

2004 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 6, 2004

A WORTHY GOAL

Many people have set, and already broken, many goals for this New Year. Let me encourage you to set, and keep, the worthy goal of reading the entire Bible this year.

A prisoner, condemned to solitary confinement, obtained a copy of the Bible and by three years of careful study, obtained the following facts. The Bible contains 3,886,489 letters; 773,692 words; 31,173 verses; 1,189 chapters, and 66 books. The word "and" occurs 46,277 times. The word "word" occurs 1,855 times. The middle verse is the 8th verse of the 118th Psalm. The 21st verse of the 7th chapter of Ezra contains all the letters of the alphabet except the letter J. The 19th chapter of II Kings and the 37th chapter of Isaiah are alike. The longest verse is the 9th of the 8th chapter of Esther. The shortest verse is the 35th verse of the 11th chapter of St. John. The 8th, 15th, 21st, and 31st verses of the 107th Psalm are alike. Each verse of the 136th Psalm ends alike.

The Bible continues to be the best-selling book in all the world. It is interesting to read and wonderful to contemplate. YOU can read the entire Bible this year with a very little effort. At a normal reading rate, did you know that: It takes 70 hours and 40 minutes to read the entire Bible? It takes 52 hours and 20 minutes to read the Old Testament? It takes 18 hours and 20 minutes to read the New Testament? The Psalms take longest to read: (4 hours and 28 minutes.)? The Gospel of Luke takes 2 hours and 43 minutes?

In less than 12 minutes a day you can read the Bible through in a year. No more excuses. Make this the year that you read the only book that will still be read a million years from now- The Bible.

January 7, 2004

THE WAY TO ESCAPE

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Cor 10:13)

The major problem Christians face is overcoming temptations. The main reason many lost people use for not becoming Christians is because they "could not hold out" (They don't think they could withstand the temptations they would have to face). Temptations are a problem!

The truths in our Scripture verse will help you.

- 1) Temptations are Common to man. You are not alone in your fight. Everyone has a battle with something.
- 2) Temptations are limited. God will not suffer you to be tempted above your abilities to cope with the temptation.
- 3) Temptations have a WAY out. God always provides an escape hatch so you can get away before you are defeated.

The Way out of temptation is always available but you must Look for the way out (Some people are more interested in giving in than in getting out!). Then you must Leave by the way provided. God opens the door but you must walk through it.

You can't escape being tempted but you can triumph over temptations and live a victorious life. Trust in God's care and look for God's way out. It will always be there!

January 13, 2004 A SMALL GOD

In my early Christian life I read a book entitled "Your God is too Small". I don't remember what was in the book but I've never forgotten the title. Today I believe there are multitudes of people who need to examine afresh their belief in the Power and Ability of God. I believe their God is trapped in the smallness of their mind and it would shock them into fear, amazement, and wonder if He would do something truly miraculous.

The Faith preached by most people today is more about denouncing what God does not want them to do than it is about demonstrating that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us! I am not talking about turning God into a circus act where we "wow" our friends and family with our feats of daring. Nor do I mean that God is some "magic" power we can use at our whim to turn us into "gods" and God into simply a powerful servant. I am saying we need a living Faith in the God of the Bible who can open the Red Sea to preserve His people, who can feed 5000 people with a little lad's lunch, and who turn the defeat of death into the victory of resurrection.

Is your life filled with wonder at what God is doing for others instead of overflowing with Glory for what He is doing for you? Is your Christianity a standard of conduct that limits your life instead of a strengthening force that opens the way for you to live an abundant life? God is not dead; He is not even sick! Stop limiting Him by keeping Him in the small little mold of your mind. Let Him be God and learn what it means to have joy unspeakable and full of Glory!

January 14, 2004 LOT'S LOSS

I recently read of a couple who won over \$100 million dollars in a lottery drawing. My heart aches for them. Statistics tell us that within 5 years their marriage will be in trouble and within 10 years they will be worst off financially than they were before they became "winners". Sometimes the things you think you would really like to have are the things that will do you the most harm.

A good example of this is the story of Lot. Prosperity caused him to leave the godly influence of his uncle Abraham and move into the city of Sodom. In spite of the fact that his family loved the new situation and he was elected to a prominent place on the city council his discovered his soul suffered every day as he saw the decadence and moral decay of the city.

One day God send messengers to tell Lot to leave the city because God's wrath was going to destroy it. On that day Lot began to realize how much he had lost by becoming a "winner". His son-in-laws laughed as he urged them to escape, his wife's heart remained in the city even as she fled and soon she looked back and turned to a pillar of salt, and his daughters had been so ingrained with the morals of Sodom until they believed incest was the right course of action- to Lot's perpetual shame.

Sometimes being a "winner" is actually being a loser. No wonder Jesus demanded cross bearing instead of bank accounts from his followers.

January 20, 2004 WHAT ABOUT JOHN?

It has always been the temptation of the human heart to look at the duties of others rather than as one's own duties. In one of His last meetings with His disciples Jesus "pinned Peter to the wall" with His threefold repeated question about Peter's love and His description of Peter's soon coming suffering. Instead of humbly accepting the proclamation of the Lord, Peter looked around and asked in essence, "What about John? If I am going to have to undergo all this then what will John have to do?"

When the Lord gives us a command there are several things we need to have settled in our heart. Is it best to obey what He commands? Is it safe to obey what He commands? Is it possible to obey what He commands? Is it our duty to obey what He commands? Peter had not crossed this bridge yet. Instead of reporting for duty when he received his command Peter wanted to make sure everyone else had to do what he was expected to do.

Many times we are tempted to ask the same question Peter asked. "Lord, you expect me to suffer for you. Will others have to suffer as much as I do?" "Lord, you commanded me to feed the sheep. Will John have to work as hard as I do?" "Lord, you told me I would be bound and lose my freedom. Will John be free to do as he pleases while I endure captivity?" "What about John, Lord, what do you plan for him?"

The answer Jesus gave Peter is the same one we need today. In simple words, Jesus said, "I have a plan for John but it is none of your concern. Do what I have told you to do and let me worry about John." That was God's advice to Peter and it is good advice for you and I.

January 21, 2004 DESCRIBING GOD

Trying to describe God is like trying to describe the wind. You know it is there because you can feel its gentle caress and see its effects on things around you but you can't "put it in a box" and show it to someone.

That was the problem facing Moses when he stood before Pharaoh. Moses had been adopted by the Pharaoh's family but he turned on the very people who had so graciously taken him in and even went so far as to committed murder. Now he tells Pharaoh he must let the Israelites go and give up a major source of cheap labor for his country. His only authority for asking this is because "the Lord" had told him to make the demand. Naturally, Pharaoh asks the question, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?"

Preachers proclaim each week that men are to turn from the pleasures of sin and take up the cross of self-denial and their only authority is that "the Lord" commands it. Like Pharaoh, you may ask, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him?"

If you judge God by failed TV "prophets" and by unchristian Christians then you will continue as you are. But if you can see His impact, like the wind, on those who truly know and love Him then you will bow before Him and ask Him to bring the changes in your life you so desperately crave. And you will no longer wonder who God is; you will wonder how you ever lived without Him in our heart!

January 27, 2004 LIGHTING YOUR LIGHT

Jesus said we were to be the “Light of the World”. The Bible also declares we are part of the Body of Christ in which we perform a common task by accepting our assignment as different parts of the body. I think that means we also light up the world by being different kinds of light. Which leads us to this question. What kind of light are you?

