

# ***NEVER GIVE UP!***

**A collection of over 100 Burning Bush Devotionals to encourage, strengthen,  
and inspire the believer.**

***by Ed Wrather***

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***Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us....  
Hebrews 12:1***

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# **NEVER GIVE UP!!**

A Collection of Devotionals by Ed Wrather to Encourage, Strengthen, and Inspire the Believer.

## *Never Give Up!!*

**“And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou has said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.” - 1 Kings 17:12-14.**

Today the United States creates more garbage than any other country in the world. We are a throw away society. Disposable seems to always be better than the reusable. It wasn't always that way. During the depression years and through much of the war years in the United States things were different. During those years not very much of anything was thrown away because everything was needed to survive. Everything was used down to the last drop, down to the last tiny bit.

During WW II tires were very hard to find because of use of the material in the war effort. Neighbors would sometimes share tires with each other in order to have one vehicle they could use. If someone in the family was ill, having a vehicle that had tires became very important. Because of that, my Dad hoarded old tires for years after the war. He's finally gotten rid of most of them now. But he still remembers a time when an old tire would have meant almost the difference between life and death.

In these modern times I believe we give up too easily. We give up too early. We give up before it's down to the last drop. We give up before we are down to our last dollar. We would do well to remember Elijah and widow of Zarephath. God gave them the food they needed as long as it was needed. We should remember the example of our Lord at the feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand. Only a very little food and it was enough for only a few people. But our Lord blessed the food and it was multiplied into a provision for the thousands with baskets of food left over.

Before we give up. Before we bail out. Let us give God an opportunity to work that miracle in our lives. Let us thank God for all that we have and are. Ask Him to sustain us. When we think we can't make it another day, let us live one more and see what God will do. When we've gone our last mile, let us walk one more. As we do, we will see the hand of God upon our lives sustaining us each day as we trust Him to provide. Never, ever, give up!!

## *Follow The Voice*

**1 Kings 19:12, 13b: “And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. ...And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”**

In 1982 I had a small oilfield business which was doing very well. Life was good at least materially. But God seemed to be speaking to me. In July of 1982 I knew that I wasn't where God wanted me to be but how could I give up a business that was doing so well and a nice home and everything? By November of 1982 oilfield activity had taken a nose-dive and my business didn't have any work. I thought it would change. December was the same and by the middle of January I knew I needed to find a job.

Some companies still had work. One of the companies I had worked for previously in the oilfield still had business. But I didn't want to go back to work for them. God seemed to have other ideas and one weekend He was speaking to me about the need to go see the owner and ask for a job. So I swallowed some pride and went to see my former boss. He said that he had just placed an ad in the newspaper and that he needed me. It seems God had been working on him as well.

I worked there for a few months until their lack of business forced them to layoff most of their employees. By then I knew something else was needed. I went back to college and worked part-time. We sold our house after much prayer and God led us through each problem step by step. It looked as though it would be impossible for us to survive financially but the Voice kept leading. The still, small voice kept speaking and we were listening.

Are you listening?

*True Love?*

**“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.” - Philippians 1:9.**

Charles Dicken's in his *“Child's History of England”* tells of the romance of Thomas a Becket's parents. Gilbert Becket was a London merchant in the 11th century. While on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he was taken prisoner by a Saracen lord who had a beautiful daughter. The girl fell in love with Gilbert and expressed a desire to become a Christian, escape with him and become his wife. Gilbert seemed to return her love until he found a chance to escape with Richard, his servant.

Once he was back in England, Gilbert's love for the beautiful Saracen maid began to grow dim until he all but forgot about her. But while his love was decreasing, her love was increasing. She left her father's home in disguise to follow Gilbert and made her way to the coast. Gilbert had taught her two English words, *“London”* and *“Gilbert.”* She went from ship to ship saying over and over the name of the city where she so desperately wanted to go. She found a ship going to London and with some of her jewels paid for her passage. She soon arrived in London.

As Gilbert was sitting in his office one day his servant, Richard, came running in saying, *“The Saracen lady! As I live, she is going up and down calling out, ‘Gilbert! Gilbert!’”* Gilbert went out and found her in the crowds. When she saw him she fainted in his arms. Soon afterwards they were married.

Distance can sometimes destroy a love affair. But true love will overcome whatever the obstacle. Do we have a true love for our Lord? A love that is increasing day by day? We should pray as Paul prayed for the Philippians that our “love may abound yet more and more....”

*If You Ask...*

**“Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” - Matthew 21:21-22.**

I no longer remember their names but I remember their story. I remember their testimony of faith. It has been thirteen years or more now but I remember when a new client and his wife reported for intake while I was a parole officer. They were so happy! That in itself was unusual in my business. They were so excited they couldn't keep from sharing what God had done for them.

It seems the husband had been sitting in the county jail for some time awaiting trial. Meanwhile things were

growing more and more desperate for his wife and three little kids. The electricity was turned off. They had used all their money and almost all their food. That was when they began to pray. The husband by himself praying to receive Christ as His Savior. Praying for God to somehow release him from jail and help his family. His wife was praying as well.

It seemed hopeless the trial date was weeks away but suddenly they came for him and during a brief hearing bail was reduced. He was released. Meanwhile a neighbor had found out about my client's family. The electricity was turned back on and food was provided for them. Their lives were forever changed. They knew that only God could have done what had happened in their lives. They knew it was because they had asked. Because they asked their mountain had been moved and cast into the sea.

Have you asked?

### *Out Of The Darkness*

**“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” - Romans 8:28.**

Out of the darkness can come what? Good. If, if we love God and are the called according to His purpose.

Out of the darkness of the flood came the Rainbow. In the darkness Joseph was sold into slavery, falsely accused and thrown into prison. But out of the darkness came God's provision to save his family and the lives of countless others. Out of the darkness of a whale's belly came repentance for Jonah and salvation for hundreds of thousands of Ninevites.

Out of the darkness of John Newton's life as a slave trader came a preacher, a hymn writer, and a relentless crusade to end the slave trade. Out of the darkness we hear, *“Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”*

Out of the physical darkness of Fanny J. Crosby's life came such great hymns as, *“Jesus keep me near the cross.” “Near the cross, a trembling soul, Love and mercy found me; There the Bright and Morning Star shed His beams around me.”*

Out of the darkness of the crucifixion of our Lord came **“He is not here: for he has risen (Matthew 28:6).”** Out of the darkness of death came the resurrection. Out of death came life! Out of the darkness comes what? Out of the darkness comes life. Out of the darkness comes the dawn for those who love God and are the called according to His purpose.

### *You Can Have Joy!*

**“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” - Psalm 16:11.**

Depression can be very devastating. My mother has had a lifetime struggle with depression. While I was a teenager she was in and out of hospitals. She had so many shock treatments that I lost track of the times. It seems to be inherited. My sister has been hospitalized for depression, as has my uncle and his two daughters. My grandmother also had a problem with depression. I have had my own struggles at times.

My greatest relief from depression has come from the Lord. Through prayer I have found peace beyond understanding. Through the reading of God's Word and memorizing God's Word I have found strength to keep moving forward when it didn't seem possible. In His presence I have found joy. At His right hand I have found relief from torment that would have otherwise destroyed my life.

Is your life empty of happiness? Try this prescription: Seek the Lord with all your heart, mind, and soul. As you pursue God you will find that out of that pursuit will come a **“fullness of joy.”**

*Ever Have Doubts?*

**“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.” - 1 John 4:4.**

Ever have doubts about whether God really loves you or if you even really know Him? Are you really His child? I remember a day twenty something years ago when I spent several hours in prayer. I was praying and reading the book of 1st John. John says at the beginning of the book, **“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”** After those hours in prayer I have never doubted my salvation. I know that, I know that, I know, I am a child of God.

Not only do we have doubts sometimes about our salvation but sometimes we doubt God's love for us. D. L. Moody tells of a paralyzed man he once met in Scotland. The man had been paralyzed since he was 15 years old but Moody thought he was the happiest man he had ever met even though the man had been paralyzed forty years. The paralyzed man admitted to Moody that sometimes he was tempted by satan when he would see people he went to school with walk by in perfect health.

Moody asked the man what he did when he was tempted by satan. The paralyzed man told him that he took satan to the cross where his Lord had been crucified. He would point out to satan the wounds in his Lord's hands, feet, and side. Then he told satan that his Lord loves him and satan leaves him every time. Sometimes we need to remind our enemy and ourselves of our Lord's great love for us.

*Had A Bad Day?*

**“Casting all your care upon Him; for he careth for you.” - 1 Peter 5:7.**

Have you heard the one about the deacon who was run over by a hit and run driver? Upon the police officer's arrival he asked the man if he had gotten the tag number of the car that hit him. The man told the officer that he didn't need the tag number because he would recognize his pastor's laugh anywhere! We've probably never been run over by our pastor (At least physically!) but we have had days when we have felt like a truck has run over us.

When I was working in the oilfield it seemed I had those kinds of days on a frequent basis. The oilfield is much like the army in that if there is something to be done nothing is going to stop it. It doesn't matter how cold, hot, or wet it gets the work has to be done.

It was one of those days I woke up to many years ago to see that an ice storm had come in the night. I had a job to do 250 miles away. I was driving a small semi truck and my crew was behind me in another vehicle. The highway was frozen with ice the entire way but we drove slow and carefully. The further we went the thicker the ice became. We made it fine until we turned off of the main highway to go to the rig location. Then as I was almost to the top of a hill I started sliding backwards. Backing a truck picking up speed on ice is somewhat difficult and half way down the hill the truck jack knifed coming to a stop.

We were okay and there seemed to be little damage to the truck. We went to a farm house and called for a wrecker. With the wrecker we were able to slowly pull the truck up the hill but it took several hours. Finally we decided that it would be just too dangerous and difficult to go any further. I called into to my company expecting to have to argue with them about not continuing. But to my surprise they told me they had been waiting for me to call all day. Because they were going to tell me just to park the truck and come back home!!

From the jack knifing of the truck and falling on the ice many times I pulled a muscle in my back which took some time to recover from. It had been a bad day.

When we have those bad days how do we make it through them? How do we recover from them? Our Lord is the One who sustains me. I cast my cares, my worries, my problems upon Him and He carries the burdens that would have broken me.

### *He's On His Way*

**“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also.” - John 14:1-3.**

Growing up on a farm it was rare to be able to go to town and visit my friends except during school. One of those rare days arrived during the summer when I was ten years old. My Dad was taking the tractor and mower to the big town of Canute, Oklahoma (Population about 500.) to help clean up the empty lots. I was allowed to take my bicycle along and spend the day having fun with my friends.

When the time came to go home I asked my parents if I could ride my bike home. It was four and a half miles to our farm. They agreed and they would be coming along later. The first mile went fine but I had to walk up Turkey Creek Hill and then I noticed both my tires were nearly flat. By the time I had pushed the bike another mile I was hot, tired, and crying. That was when my parents drove up. They could see I was upset and my Dad said, *“Didn’t you know we would be coming?”* While I had given up my parents were on their way to pick me up.

Sometimes, most of the time, when bad things happen we become impatient. All we can see is what is going on in our lives right then. All we can feel is the pain we feel then. What God would want you to know is this: He’s still there, He’s still God, He still loves you. He’s on His way to pick you up.

### *Heaven’s Floorboards*

**“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” - Revelation 21:2-3.**

What will Heaven be like? John attempts to describe his great vision of Heaven in **Revelation 21**. But human words are insufficient to truly describe the wonder of a place where God Himself is the light of the place. A place with golden streets, a crystal sea, and the tree of life. Early Christians were encouraged by John’s vision of Heaven. We should be encouraged as well knowing that some bright shining day we too who know the Lord as our Savior will be living in the Celestial City of God.

At a recent evangelism conference I was blessed to hear Rick Ousley speak. He is a pastor of a large and growing church in the south. He said when he was about eight years old he once asked his daddy what Heaven would be like. At the time they were on their way to visit Rick’s grandmother. His Dad told him he would tell him later. Rick said his grandmother’s house was build on a hill with the porch extending out over the hill with supports. Rick would climb underneath of the porch to play.

Later that night Rick asked his Dad again what Heaven would be like. His Dad took him outside and asked Rick what it was like underneath the porch where he liked to play. He also asked him what the floorboards of the porch looked liked from underneath. Rick said he described how the floorboards were all dirty with nails sticking through. There were dead bugs, spider webs, and it really looked bad. It was a beautiful night with

sky filled with stars. Rick said his dad pointed up to all the sky and said, “Son, I really don’t know what Heaven will be like but up there is the bottom of Heaven’s floorboards, and it just gets better from there.”

#### *Got An Attitude?*

**“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” - Philippians 4:4.**

Paul had an attitude! His attitude was one of rejoicing no matter what. When the letter to Philippi was written Paul was under house arrest in Rome knowing that he could very well be executed. In addition, there were those who were trying to add to Paul’s troubles. But Paul was able to rejoice in spite of his circumstances. How? With each difficulty Paul was able to see good coming out of them (**Philippians 1:13-18**).

Paul could also have joy in spite of people. There were people in the church at Philippi that were causing trouble. There was a false teacher (**Philippians 3:1-3**) and a division in the church (**Philippians 4:1-3**). Paul could have joy because he followed the example of Jesus (**2:5**). Paul said to have an humble spirit (**2:3**), think about the other person’s situation (Walk a mile in their shoes - **2:4**), don’t murmur and complain (**2:14**).

Paul had joy too in spite of the lack of the things of this world. Before Paul was a Christian he had “arrived” in the Jewish world. He was the “**Hebrew of Hebrews**” (**Philippians 3:4-8**). Those things were actually robbing Paul of true joy. Jesus says in **Luke 12:15**, “... for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

Worry was another problem that could have kept Paul from having joy. In **Philippians 4:6-9**, Paul tells us how to cope with worry. We cope with worry by praying right (**4:6-7**). We cope with worry by thinking right (**4:8**). We not only need to pray right and think right but we also need to live right to be free of worry (**4:9**).

Got an attitude? I hope it is an attitude like Paul’s!

#### *When East Looks Like West*

Capitola, California is located on the Monterey Bay with the Pacific ocean stretching out to the west as far as the eye can see. But strangely enough when we were taking some photos prior to leaving we noticed that the early morning sun was rising in the west!?!?! It had to be the west didn’t it, because the sun was rising over the Pacific Ocean which had to be in the west didn’t it??

Jeanie had her directions confused the whole time she was in Capitola but I always knew which way I was going because the ocean was always in the west. Suddenly I realized that what I had considered to be west, what I felt to be west, could not be west. It had to be east! As I have looked at a map of the Monterey Bay the land wraps around so that in the area we were the ocean actually was to the east.

