John 10:10b**).

Free Indeed

“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” - John 8:36.

Dennis Fritz and Ron Williamson have been set free. They were wrongly incarcerated for more than a decade for a murder they did not commit. Fritz says, *“You just can’t imagine how it feels to be confined in a place like that to the point that you literally have given up on ever being a free man again.”* DNA evidence finally resulted in their being set free on April 15, 1999. Williamson talking about that day said, *“Words can’t describe that day. It was surreal. It was strange. It was wonderful. Whatever word you pick, it would probably fit because there were so many emotions flowing through me.”* At one point during his imprisonment Williamson came within five days of execution.



There are many that are spiritually incarcerated and they have no hope or desire of being free. They walk in darkness having their eyes blinded by the god of this world. The Bible describes their condition **“Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as at twilight. We are as dead men in desolate places (Isaiah 59:9-10).”**

Oh, but to be set free by the Son from the darkness. What joy! To be free from the eternal death sentence and instead to have eternal life. What amazing grace! As the apostle Paul says, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (II Corinthians 5:17).”**

Have you been set free? If not, what better day than today to be released from the darkness and to walk in new life? Turn from the darkness and receive Christ Jesus as your Savior. **“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13).”**

To receive Christ as your Savior pray the prayer below or put it in your own words:

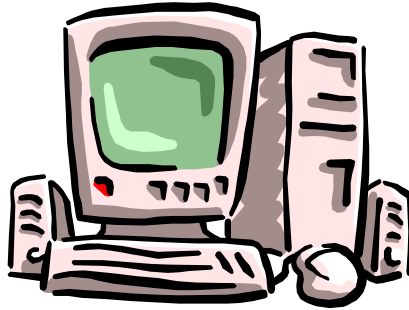
“Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose again on the third day. Please forgive me for the sins, the bad things I have done, I want to change and be like You. Please help me to change, be my Lord and my Master and my Savior. In your name Lord Jesus I ask You to come into my heart and save me. Amen.”

Please remember that words alone will not save you. Only if you truly mean it in your heart will you be saved. If you do pray the prayer above and mean it in your heart please send me an email at wrather@dobsonteleco.com or edwrather@theburningbush.org and I will send you additional helpful information (Or, write to me at P. O. Box 210, Sweetwater, OK 73666).

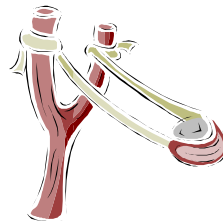
Low Tech

“So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them: So David took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine.” I Samuel 17:38-40.

In 2001 there was a rescue made of a doctor who had a life threatening condition at the South Pole. Temperatures in the harsh winter in Antarctica sometimes reach minus-103 degrees. At first it was planned to use the giant LC-130 “*Hercules*” airplane. However, this huge plane has a hydraulic system used for raising and lowering the landing gear and this hydraulic system would be susceptible to the freezing temperatures. The fuel system on the Hercules is also only usable for temperatures down to minus-67 degrees. The rescue planners opted for two smaller planes, *Twin Otters*. The Twin Otters are propeller driven eight-seaters with a fixed landing gear and no hydraulic system. These planes with their low-tech systems are able to operate in temperatures as low as minus-107 degrees. The doctor was successfully rescued and is doing well.



The shepherd boy, David, understood the value of low tech. David opted for five smooth stones and his sling over all the king’s armor and sword. Goliath, with all of his hugeness did not have a chance against one shepherd boy and a sling. The Bible says, **“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence (I Corinthians 1:27-28).”**



What impossible situation are you facing? In the hands of God, little can be better. In the hands of God, less can be more.

Sinking in the Mud

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” - James 1:24-25.

The creek waters were only a foot deep where the two large earthmovers were making emergency repairs to the Haikey Creek Bridge in Tulsa. But then the track came off one of the machines and it began to sink in the mud. They tried to pull the sinking earthmover out with the other machine but it too began to sink. Daryl Maxville, a maintenance supervisor said, *“They were pretty well buried. The only thing you could see was the cab.”* Workers built a temporary dam and were finally able to rescue their equipment. One of the operators said that *“working in the creek wasn’t a big problem until the mud worked its way through the creek bed.”*



For Christians there is a lot of mud out there that we must avoid. It all begins with a little mud. Its been said that if you *“sow a thought you will reap an act. Sow an act; reap a habit. Sow a habit; reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.”* **Romans 13:14** says, **“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”** Another translation says, **“Rather clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”** That is where the mud starts with the thoughts and the dwelling and contemplating upon those sinful desires.

A literal translation of **James 1:15** would be, **“Desire, having conceived, continually gives birth to sin, and sin, when it reaches maturity, continually gives birth to death.”** As you can see it goes quickly from bad to worse. Before you throw a track and start sinking in the mud of sin put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of thinking about all of the mud start thinking about the good things as the apostle Paul suggests in **Philippians 4:8**, **“Finally, brethren, whatever, things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things.”** There is nothing better to think about than our Lord Jesus and His Word.

Selling Your Soul

“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” - Matthew 16:26.

What would you do to gain the whole world? Sell your soul? What is the price of a soul? For one man in Woodinville, Washington apparently the price is \$400.00. On February 1 bidding for the man's soul began at 5 cents. The item was listed on ebay as *“20 yr-old Seattle boy's SOUL, hardly used.”* Ebay removed the listing and has suspended Adam Burtle from using their service. But not before he sold his soul for \$400.00 to a woman in Des Moines, Iowa. Burtle, an atheist, says, *“I don't think she's going to be able to collect on my soul, to be honest.”*



Most likely you have not literally tried to sell your soul as Adam did. However, it does appear to be a popular concept in our culture with some movies, books, and songs mentioning the selling of the soul. Usually the selling of the soul occurs in more subtle ways. We want to fit in with everyone else and so we will not speak up even when we know something may be wrong. We do what everyone else is doing even when we know it isn't right. Later in life we may become locked into our work and the making of money at a certain level to maintain or improve our lifestyle. As a result we neglect the spiritual aspect of our lives. For some it may mean that they never come to a saving knowledge of Jesus as their Lord and Savior. For Christians it may mean that they are continually ineffective in their witness and service because their focus is on the world.

Jesus tells us clearly how to not sell our souls. He says, **“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 16:25-26).”** No, the woman in Des Moines will not be able to collect Adam Burtle's soul. There is, however, One who will. **“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Matthew 16:27).”**



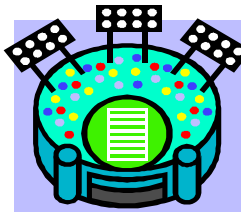
Frivolous

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” - Hebrews 12:1-2.

A frequent problem for the criminal justice system is the filing of frivolous lawsuits by inmates. A recent lawsuit came from an inmate in the Michigan corrections system. Chad DeKoven in his lawsuit sought recognition of himself as *“Messiah-God”* and wanted the state to provide him with a full pardon, and full-time personal attendants. DeKoven also demanded peace in the Middle East. Judge David M. Lawson has dismissed the lawsuit and called it *frivolous*.