Are you a reading lamp light helping to illuminate the word of God by shining upon those who are studying the Bible? Are you a chandelier light who may look simply decorative but you join with many other smaller lights to brighten up a house of worship so the service of God can go forward? Are you a classroom light who shines when there is a need for instruction? Are you a fellowship building light that brings people together in order for them to develop a sense of community as they share a common meal? Where is your light shining to reveal God to a world stumbling in the darkness?

Maybe your light is not burning very brightly right now. Did someone accidentally bumped against the dimmer and now your feelings are hurt and your light is very dim. Maybe your light is in place but it has been allowed to get very dirty and now cast more shadows than it illuminates those in need. Maybe, just maybe, your light has burned out. You burned brightly for a long time but weariness, wickedness, or bitterness put too much pressure on your insides and now your light is dark. You still occupy the place of power and you could shine brightly again if some changes were made but for now you occupy space, allow others to do the work, and desperately wait for someone to notice that you are no longer shining.

Jesus said you were to be the “Light of the World”. Is your light lighting?

January 28, 2004 MARCY’S MAINTENANCE

Her name was Marcy. Every day she would come by the lobby area where I was enjoying the coffee provided by the hotel and reading my Bible chapters. I was in town for a financial seminar and my days were filled with brain numbing facts and figures so I needed this spiritual refreshment before the day began.

Marcy always spoke to me when she passed and her pleasant personality brightened up the morning. As she wandered around I noticed that she stopped at lamps and looked at all the lights high in the ceiling. One day my curiosity got the better of me and I asked her what her job for the hotel involved.

Her job, at this very large hotel, was to make sure that all the lights worked. What a neat job. Chandeliers, overhead lights, lobby lamps, and hall lights were all part of her territory as she went around each day checking that none of them were burned out or inoperative.

We need some “Marcys” in our Churches. Not someone who would go about trying to tell everyone what they should be doing but someone who would always be on the lookout for ways to keep the various lights of the Church shining as brightly as possible. Someone who would care about the little lights as well as the bright lights. Someone who would ensure that the lonely lamp was ready to shine when called upon. Could that possible be you??

February 3, 2004 WASTED WARRIORS

De 2:14 And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them.

What a horrible statement, "until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host,". Warriors lives were wasted wandering in the wilderness and dying in the desert instead of winning great battles and claiming victories for the Lord. Not what God intended and not what should have happened.

The story is simple and familiar. The children of Israel came to the door of the promised land but the obstacles appeared to be more than the opportunities so their faith faltered and they refused to go into battle. God's judgment was decisive. The nation of Israel would wander in the wilderness until everyone over 20 years old died. Warriors now became wanderers and death now brought shame instead of glory.

Sadly, this same story is played out in some churches. Men who are able to manage booming businesses cower at the giant of teaching junior boys. Men who handle life's problems with hardly a shrug turn away from the responsibility of responsibility in the activities of a Church. They could make a difference for now and for eternity but they become "wasted warriors" wandering through life, just showing up at church, waiting to die. What a sad commentary on a man's life in the annals of eternity.

February 4, 2004 FILL IN THE BLANK

He bought the calculator for a major math test he had to take as part of his work. It had many "whistles and bells" that you would never use under normal circumstances but would come in handy during this test. Once the test was completed he went back to using it as a simple calculator to help him with his work as treasurer of First Free Will Baptist Church of Greenwood.

One day as he entered figures into the calculator he noticed that the fourth number from the right was blank. He tried everything he could think of and still that space was blank. Finally, in frustration, he stopped using the calculator. From time to time he would find it in his drawer and try again. Always the fourth number from the right was blank.

A special series of sermons at church taught him that instead of fighting the circumstances that confronted him he should learn to turn them over to the Lord. That night when he came in to do the church finances he accidentally grabbed this calculator again. Instead of being frustrated that the fourth number from the right was blank he simply told God that he was giving the calculator to Him and put it back in the drawer.

Next week he again picked up that calculator. This time when he punched in the numbers ALL of them worked! When he told me the story and showed me the string of numbers across the calculator I just had to say, "Glory". What a great God we serve.

February 10, 2004 PIZZA PRINCIPLE

A new pizza place opened in town about a year ago. It offered a pizza buffet so my wife and I decided to try it out. The pizzas contained a lot of bread but the ingredients were not very tasty. Several months later when we again wanted pizza we decided to go back to this place to give them a second chance. Same song but the last verse for us.

One night recently my wife said she wanted pizza again. Right across from the pizza place with the buffet was another pizza place that we thought would be more expensive. Surprise, they had a pizza meal for two that included a salad and drinks and cost about the same as the buffet place. And the pizza, "Momma mia" it was good. The crust was light and delicate, the cheese was abundant, and there was enough meat to taste in every bite.

This is not a pizza commercial!! Just wanted to point out something about relationships. We live in a society today that pushes young people to believe that "buffet relationships" with many partners should be their ultimate goal. In the process they find they have partaken but they aren't satisfied. There is a craving deep inside them that remains unfulfilled.

Thirty four years ago I married the lovely Princess Paula. We haven't been involved in the buffet business, we have been joyfully satisfied with the meal for two. We have found that getting to really know one another has brought a joy and satisfaction to our relationship that is beyond anything a buffet could ever offer.

God's plan for marriage in the Bible is not only the right plan; it is also the best plan. Use it to build your relationship and you will find the meal for two is really the best value after all.

February 11, 2004 TELEO

Has the Bible become obsolete? Now that we see all of the vast number of religions in the world does that mean Christianity is just another religion among many? The Greek word "Teleo" in the Bible will help us to see clearly.

The word "Teleo" means to end, to complete, to conclude, to accomplish, or to finally finish. It is used like this by Jesus when He cried from the cross, "It is finished". Jesus wanted the world to know that God's plan of salvation was concluded, accomplished, and finally finished!! Nothing else could, or needed to be, added to it in order for it to be complete.

Society today would have you believe that there are many ways to God and that salvation is a work in progress. Jesus declared from the cross that He was the only way to God and that Salvation's plan was finished by His payment of our sin debt on the cross. Nothing needs to be added to it and nothing remains to be done by God for it to be completely effective. It is "Teleo".

Interestingly, there is another place "Teleo" is used in the Bible. After the birth of Jesus the Bible tells how Mary and Joseph "performed" all of the things God intended concerning raising Jesus correctly. Performed here is the word "Teleo". It simply means they did what God expected of them.

God's plan of Salvation is "Teleo"- finished completely and awaiting you to "perform" your part by faith and obedience.

February 17, 2004 MOTIVE DOES MATTER

The day is beginning to fade into the dusk of night as you walk down the street. Suddenly, a man jumps out from behind a building banishing a knife and demands all your money. Afraid and confused, you hesitate and the thief becomes more and more excited. Suddenly, he lunges at you and you feel the sharp pain of the knife as it plunges into your body. Slowly, the dusky light fades into darkness as you slip into unconsciousness.

Finally, a sound penetrates the pain and darkness as you struggle to understand where you are and what is happening to you. An unfamiliar face leans over and declares that he is a doctor and that he must preform surgery on you in order to prevent you from bleeding to death.

Two men, both are strangers and both plunge a knife into you. One to take your life; the other to save your life. The difference is the motive that drives the person yielding the knife.

The Bible declares that “the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7). As mere humans, we develop a perception of people based on their outward appearance. Then we attribute certain characteristics and motives to that person based on our perception and prejudices. Only God, however, is able to look beyond the exterior and see the true motivating force of that person’s heart.