I felt like the ocean was to the west. It looked like the ocean lay out to the west. In my mind I knew that the ocean had to be in the west. But the truth was I was wrong. Even though it felt right. It looked right and my knowledge said it was right, but I was wrong. The truth was different from what my human emotions, sight and knowledge said was right.

Much of the Christian experience is similar. I may not feel like I am saved. I may not look like I have been born again and human wisdom would say that it is not possible but the Bible says in **John 1:12**, “**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.**”

The Christian disciplines of prayer, Bible study and church attendance seem like a waste of time to the human non-Christian mind. To the non-Christian those things don’t look like they could possibly be of any value. The non-Christian doesn’t feel anything good when they think about praying, or reading the Bible or

going to church. But for the children of God we know the truth is that in those resources of God we find immense value.

Even as Christians many times we feel like we can't go on when faced with difficult circumstances. Those circumstances look overwhelming and our mind tells us there is no way so we might as well give up. The truth as Paul would tell us is, **"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."**

The next time east looks like west we best get out our compass, the Word of God, and determine what is the truth of the situation.

### *The Dayspring*

**"To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." - Luke 1:79.**

As a parole officer (before I was a pastor) I would often go into spiritually dark places. Sometimes it would be into bars trying to find someone or it would be into homes that weren't really homes. The darkness was so great and is so great in so many lives. But God knew that, He knows that. That is why Jesus came to be born in a manger. That is why God Himself came down from the glories of Heaven to walk upon this earth in flesh. So that light could come into the darkened and near death lives of the people on planet earth.

If you have ever worked all night the sun is such a welcome sight. The sun as it arises seems to give new strength and chases the darkness away. In **Luke 1:78**, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, calls the unborn Jesus the **"Dayspring."** Jesus is the **"Dayspring"** that will chase away the darkness just as does the rising sun. In Malachi, Jesus is the **Sun of Righteousness**.

Have you been in the darkness, sitting in the shadow of death itself? Why not let the **"Dayspring"** forth in your life and allow the Sun of Righteousness to bring new light, new life into your heart?

### *Rise Again!*

**"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again...." - Proverbs 24:16.**

What do you do when the deal you hoped for falls through, when the love of your life walks out and slams the door, when the house of your dreams burns down and you don't have insurance, when the policeman comes to your door and tells you your child is in jail for selling cocaine or even worse? What do you do when your dreams fall apart and there's no way to put them back together again?

The natural response after we lose a job, we lose a loved one or some bad thing happens in our life is to become angry with God or even to turn away from Him. Many, many have chosen that response. But the just person rises up again. When things are falling apart around us we must remember God's love never fails and Jesus continued on even to and through the cross. Jesus rose from the dead, triumphant!

When our dreams fall apart we need to hold onto God's love and believe that no matter what this old world may throw at us things will work out for the very best for us in the eternal end. The just man may fall, may encounter obstacles, may experience tragedies but the just man through Christ will rise again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again (Seven is a number symbolizing perfection which would mean that no matter how many times a just man falls he will rise again.).

### *The Law Of Love*

**"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also**

**love one another. by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”  
- John 13:34-35.**

This morning at the beginning of the hearings in the US House of Representatives Rep. Henry Hyde spoke of the rule of law. He noted that through the evolution of the rule of law we now have freedom from abuse of power by a king or dictator. God’s laws in the Old Testament, primarily the ten commandments, were meant for the good of the people. Keeping those laws were for your own good.

Law, however, can be cold and unbending. The law rolls on like a bulldozer with a life of its own. The law says you die for murder, you die. The law says you die for stealing, you die. The law says you die for rebellion against your parents, you die. The law says you die for adultery, you die. In the New Testament we are told in **Romans 6:23** that, “... **the wages of sin is death.**” Also in **Romans 3:23**, “**For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.**”

According to the Law we should all die for our sins. I am thankful, however, that there has been an amendment to the Law. It is an amendment of Love. Through love we can have forgiveness of our sins. It was love that brought Jesus down from the glories of Heaven to the humbleness of a stable and a carpenter’s family. It was love that drove Jesus to and through the cross. That love will reach into the darkest of hearts and bring light and life if it is invited. The rule of love overwhelms the rule of law to bring life. Is the rule of love reigning in your life?

#### *Failure?*

**“And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes and their net brake.” - Luke 5:5-6.**

Peter’s fishing attempt had failed and they had caught nothing. But through the Lord’s miraculous intervention they tried again and had the catch of their lives. It is possible to come back from failure even when it seems impossible. Peter and his fellow fisherman knew that after trying all night to catch fish in the best fishing spots it would be impossible to catch anything on that day. But what man calls impossible God calls possible. It is possible for us to come back from failure through the power of God.

No one today thinks of Thomas Edison as a failure even though he failed 10,000 times before finally inventing the light bulb. Failure is not when we have been knocked down. Failure is when we stay down. Through failure we can gain an education. There is a country song that talks about a working man’s Ph.D.. And as I was growing up I heard it mentioned from time to time about the school of life’s hard knocks. **Proverbs 26:11** tells us, “**As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.**” In other words we ought to learn from our mistakes.

Whatever the problems we face, problems force us to examine our lives. Peter and the other fishermen had caught nothing after fishing all night. Jesus doesn’t tell them it is time to put up the nets. No! instead Jesus tells them in **Luke 5:4**, “**...Launch out into the deep...**” When we experience failure that’s what we need to do. Instead of giving up and refusing to try again we need to boldly “**launch out into the deep.**” Let us “**launch out into the deep**” and go boldly where no man or woman has ever gone before.

#### *What Is The Spirit Saying?*

**“Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” - Acts 16:6-9.**

Paul received very specific instructions from the Spirit about where he was to go and where he shouldn't go. The Spirit is still busy today leading and guiding us. Sometimes He blocks us. Sometimes He warns us. Sometimes He sends us in another direction. Sometimes He says, **"come over and help."**

As a pastor before I have moved to another pastorate I have always driven to the area and looked around. We have had some interesting experiences from these trips. On one trip when we had arrived in the area we stopped at a convenience store and when Jeanie came back out she said that she had become dizzy and almost passed out. We decided to drive on to the church facility and maybe she would feel better by then.

Jeanie was feeling better by the time we drove by the church building. But the car seemed to be having a problem. By the time we had located the parsonage and driven by it the needle on the engine heat gauge had red lined. The electric fan motor had burned out. After our excursion we decided that wasn't really where God wanted us to go.

Before we came to our current pastorate another church was interested in us. We drove to their church facility and as we drove into their parking lot the car died and wouldn't start. The alternator had stopped working. We were finally able to have the car repaired but we had the definite impression that God had given us a warning about that church.

The Spirit still leads and guides today. What is the Spirit saying to you?

#### *The Strong Tower*

**"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." - Proverbs 18:10.**

One of the things that caused me to be hesitant about being a pastor was my wife having to drive many miles to work. We were living in the same city as her job and it took only three or four minutes for her to arrive at work. In my first pastorate she had to drive about 35 miles to her work place. I was concerned about the stress on her and also the danger if the car had mechanical problems. At that time cell phones had not arrived in the area. Later we had a cell phone for about a year but don't have one now.

My fears about the possibility of my wife's car breaking down in an isolated area have been unfounded because God has protected her. I remember well the times that her car has broken down because I have always been with her or driving her car. My wife had made it home safely one evening during a lightening storm. She told me how there had been one lightening strike that was really close to the car. The next morning we left in her car and made it about 50 feet before it died and wouldn't start. The lightening strike had somehow ruined a circuit board and it had to be replaced.

My wife has been driving for over seven years now the longer distances to work. Now she drives about 45 miles to work one way. The Lord is our **"strong tower"** and He continues to amaze me. I have failed Him but He has never failed me.

Is the Lord your **"strong tower?"**

#### *A Clear Conscience*

**"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men." - Acts 24:16.**

Paul says that he strives always to keep his conscience clear before God and man. A friend of mine has been having trouble knowing for sure if he has salvation. It has been a troubling thing over a period of years. He lives a very upright life and is one of the more faithful members of our church. He finally arrived at the conclusion that he did have salvation. However, we prayed and asked God to reveal to my friend if he had

any unconfessed sin in his life. As far as he knew he didn't.

This last week he woke up knowing that he had stolen from a former employer. This was many years ago. He had stolen by using the employer's equipment for personal use. As he came to a realization of that, he knew he had to confess this to his former employer and pay for the cost of using the equipment. It was a very hard and costly thing for him to do but he immediately made the confession and reimbursement.

This morning I heard on the news about a man that had confessed to murdering and raping a young woman 19 years earlier. A horrendous crime. The man responsible was living far away, is now married and has two children. He had started attending church and through his pastor contacted authorities and confessed to this crime. His conscience would not let him live with this unconfessed sin. Authorities say that most likely the crime would never have been solved without the confession.

A clear conscience is a precious thing. We as Paul should always strive to keep our conscience clear before God and man.

### The Patience Of God

**“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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” - Hebrews 12:2-4.**

Have you ever considered the patience of God? He has such great patience with us. As the hymn says he could have called 10,000 angels to destroy the world and set him free from the cross but he didn't. Instead Jesus **“endured the cross,” “endured the contradiction of sinners against himself.”**

Not only does God have great patience with us as sinners (And His mercies through Jesus are sufficient for every repentant sinner.) but he has great patience in guiding us.

Think for a moment about Gideon in the Old Testament (**Judges 6:1 - 7:22**). God finds Gideon hiding in an abandoned winepress, threshing wheat, but fearing for his life. God calls him to be the one to lead Israel in delivering them from the Midianites. From Gideon's actions we know that he continues to have doubts about God's call and how the deliverance is to be brought about. But God is patient! He gives Gideon six reassurances as He leads Gideon to victory over the Midianites.

God created us and He knows our frailties, our weaknesses. He knows that we need His guidance, His reassurances. When He calls us, He is not finished with the process. That's the beginning. He is still there to guide us. When we have our doubts. He is still there to reassure us, to point us again in the right direction. He loves us as His children. He **“endured the contradiction of sinners,”** how much more so does he endure and have patience with us His children.

Not sure about where or what God wants in your life? Ask Him? He won't be angry. Would we be angry at our own children if they asked us what we wanted? No, of course not! God is all powerful and all knowing. I think that He can handle a question or two (or three, or four, or five.....) from His children.

### *When God Calls*

**“And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.” - Judges 7:7.**

God calls upon His people many times to do the unexpected. Gideon had 32,000 men but even this army was not enough to march the men arrayed against them. **Judges 7:12** describes the opposing force as

**“grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude.”** But God reduced instead of increasing Gideon’s army. He reduced the thousands to only 300 men. Yet we know that God gave Gideon and his 300 men complete victory over the Midianite army.

Joshua we know was called upon by God to attack Jericho in a strange way. They were to march around the city once a day for six days but on the seventh day they were to march around Jericho seven times. The seven priests were to blow the trumpets and the people were to shout. As we know the walls came tumbling down.

Jonah was called upon by God to do the strange and unusual as well. He was to go to Nineveh and preach to the hated enemy. Jonah thought that he would rather die than do that and headed in the other direction. He was swallowed up by a great fish and in the belly of the fish he had a change of heart. Jonah went to Nineveh with God’s message **“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”** One of the greatest revivals in history broke out and these evil people got right with God.

The point is that when God calls He may sometimes want us to do what the world will laugh at. But make no mistake. If we are faithful to be obedient to God’s call, the world most likely won’t be laughing at the results of our obedience. The Midianites weren’t laughing after the battle was over. The people of Jericho were no longer laughing at those crazy Israelites when the walls came down. And the Ninevites called a fast and sat in sackcloth and ashes when they heard the one sentence sermon of Jonah.

#### *Between A Rock And A Hard Place?*

**“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30.**

When life gets tough and we’re between a rock and a hard place what do we do? What do we do when the car is repossessed and the IRS wants the rest? What do we do when the doctor tells us there is no hope? What do we do when we are arrested for a crime we didn’t commit and no one will believe us? What do we do when unexpectedly we are given the *“pink slip”* and told to find another job? What do we do when we have an addiction that won’t let go and it is destroying our life?

What are we to do? Do we just *“grin and bear it?”* Do we *“count our many blessings?”* Do we *“look on the bright side?”* Do we put on our smiley face and tell everyone we’re fine when we’re really dying inside? Do we pop a few more pills, shoot some more dope, or go on a week long drinking binge?

Jesus says, **“Come unto me...and I will give you rest.”** How can Jesus give us rest? He can give us rest by taking away our burden of sin. He can give us rest by giving us **“peace which passeth understanding (Philippians 4:7).”** He can give us rest by giving us supernatural strength to endure our situation **“through Christ (Philippians 4:13).”** He can give us rest through His supernatural provision **“according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).”** He gives us rest through His Spirit, through His Word, through His people.

Are you between a rock and a hard place? Are you at the end of your rope and your fingers are slipping? Jesus is the answer. His yoke is easy. His burden is light. Only Jesus can give rest to your soul.

#### *Thoughts About Disciples*

**“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” - John 8:31-32.**

The word disciple, comes from the word discipline. Most successful people in this world learn at some point

in time that the disciplined life is the easiest life you can live. It is the easiest load you can carry. Who enjoys life the most? those whose life is out of control? Those whose freedom has been lost because of their freedom? Millions of dollars are made every day by casinos, liquor stores, bars, drug dealers, and porn sellers. These people are made rich by people who are out of control. Because they are out of control they are carrying a heavy burden.

Who is going to have the abundant life that Jesus talks about in **John 10:10**? It is those who take His yoke upon them. It is those who come under His discipline. It will be those for whom Jesus is Lord and not just a fire insurance policy.

To be a true disciple of Jesus we must come under His discipline. What are those disciplines?

1. Prayer is one of those Christian disciplines. Who has the lightest load? People who pray, or those who don't?
2. Bible study is a discipline. Who lives with more peace? Those who know the promises of God or those who are ignorant of God's promises and of the power of God's Word?
3. Going to church is a Christian discipline. The Bible says in **Hebrews 10**, "...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is." When we assemble together, we know we have worshipped God and have established relationships with people of God who will be there when life's burdens must be carried.

Isn't our burden made lighter when we accept these disciplines and become true disciples of our Lord?

### *Avoid The Leaven*

Jesus says in **Mark 8:15** (Read also v. 14.), "**Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.**"

Jesus talks about yeast in describing the teachings of the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees. The thing to remember about yeast is it has power. This power can be a source of good or of evil. In the parable of the leaven in **Matthew 13** Jesus used yeast to symbolize the invasiveness of the kingdom which eventually transforms the world. This is the good use of yeast. In **Mark 8** Jesus warns of a bad use. There are four obstacles to our faith which Jesus classifies as yeast. If the Christian accepts these they can work to destroy our faith.