We can agree that DeKoven’s demands were a little frivolous, ridiculous, crazy, and even incredible. But what about our demands? We who are living the Christian life sometimes insist on hanging onto our sins and the pursuing of the attractions of this world. Sometimes we also insist on hanging onto our anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred, bigotry and so many other things.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to **“lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us....”** These weights and sins are just frivolous things when compared to **“Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame....”** When we insist on hanging onto our weights and sins that **“great cloud of witnesses”** must think it is so frivolous, ridiculous, crazy, and even incredible that we persist in acting the way we do.



What frivolous things do you need to lay aside so that you can **“run with endurance the race that is set before”** you?



Clinging

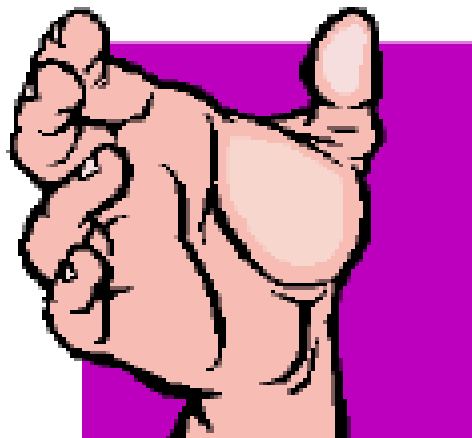
“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” - Romans 12:9-14.

Phillis Roberts once had a very frightening experience at the beach. She was having a nice day at the beach at Palm Beach, Florida when the tide suddenly carried her out to sea. Phillis, who is forty-one years old, somehow managed to grab hold of a lobster trap buoy. The Coast Guard found her twenty hours later still desperately clinging to that buoy. She received treatment for hypothermia and otherwise was in good condition.

Can you imagine clinging to a buoy all of those hours not knowing whether anyone would ever come to rescue you or not? How tired and cold Phillis must have been but still she had a grip on the buoy that was saving her life. She was in a desperate struggle with the elements to survive. She was becoming colder and colder and the waves kept coming and pounding at her the entire time.

As Christians we are in a struggle to survive as well. The world is constantly bombarding us with its evil message. The flesh wars against us and the devil sends his fiery darts. The apostle Paul was well aware of this struggle because he had been in the very midst of the battle and knew exactly what it was like. Paul tells us that we must **“cling to what is good.”** Our struggle may not appear to be as desperate as that of Phillis Roberts but it is. We are in the spiritual struggle to have life. The more we **“cling to what is good”** the more life we will have.

Grab hold! Get a grip! And don't let go!



Eternal Living

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” - John 10:10b.

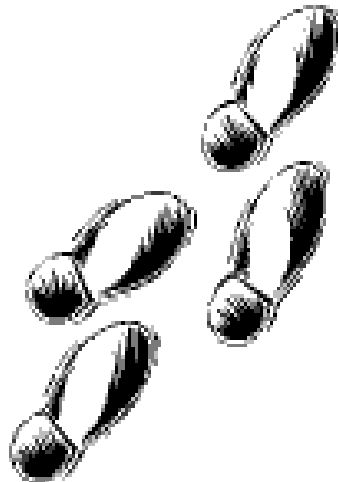
“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” - John 3:16.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” - John 5:24.

When does eternal life begin? When you think of eternity what comes to mind? Heaven? But Heaven is not where or when eternal life begins. Eternal life begins at the moment of our believing upon Jesus for our salvation. At that moment in time we have **“passed from death into life.”**

Emerson makes a statement, which appears to be true for most people. He says, *“People are always getting ready to live but never living.”* The psychologist William Marston confirmed that when he asked 3000 people, *“What have you to live for?”* He found that 94 percent of them were just enduring the present while waiting for something to happen. As Christians many of us appear to be planning to really live only after arriving in Heaven. It is true that our quality of life will be many times better in our glorified bodies, however, Jesus came to give us life **“more abundantly”** not just in Heaven but in the here and now.

How can you live the abundant life today? Try living like Jesus. As we begin to truly follow in His steps we will experience the life eternal.



On Strike!

“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.’ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.” - Acts 15:36-38.

A few years ago in Connecticut in three towns, drivers for an airport limousine service went on strike. The strike effected 8,000 people a day that used the service who are shuttled to airports in New York and Connecticut.

Some people go on strike against God. John Mark apparently went on strike while on Paul’s first missionary journey. No one is for sure what happened. Some think that when the persecution became intense that Mark was afraid and fled for his safety. Others think because he was so young that he became homesick and could no longer take the separation from his family. But whatever the reason Paul notes that Mark went not to the work.

What about us have we ever gone on strike against God? If we have it was probably not while we were missionaries in a foreign country. Our strikes are more like “*sick outs*” or the “*refusing to talk*” when we are angry kind of thing. Sometimes we are not even aware that we are on strike against God. Here are some symptoms of a spiritual strike:

1. Refusing to talk to God except for a few brief moments during the day.
2. Refusing to read God’s Word.
3. Refusing to attend church or if we do attend we only attend the Sunday morning worship service.
4. Refusing to give.
5. Refusing to serve, witness, help, etc.
6. And in its worst manifestation the spiritual striker even works against the Kingdom of God by helping the enemy through their willful sins.

We do not know how it happened but John Mark ended his spiritual strike because in **II Timothy 4:11** while Paul is in prison in Rome he writes **“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.”** Striking is difficult for the worker and for the company they are striking against. The hope is that the company will give in to their demands and they will soon be back at work. Striking spiritually will not work in that way because God will not change His Word to suit our personal desires. Striking spiritually only serves to make life more and more difficult for us.

Isn’t it time to end your strike and get back to the work?



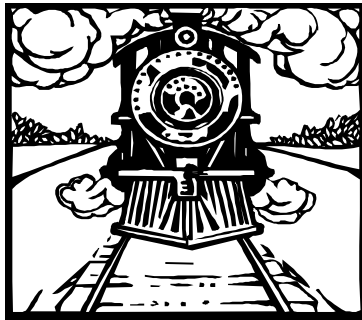
Runaway

“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.” - Luke 15:11-13.

In Ohio there was a near disaster as a runaway freight train with hazardous materials on board traveled some 70 miles before being stopped. The train reached speeds of 46 mph. A catch engine was sent after the runaway train and as it slowed going up a hill the chasing engine was able to hook on. The catch engine applied braking power and was able to slow the train to about 10-mph. That was when engineer, Jon Hosfeld, jumped on board the runaway and brought it safely to a halt.

The lives of some people are like a runaway train. The prodigal’s life went from bad to worse picking up speed in his downward plunge. Most of us know people like that. Some of us have close friends or even relatives whose lives are out of control and picking up speed. How do you stop a runaway life?