That same faulty judgement is often seen in our perception of God. Many people tend to perceive of God as being legalistic and narrow minded because of the necessary guidelines and organizational details He has given mankind. The truth about God’s motives, however, is revealed in His word- “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.” (Jer 29:11)

Don’t fear and fret. The only reason God plunges His “Knife” into you is to save you from the vicious attack by Sin or Satan. Rest in God’s love; He is a great surgeon.

February 18, 2004 BELOVED OF THE LORD

Two men in the Bible are called “Beloved of the Lord” - Daniel and John- and to both of these men God confided His future plans! What would cause God to give a person such a name and then share special secrets with him? Let’s look at Daniel and see two characteristics that may have caught God’s eye.

1) Daniel was a person of unwavering Godliness all his life- From his refusal to eat the king’s meat as a youth until his visit to the Lion’s den rather than stop praying in his later years his character shines out. Where did this Character come from? Daniel’s early years were spent in the palaces of good king Josiah under the influence of the prophet Jeremiah. The teachings and actions of these Godly mentors was used of God to build a strength of character that could withstand the assault of the evil Babylonian culture. This is why it is important for you today to belong to a Bible teaching Church and attend regularly!

2) Daniel had a servant’s heart that gave him kingly positions- Like cream, he always rose to the top in spite of his position as a captive and even when the government would change. Someone has said that the meaning of life is to discover your God given gift and the purpose of life is to use that gift to help others. That is exactly what Daniel tried to do.

“Beloved of the Lord”. What a title! Does your character and conduct allow God to say that of you?

February 24, 2004 JESUS LOVES ME

Anna Bartlett Warner began writing books because her father lost much of his fortune in the 1837 depression and the family needed extra money in order to survive. Miss Warner wrote "Jesus Loves Me" for inclusion in her sister's 1860 novel "Say and Seal". In the book it was a poem spoken by a Mr. Linden to comfort Johnny Fax, a dying child.

"Jesus Loves Me" is one of the first hymns missionaries teach to new converts because of its simple direct message. In the Church Hymnal the subtitle for the song is "The favorite Hymn of China" but it could easily be considered by many to be the favorite hymn of the world. Who can resist the joy of the thought that "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so; Little ones to Him belong, They are weak but He is strong"?

I think the real joy of "Jesus Loves Me" is that it is not just a catchy song; it is a wonderful truth. Jesus loves me when my diaper is dirty (although He loves me too much to leave me in a dirty diaper!) just as much as He does when I am snuggling deep in His arms making wonderful cooing sounds. Jesus loves me just as much when the only bill in my wallet is a phone bill as He does when I put my tithes into the offering plate. Jesus loves me, what a wonderful truth! Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. And knowing He loves me puts joy in my life and removes the fear from death from my heart.

February 25, 2004 EYES TO SEE

Miss Emily Cavanaugh broke her engagement to Billy Graham in 1938 because she wanted to marry a man who was going to amount to something and she didn't think he was going to make it!! Hindsight is twenty/twenty but present sight is sometimes blurry.

If you stand with your eyes only an inch from a painting you have never seen before the blur of colors makes it almost impossible to tell what the painting is all about. Back up three feet from the painting, however, and you will probably instantly recognize what the artist was trying to show. Sometimes being too close to something blurs our vision and hides the real picture.

Standing watch one day aboard ship while everyone else on the ship was engaged in a Fourth of July celebration allowed me to see a school of porpoise suddenly surface in splendor and beauty. When I excitedly called out to those in the celebration they all turned to look but it was too late. Looking inward at the party had caused them to miss the porpoise appearing.

Jesus told about men who had eyes but would not see. Caught up in their self-centered world they have abandoned God, forgot about the big picture, and have eyes only for the present party without any thought of the soon appearing Jesus. How horrible it will be when they finally open their eyes and see only outer darkness instead of marvelous mansions and streets of gold.

March 2, 2004 BENEFITS

Three times in scripture God tells us about His “Benefits”. The Hebrew word means “an act of good”. This is a wonderful description of the Benefits we receive from the Lord because they are always for our good! Ranging from the air we breathe to the daily bread we consume, the benefits of God constantly remind us of His love and care.

1) The Bounty of His Benefits- Ps 68:19 “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.” The word “Selah” on the end of a Psalm is a musical term meaning “stop”. It is used by the Psalmist to tell readers to pause and think carefully about what he has just said. Think about it! God daily “Loads” us with benefits. He doesn’t just send down a few “mercy drops” from Heaven, He provides buckets full of “acts of good” for us.

2) The Praise of His Benefits- Ps 103:2 “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:”. Do you go through life complaining about circumstances while never praising God for the “acts of good” He is doing for you? If I found a good restaurant and began telling everyone I met how good the food was it would not be long before some of them would want to go to that restaurant! Remember that if people are not coming to your church or if you never lead anyone to Christ.

3) The Obligation of His Benefits- Ps 116:12 “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?” God has been good to me; shouldn’t I do good for Him? What can you do today that will help God and others see how much you appreciate all the “acts of good” God has done for you? He daily loads us with benefits; find a way to share some of them.

March 3, 2004 HAVE A GOOD DAY

Ever felt like kicking someone in the leg when they tell you to “Have a good day.”? Ever felt like shouting, “If you had to face what I have to face today you wouldn’t be so cheerful.” when someone smiled and told you to “Have a good day”? Maybe you need to learn the 4 rules for having a good day.

1) Begin the Day with a smile. I know you want to kick me for saying that but remember “This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Ps 118:24). Rejoice in the fact that God has given you another day even if you can’t rejoice in the circumstances that day may bring.

2) Expect a daily blessing. Jesus taught us to pray for the Father to “Give us this day our daily bread”. This simply means we are to look each day for God to provide what we need for that day. Sometimes looking at bitterness instead of expecting blessings makes us overlook the bread when it is provided.

3) Find someone to help every day- (Heb 3:13) “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” It is amazing what a difference it makes when you reach out to others instead of crawling into a shell of personal pain and self pity.

4) Live each day for God- Lu 9:23 “he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Put God first and it will be a GOOD day.

March 9, 2004 PERFECT PEACE

Isa 26:3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

Perfect Peace, the claim of some, the dream of all. The Hebrew word for "Perfect Peace" is actually "Peace Peace". It is such a wonderful condition until the writer finds no other adjective to describe it except the very word itself!

What could bring about such confidence and comfort? It is not possessing possessions because the very possession of possessions brings about anxiety concerning the safety and use of those possessions. It is not the artificial peace of ignorance nor the foolish peace of ignoring the realities of life. And it is certainly not a drug or drink induced haze that insulates our mind from the fact that the drug or drink we take to find that peace is in reality destroying our mind and body .

"Perfect Peace" comes when a person's mind settles down into a state of complete confidence in the actions and attitude of God. Peace is not based on the absence of disturbance but on the presence of the Divine God!

Use the letters of Peace to show how such a peace is produced. "P" is for the Promises of God that we cling to in all of life's circumstances. "E" means God is Everywhere so there is nowhere we go that God is not there with us! "A" reminds us that God's love and care is not for a select few but for All. "C" reveals the Care of God and reminds us that He numbers the hairs of our head and knows when even a sparrow falls to the ground. "E" stands for Eternal and helps us realize that God can be counted on now and forever.

Perfect Peace, the dream of all; the reality of those who continually rest in God's love and care.

March 10, 2004 PEACE OF GOD

Knowing God's Forgiveness brings peace to our heart. Showing God's Love brings peace to our community. So you would think God's Peace would be a major topic in Scripture.

Surprisingly, the "peace of God" is only used twice in the Bible. Both times are letters from Paul and both times are exhortations to manifest Christian Character.