The first one is the yeast of the Pharisees. Their yeast was traditionalism because they held their traditions to be above the law of God. Because of their traditions, teachings, they were unable to recognize Christ when He walked among them.

Secularism was the yeast of the Herodians. They believed the world could be changed by the Herods and their politics. Their faith was in government and not in God. They had the government so they did not need a Savior.

In **Matthew 16**, the Herodians are not mentioned but the Sadducees are. The Sadducees were known for their unbelief in anything supernatural (re: **Mark 12** and **Acts 23:8**). The Sadducees were religious skeptics. They had a form of religion but it did not have any power. Jesus warns us against those who claim to believe in God and yet at the same time deny God is able to work in the supernatural. For example, many who claim to be Christians do not believe God created the world, the virgin birth of Christ, or His resurrection from the dead. Can we really have saving faith in a Savior who we believe was only a man? I don't think so.

The last obstacle was pessimism. The disciples were pessimistic. They were upset because they had

forgotten to bring any bread with them. And yet they had seen Jesus take a small amount of bread and feed an army of people. Pessimism is dangerous. Why? Because it tells Jesus there are things that He can't do. When we do that He usually can't because we are without faith.

Traditionalism, secularism, skepticism, and pessimism will rob us of the faith and power necessary for living the abundant life.

### *A Life Worth Living*

**“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”**  
- **Matthew 5:13-16.**

On a television special on June 6, 1994, observing the D-Day invasion, General Norman Schwarzkopf and Dan Rather were walking through the US cemetery on the Normandy coast. General Schwarzkopf reflected on the sacrifices of the soldiers buried there. He said, *“We should live to make this world worth dying for.”* There seems to be doubt in those words as to whether or not this world is worth dying for at the present time.

There does seem to be a moral decay in this world that is ever increasing. The level of immorality reminds me of the statement made in the last verse of the book of **Judges (Judges 21:25)**, **“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”** The book of Judges records the result of that kind of attitude.

The only thing restraining God's hand of Judgment upon this world are those Christians who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Just as salt acts as a preservative in meat and prevents decay and spoilage so do Christians. Christians sprinkled across this world act as a moral preservative preventing or slowing further decay and in some situations even bringing restoration. But sadly there seems to not be enough salt and the decay continues.

Why was Sodom and Gomorah destroyed? It was a wicked place, yes. But also because there were not even ten righteous people in the place. Not enough salt and what salt it had, Lot, seemed to have lost its savor, its effectiveness.

Does it make any difference how you live your life? Yes, it does! You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Does it make any difference whether you come to church all the time or just when you happen to feel like it? Of course it make a difference. Your neighbors know when they hear your car start up and drive by their houses on Sunday morning and when they see you come home with Bibles in hand, they know.

Does it make any difference whether or not you pray and read your Bible? Of course it does! You don't want to lose your savor, your effectiveness, your influence for the Lord do you?

Does it make any difference whether or not you ever tell anyone about Jesus, give someone a tract, invite them to church? Of course it does! How will there ever be any more salt! How will there ever be any more light! If we don't win more people to the Lord?

It makes a difference how each one of us live our lives. We should live our lives to make this world worth dying for. You and I are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

### *Where Art Thou?*

**“And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou.” - Genesis 3:9.**

Adam and Eve had sinned and God called unto them. God is still calling to those of us today with sin in our lives to return to Him. Our God seems to be constantly calling out. He calls us to salvation. He calls to us when we sin. He calls us to service.

I remember hearing Jeanie's (my wife) testimony for the first time and God through her testimony issued His call for my salvation. I then began to hear a call to service. God's call upon my life to preach His Word eventually became almost a shout. His call was so loud that it was impossible to ignore. I had to say, yes. Or, I had to say, no.

Once I had answered God's call to preach His Word there were other calls that He began to issue. Where would I preach? Once I answered the call to a place of service is that the only time God will call me in that way? For me the answer has been, no. God has called me from one place to another. I have at times tried to analyze and examine the reasons God would do that. Usually at the time of the call I don't have the understanding to know why, but I can understand enough to know that I must go. With the advantage of several years I can now look back and understand more of why God took me from one place and brought me to another.

Has God been calling you? Most likely He has about one thing or another. No, you may not fully understand His call. But to the extent that you know what He wants you to do you should take the steps that are possible. As you do so He will reveal more and more of His plan.

The call of God. The Bible begins with a call to Adam the first man and the Bible ends with a call to all, **“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).”**

### *Would You Like To Run Away?*

**“Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” - Jonah 1:1-3a.**

Have you ever ran away from home? When I was five years old while my mother was taking a nap I went to visit my cousin. My cousin lived two and a half miles south of us on a country road. Now I knew that I shouldn't leave our farm property but I left anyway. By the time I was two miles from home I was tired but still determined to make it to my cousin's home. I was careful on my journey having been warned about strangers and whenever a car would approach I would go off the roadway and hide until they were gone.

Unknown to me by this time my parents had all of their neighbors out looking for me. One of the farmers who was plowing saw me and called my parents. Just as I was crawling through a fence to go to my cousin's my parents found me. I never knew until later the anxiety I had caused them and their friends. That was the last little trip I went on by myself for several years!

Thinking about Jonah, he knew where God wanted him to go and went in the opposite direction. Sometimes we are at least a little like Jonah. We know what God wants us to do but we don't do it. We know what God doesn't want us to do and we do it. From Jonah's experience we know that God is capable of getting our attention. It may not be with a big fish but it will be something very personal to us that we understand.

Even now I would sometimes like to run away but I understand the consequences better now. I understand much better the pain I cause my Heavenly Father when I take my little excursions outside of His will. I also

understand His discipline just as I understood the discipline of my parents.

### *Images On Our Walls*

**“Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth.” - Ezekiel 8:12.**

When we are alone with our thoughts, what are the images that we see flashed on the walls of our minds? What is it or who is it that we worship there in the privacy of our thoughts? Some worship there the material. Some worship there themselves. Others worship there the true and living God.

I can look at different periods of my life and think of my worship. Before I was a Christian I not only worshipped the material but I also worshipped myself. Strange how when Christ came into my life the self worship, the material worship has become harder and harder. Yes, I do sometimes think it would be nice to live in a nicer home and have the money to do what I cannot do now. But those material things are not what sustains me. Those things have become less and less important as Christ has become more and more important to me.

Henry Drummond once told a story about a mother who visited her son at college. She was shocked to discover pornographic images on the walls of his room. But she didn't demand that her son remove them. What she did was to buy a painting of Christ. She gave it to her son and asked him to hang it on his wall. When she next visited her son she found the obscene images gone and the painting of Christ hanging on the wall instead.

Let us hang the image of our crucified Lord and Savior upon on the innermost chambers of our hearts!!

### *The Right Directions*

**“Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths.” - Psalm 25:4.**

What way is our life headed? What path are we really traveling? Are we going the way that we want to go? This is the way that our flesh, our natural man wants to travel. The Bible tells us in **Proverbs 14:12**, **“There is a way which seems right to a man.”**

There is also the way that others would want us to travel. The Psalmist says in **Psalm 1:1**, **“...the way of sinners....”** There is another way, a best way, that the Lord wants us to take: **“This is the way, walk in it (Isaiah 30:21).”**

I remember while working in the oilfield going to a job out in ranching country west of Canadian, Texas. My directions were to take the second fork in the road after leaving Canadian. We took the second fork in the road and drove and drove. We came back to the beginning and took another possible second fork in the road and drove and drove. I enlisted a deputy sheriff to help find the rig location we were to go to. I went back to Canadian and called in for more directions. We searched for most of the day and burned up a tank of gas before receiving the directions for the right way to the location.

Yes, it was the second fork in the road but the second fork turned onto a pasture trail with only tracks for the tires of vehicles. Where we were searching for an actual road traveled by many vehicles the road we needed was a narrow one!. After traveling this narrow road for about a half mile we went down into a valley where the oil rig was located. The drilling rig couldn't be seen from the main road which we had traveled many times by then. By the time we arrived we were tired, frustrated, and still had a job to do.

How much simpler and easier life is when we have the right directions! But we have to be careful as to where those directions come.

### *Swimming Iron*

**“But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.” - 2 Kings 6:5-7.**

There is a message here for us in the miracle of the swimming axe head. Elisha the prophet cut down a stick and threw it in the water and the iron axe head came up from the bottom and floated. The man was upset for two reasons. First, he was troubled because the axe head was not even his and he would have to somehow repay the owner for this valuable property. Second, he was upset because he would no longer be able to cut down any wood. How could he cut down a tree with only an axe handle? Impossible!

Yes, it is impossible to cut wood with an axe handle but that is what many in the churches of today are trying to do. We see a picture of the axe handle representing the work that we can do in our own strength. We also see a picture of the axe head representing the work that can be done through the supernatural empowerment of our Lord.

We lament the spiritual condition of our world. We lament the spiritual condition of our churches. We lament the spiritual condition of our own lives. So, we try harder and harder in our own strength. We swing the axe handle faster and faster but we only succeed in burning ourselves out. What we must do is return to our Lord. We need the daily intake of the Word of God. We need the daily communication in prayer. Without it, the axe head will remain at the stagnant bottom of the lake of our lives.

### *Have You Been Run Over?*

As Christians we should periodically examine our commitments. Our determination to be faithful to commitments make up the true Christian life. Before we can become a Christian we must commit ourselves to turn from sin (repentance) and commit ourselves to have Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Out of the continuation of those commitments flow the Christian life.

Too often after a few years of being a Christian (If not long before) we see people begin to back away from those original commitments. They begin to try to find a middle ground between the world and the Lord. We see many living exactly that way with their lives. They come to church just on Sunday morning. They put on their happy faces and know all the Christian things to say. But through the week their Christianity has very little real value to them.

There's an old saying that is still very true: *“If you sit in the middle of the road you will be run over!”* If we sit in the middle of the road with our Christianity we will be run over by life. We may try to blame the Lord for it but we really have no one to blame but ourselves. The Bible often warns and challenges us to living completely, totally for God.

Joshua said, **“Choose you this day whom ye will serve (Joshua 24:15).”** Elijah said, **“How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him (1 Kings 18:21).”**

And our Lord says to many who make up His church, **“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art luke warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Revelation 3:15-16).”**

Has life run you over? Maybe it is time to get out of the middle of the road!!

### *Jesus Has The Power!*

Remember the story of Lazarus? He had died and was buried but Jesus came and intervened in the situation. **"...he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go (John 11:43-44)."**

When Jesus first arrived in Bethany, Lazarus was dead. But when Jesus, the resurrection and the life spoke, Lazarus came forth. Lazarus was alive but bound in the grave clothes and sticky burial spices. But Jesus didn't leave Lazarus bound. Jesus said, **"Loose him, and let him go."**

The tragic thing for many Christians is that we have passed from death unto life but we keep trying to put the grave clothes back on and bind ourselves up again. Whenever we sin it is like trying to put on those stinking grave clothes again. Some Christians have bound themselves up with addictions. Others with various forms of sin.

What is important to know is that Jesus still has the power today to release you from those grave clothes. Jesus is the "same yesterday, and today, and for ever (**Hebrews 13:8**) Which means that you don't have to remain in bondage because Jesus has the power. Because Jesus is still **"...the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live (John 11:25)."**

### *Billboards*

Have you seen the billboards in south Florida? An anonymous person through an advertising agency has been placing statements as though spoken by God on billboards and sides of buses. Here are a few of them:

*"We need to talk." - God*

*"What part of '**Thou shalt not**' don't you understand?" - God*

*"If you keep taking my name in vain I'll make the rush hour longer." - God*

It would be easier wouldn't it, to live by sight? To visit with God face to face. Watch God on the television. Listen to His Voice on the radio. See His photo on the billboard.

But God has chosen for us to live by faith. And faith comes how? **"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17)."**

### *Are You Waiting?*

**"For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, not perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." - Isaiah 64:4.**

There are over one hundred references to the word wait in the Bible. It seems that people in the Bible were to wait or that they were waiting frequently. Things haven't changed very much because we are still waiting today. Waiting seems to be one of the more difficult things that I have to do. We catch a vision of what may be and we work and wait and finally that vision comes to pass.

Before I began to preach God's Word, He had been calling me for several years. But the timing was not right. I began over the years to wonder if what I was waiting for would come to pass. The right time finally came. God was faithful to reveal His will to me and to Jeanie (my wife) so that we had no doubt that it was the right time. Now I understand that the waiting was important. It was during the waiting that God was teaching and training me for ministry. It was during the waiting that He was developing my character for what

was ahead. It was during the waiting that my faith grew and I became more and more sensitive to His Voice.

Today I am still waiting but for different things to come to pass. But while I am waiting I know that He wants me to live life each day to its fullest. I think one of the biggest lessons that I have learned from waiting is that we must not let the waiting get in the way of the living.

### *Surprising Love*

Jesus says in **Matthew 5:44**, **“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”**

There is a bumper sticker that I see occasionally which says, *“I don’t get mad, I get even.”* Our natural response to someone who hurts us is to *“get even.”* Usually we get mad too!

Driving in traffic in a large city we see the natural man constantly at work. People seem to take on another personality when they are driving. Or maybe it is the personality they really have with the mask stripped off. *“Road rage.”* This a term that we hear more and more of in the United States. Even in Oklahoma there have been instances of people being shot while traveling down the interstate for no apparent reason.

How can we **“love our enemies?”** Only through the power of God. Loving our enemies is in complete opposition to what the natural man wants to do.

Today, why don’t we surprise someone with an act of love. God may very well be able to use that love to change someone’s heart and take away their rage!

### *Are You Slipping?*

**“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (Hebrews 2:1).”** The last part of this verse can also be translated as, **“...so that we do not drift away.”**

Here is a reason why some of us give up on life and some even appear to give up on God. What is it that we have **“heard?”** What is it that we have been taught? We know the importance of discipleship. We know the importance of church attendance. We know the importance of spending time in prayer and reading God’s Word. We know the importance of being obedient, of holy living.

**“...so that we do not drift away.”** Drifting away. Drifting is a slow compromise of our commitments. Compromises are rarely satisfying. It is like the hunter and the bear who encountered each other. The hunter was ready to pull the trigger when the bear spoke. The bear asked for negotiations. They agreed. The hunter wanted a fur coat. The bear wanted a full stomach. They decided to compromise. The bear after a little while walked away alone. The hunter had his fur coat and the bear had his full stomach!

The world would have you to compromise on your commitments to what you know to be right. The world promises you a fur coat but neglects to tell you the full price.

### *At The End Of Your Rope?*

**“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” - Hebrews 3:12-14.**

Do you ever feel like you’ve had all you can take, you’re at the end of the rope and your fingers are slipping?