Ohio’s runaway train offers some suggestions as to how to stop a runaway life. In order to stop the train they had to first want to stop it. Then they had to take action to slow it enough for the engineer to board and stop the train.



Our first reaction to those whose lives are fast becoming disasters may be *“what’s the use?”* Don’t give up on people! The Father did not give up on the prodigal. He was still watching and waiting for his return **“...when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.”** Maintain as much contact with the runaway as possible to slow down and block their self-destruction. Continue to pray for them and ask others to pray. They have no defense against our prayers.

Our ultimate goal is to get the Chief Engineer (Jesus) on board their lives. Once the Chief Engineer is on board He will bring the runaway to a halt and begin the restoration process. **“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”**

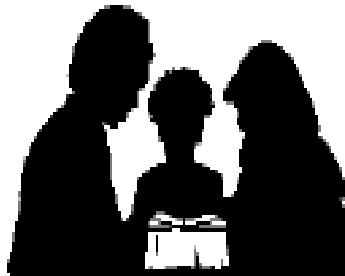
When Two Agree

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” - Matthew 18:19-20.



I remember hearing about my uncle, Levi Taliaferro, starting to attend a Baptist church some 35 years ago. I thought it was strange and my family thought it was strange. But even stranger was that they said my uncle had stopped drinking. I didn't even know he had a drinking problem but was relieved to hear that it was apparently now under control.

Once a few years ago I visited with my uncle and he shared with me the rest of the story. After a church service he and my Aunt Bea went up to the front pew of the church where Bro. Rowley and his wife sit down together and prayed with them. Levi said when he sat down he wanted a drink and when he got up the desire to drink was gone and never came back.



Have a problem? There is nothing like having a little prayer meeting to change your life and solve your problems. Jesus says, **“if two of you agree.”** Get together with a friend, or your pastor, or someone and pray.

Your Best

“Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.” - II Chronicles 31:20-21.

There has been much talk about the greatest generation, which is the title of a book written by Tom Brokaw. Americans born in the 1920s who came of age during the Great Depression, fought in World War II, and went on to build America are those Brokaw refers to as being a part of the greatest generation in his book.



Facing great adversity the greatest generation never gave up but continued on. They had a great work ethic, which I believed was instilled through the background of faith in which they grew up. America during those years was a Christian nation. As Hezekiah did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God so did much of the greatest generation. According to my uncle, my grandfather used to always tell him *“if something is worth doing; it is worth doing your best. If you can’t do your best don’t do it.”* I think Hezekiah would agree with that.



God does not expect us to be perfectionists, or to do the impossible. He does want us to do our best and He will do the rest. We see the evidence of this being true in the lives of the greatest generation.

Have you been doing your best or just enough to get by?

Terror in the Night

“You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.” - Psalm 91:5-6.

A family in Redlands, California understands very clearly what is meant by the terror by night. A mountain lion crashed through their closed dining-room window shattering the glass. The lion then ran down a hallway, through the bedroom where their six-year-old and three-year-old children were sleeping. The lion then crashed through the closed bedroom window. Mountain lions are having more and more encounters with people and attacking people more frequently in the United States.



There are so many potential dangers, which threaten our lives and that of our loved ones. To dwell upon these threats can almost bring about a paralysis, which would hinder every area of our lives. What a comfort to understand that we who are the children of God are under His protection and the watchful eyes of His angels. The Psalmist says, **“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1).** In **verse 11** the Psalmist says, **“For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.”**

When the terrors of this world seem overwhelming and pressing in from all sides we must look as the Psalmist did to the Lord God and say with him, **“I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust (Psalm 91:2).’”** Making the Lord our refuge and dwelling place (v.9) we can walk in confidence through the terrors of the dark and of the day.



Trouble

“Yet man is born to trouble.” - Job 5:7a

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.” - Job 14:1.

A letter to a business columnist stated: *“Recently I messed up a really important project. I’m so embarrassed in front of my co-workers that I hate going to work.”* It was signed, *“First-time failure.”*



I think the writer has it right when they indicate it is only the first time that they will fail. I am just surprised that they are only now having their first failure. In regard to trouble you are in one of three areas. You have just gotten out of trouble. You are in trouble right now, or you are headed for trouble.

Job had more than his share of trouble. His family was destroyed along with all of his possessions. From there it became even worse with his physical body being attacked by disease. Job says in Job **5:7 “man is born to trouble.”** But after going through even more trauma Job repeats this and adds to his previous statement in **Job 14:1** where he says **“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.”** Man did not just have trouble in life but it was **“full of trouble”** according to Job.

Even the apostle Paul had his share of problems (**II Corinthians 11:23-28**). If Paul had problems you can be sure that every Christian is going to have problems as well. But the difference between the child of God and the non-Christian is that God promises to go with us through the problems of life. The Psalmist says **“God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in the time of trouble (Psalm 46:1).”** Jesus says in **John 16:33 “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

Yes, we will have trouble, problems, trials, and difficulties in this world. However, we must not focus on them but upon the problem solver. David said in **Psalm 73:16, “I tried to think this problem through, but it was too difficult for me, until I went into Your temple.”** When the day of trouble comes let us take them to the Lord.

Little Known Dangers

“But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” - II Chronicles 36:16.

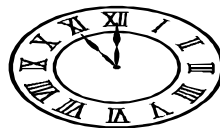
In December 1998 Kevin Mackle a 19-year-old student in Quebec tried to shake loose a soft drink. Instead of receiving a soft drink Kevin was crushed to death when the 920-pound machine tipped over on to him. *Who would have thought that a coke machine would be dangerous!* But since 1978, 35 people have died in the United States alone from vending machines, which have tipped over.



The people of Judah must have been just as incredulous about the danger involved in ignoring God. Judgment did come upon them in a devastating way when they were carried into captivity. Who would have thought that God was that serious about it. But He was and He still is serious about it.

Do you despise God's Words? Do you mock or misuse the messengers of God? Why would anyone want to do that? We despise God's Words when we know what He wants us to do but we do something else with our lives. We mock God's messengers when we hear the Word of God preached and fail to respond as God has spoken to our hearts. Little known dangers but spiritually just as dangerous as a falling coke machine.

Judah waited so long that they ran out of time and God's judgment came upon them. Why risk another day outside of God's will? Determine in your heart that you will no longer despise God by the way you live your life. **“Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation (II Corinthians 6:2).”**



Name Above All names

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” - Philippians 2:9-11.

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.” Luke 10:17.

The seventy that had been sent out by Jesus returned and there apparently was some surprise that there was such power in the name of Jesus. We pray in the name of Jesus but do we really comprehend the tremendous power that is still available to us today through His name? The early church clearly understood this because the name of Jesus is frequently referred to in the New Testament. But what about today? Is the name of Jesus still the name above all names? Is there still power in the name of Jesus?

Every two or three years we see news reports of someone in a crisis situation using the name of Jesus in order to survive. Sometimes they are in out of the way places and do not even make it to the national media. In December 2000 I cut out an article of such an incident which occurred in Ardmore, Oklahoma.