Php 4:7 "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." First, we are told that the "Peace of God" will guard our hearts and minds in all of Life's Circumstances if we will simply seek God's face and ask for God's favor. What a neat thought. We bring our needs to God and He stations His Peace to guard our gates as we await His answer to our prayers.

Col 3:15 "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Secondly, we find that letting the "Peace of God" control our heart causes us to see other Christians as brothers instead of adversaries. This sounds like a "no brainer" but church conflicts, fractured families, and power problems show that it has not been applied very well in many local congregations.

It is not enough to have Peace with God to assure us of Heaven someday. We must also allow the Peace of God to guard our hearts and change our lives today!

March 16, 2004 SECOND HAND BLESSINGS

This is my "Birthday Week". My pretty princess Paula celebrates her normal birthday this week and I celebrate my 42nd Spiritual Birthday this week. I won't tell you when Paula was born but I was born again on Monday, March 19th, 1962. Accepting Christ as my Savior and Lord on that night has been the most wonderful peace producing event in all of my life. It changed the course of my life on this earth and my destination after death. It also changed my family, my friends, and my purpose in life. Words are not adequate to describe the joy that abides in my heart continually because of a simple sinners prayer at an old fashion altar on that Monday night.

When Moses was headed to the promised land he made an interesting statement to his father in law, "if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the LORD shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee." (Nu 10:32). I call this "second hand blessings". It is found again in the life of Joseph when the Bible declares "the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" (Gen 39:5). People who don't know God receive "second hand blessings" because they are around people who do know God!

Society is becoming more and more anti-Christian in America. The media, the movies, and the modernist all want to put Christians in a box where they will not bother anyone with their righteous preaching anymore. Think for a moment. If all of the Christians in America were removed today (We call that the Rapture!) and, along with them, all the "second hand blessings" cease to come; what a horrible condition will exist in America!

I appreciate the blessings that are mine because others have lived Godly lives. I hope you will realize that also.

March 17, 2004 SLIPPERY DARK PATH

During the great Ice Storm of 2004 I came home from work and, like many of you, I found a cold dark house. It didn't take me very long to realize that being without electricity is ungood, very ungood! Some people might like roughing it with no water and no heat but I am not one of them.

I have a small propane cylinder in my store house that has a heater attached. We keep it handy for just such occasions as this. The ground was icy and slick but I managed to made it to the store house safely.

When I stepped up onto the store house step I had my mind set on finding the lock on the store house door and getting the key inserted in the dark so I didn't see the ice that had accumulated on the step. As soon as I put my foot down it promptly went out from under me and I found myself flat on my back on the icy ground. Now I really don't like the dark icy conditions!

Jeremiah, the prophet, warned people who had turned from following God that God would put them on a path that was like a slippery path in the dark (Jer. 23:12). Let the voice of experience tell you that a slippery step in the dark is not a pleasant prospect. It makes life uncomfortable in the living and its end is embarrassing and painful.

March 23, 2004 OTHER SHEEP

Someone once said that the Lord may ask you two questions when you arrive in Heaven- "Did you come alone?" and then the most heart wrenching of all, "Why?". Maybe this is what Jesus had in mind when He inserted this verse into His famous "Sheep Sermon" in John's Gospel- John 10:16 "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

Sometimes as I pray for Pastor Bolen and picture all the people he deals with each day who are suffering under the grinding poverty and the bondage of Satan in India my heart weeps for his needs and I plead with God for enabling power so he can reach the millions and millions who are clinging to a false hope; or to no hope at all. Other sheep who need to be in the fold.

I think of Jean Carlo Ache who pastors a growing church in Brazil but whose heart for "other sheep" leads him to reach out to the thousands in the Amazon jungles who have never heard the Gospel. He could be content with his flock and his family but the bleating of "other sheep" rings in his ears and drives him out of his comfort zone.

These Pastors, and many more in Spain, Japan, and around the world, are reaching "other sheep" because missionaries brought the gospel to them. These missionaries could have settled close to home and family and they would have been "great workers" in their local church but the bleating of "other sheep" broke their heart and directed their path to the regions beyond.

When you get to Heaven can I ask you two questions, "Did you come alone?" "Why?".

March 24, 2004 SHEEP SIGNS

John 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

Many people claim the promise that "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" found in David's famous Psalm. If the Lord is your shepherd, however, then you must be one of His sheep. How can you be sure you are part of the right flock? Jesus gives three "sheep signs" in this verse from His famous sheep sermon in the tenth chapter of John's gospel.

1) Sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd. They listen to His word (the Bible) and they recognize that society's standards, like shifting sand, are ever changing; but the voice of God found in Scriptures is timeless and trustworthy.

2) Sheep have a relationship with the Shepherd. The Shepherd "knows" them. The Shepherd is not a hireling who serves for money and runs away at the first sign of problems. The sheep and the Shepherd have a heart relationship because the sheep have put their faith in the Shepherd's care and provision.

3) Sheep follow the Shepherd. The grass may look greener over the septic tank but the sheep are content with the green pastures and still waters provided by the Shepherd. The character and conduct of the sheep conforms to the voice of the Shepherd.

Are you a sheep following the Shepherd or are you a wolf in sheep's clothing that will one day be exposed and destroyed?

March 30, 2004 JOY BEYOND

Beyond description. What they did to Jesus before and while on the cross was beyond description. The physical punishment was such until Isaiah the prophet declared him to be beyond human recognition as he was beaten, battered, and bruised. And in His time of greatest pain and suffering, when a kind word would have meant more than any amount of gold He was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3)

How did He do it? How did He keep from lashing out when pain and rejection are all He saw? A single word would have called a legion of angels to His rescue and ushered in the destruction of all those who taunted and tormented Him. How could He say, “Father, Forgive them” instead of “Angels, destroy them”?

The answer is found in Hebrews where we are told to “Look 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.” (Hebrews 12:2). The Joy of a finished work that would make salvation available to all men and the anticipation of His future blessings beyond the cross overcame the present pain and terrible torture.

When your body is racked with pain. When you are forsaken by friends and family. When the present is so bad until it is almost unendurable; do you have a relationship with God that will allow you to patiently endure instead of spitefully retaliate because you look to the joy beyond? Jesus had an inner strength born of a joyful anticipation. What do you have?

March 31, 2004 FRUITLESS FAILURE

The final few days before the crucifixion are passing quickly. Jesus knows He has much to teach and do. Triumphantly, He enters into Jerusalem where He is proclaimed as a mighty prophet; but not the Son of God. He enters into His Father’s house where He once again casts out those who have turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves.

Next He spends much time healing the blind and lame. Evidently it was so late, or He was so tired, until He received little, if any, food for His evening meal so He left for the next day’s activities hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road He stopped to get a few figs and relieve His hunger.

Imagine His disappointment when He found nothing but leaves! In an unusual, but symbolic, gesture He cursed the fig tree and it withered away.

Jesus continually taught about the need of fruit in the life of a person and in the standards of a nation. He was well aware that Fruitlessness resulted from a lack of love and faith- not a lack of ability. He expected only what He should have expected from a tree that showed the leaves of fruit. On this faithful day He demonstrated how serious He was about finding fruit.

Are you a “leaf Christian” who makes a show for the world to see or do you produce the fruit God expects? Take heed, fruitlessness can be a very serious failure.

April 6, 2004 THE RESURRECTION

Do you know the most miserable man on earth?? According to First Corinthians 15:19 it is the Man who does not believe in the Resurrection of Christ. Add to this the fact that Paul declares that if Christ was not resurrected then the Preaching and the Faith of Christianity are worthless and you can begin to understand that Easter goes way beyond bunnies and bird eggs.