It happens frequently to Christians and to non-Christians. In Hebrews chapter three we are given a hint as to how to hang on and help others to hang on as well. The Bible says, **“exhort one another daily....”** Sometimes we forget that we are not Lone Rangers and that we need the help of other Christians and they need our help as well.

Dr. Karl Menninger a psychiatrist and founder of the Menninger clinic was once asked a question while giving a lecture. He was asked what he would do if he felt he was about to suffer a nervous breakdown. Menninger replied that he would find someone that needed help and he would do something to help them.

Encouragement has a way of coming back to us. As we exhort others, they in turn encourage us. As we help others we find others helping us. The Bible says we should do this **“...while it is called Today.”** Before we turn loose of the rope why don't we reach out and help someone else to hang on a little while longer?

### *Time To Wake Up!*

**“...knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” - Romans 13:11.**

Whoever created the *“snooze button”* should win a Nobel Prize! I love the *“snooze button.”* Jeanie, usually sets her alarm for an half hour earlier than she needs to get up and she can then hit the snooze button a few times. I love that luxurious feeling of semi-consciousness when you snuggle back under the covers knowing you have at least another ten minutes of blissful comfort. The challenges and hardships of the day can wait for another ten minutes.

The snooze button symbolizes the mentality of many of us. We would rather stay in bed than get up and face the day. We would rather eat anything we want than watch our weight. We would rather spend our money foolishly than invest it wisely. We would rather sit on the sofa and watch TV than do all those much needed chores around the house. We would rather sit in the pew than get involved in a ministry. We would rather use our finances selfishly than joyfully give to God's work. We would rather be comfortable than accept a challenge.

The problem is, God always challenges us. He is like that alarm clock that buzzes in our ear. In the same way you make sure your children get up and meet the challenges that lay before them, God is ever poking, prodding and leading us from our comfortable slumber. God says, **“...it is high time to awake out of sleep!”**

### *Tanggung Jawab*

**“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” - Colossians 3:17.**

The Indonesian language has a word for responsibility *“tanggung jawab.”* It means literally, *“to hold the answer.”* This is to say that for anyone to hold the answer in any situation and not to share it would be out right irresponsibility.

What is the responsibility of the Christian? The apostle Paul sums up the Christian's responsibility with one verse in **Colossians 3:17.** What does the Christian life include? The Christian life is everything you say, everything you do, and everything you are. The Christian life should be everything, every detail of what you are - nothing held back.

What does it mean to **“do all in the name of the Lord Jesus?”** In the time of the early church the name of a person indicated the person's authority and power. To do something in the name of that person, or in relationship with that person. What is our relationship to Jesus? How do we see Jesus in our life? We must

see Jesus as Lord of our lives, not as a Lord, or one of many Lords, but as the Lord.

Many Colossians, because of a false teaching called Gnosticism, saw Jesus only as a god (among many) and that there were more powerful spirit beings than Jesus. Today, few Christians would admit to having the same problem that the Christians at Colossae had. But the truth is that many of us do. We just have different names for the false gods we worship. Because if there is anything that we put before God then it is a false God, an idol.

The false gods we worship and serve today have names like: money, material possessions, careers, recreation, selfishness, alcohol, drugs, pornography, school activities, even our children or our spouses. Before we can ever fulfill our responsibility as a Christian we must deal with our false gods.

*"Tanggung jawab."* We hold the answer for those around us but before we can ever reach them we must deal with our own lives. We are responsible to place Jesus on the throne of our lives so that we can fulfill our responsibilities as a child of God.

### *Delight In The Lord*

**"Delight yourself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." - Psalm 37:4.**

Knowing God's will about practical ongoing issues of life is faced by every child of God. God's will has not been hidden from us. God wants us to know His will for our lives. So, why do many Christians have such a problem determining God's will for their lives?

The problem has to do with what the Psalmist says in **Psalm 37:4**. Do we really find delight in the Lord? What does He mean when He says delight yourself in the Lord? God has given us many wonderful resources (**Philippians 4:19**). At the top of the list is the Holy Spirit. God has given us Himself. He has also given us His Word. He has given us the church made up of other Spirit filled believers. He has also given us the fantastic privilege of prayer. We can talk directly with the Creator of the Universe.

To delight ourselves in the Lord means that we are taking advantage of those resources. We are communing with God through the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of other believers. We are studying and searching the Scriptures and we are on a talking basis with our God. If we are delighting ourselves in the Lord, God the Psalmist says will give us the desires of our heart. If we are in a right relationship with God the desire that we have will be God's will.

### *Continue On*

**"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." - Acts 2:42.**

This verse says much about what we need as Christians today. When our world comes crashing in and everything is going wrong what do we do? Where do we turn? We should follow the example of the early church and continue on. They **"continued steadfastly."** This seems to indicate that there was at least some opposition to their doing what the remainder of the verse states.

When all seems lost, continue on. Continue on in the **"apostles' doctrine"** which was the Word of God. Continue on reading, studying and meditating upon the Word of God. Continue on memorizing and imbedding the Word of God in your hearts.

When all seems lost, continue on. Continue on in fellowship with other Christians. Continue on provoking and encouraging others to love and good works. Continue on and stand firm with your labor for the Lord because we know that it is never in vain (**1 Corinthians 15:58**). Continue on in that fellowship of obedience

to the Great Commission.

Continue on and you too will have **“gladness and singleness of heart!”**

### *Finding Peace Of Mind*

**“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.” - 1 Timothy 6:12 - see also verses 13-19.**

There was a survey conducted by USA Today back in 1992 which is probably still accurate. In the survey they asked people what they wanted most. The majority of those that responded said, *“peace of mind.”*

I think that by saying *“peace of mind”* we want more than an abstract sense of serenity. To have real *“peace of mind”* we need a sense of satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, and a sense of meaning/purpose. When we say we want *“peace of mind,”* we’re saying we want to get hold of life, real life. That’s what Paul was telling Timothy in this passage of Scripture. In **verse 19**, Paul says, **“...lay hold on eternal life.”** Paul had some ideas about how Timothy was to take hold of life. First, we need to put our hope in God (**v. 17**). Second, do good to all people (**v. 18**).

There can be no true hope in God without having a Savior. We need Jesus as our personal Savior to have that true hope. Not only do we need a Savior but those around us do as well. What is the greatest possible good that we can do for someone else? Tell them about Jesus so that they too might have life, eternal life.

Let us **“...lay hold on eternal life”** today and we will find that we have found peace of mind.

### *Human Relations*

Today I was run over by a truck. Not really, it just felt like it!! I thought I was looking after the interests of our church as a pastor should. I thought that what I had wanted was what would be in the best interest of those affected the most. It feels almost like a truck has run over you when a Christian brother or sister does something that is most uncharacteristically Christian and hurts you and others. It hurts even more when there is little that you can do about it at the time but still that human flesh wants to get even.

My first response was that I wasn’t going to let them get by with this, I can cause them trouble. But then that didn’t sound very Christian either. What was it Jesus said? Where was that? **Matthew 5..verse...39**, **“...resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”** There’s more! **“And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”** Here’s the one that gets to me: **“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”**

There is really an amazing thing about giving a situation like mine to the Lord along with all the anger, with all the pain. The amazing thing is you can almost feel the hurt, the pain drain away. I know that God will now use this situation to bring about good which maybe He is already doing through this devotional.

Is there a situation in your life that is causing you pain, distress, anger? Place all of that in the hands of Jesus. Allow the Lord to take care of it for you. When you do that you will find as I did that it makes life much, much easier!

### *Under His Wing*

Today a friend wrote a note of encouragement to me along with the notation **Psalms 91:1-2** which says, **“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will**

**say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.”** My friend had no idea of the depth of the meaning that those verses have for me on a personal basis.

In 1993, it was late on a Saturday night, I was putting the finishing touches on a sermon and stopping occasionally for prayer. I'm not entirely sure now what I was praying about but I was somewhat distressed about my life at the time. I was standing at the pulpit when I noticed the shadow which was moving quickly across the sanctuary, something was blocking the light from above. It moved over my head and I thought I could sense something passing above. At that point I jumped off the stage and looked up to see what was causing the shadow but there was nothing there. I was frightened and fled the church building as fast as I could!

Even though I was frightened I believed that whatever I had experienced was of God and had been in answer to my prayers. I found these verses in **Psalm 91** and also the verses in **Psalm 57:1** and **63:7**. It may be that it was a hallucination but God used it to reassure me that I was under His protection, under the shadow of His wings. He had not forgotten me and today my friend reminded me of that again.

Dear saint of God, our God has not forgotten about you either!!

### *An Attitude Check*

In **Proverbs 22:6** the Bible says, “**Train up a child in the way he should go....**” And in **Ephesians 4:29** we are told not to let any unwholesome language come out of our mouths but only what is useful to edify or build up those who are listening. In **Hebrews 10:24** we are told to, “**...provoke one another unto love and to good works.**” When we think about training, when we think about building up, when we think about provoking we normally think about actions or words. Those things are necessary but there is another ingredient that we don't want to leave out.

I had a pet crow when I was a boy that I raised and taught to fly. Interesting thing about my crow, he had a great dislike for my sister. Whenever she would come outside the crow would immediately dive bomb on her head trying to land and peck her. Of course, my sister had a strong dislike for the crow as well. I enjoyed it because at that young age I had a strong dislike for my sister and she didn't care much for me. (However, I do love my sister and it was just a stage I was going through.) How did the crow know to dislike my sister? I believe he simply picked up on my attitude toward her.

If a crow can pick up on a human's attitude toward another person how much more so should another person be able to know our attitude toward others. I believe part of training up a child must be our attitude about all of life. Part of the building up of others may be our attitude toward things when we are around them. Part of provoking one another unto love and good works may be our loving attitude that they can sense when they are near us. How is our attitude? Have we been dive bombing anything lately?

### *Misunderstandings*

I grew up on a cotton farm and by the age of four or five I was ready to help out with some of the farming duties. The day arrived when I was to go to the field and “*chop*” cotton along with my mother and sister. Now I had heard about chopping cotton but had never really paid any attention and didn't know how it was actually done. Because I was always too busy playing and having fun.

When we arrived at the field my mother assigned a row of cotton to me. The cotton plants were still small, planted in rows stretching a half mile. I began literally chopping cotton and had cleared out about twenty feet of the plants when my mother grabbed me. It was a definite surprise to me but chopping cotton didn't mean chopping cotton, it really meant hoeing out the weeds around the cotton plants.

We can become caught up in our own lives and our own agendas to the extent that it causes

misunderstandings. Someone meaning well tells us one thing and we interpret it as meaning something else. We think we're "chopping cotton" but actually we may be destroying the crop. In **Philippians 2:4** the Bible says, "**Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.**" The NIV translates it as, "**Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**"

To keep from destroying the crop of spiritual growth in the lives of other Christians we must look beyond ourselves and consider what is best for them.

**"Fear thou not..."**

**"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." - Isaiah 41:10.**

Going to a dentist's office is usually not something that most people look forward to, myself included. So when I needed to have my wisdom teeth taken out by an oral surgeon I was not looking forward to the event. But the day came and I was a little nervous. My way of coping with the waiting prior to being given general anesthesia was to repeat one of my memory verses over and over again in my mind. Isaiah 41:10 was the verse of that day.

As I was given the anesthetic I was repeating in my mind, "**Fear thou not...**" When I came out from under the anesthetic I was surprised to find myself still repeating **Isaiah 41:10** over and over again. Since that day I have at times found myself facing much more difficult situations than oral surgery. **Isaiah 41:10** has been there for them all. "**Fear thou not, for I am with thee,**" and I know that He is with me and He is holding me in His right hand. Through **Isaiah 41:10** I have felt God's presence and experienced Him.

Whatever it is that life may be throwing at you, God would say, "**Fear thou not, for I am with thee....**"

### *The Shock Of Kindness*

In **Galatians 5:22-23** we are told, "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance....**" The NIV translates gentleness as kindness.

Kindness can be a shocking thing when you are expecting the opposite. Before I was a pastor I was a parole officer. My job was to supervise people who had been convicted of a crime. I used different approaches with different people. Sometimes I was forced to be stern and tough. Other times it would be obvious that I was supervising someone that was broken and defeated. I've enjoyed seeing the broken and defeated come back to life as they have encountered gentleness, kindness, and goodness.

Our Heavenly Father enjoys touching lives with goodness as well (**Romans 2:4**). It could be that you may encounter some broken and defeated lives today. Why not follow the Father's example and shock someone back to life today with kindness, gentleness, and goodness?

### *Begging Crumbs*

Think of the lame man in **Acts chapter 3** who was laid at the gate Beautiful so he could beg. He was just begging for alms. He just wanted to survive. Just give me some crumbs he was most likely crying out to the people that passed. He had been doing this for years. I think that we all have a tendency to beg of God give me the crumbs Lord, give me the crumbs Lord and we're about ready to give up and we don't know how we can go on.

That's where this lame man was at. He was where you were, life couldn't get much tougher. He had no hope. No one like him had ever been healed if someone would just give him a few scraps he could live to

beg again tomorrow. But there came a day, an ordinary day, a day like all the others when the servants of the Most High, Peter and John passed by. And the lame man heard these words from the mouth of Peter, **"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."**

You and I are out there much of the time begging for the crumbs and we have the tendency to think that God has forgotten about us that we might as well give up. It may only be tomorrow, it may only be an ordinary day begun as any other day when the day comes when God takes you by the hand and lifts you up.

The Bible says that if we humble ourselves under His hand in due time God will raise us up. Joseph humbled himself and he was raised up on what seemed like an ordinary day to become the prime minister of the most powerful nation in the world at that time. Moses spent 40 years wandering in the desert getting a graduate degree in desert survival and he became humble. According to the Bible, Moses was the meekest man on earth. But there came a day, an ordinary day, when he encountered a burning bush that did not burn and Moses walked on holy ground.

Your day is coming too!

### *Have You Been Having Hallucinations?*

In 1991 at a pastor's conference I had the opportunity to hear an elderly evangelist by the name of Oakley. I believe it was W. B. Oakley. He told of his salvation and call at the late age of 36. He was a farmer and had not even finished High School. But God called and so he left his family and farm and by bus went to where he could finish high school. When he arrived he was heartsick and planned just to get back on the bus and return home but the bus wasn't leaving immediately.

He looked up the street and saw the spire of a little church and so he went up there and tried the door and it was unlocked. So he went inside and at the altar began to cry out to God. He didn't know how long he had been praying but heard the sound of trailing garments and he heard a voice saying, *"I will go with you."* *"I will go with you."* W. B. didn't know how many times the voice repeated *"I will go with you."* But it was enough. He went to high school and then he went to college and then he went to seminary and then he traveled over the world the rest of his life as an evangelist.