Barbara Rhodes, the owner of Bobbie’s Outlet Store in Ardmore suddenly came face to face with a robber pointing a gun at her Barbara’s response was to say, *“I rebuke you in the name of Jesus.”* Several times the robber demanded her purse. Each time Barbara responded, *“I rebuke you in the name of Jesus.”* The gun at one point made a click as if he had tried to fire it. Barbara laid the magazine she was holding onto the counter and started walking toward the door. The man fled. Why did he leave? Barbara says, *“It was the Lord that made him take off.”*



“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...(Colossians 3:17).”

All That Glitters

“For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.” - II Timothy 4:10.

In Lima, Peru at their famous gold museum (Museo de Oro) apparently all that glitters is not gold. Many of the ceremonial daggers, jewelry, ornaments, and other artifacts have been found to be only replicas. It is estimated as many as 85% are copies and only 15% are the real thing. The 20,000 artifacts held by Museo de Oro have been displayed across the world. The museum may now face fines and other sanctions as a result of their actions.



The world presents itself as glittering gold but the truth is that the world's riches are much like the gold of the Museo de Oro. Adam and Eve found out the fruit of the forbidden tree was not as sweet as they had thought when living the rest of their lives with the consequences. The Children of Israel continually lusted after the world and judgment fell upon them in horrible ways. The prodigal son wanted what the world had to offer but found himself ready to eat the slop of the hogs as a result.

The world presents itself as glittering gold but we know the truth is that the glitter is false. We have a choice. We can drink of the spit of this world or of the River of Life from our Lord. We can eat of the hog slop of the world or we can eat of the Bread of Life. Have you **“loved this present world“**? Have you believed a lie? Give up the fool's gold of the world and grab hold of the real thing. Seek God with all your heart (**Psalm 119:9-16**). Resist the devil and draw near to God (**James 4:7-8**). Listen to wisdom (**Proverbs 8:1-11**).



Bringing Glory

“Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.’ And they glorified God in me.” - Galatians 1:21-24.

When I was about 10 or 11 years old I was a member of a church and considered myself to be a Christian (Although I found out later I really wasn't.). Others also thought I was a Christian because I was a member of church. I lived on a farm and found various ways to entertain myself. One of those ways was my beer bottle collection. People seemed to always be throwing out beer bottles and I found it interesting to see how many different kinds I could find. I kept the collection in a tree row far away from our house.



One day I let my cousin see my collection. He thought it was great and started his own collection, which was fine, until his mother found out. My cousin told me he had to find something else to collect. I was surprised because I had not realized there was anything wrong with collecting beer bottles. Apparently his mother thought collecting beer bottles might lead to drinking beer later in life. Unknowingly I had been a bad influence upon my cousin.

The apostle Paul on the other hand was being a good influence upon those who heard of him after his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. He who had once persecuted was now bringing glory to Christ.

So, what kind of influence are we having on those around us? Is God being glorified by what people see in our lives or are they thinking if that is a Christian that's the last thing I want to be? What a choice we have! We can influence people for good leading them to salvation through Christ or we can be a stumbling block causing people to reject Christ.

Is the life you are leading bringing glory to Christ or are you a stumbling block?

GOD'S HELP FOR THE TOUGH PROBLEMS

Overcoming Addictions Through God's Power and Resources

(by Ed Wrather, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Sweetwater, OK)

Drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and sexual addictions, (and anger) these problems have been classed too many times as being beyond the power of God. Does God have the answer for really serious problems such as these? I believe the answer is a resounding, YES!

For many years I served as an adult probation and parole officer for the State of Oklahoma. My caseload reached numbers of over 100 for the majority of my time of service. Clients on probation, parole, pre-parole, and house arrest were supervised. Clients serving sentences for murder, robbery, rape, other sexual offenses, drug offenses, and a whole range of minor offenses were supervised. In addition, pre-sentence investigations and recommendations were made to the courts.

For approximately 90% of my clients (May have actually been a higher percentage.) there was a common denominator, they had a drug or alcohol problem. This substance abuse problem contributed to most of their offenses. From the use of traditional treatment methods, I know personally of few long-term successes in solving those substance abuse problems. They are, however, the best thing available to many and are a good starting point for serious addictions. Also, in the short-term, traditional treatment programs are effective for many who have the desire to change and can be a starting point for the use of God's resources.

In November of 1990 I responded to God's call and entered the ministry. One of the factors involved in answering that call was the frustration experienced in using man's methods to help people solve their problems and seeing mostly failure. Sure, for many clients intensive supervision provided a temporary respite to their problems. However, when supervision was reduce or ended, most returned to their old life style. Through my service as a parole officer and my failure to induce change, I have come to believe God has the only real solutions for addictions on a long-term basis.

In addition to observing sin at work in the lives of my clients, and others; I have over the years experienced my own problems with sin. Problems such as: greed, lust, selfishness, dishonesty, anger, pride, and others. Can God solve these problems? The answer is, YES! This is not to say that we can ever be perfect, for only our Savior, Jesus Christ, is perfect. But for all practical purposes in our day to day lives these problems can be controlled. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit which are listed in the bible. **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV).** God has given me and countless others the fruit of self-control and since it comes from God, it is really God-control. You can have God-control too.

How does a person go about receiving relief from their problems of substance abuse, sexual addiction and other problems? These problems and all sin problems are like a terrible cancer which destroys and consumes. The result of sin is death (**Romans 6:23a**) and whether we agree substance abuse is a sin the result is the same. The result of all these problems is the destruction of all that is good in a person. Call it sin, or whatever you like, the result is the same, the result of these problems is self-destruction, the very opposite of what God wants to give to us. In the bay at Naples, Italy lives a variety of snail which the jellyfish there love to eat. Little do the jellyfish know that when they eat the snails, the snails do not die but instead begin little by little to eat the jellyfish from inside out. Eventually the jellyfish dies and the snail lives on. Of course the best way to avoid the results of sin is to avoid eating one of those snails like alcohol, or drug addiction.

Solving problems of sin can be as simple as going to our Heavenly Father, confessing our sins and

seeking forgiveness through Jesus Christ. For some, God has immediately taken away their problems, but we know that for most people it's not that easy. Personally, I know of very, very few people that have had their problems with addictions taken completely away upon forgiveness of their sins. Receiving Christ as our Savior is, however, the starting point for us all. If we want God's help we must be sure we belong to him. Come to Jesus in repentance, ask Him to come into your heart and life. Ask Jesus to be Lord of your life and to solve the problems of sin in your life. Right now you can do that by praying a prayer such as the one following. Remember it is not so much the words that you say but whether or not you mean it in your heart.

"Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose again on the third day. Please forgive me for the sins, the bad things I have done, I want to change. Please help me to change, be my Lord and my Master and my Savior. In your name Lord Jesus I ask You to come into my heart and save me. Amen."

The Bible says, **"But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12 KJV)**. God has the power to enable you to live a Godly life. Putting your trust in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior is the starting point.