It was faith in the Resurrection that changed "ignorant, unlearned" fishermen into world changing Missionary Preachers. It is faith in the Resurrection that delivers men from the hopelessness and helplessness of Death. And it is "believing in your heart that God has raised Christ from the dead" that changes hell bound sinners into Heaven bound saints.(Rom 10:9).

The Resurrection shows that God does not simply forgive what I have done in the past. It provides proof positive that God gives me the supernatural ability to begin and live a new life. The cross demonstrates God's Love and provides the payment for my sin debt. The Resurrection demonstrates God's power and shows His ability to conquer the "last enemy", Death, so that I can live the abundant life in victory and hope.

This Easter season look beyond the new clothes and the "Easter eggs" to the Dying Savior and the Resurrected Christ. This will allow God to change you into a born again child of God who faces life with confidence and the future with joyous expectation.

April 7, 2004 THE NEED OF THE CROSS

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

We live in a day when morals are meaningless as every man does that which is right in his own sight. Morality is based on the limits people will accept instead of the standards God commands. And when nothing is a sin then there is no need for repentance because everyone is accepted just as they are by a god of "love" who is more interested in making people happy than in calling them to be holy.

This modern way of thinking does away with the need of a Savior since people "find their own way to God according to their personal beliefs and abilities". Jesus becomes someone to admire for His teachings instead of someone to worship for His sacrifice.

One small huge thing has been forgotten. God is the Judge and He says we are sinners and Jesus is the only Savior. He has declared the Gospel is about Jesus dying, being resurrected and returning one day. Something you might want to keep in mind.

April 13, 2004 CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Pastor Chuck Thornton of Peace Free Will Baptist Church, Spartanburg, SC recently preached a dynamic message using the catch phrase of a mobile phone ad, "Can you hear me now?". His emphasis was on always being able to hear the voice of God when He speaks to you. A powerful thought and a worthy consideration.

In his message, he talked about how Christians sometimes go to places they should not go and, as a consequence; the voice of God does not get through as it should. God is speaking as clearly and distinctly as ever but we fail to receive God's "signal" and end up missing God's Call. This can result in something as simple as a missed blessing or as dramatic as a life changing error.

God uses many ways to speak to us. Sometimes it is something as sublime as the exhibition of His wonders when "The Heavens declaring His glory" (Psalm 19:1). Sometimes it is startling as the thunder of a gospel preacher. At other times it is the gentle, or not so gentle, nudge of life's circumstances. And, of course, there is always the clear and life changing voice of God that comes from the reading and study of His word. None of these impact us as they should, however, when we have wandered away from God and now live in a "dead zone" areas where the "Signal" from God is weak and intermittent.

God is calling out to you today. He is inviting you to abundant life and rest from your heavy burdens. His call is clear and strong. If you aren't hearing His voice then you need to find out why. God is calling. "Can you hear Him now?"

April 14, 2004 FITLY FRAMED

I work for a carpenter but I am not one! In almost every church that I have had the privilege to pastor we have had a building program. Although I am not an expert I have found that the foundation and the framework are vital parts of a building. If either of these are less than solid then the building will be in danger from its beginning.

Paul had this in mind when he told the Ephesian Church that the work of God is built on a solid foundation (Christ) where the people of God must be "fitly framed" together (Eph 2:19-22). "Fitly framed" means that the framework of God's building is a planned structure where the partnership of placement brings the power of unity. In non-preacher talk that simply means that the framework is put together according to a master plan so that as the pieces are put together they gain strength from their being united together.

Each Christian has a distinct part to play in the building of God's Kingdom. The parts may be different but they should all join together so that the work of God is "fitly framed" into the building God wants erected.

Do you fit into God's framework properly so that the world can see the greatness of God's glory? Or do you sit on the sideline among the weeds and trash wasting away your life?

April 20, 2004 SPECTATOR MEMBERS

In one of the most encouraging examples of self-sacrifice I have witnessed lately, one of our Pastors is working a full time job in order for the Church to use his normal pay to support a long time previous Pastor who is now ill. Christianity at work in the real world.

The plant where this Pastor works manufactures ice cream and bottles milk and orange juice. Recently he took me for a tour and I was impressed. Stainless steel pipes and conveyor belts were everywhere as computer controls directed the countless operations taking place at the same time.

We watched as hundreds of half gallon containers were filled with 3 flavors of ice cream at the same time. Then we saw thousands of jugs being manufactured from little pellets before being filled with all kinds of milk and juice. Then everything was either quick frozen or packaged for shipment so that it could quickly be sent to grocery stores, schools, and the many other places who need these products on a regular basis. I could have stood and watched all day.

After we left the plant I kidded this Pastor that I had been in the presence of more milk and ice cream than I had ever seen before and yet had not tasted any of it! I think of that sometimes in Church when I witness spectator church members. They see all the good things that God is doing in the services; and they may even be impressed with the way things are working, but they never “taste and see that the Lord is good”. (Ps 34:8). What a shame. What a loss.

April 21, 2004 SIN DETECTORS

While touring an ice cream factory recently one machine stood out as something I would not have thought about in ice cream production. It was a metal detector. Why would ice cream need a metal detector?

The production manager explained that from the time the milk arrived at the plant until it was placed in the ice cream box that it stayed in metal containers or was transported by metal pipes. The metal detector was to ensure that the ice cream was completely free of metal contamination when it left the plant.

Christians live in a sin cursed world. From the time we arrive until we leave for our Heavenly Home we are in constant contact with contamination. Jesus was aware of this potential danger when He said we should be in the world but not of the world.

It is easy for worldly ideas and society's moral standards to contaminate our character and our beliefs if we are not careful. That is why God puts “sin detectors” along our path to sound a warning when things get into our life that do not belong there. These “sin detectors” range from the gentle nudge of a fellow believer to the piercing sword of the Spirit as the word of God is proclaimed from the pulpit.

God wants a pure product at the end of life's process. So heed the warning when the “sin detector” sounds. It is warning you about dangerous contaminating influences in your life.

April 27, 2004 CAREFUL FEET

They were so young until the lack of harmony was cute instead of distracting. Sunday School was just over and the little ones were singing their specials for the assembled congregation and moms and dads were sitting there with obvious pride in the good thing happening in the life of their children. Like most songs for the very young, these involved a lot of motions and activities.

The problem came about because the kids were so small and everyone wanted to see them so they all stood a step up from the floor on the altar step. The step was small and the children were very active in their version of "Be Careful". You know the song I'm talking about, everyone has sung it in church at one time or another- Be careful little eyes what you see, be careful little hands what you do, be careful little mouth what you say, and so forth. The problem came in the "be careful little feet where you go" verse. The Children were supposed to emphasis their feet by marching in place as they sang. A difficult thing to do for little ones, especially when they are perched precariously on a narrow step.

Sure enough, about the middle of the verse, one of the children got a little too energetic and was not careful where he placed his feet as he sang about being careful little feet! The fall was short, no damage was done, and the little boy almost immediately jumped back up on the step to continue the song.

I don't remember the sermon that day but I remember the little boys fall. The Holy Spirit used it to stir my soul again about the need of practicing what you preach; and to warn me afresh that a fall can happen even if you are on the altar singing about being careful not to fall!

April 28, 2004 SECOND HAND MOPED

The only good thing she had found from her parent's divorce so far was that her dad always brought a present to bribe her when he came. This time it was a moped bike and it made her the envy of the other kids. Soon, however, reality set in when she found it was a second hand moped her father had picked up at a deal. In order to make a moped work you are supposed to pedal for a short distance so the engine will start. Then you can go sweeping through the air at an amazing 5 miles per hour with the moped doing all the work.