Now when he tried to tell some of his fellow classmates at seminary about his experience and about other experiences he had while still on the farm (like walking around his corn field with his hand up in the air holding the hand of God.). The professor and his classmates said, *"Brother Oakley you've been having hallucinations."* Now Brother Oakley didn't know what hallucinations meant so he just said, *"Amen Brother!"*

Now when Brother Oakley learned what hallucinations meant some time later he said he went back. He said he told that professor if he had been having hallucinations he was praying that God would give him some more.

I believe God would say to you as He said to Brother Oakley and as He said to Joshua, **"Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:9)."**

### *The Aroma Of Your Life*

In **2 Corinthians 2:14** we are told, **"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place."** The NIV puts this as, **"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him."**

It's true just being around or communicating with a committed Christian brings a touch of God or the fragrance of God into your life. As children of God we become used to the fragrance of goodness and it is unpleasant for us to be around those with a different aroma.

The world is constantly spreading a different fragrance, a foul smelling fragrance of death. I believe one of the worst smells of foulness on the internet are the newsgroups (At least for me, for you it may be something else.). I used to have a program to access them but have now deleted the program entirely because I believe that it was an entry point of evil.

We must be alert to the fragrances around us. Not only do we want to spread the aroma of life but we want to avoid being influenced by the fragrances of death. Sometimes we must do as Joseph did and flee the foul evil smell. We must guard our heart for it is the wellspring of life. We must maintain our own saltiness if we are to be the salt of the earth. We must keep the cover of evil off of our own light if we are to be the light of the world. But thanks be to God who, if we will follow, will always lead us in triumphal procession in Christ.

### *The Scenic Route*

Have you ever taken the scenic route? Actually it was going to be a short cut. We could cut through on this road to south of Cripple Creek (Colorado) and then over to Colorado Springs. It looked like only about 20 miles from the turn off to Cripple Creek. Probably only take us 30 minutes.

When we turned off on the scenic route we immediately noticed that it wasn't paved but then it wasn't that bad of a road. There was quite a bit of traffic too. But within a couple of miles the highway had narrowed and it was much rougher. I was beginning to wish that I had a four wheel drive (Knocked a muffler and tailpipe loose and finally lost it before arriving home.). It began to rain, and I began to pray that we wouldn't slide off into one of the canyons. Four hours later we arrived in Cripple Creek, a little older and wiser.

Jesus says in **Matthew 7:13-14**, "**Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.**"

Before you take that beautiful scenic short cut, you just might want to check it out a little. Because you may not be able to turn around and go back the other way once you have entered in.

### *Have You Been Trespassing?*

In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, detail is given to the Trespass Offering and other offerings. The Sin Offering is for sins committed knowingly and the Trespass Offering is for sins committed unknowingly against God. It seems to be a fine line between the two.

Today we think of someone trespassing as a person who enters another person's land without permission but the Biblical view is that of trespass against another person. When we hurt someone else physically or harm them in some way it is a "trespass." In 1742, two of my ancestors, Samuel and Ann Wrather, were called to be witnesses in a trespass case in Virginia. The case involved the alleged fraud by non-payment of a debt by a friend of Samuel and Ann. The case was dismissed.

Many today are trespassing against God. These people take great care to never read God's Laws and they have nothing to do with anyone or anything Christian in nature. Someday they will stand, or should I say, bow, before God in judgment. What will be their excuse for trespassing?

Have you trespassed against God? Have you sinned against God? **1 John 1:9** gives us the solution, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**"

### *Build The Walls*

Sin. It was sin that destroyed Jerusalem and sent the people into exile. **Micah 6:13, "Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins."**

In much the same way sin causes us problems too. Sin opens the door for the enemy to attack us and those around us. Once the walls of our lives have been torn down and our spiritual lives are in shambles how can we recover?

At that point we need a rebuilding project much as Nehemiah led the people in rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem. It was a struggle for the people then, it will be a struggle for us. **Nehemiah 4:14, "And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses."**

The people built with one hand and with the other held a sword ready for battle. We must take up our sword as well. **Ephesians 6:17, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."**

The spiritual battle is raging and the enemy roars but **"remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and fight...."**

### *Molding Lives*

**"And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."** - Ruth 1:16 - 17. Ruth, if you remember, had lost her husband and was facing a very uncertain future.

One of the people that has had a great influence upon my life is my step-grandmother (Ruth). Her first marriage ended only a year or so after their daughter was born. She married my grandfather many years later in middle age, they had about six good years together until my grandfather's health deteriorated.

My grandfather was unable to work, essentially bound to the house, had a leg amputated with health sliding downwards. Ruth continued to work and faithfully care for my grandfather during these seven to eight years. She eventually remarried but this only lasted for about a year. Now she is in her nineties and living in a mobile home with her daughter (her daughter is a widow). She has had a tough life but oh what an example she has been to me, and to many, many others. An example of faith in spite of the bad, in spite of the storms of life, a faith that just keeps on shining through even now. I don't know Ruth's real first name. When she went to school in the first grade she didn't like her name and told every one that she was "*Ruth*." How fitting!

Most likely if life is tough for you there are those who are watching marveling at your faith. Your life is molding the lives of those around you just as the life of my step grandmother has molded mine.

### *God's Provision*

**"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ."** - **Philippians 4:19.**

Some time ago we faced the prospect of the reduction of our income by \$1000.00 a month. I planned to be bivocational and work at a secular job to make up for the reduced income (For the full story read "*Journey to Fruitfulness*" at: <http://www.theburningbush.org/10.html>). However, my plan wasn't God's plan and I found

that it is much more difficult to obtain secular employment once you are a preacher.

How do you survive financially a thousand dollar loss in income when you are barely making ends meet? Only through God's provision. I can look back now and see how God has provided again and again. God has increased our income and reduced our expenses. Just when we think that the end has come a new miracle arrives. The result of this is that my faith has been increased and I have renewed confidence in the provision of God even for our material needs.

Maybe you are facing a mountain in your life. Your mountain may not be financial as mine was but whatever it is God has the resources that you need through His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

### *Moving Forward*

In **Philippians 3:13-14** the apostle Paul says, "**Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**"

In **verse 13** Paul says, "**forgetting those things which are behind....**" Paul refused to weigh himself down with the memory of the past. He resolved not to let the past slow him down.

Remembering past victories can be encouraging but they can also become an excuse for remaining where we are. Remembering what the Lord has done for you and those close to you can be strengthening. But much of the time the past can be a heavy weight dragging us down. For Paul, the time he spent in his life persecuting, damaging the church must have been an unpleasant thing to remember.

Paul says, those things are in the past - I've got to go on, I've got to move forward. For many of us there may be things that as Christians we don't like to remember, that we did or were a part of, or defeats that we have experienced. We can think and dwell on those things until we begin to think, "How can God use me, because I did those things?"

We must not concentrate on that, instead whenever it comes up in our minds; thank God, praise God for His mercy and grace through Jesus. Then we must forget those things which are behind, and reach forth to those things which are before.

### *Choose Life!*

My mother for a short period of time had a pet snake. She had caught it and put it in a cage outside. Whenever she fed the snake she would always have to wear leather gloves because the snake would try to bite her. It didn't matter how long my mother kept the snake or how much time she spent with the snake it would still try to bite her.

We are told in **Romans 6:23**, "**For the wages of sin is death.**" Sin is much like my mother's pet snake. It doesn't matter how much time we spend with our pet sin it is still going to give us death. Actually the more time we expend upon our sin the more death that we will receive.

Payday for our sins does not begin upon our physical death. Payday for our sins begins immediately. With every sin we receive a wage. The deeper into sin that we go the more death that we receive. The more sin that we have the deader we are in every area of our life. **Romans 8:5-6** is one of my favorites. I like the way the NIV puts it, "**Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.**"

"**The mind of sinful man is death.**" We have a choice each day. Let us choose life and peace!

### *The Barrier Of Pride*

In **Mark chapter 5** the Bible tells us the story of Jairus and his daughter. Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue, an important man, a respected man, a wealthy and powerful man. Yet the Bible tells us (**Mark 5:22**) that Jairus fell at the feet of Jesus and pleaded with Jesus to come and heal his young daughter who was deathly ill. The daughter died before Jesus reached her but he spoke words of life "**Talitha cumi**" (little lamb, wake up) and the girl came back to life.

Jairus had to lose something before the hand of God moved in healing power. Jairus got rid of his dignity, his pride. Our dignity, our pride, keeps us many times from receiving the blessing of God. Consider Naaman in **2 Kings chapter 5**. Naaman was the captain of the host of the king of Syria. In order for Naaman to be healed of leprosy Elisha the prophet said he needed to dip himself seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman was angry at first saying there were better rivers in Syria. But his servant said to him, "**...if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?**" Naaman dipped himself seven times in the river Jordan and was healed of his leprosy.

Is there something that God wants you to do but your pride, your dignity has gotten in the way?

### *God's Timing*

**Isaiah 55:8-9** says, "**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.**"

Many years ago now the truth of these words were brought to me. We were in Oklahoma City having several things we had to do and things to pick up. One of our last stops was at a shopping mall. I was anxious to arrive there and to be out of the traffic. But it seemed I was continually delayed and nearly every traffic signal turned red just in time for me to stop and wait.

After arriving at the shopping mall we needed to go to the upper level and we headed for an escalator. Just before arriving at the escalator I watched as an elderly lady stepped onto it. She was only part way up when she fell. Her foot seemed to be caught and she was stretched out backward with her head being banged as each step went up. I was able to reach her, raise her back up, and hold her up until another man had arrived and was able to free her foot.

Now I knew why I had been delayed. Our God whose thoughts are higher than ours can see the future and could see this accident happening. He ordered my steps that day so that I would be there at the very precise time necessary. I understand more and more that delays may simply be God working to make the timing right in our lives. I understand too that God is able to order our every step.

Have you been delayed? Are you waiting? It may simply be the hand of God upon your life to protect you or to bring good into your life. It may also be so that you can be a blessing to someone else. "**Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).**"

### *Playing With Fire*

**"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." - Hebrews 3:13.**

Does cotton burn? That was the question my cousin and I were wondering about. We were both five years old, and while our mothers picked cotton for a neighbor we played in the cotton trailer. I knew where some

matches were, and that day when we went to the field with our mothers we planned to find the answer to our question.

Our mothers were half way up the cotton row when I got the matches out and began to see if cotton would burn. Yes, cotton does burn, but you have to work at it. The trailer was almost full of cotton, and we were both working hard at our new game of burning cotton. Thankfully, someone drove by, saw the danger we were in and rescued us. The cotton and the trailer burned up. You know, I don't remember my mother taking me with her to pick cotton again after our cotton burning experiment.

It has occurred to me that sin is much like the predicament I was in that day long ago in the cotton trailer. Sin looks like a lot of fun, and most of the time, nothing so bad happens in the beginning. Sin is a deceiver, just as the fire was that day in the cotton trailer. I worked so hard at starting something that could have painfully destroyed me. We work so hard at what we think is a good time and what we are really doing is working to destroy ourselves. I never realized the danger I was in while playing with fire. Most people involved in sin never realize the danger they are in until it is too late and their lives have been ruined.

Maybe you have been playing with fire in your life. Jesus is the only One who can put the fire out. Jesus is the One who can save you and put meaning and purpose into your life. I'm thankful today for someone who many years ago saved my life by pulling me out of a burning cotton trailer. But, I'm even more thankful to Jesus, who saved my soul from an eternal burning hell. I'm also thankful, that He keeps the fires of sin put out in my life as I walk with Him each day. Jesus wants to do the same in your life.

### *Transforming Power*

How does someone become a pastor? First I would say that God must call that person to ministry. But beyond that I often ponder how God was able to transform my life into what it is now. Looking back thirty years it is beyond my wildest dreams or imaginations that I am a pastor now. Thirty years ago I would have been shocked at the suggestion.

Others have also found it strange that I would be preaching God's Word. A high school classmate's mother once told Jeanie (my wife) that of the people in her son's class, she thought that I would have been the least likely one to become a preacher. I grew up on a farm, but in high school I became a lead guitarist in a rock group and continued until I was married. My goals in life at one point were very simple, I wanted to be a great guitar player and make a lot of money. Even after I was no longer in a rock group my primary goals in life were still materialistic.

Several weeks after I was married something happened that changed my life. I had an encounter with the living God, He saved my soul and began the process of transforming my life. This transformation process didn't happen overnight, and is still far from complete. But I know that the hand of God has been upon my life and He has changed me. My goals are now very, very different than they were 30 years ago. Now I want to serve God and see the lives of others touched in the way He has touched me. Where God will lead from here I don't know, but I do know that being in the center of His will is the very best place to be. Even if the center of God's will for my life is to be a preacher.

What about you? Have you ever had an encounter with the living God? If not you can have! I know that God has a great and wonderful plan for your life. Why not let Him give you a life and an eternity beyond your wildest dreams? Jesus said, **"I am come that they (you) might have life, and that they (you) might have it more abundantly (John 10:10)."**

### *The Only Hope*

In 1874, one of the first Baptist missionaries to minister to the Plains Indians arrived at what is now Anadarko, Oklahoma. On that day when the missionaries first message was preached (**John 3:16** was the text.), some

of those present still had human scalps hanging from their belts. Over the course of years many of those Indians received Christ as their Savior.

Bruce Catton, a great Civil War historian and scholar, once gave a speech entitled “*What 1861 Has to Say to 1961.*” The point was that the problem, the nature of people, was the same in 1861 as it was in 1961. It is the same today. We still have crime, violence, substance abuse, wars, starvation, and on and on which arise from the same source as in the past. Human nature has not changed. **“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”** Sin is not without consequence and we continue to see the reaping of its evil harvest.

The solution is the same today as it was in 1874. The answer has been the same for almost 2000 years. The answer is Jesus! The *transforming, resurrecting, earthshaking* power of Jesus is alive and well today in the hearts of all believers. The same power that transformed mighty American Indian warriors into gentle servants of God in 1874 is still available today. We must have the same courageous boldness of those early missionaries who risked their lives to tell the unlovable about the love of Jesus.

Have you shared Jesus with your neighbor, with your friend, with your relative, with someone God brings across your path? How about your enemies, have you shared Jesus with them, have you prayed for them, cried for them?

Jesus is the only hope, the only answer to the problems of this world.

#### *Rule Number One*

Our Lord says, **“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.”**

This verse must be a primary rule of life for those who would overcome, for those who would be super conquerors.

If we seek after holiness then we will see that the other things such as joy, happiness, satisfaction, and yes, sometimes even the material will be taken care of for us. However, if we seek after happiness, and the things of this world we will never really obtain enough and never be satisfied. Only in seeking after the things of God will we find the flowing waters of life that quench the spiritual thirst.