The Apostle Paul talks about baby Christians and mature Christians. The Christian life can be viewed as a journey from immaturity to maturity. This process of maturing as a Christian can be speeded up if you are willing to take advantage of the resources which God has provided. The Bible says, **"And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:10 NIV)**. God has provided the resources and they are available to us, we must make use of them. Some of those resources are prayer, the Bible, the church, and the most of all the Holy Spirit.

We can view sin as a problem, like a physical disease which needs treatment. For many diseases the whole body must be treated before relief is found. For sin the whole person must be treated at the same time. The effects of sin cannot be removed and handed over to the preacher or someone else to deal with. Sin has an effect upon the total person, every part. For relief a person must immerse themselves completely in the resources of God. God's resources of prayer, the Bible, and the Church, can be viewed as a Heavenly microwave which zaps sin. In order for the sin to be treated, we must get inside of that Heavenly microwave and turn up the power.

Now, let us look more closely at how God's resources can help you in a very practical way. Consider first, prayer. The Bible says, **"Do not be anxious about any thing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV)**. The Bible also says, **"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15 NIV)**. Prayer will activate God's resources in your life. Personally my prayer life only began to grow when I made a commitment to pray every day.

How much time in prayer should you spend on a daily basis? The more serious the problem the more time in prayer that will be needed. For someone that has never prayed, fifteen minutes can seem like it goes on forever. But when we see God's hand working in our lives in response to our prayers, we can easily begin to stretch the time we spend with our Lord, from 15 minutes, to 30 minutes to an hour or

even more. Because that time with God becomes something we treasure more than anything else in life. It's almost like developing a new addiction, and addiction to God.

However you do it, the important thing is to get started, begin talking to God. Do it in the way that is most comfortable for you. During my regular prayer time, I spend some time sitting, some time kneeling and some time walking. Take advantage of the times during the day when you are not using your mind for other things, to pray. You can pray while driving, or doing household chores, or while standing in line, don't waste those opportunities to spend time with your Lord. One final thing about prayer. Ask others to pray for you, the more prayer support you have the better. It's not a substitute for your own prayers but the prayers of others do make a difference. And, of course, you should pray for others too. You can be assured that I pray for all those that read this message, God's Help For The Tough Problems.

Now for the Bible, another of God's fantastic resources. The Bible is the sword of the Holy Spirit. **"And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:17 KJV)**. Daily Bible reading is an absolute necessity for the defeat of sin in our lives. But even more of a necessity is the memorization of verses of scripture. The Psalmist asks the question. **"How may a young man keep his way pure" (Psalm 119:9a NIV)?** He answers his own question by saying, **"By living according to your word" (Psalm 119:9b NIV)**. And how does the Psalmist live according to God's Word? The Psalmist then says, **"I have hidden your word in my heart so that I might not sin against you."** We must do the same.

Several years ago I found myself going backwards instead of forward in my Christian journey toward maturity. I found myself sinking deeper into sin, even though this was not what I wanted. A verse in the book of James seemed to come out of the recesses of my mind and speak to me. The Bible says, **"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8 NIV)** The question for me at that time was, how could I draw near to God? I was praying every day, I was reading the Bible, and I was attending church. What more could I do?

The Psalmist's answer began to loom in my own heart as to what was needed. I needed to hide God's Word in my heart, I needed to memorize God's Word. Now, my memory has never been that great, but desperate people do desperate things. I became determined to memorize verses of Scripture, whatever it took, if this would help, I wanted to find out. I purchased a Scripture memorization program and began memorizing two verses of Scripture a week.

My problems didn't immediately disappear, but I kept memorizing Scripture. For me, this was my last stop, if this didn't work I didn't know of anything else to try. If this didn't get me back on track and moving toward maturity, nothing would. Immediately I did sense that there was power in God's Word. With each new verse that was memorized it was as if a brick out of the wall separating me from fellowship with my Lord had been removed. Brick by brick that wall came down and God did draw near as I sought to draw near to Him. It took several months before it seemed I was again headed in the right direction.

I eventually memorized 200 verses of Scripture and through His Word, God has brought me to where I am now. I will never out grow the need for God's Word. Each day I repeat out loud 60 or so verses, usually in the morning. I do this while showering (Some people sing in the shower, I repeat memory verses.) and getting dressed. Sometimes I repeat these verses while walking or while driving. And whenever I feel temptations, have anxiety, or experience anger, or depression, I immediately pray and

run God's Word through my mind. His Word always soothes my soul. God's Word can do the same for you. There is no problem too tough for this resource of God and everyone can memorize. It just depends on whether you are really serious about breaking free of the bondage of sin. I know that I was very, very serious.

Next, we come to the resource of the Church. God has used the church powerfully in my life. Through the church God has held my family and my marriage together when nothing else seemed to be working. In the church is where I heard about God's amazing resources. The Bible says, "**And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but so much the more as you see the day approaching**" (Hebrews 10:24-25 KJV). It is God's will for us to be in church, faithfully serving and worshipping Him there. In the church we are lifted up and encouraged, we are "**provoked unto love and good works.**" In the church we see a focusing of God's power. Jesus says, "**For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them**" (Matthew 18:20). This focus of God's power cannot be found by simply watching TV on Sunday morning by yourself. Many times my family would go to church on Sunday morning with frowns on their faces. When we left the church building to go home, replacing those frowns would be a radiance, a glow of joy on our faces. The Church is where you can find people who will love you, help you, lift you up and pray for you. No matter what terrible dark sins you may have committed, in the church you will find people who will forgive you and care about you. Thank God for the Church!

The plan which I have given here is not an easy plan. It will not happen automatically. In this life we have to make some tough choices. Do we want to continue down the road of self-destruction? I have seen hundreds of people who have chosen to do exactly that, they have chosen to destroy their own lives and the lives of those around them. You don't have to follow them, you have a choice.

My prayer for all those who struggle with sin, is that you would not only get into that Heavenly microwave of God's resources, but turn the power up on high. I've seen nothing else that truly works. It has worked for me, I have seen it work for many others, and I am convinced that God has the power to change and transform the lives of every person sincerely committed to using God's resources.

The Building is Safe! **The Remembrance and Challenge of 9/11**

It has been more than a year since the terrible tragedy of 9/11 with over 3,000 lives lost from all three disaster sites. Even though it has been a year since this terrible thing has occurred the images of the airliners slamming into the World Trade Center Towers are still very vivid in our minds. I believe we all experienced a certain amount of fear even here in Sweetwater far from where these attacks occurred. Immediately after the attacks we had the anthrax mailings and more people dying and most of us realized that even we could be reached by this evil here in Sweetwater.

Thankfully we have been spared further acts of terrorism in this country and things have returned somewhat to normal. There is still an uneasiness that we have and we are uncertain about the plans of Iraq and Saddam Hussein. But for many the war on terrorism has come to a virtual halt and victory can be declared. We know that to stop now before the enemy has been eradicated from the Planet would be a mistake and would subject our country to additional threat and attack. We need to continue to pray for our leaders and the members of our armed forces during the time of uncertainty.