Pedaling a second hand moped, however, only brought more pedaling as time after time the engine failed to spark and start.

Far too many people go thru life trying to get a "second hand moped" to work. They pedal with all their might trying to find a spark that will get their life really going. Most of the time they end up simply having to pedal harder!

Jesus said He was going away so that the Holy Spirit would come and live within us. If you are tired of pedaling through life trying to find a spark from a program, a person, or the profit you can gain then you need to stop playing with "second hand mopeds" and starting yielding to the power of the Holy Spirit. This will allow God to work in your life so that you will be able to "run and not grow weary; to walk and not faint" (Isa 40:31). And that sure is better than pedaling a second hand moped that will never start!

May 4, 2004 MOTHER'S MORALS

Men have a problem with nudity. Sometimes it is a problem for women also but most often it is a male dilemma. God created men so that they are aroused by visual stimulation. When men see girls with plunging necklines and raised hem lines immediately they begin to draw certain conclusions. These conclusions are not always correct but it is hard for the man to "ignore the advertisement". (Women are normally aroused by sound instead of sight. That is why they want men to talk to them and that is why a man on a date instinctively knows that whispering "sweet nothings" in the ear of his girlfriend is the best approach.)

Paul told young preacher Timothy, that women were to "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety;" (1Ti 2:9) because he knew the potential problems that immodest clothing could produce; even in the church, and even among righteous men. Modesty was not based on a woman's taste in clothing but on exposing herself in such a way that she would be "shamefaced".

Sadly, today, many women seem to be ashamed of nothing so it is difficult to get them to be really modest. That is where Mothers come in. Godly Mothers are to teach their daughters the value of, and the requirements for, modest dress. It is one of the most valuable lessons a Mother can teach because it helps determine the present behavior and the future stability of a daughter.

Mothers who push their daughters to view themselves as an object of display usually find headaches for themselves and heartaches for their daughter. Instead of pushing them to dress to expose themselves, why don't you point them to the personal joy they will feel when they dress themselves modestly and enjoy the respect of real men.

May 5, 2004 SILENT SINNING

It all began with my morning devotions. Several verses stood out in my Bible reading and I could not seem to get a good grasp on their meaning. I asked the Lord for wisdom but no "bolt of lightening" flashed in my mind.

Here are the verses: If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works? (Proverbs 24:11-12). In the "Jones devised version" they say, "If you see someone headed for trouble and you ignore the chance to do something about it then the Lord will take that into consideration when He deals with you."

The day's devotion was followed by a wonderful conference meeting where the Spirit of the Lord was manifested in an unusual way. During the spontaneous testimonies that erupted during the worship service a Pastor stood and said he needed to confess a sin. His silence on a question asked him during the business session had given the impression that something was true about someone that was not really true; thus putting that preacher in danger of being in wrong standing with the conference.

A perfect example of my devotional verses about silent sinning; given by the Lord in a very unusual way.

May 11, 2004 TWELVE YEARS

The fifth chapter of Mark's Gospel is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. It is about a "Mad Man, a Sick Woman, and a Dead Child". It shows the ability of Christ to conquer Demons, Disease, and Death. I also like the fact that help is given to a man, a woman, and a child; no one who needs help is left out!

There is enough action and adventure in this chapter to satisfy anyone's cravings as you see the transforming power of Christ shown in all its glorious beauty. Within this chapter Jesus changes a demon possessed "graveyard stalker" into a flaming evangelist, a desperate but timid woman into a testifying example to others, and a funeral service into a joyous family reunion.

In the midst of these great stories about the tremendous power of Christ is an interesting little fact. Twelve years before this time the woman with the issue of blood was just beginning her extended period of misery. I can almost see her as she noticed a little something wrong but assumed it would get better. Little did she know that twelve long years of doctors, debt, disease, and distress stretched out ahead of her.

On the other hand, twelve years before this time Jarius' joy was just beginning as the daughter who was the light of his life was just being born. For twelve wonderful years he watched as she grew into a lovely young girl and every day his love for her grew.

Twelve years of misery and heartache for one person. Twelve years of joy and love for the other person. Yet, both would come to crisis at the same time; and both would come to Christ for help at the same time! I don't know which "twelve years" you are in right now. I just know you are going to realize one day how much you have needs that only Christ can meet. My prayer is that it will not be too late to call on Him when you finally realize He is your only help.

May 12, 2004 DEALING WITH DEBT

Ro 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Pr 22:7 ¶ The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

In spite of the fact that America is a prosperous country with great opportunities, many people still find themselves "slaves" to debt. They worry and work and weep but still their pay check ends a long time before the month ends! In the next few weeks I want to share several methods that will help you deal with the debt that is sapping your strength and stealing your time away from your service for God.

Make no mistake about it, if you are a child of God then God will supply your needs and enable you to enjoy the life He has given you. He can feed 5000 men with a little boy's lunch. He can provide for a widow with a "bottomless floor pot". And He has provided the needs of this writer over and over and over.

It is not God's ability that is in question; God is able to supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. The problem is in the way you receive and use the resources God gives you. If I send you a letter containing a check for a thousand dollars and you never open the letter you can never buy food with that money. And if you use the money to paper your wall instead of buy food you will still go hungry!

(Continued)

May 18, 2004 FAULTY FORMULA

Recently a large number of babies dies in China from starvation. They were being fed but it was discovered later that the formula they were being fed had been manufactured by shysters who had cut cost by producing formula with no nutrients. The babies were eating but they were receiving no nourishment!

Today, in America, many people have gone on a spiritual “no carb” diet that has eliminated the “Bread of Life” from their menu. Slowly but surely they are starving to death even though they think they are eating sufficient food. Pabulum preaching and empty husk teaching fill their hour of church service but do little to fill the ache in their heart for a close personal walk with the Lord.

I love a good emotional service where the Spirit of the Lord moves in a marvelous way but I realize there is more to Christianity than a shout and a song. For some people today, however, that is the only type of Church service they will “eat” and, while it gives them a rush during the service, it does little to nourish them and develop them into strong soldiers of the cross. They talk about how good their services are and then wonder why church marriages are in problems and church attending children are going the way of the world.

I have an opinion and I love to express it but I realize my opinion does little to change people; the word of God is God’s method for accomplishing that task. Sunday School teacher and preachers who get up every Sunday and tell me the world is going to hell in a hand basket but never delve into God’s word for answers and corrections only tell me I’m hungry while providing little food to help my starving soul.

Don’t try to live on husk and hollers. Get into God’s word and let God’s word get into you. It will make a life changing difference.

May 19, 2004 DEALING WITH DEBT (II)

Pr 21:20 There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.

Last week we learned that God can supply the needs of His children. Now let’s begin looking at wise ways we can use the resources God has given us.

The First way to deal with your debt problem is to SPEND LESS! I know you wanted some “magic formula” that would allow you to spend like there is no tomorrow without the painful reality that sets in when tomorrow finally comes but if your outgo exceeds your inflow then soon you will be in a big woe!

Spending less does not mean you turn into a miser and live a life of financial misery. The best diet is one in which you cut out one “Snickers” a day so you gradually get into a pattern of eating what you need instead of packing on extra pounds. If you try to lose 25 pounds in a month you will probably end up losing a few pounds and then gain more back as you finally give in to your cravings. It works the same way with spurge spending. You cut back for a week and then buy something more expensive than all you have saved to reward yourself for saving some!