#### *The Right Focus*

**“Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you do not grow weary and lose heart.” - Hebrews 12:3.**

So many times when things begin to go wrong in our lives the temptation is to focus on what is wrong. It may be the lack of money, a relationship problem, a physical illness, an addiction, or you may be facing something even worse. As we focus in on those bad things our attention is taken away from our Lord and the things of God. As a result we begin to feel worse and worse about our situation, about our life.

The Bible tells us the solution in **Hebrews 12:3**. If we don't want to grow weary and lose heart. If we don't want to give up and grovel in defeat. If we get tired of having a pity party all the time then the solution is before us. The solution is to put our focus upon Jesus and the things of God. Intentionally shift our focus from the bad to the good. As we do so we will find the strength to continue on even in the worst storms that life sends our way.

#### *A Crown Of Life*

**“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life,**

**which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” - James 1:12.**

Most of the time when we think of the crowns that we will receive from God for faithfulness we look to that time when we are in Heaven. However, I believe that every time we are obedient to our Lord we receive a crown of life. With each step of obedience, each step of holiness we become more alive, crowned with more and more life. With each step of obedience the next step becomes easier. The more life we have the more power we have to take that next step toward becoming transformed into the image of our Lord.

How long during each day are you truly alive, awake to life? We can live more, we can be more alive, as we live our lives with each step of obedience, each step of faithfulness that we take. Why not allow God to crown your life with LIFE today?

*Selah!*

Are you in the midst of problems? Troubles? Uncertainty? Without hope? Whatever it is God says, “**Selah!**” **Psalm 46** is where many through the ages have turned to find hope. It is where Martin Luther found the inspiration to write the hymn, “*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.*” **Psalm 46:10** says, “**Be still, and know that I am God....**”

“**Selah,**” is a musical term to the extent that it is understood. It means to take a break, or pause. In **Psalm 46** after **verse 3** there is the word, “**Selah**” and also after **verse 7**. Then, comes **verse 10** with, “**Be Still!**”

In the midst of our problems and troubles and modern world of constant activity, God says, “**Be still, and know that I am God....**” He is still God. He can still give you peace which is beyond human understanding. He can still make all things work to the good. **Verse 11** says, “**The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge, SELAH.**”

Allow God to be your fortress today, **SELAH!**

*Definition Of A Happy Person*

God’s definition of a happy person: “**Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night (Psalm 1:1-2).**”

God says the result of that kind of happiness is, “**And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper (Psalm 1:3).**”

Let us delight ourselves in the Law of the LORD and plant our lives by the river of life. Then we will see our lives bring forth fruit and our lives will prosper as our roots sink deeper and deeper into the Law of the LORD.

*Making It Count*

The Psalmist says in **Psalm 90:2**, “**Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth, and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.**”

There is a God and according to the Psalmist our days are numbered before we meet Him face to face. In **verse 10** of **Psalm 90** the Psalmist says, “**The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is there strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.**”

In **verse 12** the Psalmist says, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

The point is that there is a God, there will be an end to our physical life, and so we should make each day count. We should make each day count for God. How will you make this day count for God?

### *How Thirsty?*

**“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” - Matthew 5:6.**

In South Africa I have heard that you can sometimes see an amazing sight; deer defying lions in order to drink at the river. Their thirst will not be denied. They must have water or die.

Spiritually as Christians we are either moving forward or moving backwards. There is no status quo for the child of God. In our own lives there will be spiritual starvation unless we have a continual intake of the spiritual, such as: the Word of God; prayer; and, fellowship with other Christians.

The question we should ask ourselves is how thirsty are we? Are we thirsty enough to defy that old lion, the devil, who is going to and fro across this world seeking whom he may devour? Are we thirsty enough to go to church this Sunday? Are we thirsty enough to wake up each day and spend some time reading God’s Word and praying?

Are we thirsty enough to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him?

### *Commit Your Way*

**“Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” - Psalm 37:5.**

Are you covered up with problems, adversities, and tribulations? The Psalmist says, **“Commit....”** A commitment is a decision that we must make to trust our lives, complete with heartaches and problems and everything else, to the Lord. Which means that we give all of that to the Lord and if we give it to Him we don’t take it back. Trust means to trust whether the answer comes immediately, or it takes years, or even if we never see the answer we want. But when we commit ourselves to God and trust like that, then, we will have peace in the midst of the storm.

An old hymn called *“Leave It There”* by Charles A. Tindley puts it like this:

*“If your body suffers pain and your health you can’t regain,  
And your soul is almost sinking in despair,  
Jesus knows the pain you feel,  
He can save and He can heal -  
Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.”*

Why not take your burdens to the Lord even now and leave them there?

### *The Secret Of Success*

What is the secret of success? People have through the ages sought after success. Great numbers of books have been written about how to obtain success. Seminars are given almost every day in the larger cities on how to have success. Large amounts of money have been paid to know how to succeed in life. The world has sought after the answer to the secret of success in all the wrong places.

The Bible has the answer to the secret of success in in **Joshua 1:8**. God’s instructions to Joshua are still His instructions to us today: **“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein:**

**for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”**

The secret of real success is free! Are you reading the Bible daily? Are you studying the Bible, meditating upon the Bible, and memorizing the Bible?

If not, why not begin today?

### *Go Forward!*

Once when I was learning to drive my Dad gave me some driving advice, “*never go backwards, when you can go forward.*” I was having trouble backing the car. He only said it once but it is a profound piece of advice for life, at least for the Christian life.

In **Ephesians 6** we are given a list of the armor of God: **“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”**

Notice this armor is for offense, for a forward attack. There is no back plate or a back shield. When we withdraw from the spiritual battle, when we draw back from God, we are less protected than we are in the thick of the battle. Let us never go backwards when we can go forward with our Lord.

### *Taking The Right Action*

The Bible in **1 Samuel 2:3** tells us, **“...for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.”**

Our lives are filled with actions. Believing upon Jesus as our Savior is an action. Following Jesus in baptism is an action. Praying is an action, and so is reading the Bible, attending church, ministering to others, and witnessing. To choose not to believe, to pray, to read the Bible, etc. is also in each case an action.

Each day we have a choice of actions we can take. The world says take it easy on the God stuff today. The world says you do enough for God on Sunday. But God still weighs our actions each day. What action will you take today for your Lord?

### *Calling On God*

Before Dawson Trotman became the founder of the Navigators he was a truck driver. During that time he and a friend prayed early in the morning over a map of the world for each nation prior to work. They did this for a several week period. Little did Dawson know that God would use his life to touch the lives of people in all the countries for which they were praying.

God says through the prophet Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 33:3**), **“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”** You may be a college student but what great and mighty things would God show you if you were to spend an extended time in prayer? What impact would it have upon your life? Upon the lives of countless others? It changed Dawson Trotman’s life forever.

Why not begin to call upon God today in a deeper way than you ever have before? Allow God to reveal to you great and mighty things that you do not know.

### *What To Do In A Storm*

In **Mark chapter 4 (vs. 35-41)** the Bible tells us of the disciples and Jesus being caught in a storm at sea. The disciples are terrified but Jesus is sound asleep. In their terror the disciples cry out to Jesus, “**Master, carest thou not that we perish?**” Jesus “**...arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.**”

Over the years of living in tornado alley in Oklahoma I remember many times of crying out to God to save me in the midst of storms. One time in particular as a tornado lifted over our roof and resumed its path on the other side. I have watched many newscasts of survivors of tornados testifying of their faith and of their prayers to God in the midst of the terror.

On Saturday evening, June 13, it was with a grim fascination that I watched as tornados again made their way across our state. Through the advance in technology the tornados were watched live. The tornados were filmed through cameras on helicopters, spotter vehicles and live cams now stationed around the state. As the tornados invaded Oklahoma City they skipped seemingly on a random basis from place to place. I watched with fascination as a thin tornado twisted and turned and made a direct hit on a thin sliver of a radio tower. There were only a few minor injuries during this outbreak of twisters.

In the state of Oklahoma there are two 24-hour contemporary Christian radio stations with one in northern Oklahoma and one in the western part of the state (At the time the devotional was written.). There had been three, one in Oklahoma City also, until a week before the storm when a decision was made to drop the station's Christian format. Was it just a coincidence that one week later a tornado happened to make a direct hit on their radio tower? Could it be that they not only dropped their format but their prayers as well?

### *Crossing The Frontier Of Life*

In the mid 1800s wagon trains began to make their way across what is now the United States to that far away land of California. The Stevens wagon train made a safe crossing of the frontier in 1844. They had a great leader in Elisha Stevens. They faced uncharted lands, filled with great dangers. They made a safe crossing because of their excellent leader.

Other wagon trains were not so fortunate such as the Donner group. Because of their poor leadership the crossing ended in disaster with 70 people dying. They were even warned once by, Joseph Walker, one of the most able mountain men in America, that they were on the wrong path.

Life is much like a frontier. It is filled with unknowns. None of us know what tomorrow holds. How much easier it would be if we had a guide, if we had a map. But we do! The Bible tells us in **Proverbs 3:1-2**, “**My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.**” And in **Proverbs 3:5-6**, “**Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.**”

The Bible is our map and the Lord is our guide. But even the best map will not help if it is never opened. Even the best guide in America did not help the Donner group because they would not listen to him. Jesus is the ultimate guide and leader. Are we listening?

### *Be God's Friend*

Have you ever wondered if you were capable of doing some terrible thing? The truth is that every person is capable of doing evil. I know that it is only the restraining power of God that has kept me from doing some terrible thing.

None of us want to bring embarrassment to our friends, family, or community. None of us want to intentionally hurt someone else. But the truth is that life changing and life devastating decisions are often made in the whim of an instant. The decisions of an instant have ruined many a life.

There is, however, one thing that will keep you from doing some terrible thing and at the same time propel you forward to your highest potential in life. That one thing is to be a friend of Jesus. Jesus says in **John 15:15** “...I call you not servants...but I have called you friends.”

I know why I'm not in prison today for doing some terrible thing. It's because I have a friend and that friend's name is Jesus. If we know Jesus as our personal Savior He is our friend. But on the basis that we maintain human friendships could Jesus call you His friend?

### *Learning To Fly*

When I was a boy a neighbor gave me a baby crow. After the crow was about half grown I decided that he needed to learn to fly. I climbed a ladder to the top of our house with my crow (His name was “Rocket.”). Then I dropped him over the side. He fell, then flapped his wings, and landed safely. I repeated the process six or seven times until, finally instead of landing, Rocket flew over to a tree. He now knew how to fly!

An eagle that lives in the mountains does much the same with its young. When the time is right the mother eagle literally tears the nest apart and forces the eaglets to go plummeting toward the earth. Before the eaglet hits the ground the mother eagle will catch the eaglet and bear it up on its wings. The process is repeated until the eaglets can fly. Because the nest has been destroyed the eaglets are forced to begin their own lives.

Have you ever been safe and secure then suddenly your nest has been destroyed? Sometimes God, just like the mother eagle, must nudge us out of our comfort zone. It isn't always pleasant but then we do want to learn how to fly don't we? Actually eagles don't fly they soar on the currents of wind. We want to be able to soar as well on the wind of the Holy Spirit. **“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isaiah 41:31).”**

### *God Is Our Victory*

Have you ever felt as though you have lost your joy for life? Do you feel as though when Jesus was talking about the abundant life He must have meant someone other than you? It happens to most Christians at one time or another it has happened to me in the past. There can be a variety of reasons for it. However, the most common reason is a lack of repentance.

A friend of mine, Bob Schlauger, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Aztec, New Mexico wrote this: *“1 Samuel 4 gives the account of the nation of Israel in battle with the Philistines. In the first battle Israel lost 4000 men and was defeated. They asked God why? They should have known the answer because both Moses and Joshua had told them that when they departed from God, He would depart from them and His power and presence would not be there for them. So instead of going home and repenting they did a religious activity. They brought the Ark of the Covenant into the camp. Now, talk about a positive attitude! They shouted thinking they now had the victory. The Philistines cringed and said we have lost already, but stand and die like men. The next day Israel lost the battle and the Ark was captured. Religious activity and positive thinking had just been mightily defeated.*

*Twenty years later in 1 Samuel 7 Israel finally repented. The Philistines heard that they were at Mt. Carmel and gathered for the kill. The Philistines thought the battle was theirs. The Israelites were sure all was lost. But the difference then was they had returned to God. He was their victory. The next day Israel mightily defeated the Philistines.”*

Repentance, just the word sounds difficult. However, in the turning from the things of this world to God we will find joy, peace, and power to live the abundant life. Through repentance we will find that God is our victory. Why not turn to God today and give Him everything?

### *Why Do Bad Things Happen?*

Why do bad things happen to good people? It would be nice if there were an easy answer to that question. It is a question that I have considered many times in my life, and still I don't know the complete answer.

On September 2, 1978, our second son, Nick was born. As with most parents, even before he was born, we had plans and hopes for his life. Those plans came to an end when the doctor called the night of his birth. The doctor wasn't sure what was wrong but the baby was having difficulty and he had to be taken to Children's Hospital in Oklahoma City. I followed the ambulance that night, praying all the way.

Within a few hours of arrival at Children's Hospital the immediate physical problems were solved and Nick was released from the intensive care unit. He remained in the hospital for most of the week while many tests were performed. A doctor eventually explained that Nick had Down's Syndrome (Trisomy 21 which results in mental retardation.). The diagnosis was confirmed after chromosome testing.

Why did this bad thing happen? I struggled with it and prayed that God would change Nick. I still remember determining that I was going to pray all night if necessary until God healed Nick. On my knees by the crib I began to pray. In less than an hour the answer came. No, God wasn't going to change Nick, but it was going to be okay. God was going to be with us. I haven't questioned God since that night.

Almost twenty years later I can look back and see that Nick has been one of God's greatest blessings in our lives. He has changed our lives for the better and taught us much about the real way of love. Not only has God through Nick touched our lives but the lives of many others as well.

No, things are not perfect in this world, but God is true to His promise in **Romans 8:28** to bring good out of the bad for those who love Him and serve Him.

### *God Can Bring Good Out Of The Bad*

**"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." - Philippians 1:12.**

Paul was in chains in Rome when he wrote those words to the church at Philippi. Think back a moment to the tragic bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City during 1995. It was such a tragic, horrible thing which was meant to destroy, to consume lives and begin the destruction of this nation. After such devastation how could any good come out of it?

But there came a still small voice that said as He wrapped His everlasting arms of love and peace around all those touched by this tragedy. A voice that said: **"...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)."**

Except through the power and grace of God it would be impossible. But looking back we have seen that it has happened. The whole world impacted and exposed to the gospel message. Through the television coverage of the prayer service and of interviews with many who expressed their faith in the Lord. We watched as newsmen and women suddenly came out of the closet with their faith.