I want us to look more closely at the events of September 11 one year ago. In particular, one 16½ minutes of time. The attack on our country on 9/11 claimed the lives of 2,803 people at the World Trade Center alone. As we remember all too well the north tower was struck by the first hijacked airliner at 8:46 a.m. (7:46 a.m. CST) I had been having my quiet time and had spent some time in prayer and Bible reading when I turned on the TV close to 9:00 a.m. (8:00 a.m. CST). It was then that I saw a streak zoom into the south tower I wasn't sure what I had seen the newscasters were not sure either. And some were trying to say it was only a small plane and another was saying it was an airliner and as the film was replayed in slower motion it became obvious that this was indeed a large airplane and it too had hit the World Trade Center.

At that point the painful truth was obvious to all of us that this was no accident and the next thought was how many other planes were there still out there. Apparently there were at least two others one crashing after the courageous actions of the passengers in Pennsylvania and the other slamming into the Pentagon. After the first plane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center it was only 16½ minutes later when United Airlines Flight 175 slammed into the south tower. During those 16½ minutes the people in the upper floors of the south tower made life and death decisions which resulted in their escaping with their lives or resulted in their deaths. Many saw the flames of the north tower and the horrified looks on the faces of those who were jumping to their deaths to escape burning to death. To see that was enough for many to flee for their lives.

In life we have only two choices. It may seem like we have many but really there are only two and the Bible describes those choices in a variety of ways. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes the choices as being between the wide gate with the "broad" way and the alternative which is the narrow gate and the difficult way which leads to life. Jesus also describes this choice as being between building our lives on a solid rock and building our lives on a

foundation of sand. **Matthew 7:24-27**

We have a lifetime to make our choice but sometimes that time is very brief in which to make our choice and navigate our way to eternal safety. For the people in the south tower on 9/11 they only had 16½ to make the right decisions and find safety. It was not an easy thing to do.

Some 1400 people fled to safety from the upper floors of the south tower even though the emergency speaker system was blaring that *“the building is safe!”* *“The building is secure!”* This was followed by a statement that it was safe to return to work in their offices. Some believed this was an order while others believed it was an option to return to their work areas. With only 16½ minutes every action was vitally important to their survival.

Some immediately fled from the building. Others gathered up personal belongings or finished up some things they were working on. Others made phone calls delaying their exit. Some lost their lives while courageously trying to warn and save others.

Steve Miller who worked on the 80th floor and survived said, *“The conclusion that I’ve come to is: I think I acted smart, and I think it had almost no bearing on the fact that I survived. If you ran away, you survived. Everybody who ran away survived.”*

In the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24) Jesus warns of the need to flee when “you see the abomination of desolation.” Jesus says that at that point **“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes (Matthew 24:15-17).”**

Let’s consider for a moment the “abomination of desolation.” Daniel also speaks of the “abomination of desolation” and is generally interpreted as referring to the fearful calamities that were to fall on the Jews in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus Epiphanes caused an altar to be erected on the altar of burnt-offering, on which sacrifices were offered to Jupiter Olympus. Antiochus reigned in Syria from 175 to 164 B.C.

In Daniel 9:27 it becomes apparent that a reenactment of that treacherous desecration will occur when the “prince that shall come” makes a seven-year covenant with Israel. However, this “prince” who is the Antichrist breaks his covenant after three and one-half years.

There follows the period of Jacob’s trouble or the Great Tribulation in which the temple will again be desecrated by Gentiles. The **“abomination of desolation”** in **Matthew 24** refers to the coming Antichrist. In terms of symbolism the **“abomination of desolation”** is the opposite of godliness and everything good. It is the ultimate in worldliness, sin, fleshly desire and evil. The **“abomination of desolation”** becomes evil incarnate in the Antichrist.

For application to our lives in the present it is clear that we should not wait until the Antichrist arrives on the scene to flee from what he will represent. The urgency Jesus gives us in fleeing the abomination of desolation should be the urgency in which we flee the sin and the evil of the

world today. The world is shouting in every way possible that “*the building is safe and secure*” and that there is no need for God and the things of God.

The world is blaring out that there is no need to flee from sin because it is not really harmful and there is no need to panic and get holier than thou on us. The world continues to say enjoy the finer things in life. Take time to smell the roses. If you really have to clean up your life well wait awhile. You don't have to do it right now. In fact the world would tell you that hey you can wait until you are on your deathbed and then take care of the spiritual stuff God wants.

How safe and secure is your life? What kind of foundation are you standing on? Have you built your life on the rock of Jesus Christ and the things of the Kingdom of God? Or, have you built your life on self seeking sinfulness lusting after what the world has to offer. Those who have built their lives on the shifting sands of worldliness, and fleshly desire will find that their lives are far from secure. At any moment they could very well breathe their last breath and be called home to the Lord. And if they do not know the Lord as their Savior the fate awaiting them is too horrible to even contemplate or imagine. We know that from **Hebrews 9:27** and that the **Romans 6:23**

The Bible tells us in **Hebrews 10:31** that it is a terrible thing to “**fall into the hands of the living God.**” (When you are not on right terms with Him.) Surely we should flee from the shifting sands of worldliness, and fleshly desire. We should flee from the evil of the Antichrist. We should flee from the abomination of sin. Jesus says, “**then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes (Matthew 24:15-17).**”

There is an immediacy, a great urgency that is needed because of what? Because of the great danger of delaying what we know we should do. There is a great danger that we will wait too long and the evil will overtake our lives and consume us. If you play with fire long enough you will get burned. None of us know how much time we have.

On 9/11 those on the south tower had longer than many but those in the upper floors had at the most only 16½ minutes. Some saw the death and destruction, they saw the people jumping to their deaths and they fled for their lives because that was enough of a warning for them. We think we have much more time than that left to us - but we don't really know. The world cries out “*your life is safe*” “*Your life is secure.*” But we have had our warnings too - haven't we? 9/11 was a warning

Do we think we are exempt from death? Do we think we are exempt from the chastisement of the Lord. Even the apostle Paul said that “**therefore knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.**” Being struck blind by God tends to get a person's attention and Paul knew what it was like to be in the hands of the living God. It was a terrifying thing that Paul remembered very well.

It doesn't take much to miss escaping when you only have 16½ minutes. Finishing a phone call as one executive did was enough to result in his being trapped and dying. Tamitha Freeman, only 35 years old ran back to get her purse. She told a co-worker, "I have my baby's pictures in it." and that was enough.