If you can just remember that you will have to answer to God for the way you use the resources He has given you then it will change your spending habits. And spending less will give you more! (Continued)

May 25, 2004 DAMNABLE HERESIES

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. (2 Peter 2:1-2).

When the apostle Peter talked about false teachers bringing in “damnable heresies” he was referring to teaching that would destroy the faith in the believer’s heart and the testimony of the believer in the community. These are two of the most vital areas in a Christian’s life so Satan does his best to destroy or neutralize them. The method he uses is the same method he has used from the beginning, lying about God and His word. Satan lied to Eve about God’s Character (God is trying to keep something good from you) and about God’s Word (God has said you will die if you eat of this fruit but you will not surely die).

One of the great truths Satan has learned about lying is that if you lie about something often enough people will begin to believe it is true! That is why advertising is such a big industry in America and that is why TV is such a valuable tool to Satan.

If you tell people often enough on TV that all “normal” people commit adultery with as many people as possible then people begin to believe that sleeping around is “normal” in spite of the fact that God has declared that “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” (Hebrews 13:4). Satan’s lie become society’s truth and society’s truth becomes a damnable heresy!

(Next Week- “Three Lies People believe to be true”.)

May 26, 2004 DEALING WITH DEBT (III)

He which received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said,...: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. (Matt 25:24-27)

Trusting God to supply your needs and learning to spend less are the first two rules about finances. In our scripture, the Lord points out another principle called using your Money WISELY.

For many years I did not realize that money has a power beyond it’s worth as payment. Now every working bank account in my personal life and in the ministry I oversee pays interest and does not charge a service fee. The payments are the same but I don’t deduct anything for service fees and I add something every month in interest income. More money for the same money.

Every Credit card that we use pays us cash back or gives us airline miles or points toward free hotel stays. We pay the same money but it earns extras for us- I’m flying to our national meeting this year for free and I have already stayed several nights in motels for free. More money for the same money.

God gives us grace- unearned favor- to cover our sin. Use that same principle to get “grace” money for the money you spend!

June 1, 2004 THREE LIES

Last week we learned that “an often repeated error will eventually be accepted as true” and that this is one of Satan’s main tactics (After all, he is the father of all lies! (John 8:44). The problem with an oft repeated error becoming the “truth” is that it is still an error and it still has destructive consequences (For instance, suicide bombers believing the lie that they are doing good by killing themselves and others). Here are three lies that have been repeated by Satan so often until people accept them as truth; even though they produce terrible consequences.

Lie one: Everyone has a right to their own beliefs and you should not try to convince anyone to believe like you believe. This is one of the most oft repeated lies in America today. According to this lie you can live a morally corrupt life but anyone who points out the value of a pure life is “judgmental” and infringing on that person’s right to believe what they want to believe. It’s right to believe in the wrong but wrong to believe in the right!!

Lie two: God wants me to be happy and even though the Bible declares it to be wrong it must be right for me because I want to do it! This lie is used to justify every kind of sin while ignoring God’s warnings and His word.

Lie three: A loving God would not send anyone to Hell. The truth is that God’s love and mercy provided a way out of Hell but His righteous nature demands that those who spurn His offer of forgiveness accept the consequences. It is not God’s will that any perish but it is not God’s way to allow rebellion to flourish in His kingdom.

What you believe determines what do- and believing a lie makes you do wrong; and end up wrong!

June 2, 2004 DEALING WITH DEBT (IV)

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. (Malachi 3:8-10)

So far we have said you deal with debt by learning to trust God for provision, spending less, and using your money wisely. In this final installment I want to stress the important principle of multiplying your money by involving God in the process.

I will gladly work for you if you will pay me a penny the first day and then double my pay each day for a month- You end up paying me \$10,737,418.24 a day on the 31st day!! God said if you would tithe your income then He would pour out a blessing so big you would not have room to receive it. Personal and pastoral experience has proven this to be true. Tithing doesn’t subtract your income, it let’s God multiply it!

Another way to multiply your money is to invest part of your treasure into an annuity that will give you and your spouse income for life and then fund a ministry of God after your death. God blesses you as you bless God’s work!

June 8, 2004 SUFFERING FOR HIS SAKE

Philippians 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake

As the world slips deeper and deeper into the mire of moral depravity and humanistic standards it will increase its persecution of Godly people and Christian values. The world does not mind if Christians practice their Christianity secluded in the confines of a local church but notice how they react when we stand against their sinful life styles in public. Instead of being respected and admired we are suddenly vilified and scorned as fanatics and hate mongers.

One of three things will happen as the battle intensifies and comfortable Christians are called upon to make a stand instead of simply fill a seat- Some will run from the fight and leave the work of God. Many today "follow Christ" for the respect they gain and the riches they hope to earn. Being a church member gives social acceptance today but when Christianity is no longer the "in thing" to do then they will abandon the church as quickly as they give up the ever changing fads of the world.

Some will refuse to fight and "hide their heads in the sand". Tradition and long held customs will replace Biblical preaching and teaching. These people will be content to "go to church" and go through the motions as they try to ignore the collapse of society all around them. They will be so busy making sure all the seats are in place until they disregard the fact that the ship is sinking!

Some, however, will rise up and become Heros of the faith. They will see the opposition as opportunity and make a difference for Christ in these last days. They will suffer for His sake and make a difference for eternity. What will you do?

June 9, 2004 FAITHFUL FOLLOWING

What will keep you going when Christianity is no longer popular? When the going gets tough and Christianity turns from a game you play into a war you fight will you remain faithful to God or will you wilt in the heat of battle? Here are three things to remember when the going gets tough.

1) Remember what is Before You- Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Jesus could endure the pain, rejection, and persecution that was before Him because He focused on the joy that awaited Him.

2) Remember who is With You- And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit is your friend and guide and He will be with you all the way.

3) Remember what is In You- 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). No problem or pain can separate you from Christ who lives within you providing strength and ability in every circumstance of life- Glory!

June 15, 2004 BELONGING TO YOUR BELIEFS

You are what you are because you do what you do. You do what you do because you believe what you believe. You believe what you believe because you heard what you heard (“Faith comes by hearing”- Rom 10:17). You heard what you heard because you listened to what you wanted to listen to-- (Jer 7:13) “The LORD spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not;”

Whether we want to admit it or not we are products of our beliefs. Some cultures believe that cats make great pets while others believe that cats make great stew! Some people believe that someone somewhere owes them a living so they spend all their time and energy seeking to get someone else to provide for them. Other people believe that “If a man will not work neither should he eat” (2 Thess 3:10) and so they spend their days working so they can have the resources they need to enjoy life.

The doctrines you believe will determine the duties you perform. That means it is extremely important that you establish your beliefs on the rock of a relationship with Christ instead of on the shifting sand of man made opinions. And the only way that will happen is if you determine that Church attendance and Bible Study should be a consistent part of your week.

What you listen to will determine what you hear. What you hear will determine what you believe. What you believe will determine what you do and what you do will determine what you are. Do you want to be fashioned by some unseen writer of a TV series or talk show or do you want to develop eternal life values that will stand the storms of this life and carry you into a wonderful eternity with God? Every week you make that choice; and every week you belong more and more to the beliefs you are forming by the choices you make.

June 16, 2004 SPAM STOPPER

It began as a trickle. Soon it became a flood. First there were several spam messages a day in my email mail box. In time over 500 email messages a day found their way into my mail box. Over 99% of these messages were “junk” mail that I neither requested nor desired. Day after day I simply deleted them until one day I realized it was taking 20 minutes a day to dispose of unwanted emails. My time for the Lord is too valuable to waste in this way.