A terrible, terrible tragedy and yet those children of God whose lives have been so hurt by this disaster - They can now say with the apostle Paul **"...the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."**

When Jesus was crucified on the cross it was meant for evil but God meant it for our ultimate good. Are you hurting, are you troubled, have you experienced tragedy? Place it all in the hands of the One who can bring good out of the bad.

### *Magnify Christ*

The apostle Paul says in **Philippians 1:20**, **“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.”**

Before the birth of my son Nick, who is mentally handicapped, I really tried to block out of my mind and life those who were handicapped. But with the birth of my son suddenly I could see all of those people I had tried so hard not to see before. I could see not only the handicapped but I could see clearly the hurting, the lost as I had never seen them before.

Most of you at one time or another have looked through a microscope. Looking through a microscope things can be magnified hundreds even thousands of times. Through that magnification process things which we cannot see with the human eye alone are revealed.

To the world for the most part Christ is not known personally. Christ instead is viewed as an historical figure, a good man. The true Christ is as invisible to most people as a tiny microbe which is invisible to the human eye.

Paul's purpose was to magnify Christ in his own body for all to see. To open their eyes to Christ as my son, Nick, has opened my eyes to all those hurting people out there. It is through how we live our lives that Christ moves from being an historical microscopic speck to being recognized by those around us as being the living God and hopefully their personal Savior.

That was Paul's constant purpose, to magnify Christ and it should be ours too.

### *The Exercise Of Faith*

**“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” - Hebrews 11:6.**

The Bible is hard for our human minds to accept. Because when we read the Bible we are suddenly in a world where seas part and people walk across on dry ground. A world where bushes burn but are not burned up. In this world of the Bible, manna drops out of the sky to feed the people, not once but every day. In this world of faith people walk on water, the blind are able to see again, quadriplegics are made to walk and even the dead are brought back to life!!

And yet, somehow we believe, we know that the Bible is true and that God exists. **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).”**

But what is even more amazing is when God's people begin to exercise their faith. I once heard a sermon about faith and the pastor said the exercise of faith is:

*Believing when you don't see it.*

*Obedying when you don't understand it.*

*Giving when you don't have it.*

*Persisting when you don't feel like it.*

*Praising before you receive it.*

*And trusting when you don't get it (what you have prayed for).*

The exercise of that kind of faith is a testimony to a faithless world. Is your faith being exercised?

### *A Daily Choice*

A few years ago I watched a group of women prison inmates being interviewed on a television talk show. Being a former parole officer I was interested in hearing what these women would say about their lives. Nearly every one of them held up her hand when asked if drugs or alcohol was involved in some way in her incarceration. When asked why they were in prison, they all said they had made the wrong choices.

I can think of hundreds of people who were at one time on my caseload while I was a parole officer who made the wrong choice. For many it was the choice of using drugs, drinking alcohol, or gambling and these choices resulted in addictions which destroyed their lives. Some of them, however, have begun to make the right choices and their lives are being rebuilt. The beginning of the right choices came with their commitment to God. They made the right choice of receiving Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior. As they seek to put God first in their lives by following Jesus each day their lives are being transformed.

The Bible says in **Joshua 24:15**, “...choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Choices. Life is made up of choices. To continue making the right choices, each day we must continue to seek God first. A lifetime of right choices is made up of daily choices to follow Jesus through each minute and hour of every day.

### *A Hint From God*

The Bible tells us in **Hebrews 10:25**: “**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together....**” Has God ever given you a hint that you should be attending church? He has me!

The year was 1972, I was working full-time and going to college full-time. We lived in Yukon, OK in a little mobile home and didn't have time for church because we were so busy (or so I thought). After dropping Jeanie off at work in Oklahoma City, I was on my way to class in Edmond. On the way, for some strange reason, I began to think about the possibility of having car trouble (The car had been running fine.). The thought crossed my mind that if I went home to Yukon on Edmond Road, instead of the interstate, it would be better. It would be better, because there was a little church out west of Edmond that I could stop at if I had trouble.

My classes were over, ready to head home. Should I go on the interstate or cut through the country on Edmond Road? I suddenly remembered my earlier thoughts about car trouble and decided to take the Edmond Road. The car was doing great, no sign of any problem, when, the engine began to make a noise. Ahead, about a mile, I could see the little country church. I thought to myself, if it doesn't get any worse, I'll try to make it there and call for help. The car did make it to the church, but it died right in front of the church and wouldn't start.

I have no doubt that God gave me a hint that day that I needed to be in church. At the time I was too far away from God to realize what had happened. But God was just trying to get my attention. How about you has God been giving you hints??

### *Hope*

Paul in Colossians chapter one begins by saying he is thankful for the people who make up the Colossian church. He is thankful for their faith, for their love, and for their hope. In **verse five** he says, “**For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.**”

Hope. It is hard to have hope in a world where we have just had two more senseless bombings resulting in

over two hundred killed and thousands injured. It is difficult to have hope for a world where neighbors for hundreds of years in the Balkans are still killing each other. It is hard to have hope when a child dies, or your husband, or your wife leaves you. It is hard to have hope when you don't have the money to pay the bills, or even to buy the food your family needs to survive.

Hope. And yet the people of God in spite of the most difficult circumstances imaginable have hope. Because some bright shining day we will be living in a place called Heaven. A place where we will be able to talk to our Lord and Savior face to face. A place where we will no longer see through a glass darkly but we will see clearly why all these things happened here. A place where we will no longer face temptations, trials, testings, sorrow and pain. And we will take our walks on streets of gold and we will rest our eyes by gazing out at that unbelievably beautiful crystal sea. And when we've been there 10,000 years times 10,000 years we'll have no less time to praise His Name!!!

### *Don't Be Surprised*

After I was saved, for awhile I believed that because I was a Christian I would escape all the problems. The problem with the "*I'm a child of God and I'm living in a Rose Garden with only blue sky ahead*" is this: If you believe that then you have nowhere to go with your pain and guilt. If you believe the Rose Garden, blue sky lie then: The result is that now, in addition to everything else, you have to be depressed about your being depressed.

Paul said, be ready when temptations come, and Peter preached in **1 Peter 1:6**, "**don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal that befalls you.**" All Christians have something in common, that is: trials and testings. Jesus said, "**In this world you will have tribulations.**" He was just being realistic about the nature of the human condition living in a corrupted world.

With all of the good things that we have been given there is also a down side. Because we have a heart we have the capacity to have a heartache. Because we can experience love, this means we can also experience loneliness. We have been blessed with wonderful bodies which are still beyond the capacities of the human mind to fully understand. Because of this we may experience illnesses and disease. If we are alive, we cannot avoid difficulties of one kind or another. This is inevitable.

James tells us, "**...count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (James 1:2).**"

### *Have You Been Tested?*

**"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried (NIV: tested) me, I shall come forth as gold."  
- Job 23:10.**

In 1989 I received the news along with a hundred or so other parole officers in Oklahoma that we would have to go through the police officer training course again. The reason being that the first time we had not received the week of training for traffic law enforcement. As you can imagine not everyone was happy about being away from their families and homes for two months. While I was at training I bought a poster that said, "*It's a test Lord, right?*" As it turned out training was a test for me in many ways.

Throughout the Bible we see great men and women passing the test. People like Abraham, Noah, Job, Joseph, Esther, Daniel, Mary and Joseph and many more. When God tests someone they experience God, it is an encounter with God. A part of the nature, the character of God is revealed to the person being tested.

When God tests someone their faith is exercised. When God tests someone their faith is developed. When

God tests someone their positive response will be a testimony to an unbelieving world of the existence of God.

*"It's a test Lord, right?"* If it is, as James would say **"count it all joy"** because through the test you can experience God in a deeper way than you ever have before. And when you've been tried you will **"come forth as gold!"**

### Your Opportunity

**"But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." - 1 Corinthians 16:8-9.**

There are great doors of opportunity for Christians to go through to service all over the world. But these opportunities do not come without opposition. Paul had some opposition at Ephesus. He was kicked out of the synagogue so he rented a hall and kept on preaching. On Paul's first mission trip he was stoned and left for dead (Probably was dead.). But those with Paul gathered around him in what must have been a prayer meeting. Then Paul stood up and walked back into the town from which he had just been drug out of and left for dead. When Paul and Silas were placed in stocks they sang praises at midnight and as a result of their witness many were saved. While Paul was in captivity in Rome he wrote many of the words of the New Testament and was a constant witness that reached into the palace itself. He did that while chained to a Roman soldier.

In the hands of God your opposition will become your opportunity!

### *The Backfire*

My grandfather once told me about how he had came with his parents to Oklahoma from Texas to homestead in 1898. When they first came there was only one tree standing for miles around. Soon after arriving a neighbor hurried up to them to warn of an approaching prairie fire. It stretched across the horizon and he told them that their only hope was to start a backfire. The backfire was started and burned up the grass between them and the prairie fire. The backfire saved them from a horrible death.

The Bible says in **Colossians 1:30**, **"And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself by him...."** The cross. The cross is where the wrath of God was poured out. The cross was where the perfect sacrifice was made. It should have been us on the cross suffering for our sins but God has provided at the cross a burned out area of safety. Christ Jesus is our backfire that will protect us from the wrath of God that should have been poured out on us for our sins.

As we walk through this life day by day here on planet earth. Sometimes we lift our eyes to the horizon and it seems as though a prairie fire is sweeping toward us. But we must remember there is safety in the backfire. We will find safety as we abide in our Lord. Jesus says, **"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (John 15:7)."**

### Avoid The Immovable

Some things in life are virtually immovable or unchangeable. To even try to move or change these things will simply create problems and pain for us. Fire plugs are an example. When my oldest son was much younger we had bought a new house and it had a fire plug in the front yard on one side. While my son and I were playing catch I forgot about the fire plug and my shin had a close encounter with an immovable object. My close encounter resulted in an indentation in my shin and an ugly mark which is still there many years later.

Spiritually there are some things that really are immovable and unchangeable. The Ten Commandments are often thought of in a negative way. But they are really for our benefit. To attempt to *"break"* one of the

Commandments is just as futile as my trying to run over a fire plug. The result will be even more damaging to us and we will gain an ugly mark, a wound upon our spiritual selves. The more we sin the more wounds that we will gain. But **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).”**

*A Complete Life*

**“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” - Colossians 2:9-11).**

While in college I studied philosophy, sociology, and psychology. None of those things completed me. None of those things gave me satisfaction. In fact, many times in studying those things I would become more dissatisfied, and found less joy than before.

But with our Lord I have found the opposite to be true. The more I learn of my Lord the more joy and satisfaction I have found. It is because in Jesus we are made complete. Without Jesus it would be like a piece of our lives is always missing and nothing ever quite working like it should. But with Jesus included in every area of our lives, things just have a way of working out. Jesus. Only Jesus can make our lives complete!

*What Are You Excited About?*

**“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” - 1 Corinthians 2:12, 14.**

Before I knew Jesus as my Savior I had only read a few (very few!) bits and pieces of the Bible. But with my salvation came a hunger for God’s Word. The Bible somehow was just different, it was alive! The words were alive and as I read those words they would speak to me in words which were not even recorded on the paper. Not only was the Bible now alive but hearing someone preach was completely different than before. God somehow was able to communicate as He had never done so before.

The Bible, preaching, and even Christians were different than before. After I was saved the pastor (Finley Tinnin) introduced me to some of the church staff and other Christians that were at the church that day. I still remember the first Christian hand that I shook after receiving Christ. I remember it because it almost knocked me down. I couldn’t turn loose of their hand. It was my first experience with spiritual heartburn. In **1 John 3:14** the Bible says, **“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”** My heart was burning with a supernatural love that I had never experienced before.

As a natural man, before salvation, I could never have understood what I have experienced since being **“born again.”** Sadly there are many people in our churches today who are **“natural”** people. They will never be excited on a prolonged basis about attending church, or studying the Bible, or praying, or witnessing, or listening to a sermon. Because they are spiritually dead, they are **“natural”** people. But they can, however, get excited about their job. They can get excited about a football game, or some other kind of sports activity. They can get excited about a vacation or going out and having a *“good time”* drinking or doing drugs, or engaging in some other morally questionable thing.

So I would ask you, *“What are you excited about?”*

### *Guard Your Heart*

In **Proverbs 4:23** we are told, **“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”** The NIV translates it as, **“Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.”** Here in the United States if we have watched television very much at all during the last few months our hearts have taken a beating. There is the constant barrage of unpleasant things being discussed and dissected from every possible angle. Several families that I know with children have simply chosen not to watch TV anymore. At least not while the current issue with the President is being focused upon.

The exposure of our hearts to the sinful seems to build up a tolerance for such things. The more we are exposed to them the more normal the abnormal becomes. Spiritually it costs us in that it reduces our spiritual sensitivities. Which makes it more and more difficult to hear that small, still voice of God. And the further we are from that voice the more likely it is that we will become susceptible to sin.

What can we do to guard our hearts? Limit our exposure to the bad and increase our exposure to the good things of God. We are the “salt of the earth” and as such it is not possible to completely isolate ourselves from the world even though we would like to. Because salt does it’s job by being in contact with what it is preserving. So let us become more salty for there is a lot of preserving to be done!

### *Bring Color To Your World*

**“Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” - Isaiah 50:10.**

I still remember the first time I watched a color television set as a boy. Our neighbors had bought a color television and invited us to come and enjoy an evening with them. Amazing how things seem to come alive when they are in color.

Sometimes as a child of God we move from living in color to living in black and white. In this black and white kind of world everything is drab and dreary, life has lost its excitement, lost its vividness, the realness, and we just sort of go through the motions. That was a problem even in Old Testament times. There is something missing Isaiah says of these people **“...that walketh in darkness.”** There is no longer any light and it is a dim black and white world, you adjust the brightness control and it doesn’t become any brighter.

What’s wrong? Think for a moment.... As a Christian, where does your light come from? The Bible tells us in **John 8:12**, **“Then spake Jesus again unto them saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”** Jesus is the light.

As the Bible says back in Isaiah, you may fear the Lord, meaning you respect Him, you reverence Him and you may be somewhat obedient. You’re not out there killing people left and right. But are you really following Him? Do you have your eyes upon Jesus throughout the day - practicing/realizing His presence in your life. What do you think about all day long? It is the difference between darkness and light and will bring color to a black and white world. Because Jesus says, **“he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”**

### *God’s Protection*

**“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” - Psalm 34:7.**

Have you ever seen an angel? I believe it is possible for us to have seen angels and not known that we were in the company of them. Other times as Balaam found out (**Numbers 22**) angels may be invisible. But

certainly I know without a doubt that I have experienced the benefit of the protection of angels even without seeing them.