But some were like Charles Veneziano who was on the 84th floor of the south tower. He didn't even hang up the phone after the first jet hit the north tower. He threw the receiver on his desk and ran. (Reminded of Joseph in the OT who fled the temptress.) Is there some little thing holding you back from escaping the **terror of the Lord?**

There were heroes too that day. Several bosses didn't make it out because they were warning their employees and everyone else to flee to safety. Other bosses did just the opposite encouraging employees to stay and work until it was too late to flee. One woman, Virginia Urzi wouldn't leave her husband they both worked on the 87th floor. They had agreed to meet if there was ever an attack or problem on the 86th floor at Stairway C. Because she wasn't leaving the building without him.

That morning she ran to the rendezvous spot, crying, expect him to come down. He didn't. Two of her co-workers went back up to the 87th floor and told her husband, Manny Urzi, you have to come down and help us deal with your hysterical wife. He did and they escaped. (Maybe it's time for us to get hysterical about our friends that are lost?)

Welles Crowther, only 24 years old was one of the heroes he was an equities trader for Sandler O'Neil on the 104th floor but he was also a volunteer firefighter in his hometown of Nyack, New York. Just after the second plane slammed into the south tower. Blood covered Ling Young's glasses when she regained consciousness lying facedown on the 78th floor of the elevator lobby. Young looked up and there was Welles Crowther. "I found the stairs." he told young. "Follow me, and help the ones that can be helped."

After leading and helping several down a dozen flights of stairs Crowther told Young, "*I'm going back upstairs to help.*" In the elevator lobby of the 78th floor were close to 200 people who were injured or dead and that was where Young had been and that was where Crowther was going back too. There was smoke and fire all over but he still was going back. Crowther tied a red bandana around his face the one he always kept in his picket, regardless of how he was dressed.

Crowther found Judy Wein and Gigi Singer and led them out staying with them for 15 floors and then again turned and went back up intending to make a third trip. Shortly after exiting the building and being placed in an ambulance. As the ambulance pulled away with Judy Wein and Gigi Singer the south building collapsed. It collapsed with all those people still trying to make it out including the firefighters and including Welles Crowther.

We too can be and need to be heroes in the lives of those around us who have lost their way. (We have the Word of God, we have the tools/resources we need to be heroes.) Robert Morgan tells or how Mark Sloan had lost his way. Mark combined alcohol and cocaine in

almost lethal amounts. After one stay in a rehabilitation center the Morgan's invited him to live with them.

For months all went well, then one morning he disappeared. Robert Morgan says he would find him in terrible places, drunk high, hurting and spiraling downward. Then several months passed with no word from him at all. One day they heard he was living in a basement across town. Robert found him and tried to get him to enter a treatment program, but he refused. He said it was time to die. He had tried so hard to overcome his habits but couldn't. His eyes were glazed over, his words slurred, and nothing Robert said fazed him.

Mark said, *"There's enough cocaine in this apartment to kill an elephant and my body can't stand much more. A day or two, then it'll be over. You'll forget about me in a few weeks; we'll all be better off. It's meant to be..just let it be. It's meant to be."* Robert said he was turning to leave, choking back tears, when a verse suddenly came to him and he said to Mark, *"It isn't meant to be. The Bible says that God is **not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.**"* A flicker of hope registered in Mark's eyes. It was very faint, but unmistakable. Robert repeated the verse and Mark listened.

In the years since Robert has told Mark of that moment several times. He doesn't remember it but Robert will never forget it. Because he is convinced that verse saved Mark's life and eventually led to his becoming the sober, dedicated Christian that he is today. As you are fleeing from the world, be a hero and take some people with you.

Where is it that we should flee, where can we run to escape? Jesus says, **"then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes (Matthew 24:15-17)."** **"then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."**

We should run to the mountain. As the psalmist says we should run to God, to **"His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth (Psalm 48:1b-2a)."**

The world will continue to shout that *"Your life is safe!" "Your life is secure!" "Your life is safe!" "Your life is secure!"* We must ignore the world and flee from the evil, flee from the sin, flee from the fleshly earthly desires and run before it is too late.

Run to the Mountain, to the Holy Mountain of God and there we will find peace, joy, and eternal safety.

WATCH!

I Corinthians 16:13-14

With the first Fourth of July celebration in the United States since the September 11th attacks came increased security with those watching the events being watched by those determined to prevent further terrorism. In Washington D.C., our nation's capitol, the eyes of security cameras and police were focused on the National Mall. And the National Mall was only accessible through a couple of dozen security checkpoints because it had been surrounded with security fencing.

In Los Angeles even with the increased watchfulness a man attacked workers at Israel's El Al ticket counter shooting and killing two people before he was shot and killed. However, without the increased vigilance and alertness many more people could have been killed or injured in that attack. And without the increased vigilance and alertness terrorists might have felt it would be an opportunity to launch more attacks on the birthday of our nation.

In the USA we are encouraged to be alert, vigilant, and watchful because we are warned further attacks are inevitable. At the same time we are encouraged to continue on with life as normally as possible. President Bush encouraged the nation to celebrate freedom but at the same time warned that we are fighting people who want to attack us because they hate freedom. The headline in USA Today stated, *"USA must accept terrorism threat, Bush says."* President Bush said in a telephone interview about our current situation in this country, *"It's a sign that we are at war. After all, we're fighting people who hate our freedom. And as we celebrate freedom, we should be worried that they would want to attack us."*

The increased vigilance against terrorist attack in the USA is a picture of how the Christian life is to be lived. As Christians we too are in a war fighting an enemy who hates our spiritual freedom and would like nothing better than to destroy us. **I Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."** Jesus speaks of this enemy in **John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."**

As Americans it is hard for us to understand why there are those who would want to harm our country and to kill Americans just because they are Americans. After all haven't we given millions in foreign aid to the Muslim world and nearly every country has gotten a million or two from us in one form or another. Didn't we save Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein's attempt to take over their countries? Don't we still have troops there ready to defend them if need be? So why we ask do they hate us?

Because behind our enemy is our spiritual enemy who has inspired this irrational hatred. It is a hatred that can only be explained by understanding we have a spiritual enemy that hates us just because he hates God. As Christians I believe it is hard for those who are Christians or those raised even in a quasi Christian environment to truly understand that there is a spiritual enemy who wants to harm us.

But at the same time that we are aware of the danger of the enemy we must not withdraw from

all contact with the world. Jesus tells us in **Matthew 5:13-14**, “**You are the salt of the earth**” and “**Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**” If you remember salt accomplishes its work of preservation only through having contact with that which it is to preserve.

For us to have a preserving influence we must not withdraw completely from contact with the people of the world but at the same time we are warned by Jesus, “**but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.**” The temptation is to either withdraw completely from the world or while we are having contact with those in the world to disguise our Christianity. In the process of hiding we put a lid over our light and our salt loses its ability to preserve because we act just like those around us act.

Not only do we act like them but we talk like them as well. I have to wonder what kind of shape Christianity would be in if we had to endure the persecution that Christians endure in Muslim countries. C__ H____ from Cheyenne has been a missionary in a Muslim country for a couple of years. Talking with his mother she explained that in that Muslim country you cannot overtly witness to anyone or you would quickly be expelled from the country. Their witnessing must be in the form of developing relationships over a period of time where through close contact they are able to see Christianity lived out before them and have a desire to have what the missionary or other Christians have in their lives.