Before I was a pastor I took a group of young people to Oklahoma City to the Youth Evangelism Conference in the church van. We prayed together before we began our trip and we prayed together before we returned home and we prayed for God's protection.

While on the way home I was following a pickup pulling a trailer. The pickup was going just a little slower than the speed limit so I decided to speed up and pass it. Just as I speeded up it was as though a heavy weight had suddenly descended onto the top of the van. I felt the van sway to one side and then to the other. I slowed down but everything seemed fine so I again speeded up to pass the pickup. Again it was as though God has placed His hand on top of the van like a child would upon a toy and push down hard. I slowed down again.

This time shortly after I slowed down, just when I would have been beside the pickup passing it, the trailer camped unhooked. The trailer was still attached to the pickup by the safety chain but still it whipped back and forth across both lanes with sparks flying. I pulled the van over to the shoulder and stopped. If "something" had not slowed me two times from passing the pickup I believe we would have had a serious accident resulting in injuries or death.

I don't take God's protection for granted and countless times God has protected me and my family. I still pray for God's protection every day and praise Him for it!

#### *A Prayer Changed My Life*

**"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." - Hebrews 12:5a.**

About a year after I was saved (1971) things were definitely going downhill spiritually. I was working two part time jobs and going to school full-time. Jeanie (my wife) was still working as a secretary. Within the space of a year and a half I had had three car accidents and my insurance costs were spiraling higher and higher. We were not attending church, I wasn't praying and I wasn't reading the Bible. Instead I was becoming you could say more and more tempted by the things of this world.

What happened next is for the most part predictable for those who leave God out of their lives. Our marriage and everything else began to fall apart. I quit one part-time job and I dropped a class. I dropped a couple of more classes and quit my other part-time job. Before I knew it I had dropped all of my classes and wasn't working either. I was just going to get on with life, start a career. There was a problem though with the plan, I couldn't find a job. It wasn't that I wasn't looking, I was but nothing was happening. After about seven weeks of this I hadn't even had a job interview. After seven weeks of this, and all of the weeks before, Jeanie had had enough.

While we were visiting Jeanie's parents one weekend, as it was time to leave to go home Jeanie told me that she was not going. She was leaving me. It was a long drive home. The first thing I did when I got home was to get down on my knees and pray. It was the first time I had prayed in about a year and a half. I asked God to forgive me, to bring Jeanie back and to help me to find a job. Then, I went to bed and went to sleep.

The next morning I woke up to the telephone ringing. The call was about a job interview in downtown Oklahoma City with the Kerr McGee Corporation. I went to see about that job and then came back home. As I was walking in the door the telephone was ringing again, it was about another job interview. I went to the interview and I was working at 12:30 p.m. that day. Eventually, even though the job was full-time they

allowed me to move my hours around and I was able to return to college and complete my degree.

I wrote Jeanie a long letter apologizing for any and everything I had ever done and sent her flowers every day. At the end of the week Jeanie came back home and we have been together ever since. I knew that God had answered my prayer. God had become very, very real and I made a commitment that I was going to pray every day. I've kept that commitment. Sometimes the prayers have been short, and sometimes they have been long but I have been praying every day since then.

### *Are You Buying What The Devil's Selling?*

**“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist stedfast in the faith....” - 1 Peter 5:8-9a.**

Have you ever bought a car that was a lemon? I have and it was not a pleasant experience. The car was for my oldest son and on the outside it was beautiful. I failed however to inspect it closely. It was raining on the day we purchased it and so I didn't crawl underneath of the car. If I had I would have seen that the car had been in a severe accident. Later I found out it had been totaled and sold for salvage or junk. Someone had bought it and rebuilt it enough for it to pass as a desirable vehicle.

The car was at the mechanics too many times to remember. I thought that eventually we could replace and repair what was wrong with it. We had too much money in it to just give up or at least that was what I was thinking. After sinking several thousand dollars more into the car a service manager told me that if it was his car he would get rid. Why? Because it was a lemon and it would never be a good car and it would always have problems. Now he tells me, right!

That old devil is constantly trying to sell us some things too. They all look good on the outside but if we look at them closely we will see that they are lemons. What harm will one snort of cocaine do? Ask the person who drops dead from a heart attack. What harm will a few minutes with a prostitute do? Ask the man who contracted HIV. What harm will a little gambling do? Ask the person who develops an addiction and loses his family.

Before we buy what the devil's selling we ought to crawl underneath and take a good long look.

### *Have You Gotten Over It?*

**“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” - Revelation 3:14-16.**

In our little city we have a state college and several thousand young people have just returned to begin classes. For a few days I was pleasantly surprised to find people waving at me that I didn't know. Because many of the young people come from small communities where everyone knows everyone and you always wave. But their waves are gone now. We have taken away their waves and replaced them with ....?

When we first become Christians we are so excited and everything seems different. There is such enthusiasm in the new child of God. But it doesn't seem to take long before that smile is gone. It doesn't take long before they sometimes sleep in on Sunday mornings. It doesn't take long before they try to hide their faith and try to be like everyone else. Sad isn't it? But for many it is the sad, sad, truth.

The minister of education at a church I once attended was introduced in this way: *“Our minister of education was a business executive saved later in life. He was on fire for God and became the Sunday School Director. He was still on fire for God and everyone thought he would get over it but he is still on fire for God.”*

I hope and pray that you haven't "gotten over it!"

### *Prayer Changes Things*

**"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." - Jeremiah 29:11.**

The Amplified Bible has it this way, **"For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, thoughts and plans for welfare and peace, and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome (Jeremiah 29:11)."**

So many times I have found myself hurrying through life without including God. God is concerned about everything in our lives even the seemingly insignificant details. God also has a plan even for those little details.

Several years ago when we were moving to another city we had difficulty finding a house to rent. We had a certain amount of money that we could pay toward rent and we also knew the kind of house that we wanted. Jeanie and her mother had already made a trip looking for a house and had not found anything. We were down to the last weekend before we needed to move. This time I went with Jeanie and again it looked as if there would be nothing. But we found an ad for a house that hadn't been there the weekend before.

When we drove up to this house the landlord was there showing the house to other prospective renters. But he didn't rent it to them. We definitely wanted to rent the house and it was at the price that we could afford. The landlord agreed to rent us the house and said that he would take twenty-five dollars off the rent because we were Christians. We had not told him that we were Christians but the frame that held our car tag said: *"Prayer Changes Things."* Prayer had definitely changed things for the better that day!

Maybe we ought to ask God what the plan is for today?

### *The Proper Dress*

Have you ever been to an event or even to church and found that you were overdressed or underdressed? Meaning you wore a coat and tie (or a dress) and everyone was wearing jeans and shorts. It is even more uncomfortable to arrive in jeans or shorts and discover everyone is wearing formal attire!

As a child of God we want to be properly dressed as well. We want to be dressed for success and the apostle Paul tells us some things to wear and some things not to wear in his letter to the Colossians.

Paul says, **"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5)."** Paul also says, **"But ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds (Colossians 3:8-9)."**

To be a well dressed Christian, Paul says we need to get rid of those old spiritual clothes. But he doesn't stop there Paul says there are some new clothes we need to put on. **"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity (love), which is the bond of perfectness (Colossians 3:12-14)."**

It may be time for us to do a little house cleaning and throw out those old stinking clothes. Jesus has bought

us some new ones and they are already paid for! **“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).”**

#### *Share The Love*

The apostle Paul says in **Colossians 3:14**, **“And above all these things put on charity (love), which is the bond of perfectness.”** Now charity/love that Paul is talking about is Christian love which is defined in the **1 Corinthians 13**. We know that we are to love but who is it that we are to love? Who do you love?

Jesus tells us in **John 13:35**, **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”** So we know that a distinctive mark of a true disciple of Christ will be that we will love other Christians. But who else should we love? I believe that you can look at **John 3:16** and see who God loved. **“For God so loved the WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son....”** Every person living upon this planet Earth is someone for whom Christ died.

As we demonstrate our concern for the non-Christians by serving them, ministering to them, caring about them, and loving them we become Christ's hands and feet to demonstrate His great love.

Do you love everyone? If we really get right with God we will. We will even love our enemies. Because we want to follow our Lord's example and our Lord died for us while we were still sinners, still the enemies of God.

Who is it that we can share the love of Christ with today?

#### *What Are You Afraid Of?*

**“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” - Romans 8:35-37.**

An article in the newspaper caught my eye several years ago. The article asked the question, *“Are American's becoming scaredy cats?”* The article also asked if Americans had forgotten how to face a well-calculated risk and if the West were still to be won, could we round up enough brave souls to win it? The article discussed a book by Harold W. Lewis entitled, *“Technological Risk. What are the real dangers, if any, of toxic chemicals, the greenhouse effect, microwave radiation, nuclear power, air travel, automobile travel, carcinogens of all kinds, and other threats to our peace of mind.”*

After I read the article I asked myself if that was the problem with the church today. Have Christians become scaredy cats? Do the multitude of dangers that surround Christians choke off their willingness to risk anything for Christ? Have Christians forgotten Jesus says, **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me?”**

If missionaries were to be called today to be the first to go to the innermost regions of Africa, or India, or Burma, or China, who would go? Could God find a Livingstone today? Could He find a William Carey, or a Judson, or J. Hudson Taylor? Are there any Christians, today, willing to risk all that they are and have for the sake of their Lord and Savior? Are there any Christians today, standing in the gap risking all?

Livingstone once wrote to England asking for more missionaries to come to Africa. Some months later the reply came that they had found some men willing to come. They wanted Livingstone to tell them the best roads to take to where he was. Livingstone wrote back that he needed men who would go where there were no roads. God is still looking for men, women, boys, and girls like that today.

### *Risky Behavior*

**“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one: to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.” - Matthew 25:14:18. (Read also: Matthew 25:19-46)**

Every day people risk their lives and their careers for the thrill of the moment. People risk their lives doing drugs, buying drugs, selling drugs, committing burglaries and robberies to have the money to get drugs. It is amazing what people have done and will do for a thrill. I have seen people bungee jump off a bridge over the Colorado River. A few months ago a sixty something year old woman told me she was going sky diving. Other people enter the stock market when they don’t really have the money. Others play the state lotteries even though they have a three and a half time greater chance of being struck by lightning than of winning.

Most of us, however, are not into risky behavior. We are more into safe behavior. There is a new admonition being said now by store clerks as you leave. It used to be “...*have a good day.*” Now I am beginning to hear, “...*be safe today.*” Most of us are into the avoidance of risks and are committed to playing it safe. Because of that the words of Jesus in this parable are a challenge. Jesus isn’t just talking about what we should do with our physical talents. Jesus is giving us a challenge, the challenge of our lives. To follow Jesus, truly follow Him is to risk everything. It is to risk everything we are, to risk everything we have or ever will be for Him. How often are we to do that, once? Twice? How often do we take that kind of risk? Our entire life is to be lived in that way, risking everything for our Lord.

The kind of life our Lord Jesus would have us to live is a life of action. A life lived as our Lord would want is a life of taking chances, a life of adventure, a life of growth, and expansion for the cause of Christ.

How long since you have risked anything for your Lord? How long since you have told someone about what Jesus did for you on the cross? Read through the rest of **Matthew 25** and ask yourself, “*How long?*” How long since you have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, gave a stranger a place to stay, clothed those in need? How long since you visited the sick and those in prison?

### One Way

**“Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” - Matthew 7:20-23.**

Imagine the shock, you have a dream vacation planned to the city of Sydney, Australia with all of its attractions but when you get off the plane you are on the wrong continent. Instead of Australia you’re in Canada! Emma Dunn and Raoul Sebastian purchased their tickets in London over the Internet and did not realize anything was wrong until they landed in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In Halifax they were asked to transfer to a small propeller driven plane for the last leg of the trip to Sydney. Sydney, Nova Scotia! Nova Scotia’s Sydney is known as the “*steel city*” with a population of 26,083. Emma and Raoul are now trying to make the best of their unexpected visit to the wrong continent and the wrong Sydney. Andrea Batten, an employee of Air Canada in Nova Scotia said, “*They decided they might as well stay for a few days, having come all this way. It’s going to be a trip to remember.*”

Spiritually there are many who are on their way to an unexpected destination. When they arrive it will be the ultimate in surprise and disappointment. Instead of Heaven it will be that other place. There are many who honestly believe they are serving God and that they will one day be in Heaven but Jesus says they will not

be. How could this happen?

Earthly destinations for the most part have many different ways in which you can travel to them. Many believe that Heaven is like that but it is not. Jesus makes this clear in **John 14:6** saying, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”** It is only through Jesus that we may travel to Heaven. There is no other way provided by God. Jesus is the bridge between sinful man (**Romans 3:23**) and God who is perfectly holy, perfectly righteous (**Isaiah 6:3**). Jesus who was tempted at all points without sin became the perfect sacrifice. So as by one man, Adam, sin entered into the world by one man, Jesus, a way is provided for reconciliation with God. **“Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life (Romans 5:18 - Read all of Romans chapter 5 for context also 6:23 and 10:9 -13).** There is only one way to Heaven and that one way was provided at great cost through the sacrifice of God’s Son on the cross. To reject that one way and try to travel to Heaven by any other route will only result in our condemning ourselves (**John 3:17-21**).

Good works without Jesus is not the way to Heaven (**Ephesians 2:8-10**). Depending on church membership or baptism is not the way to Heaven because they are something that man does and is an attempt at using a different form of good work to gain access to Heaven (Note - Of course we should follow the Lord Jesus in Baptism once we know Him as Savior. However, baptism without knowing Jesus as our Savior or church membership without knowing Jesus as our Savior will not save us). Jesus says very clearly what is necessary to arrive safely at the Heavenly destination, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that who ever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).** Have you believed? The Bible says in **John 1:12**, **“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”** Have you received Him (Jesus) by believing on His name? In **Revelation 3:20** we are told, **“Behold, I (Jesus) stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”** Have you opened the door of your heart to Jesus? The apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 10:13**, **“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”** Have you called upon the name of the Lord Jesus?

There is only one way to Heaven but that way is well marked and very clear. To receive Christ as your Savior pray the prayer below which is based on the related Scriptures above:

*“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](mailto:wrather@dobsonteleco.com) or [edwrather@theburningbush.org](mailto:edwrather@theburningbush.org) and I will send you additional helpful information (Or, write to me at P. O. Box 210, Sweetwater, OK 73666).

**NEVER GIVE UP!!**

I pray you have been blessed, encouraged and provoked unto love and good works through these devotionals. Most of all I pray that you will never, ever give up!

*The Never Give Up! < Table of Contents > Devotional Collection*

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