But after these Muslims become Christians and publicly profess Christ the persecution begins. They are kept from having any kind of work and must depend upon other Christians for work and support. Often if churches are begun they are in danger of having their property confiscated, fines levied, and other penalties imposed. Since we are so close to losing our savor as salt now when we live in this wonderful open society I can't imagine that hardly any Christians from this country would endure severe persecution.

There was a reason in the early church for believers to be encouraged to “**be brave, “be strong”**” and to “**stand fast.**” The reason was that there was something to be brave about doing and to be strong against. There was pressure exerted from their society that made standing fast a necessity. In our society here in the United States the pressure is not as overt but it is there. It is just more subtle. So, we are encouraged to “**be brave, be strong” “stand fast....”**

Not only are we to “**stand fast**” against our enemy but we are also to “**resist him (I Peter 5:8).**” Even when our “**stand**” results in “**sufferings**” we are to “**resist him.**” “**Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world (I Peter 5:9).**” In **I Peter 4:7-9** we are told, “**But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another.**” And, “**Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.**”

Jesus explains to the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane why they should watch and pray: **Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."** We resist our enemy through being the salt of the earth and the light of the world and through our prayers. **"Watch and pray"** Jesus says.

God has long been seeking those who would stand in the gap through prayer. As God says through Ezekiel, **"So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one."**

Through prayer we can make up a wall of resistance which is a wall of protection to those around us and ourselves protecting from the evil of our enemy. Would you **"watch and pray"** **"standing in the gap?"** Your prayers do make a difference a difference for you and for many others.

Not only should we resist the enemy through prayer but also through our verbal warnings. God says to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:17-19), **"Son of Man, I have made you a watchman for the House of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: 'When I say to the wicked, You shall surely die, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.'"**

Too often we think we can just set back and do nothing while person after person goes out into eternity without a saving knowledge of Jesus. However, the Bible is clear that if we know to do good, if we know we should warn others of their eternal fate but simply slide through life trying to blend in with the world and trying not to make any waves - God is not mocked or deceived and there are consequences for our failure to warn those around us.

So many of us have not fulfilled our responsibilities before God of warning those around us of their eternal fate. We have failed many times because we have to live here we think and if we say something others will disagree with It will make it unpleasant to be around them. So, we attempt to avoid conversations about God and the eternal. We try to avoid talking about things that we know the other person will not like or doesn't agree with. Essentially we try to please man instead of God. And God is not mocked and knows exactly what we are doing.

We do indeed have an enemy who is vicious and evil and we must warn others but we must be continually watchful of our own spiritual condition. Often when we are under stress and are pressed for time we tend to neglect the spiritual disciplines. If we are working many hours a week (Or, spending time in school, doing the chores, going to all the extracurricular activities) the human tendency is to try to compensate for that by cutting out nonessentials (those things not required to earn a living or to stay in the good graces with our friends, teachers, and parents) such as church attendance, church activities, and Christian service.

It makes perfect human, common sense. But God's sense, wisdom is rarely in conformance with that of our human minds. When we are busy with work or school and have stress from

other things weighing upon us those are the times when we should pray more, have a greater intake of the Word, and continue to serve and assemble with other believers.

When we pray what happens? Jesus says, **“Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation.”** In other words if you fail to pray you are just asking for trouble not only for yourself but for everyone else that you are responsible to God for, your personal realm of influence. And you ought to be praying for every one who your life touches in any way.

If you fail to read the word of God what happens? **Matthew 4:4, “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God.”** You run out of gas spiritually and when you try to do things which can only be done supernaturally you begin to develop health problems and stress accelerates. And how does faith come? **“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”** So, the more we neglect the Word of God the less and less faith we will have. We will begin to doubt that God can do very much of anything because we have so little faith.

And what happens if we stop coming to church? **Hebrews 10:24-25, “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but so much the more as we see the Day approaching.”** We stop growing in love and slow down more and more in every way that we serve God.

What happens when we stop exercising those spiritual gifts of service that we have been blessed with? **Ephesians 3:20 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”** Why is the anointing of the Spirit given? For service. And if we do not use what we have been given for service the amount of that anointing grows less and less until we are powerless.

I fear that we are a powerless people and in the letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation we are told, **“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead (Revelation 3:1).’”** We are powerless because we have not been watchful of our own spiritual condition which continues to deteriorate.

The church at Sardis is also told, **“Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you (Revelation 3:2-3).”** Maybe there is some life still in us but we must immediately strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. To strengthen that tiny spark of life still in you: Remember what you have heard which you have received from God. Hold fast to it and repent - turn away from that which is not of God.

I want to suggest to you today that there are few public decisions here in this church in part

because of pride. Before we can stand strong and be a powerful witness without regard to what the world will think - Before we can do that we must be willing to do what God would have us to do publicly before our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. if we can't be obedient to God here how can we be obedient out there where it is so much harder?

To strengthen that spark of life that is within you, to increase the empowerment, the anointing upon you be obedient to the Spirit when He speaks to you now here assembled with other believers. Every time you sense that God would have you to come forward to pray or to ask publicly for prayer and you don't, you're choking the spiritual life out of yourself.

Every time the Spirit speaks to your heart about your need to rededicate or recommit yourself to God and you refuse to walk down this aisle you're choking the spiritual life out of yourself. And if you know God wants you to do something like join this church, follow the Lord in baptism, surrender to ministry, or special service - Every time you know He wants you to do something and you don't do it you are choking the spiritual life out of yourself.

But its not just you that you are doing it to, it doesn't just choke the spiritual life out of you. Your choking the spiritual life out of everyone else here, your choking the spiritual life out of this church. And you are responsible before God and He is not mocked!!

The apostle Paul says, **“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love (I Corinthians 16:13-14).”** Where do you begin? You begin with yourself with that spark of life that you have left that has not been choked out. You begin by coming forward publicly committing yourself afresh to your Lord. There is no easy way in the church or outside of the church to take a stand. But if you cannot take a stand among your brothers and sisters in Christ. If you can't take a stand here today, then there is little hope that you will do so when you are among those of the world. Sometimes we simply have to make a decision, we have to do what is right. We have to or by our inaction we are standing not for God but for the enemy.

I don't know what God is speaking to you about individually today but I know that He has and that He has called upon you to take some action - because He always does. I simply urge you to do not what this preacher or any human being wants you to do but I urge you to do what the Spirit has spoken to your heart about. It is a simple thing. You are either committed or uncommitted. You are either obedient or not obedient. You will move forward with God fanning the sparks that are alive or you will grow in your deadness.

What does God want you to do? How has He spoken to you? Resist the enemy today, stand fast today, be brave, be strong today by being obedient to the Spirit's Voice today. You are now living in the 21st Century and it now time for you to stand up and be counted. Whose side are you on? God's? Or, the enemy's?

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