I looked at several “spam filters” but the cost and the complication made them appear unattractive. Something had to be done, however, so I began to study the problem. For weeks I deleted spam and tried to find a common “thread” among the river of junk mail that flooded my mail box so I could develop a filter. Frustration and anger was the only result.

One day while praying about it the Lord simply whispered the word, “Positive” and the lightbulb went off. Instead of filtering out all the bad mail I simply needed to filter out the good mail and let the bad mail go into a trash folder where it could be deleted quickly and easily. Email is fun again.

Some Dads live lives of frustration because they spend all their time trying to filter bad things out of their children’s lives. If they could only realize that pointing out the positive will show the negative for the trash it really is. And it is a lot more fun enjoying the positive rather than being overwhelmed by the negative.

June 22, 2004 3 GODS

She had it all but found she had nothing. Good looks? She could count herself in that elite group of people who are beautiful by birth. Fame? Her name was on the lips of many of the young people in one of the most populous countries in the world. Wealth? In a land of abject poverty she could spend and spend and not worry about tomorrow.

In spite of all her success she still felt the need of a god so she chose 3 of them- one to give her wealth, one to point her to someone to love, and one to provide physical protection. Now she had flown all the way across India in order to meet the spokesman for one of her gods.

The first day, when she knocked on the door of the “prophet”, she expected that her name and her fame would cause the spokesman to see her immediately. She was stunned when she was told to come back another day; her “god” did not want to communicate with her that day. The next day she again came to the door and again she was turned away. She had 3 gods but she could not talk to any of them!

I arrived in Bombay the third day of her visit and read about her attempts to contact her god. The paper said that she was going back again that day to try one more time to talk with her god. As I read the article I thought to myself, “How sad for this girl. She has everything you could want but still can not contact her god; yet I have very little and I can talk with God any time day or night because He lives within my heart!”.

June 23, 2004 CANDLE CHRISTIANITY

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. (Luke 8:16)

You do not have to attend Church very long before you hear a preacher tell about how Christians are to let their light shine for the Lord. That is because this parable by Jesus was so obvious and so applicable. Here are some characteristics of Christians as candles that you may want to keep in mind as you let your light shine.

1) The Standards of a Candle- It is set up on a candlestick so that it's light can be effective. In the same way, a Christian is to live above the mud and mire so that their light can be seen by all those seeking the Lord.

2) The Sacrifice of a Candle- A candle must be willing to be “set on fire” if it is to do its job. A candle without a light is just a pretty decoration accomplishing nothing. Candle must realize also that they do not set themselves on fire by self effort or by striving to do better. A power from outside must set them on fire so they will produce light.

3) The Shining of a Candle- Candles are not to hide under the bed of laziness nor to cover themselves with so much work until they forget people. Their job is to shine; and to keep on shining!

June 29, 2004 PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION

(Free Will Baptist Missionary to India, Rev. Carlisle Hanna, is from the Lake City area and has faithfully served the Lord for over 50 years in Sonapur, India. In the next few weeks we will look at some of the “adventures” he has had and, hopefully, draw some inspiration from these “Carlisle Chronicles”. In India, Brother Carlisle is affectionately and respectfully called “Uncle” so that is the name I will use for him in the articles).

Don was only five years old but he felt he was old enough to go with daddy on his visiting that day. Uncle knew the day’s trip would be difficult and dangerous so he had to tell Don he could not go. He left Don crying at the gate; and tried not to shed his own tears, as he walked away.

Like most young children with tears, Don went running to mother so she could make everything better. Mother also had a busy schedule that day so she told Don to go feed his pet rabbit, thinking that would divert his mind and occupy his time. In a short time, however, he came back and told his mother his rabbit was dead. Now Mrs. Marie had to add a broken hearted boy and a rabbit burial service to her busy day.

Uncle arrived home just at nightfall and his wife told him about the day’s events. Early next morning he went to the rabbit cage and noticed that the chicken in the next pen was also dead. As soon as he saw the condition of the chicken he knew what had happened but it was when he pulled a tarp off of the feed barrel beside the rabbit pen and the cobra raised up with his flared head that his suspicions were confirmed.

Uncle was busy doing God’s work so God had been busy protecting his child while he was away. That is the kind of God you can tell other people to trust and that is a God you can trust yourself.

June 30, 2004 STUDENT LIGHTS

In 1966 Missionary Carlisle Hanna was ministering in the darkness of India; in more ways than one. Not only was he standing against the darkness of sin but the little house he had finally been able to build did not have access to electricity and the nights were dark and hot.

The Student Foreign Mission Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville, Tennessee decided to sponsor a project that year to purchase a generator for India. What a glad day when the generator finally arrived at the mission house. Now they could have several lights and a fan for a few hours each night.

Eventually, electricity became available at the mission house but it was so spasmodic until the generator continued to be kept in service. When I visited Missionary Hanna in 2004 he told me he had recently begun a Bible Training Center for young preachers and evangelist and he was going to donate the generator to the Student’s Dorm so they could have light at night.

What a Blessing. A generator from students in America helped light the way for missions in India for 38 years and now will help other students as they study to carry the Gospel to even more unreached regions. That is what I call a gift that keeps on giving. And that is why it is important to realize that no project is a small project when it is given to the work of a great God.

July 6, 2004 PRAYER POWER

(This is another “adventure” in the series about Free Will Baptist Missionary to India, Rev. Carlisle Hanna. In India, Brother Carlisle is affectionately and respectfully called “Uncle” so that is the name I will use for him in the articles).

Uncle had traveled many miles in the steaming heat that day to pick up a guest speaker. When he arrived back home at dusk he found his six year old son waiting at the gate. The first words from his son’s lips were, “Daddy, I don’t feel well”. Soon the visiting guest was forgotten as this son and the younger son battled dysentery and fever. Trip after trip to the bathroom sapped strength from the children (and from the mother and father!).

Their isolated location, the overflowing river, and the lack of transportation made a trip to the doctor an impossible option. Around three AM it became obvious that the children probably would not survive the night. Uncle and his wife, Marie, knelt by the bed in prayer knowing they had done all they could do. They reminded God that they were in this isolated condition because they had followed God’s plan for their life and they once again put themselves and their children into the loving hands of their heavenly Father.

The forgotten special speaker had not been idle during this time. Seeing the gravity of the situation, he had slipped out of the house after midnight and begun knocking on doors in the village trying to contact any Christians that had been won to faith in Christ by Uncle’s preaching. Soon a small band of believers were huddled under the thatched roof structure that was being used for a Church calling out to God on behalf of these sick children.

I thought about this story recently when I talked to that oldest boy, now a doctor, and asked about his younger brother, now a university professor. Is there power in prayer? Ask these distinguished gentlemen.

July 7, 2004 ENERGY UNCTION

One of the greatest dangers Christian workers face is becoming people with Energy but no Unction. For those of you who do not know, Unction is a Bible word for anointing or empowerment. It is a supernatural force that transforms human efforts into divine accomplishments.

The problem with Unction is that it requires divine assistance. Sometimes people can fake Unction by exerting great effort or by using “slight of hand” to fool the unknowing but it will not be long before spiritually perceptive people will see that the person is all performance without any real power.

Doing God work in the energy of the flesh will eventually deplete your strength and accomplish little of lasting value- “To try to do the work of God without the power of God is like trying to empty the ocean with a pitchfork. You will work yourself to death and accomplish nothing!”

We can work Energy up while Unction must be prayed down. The danger we face is that a mediocre person living a lukewarm life can produce flashy works of Energy and that is all many people want. God honoring deeds, however, demand Unction and that requires a pure personal relationship with God.

You can struggle to do good in your own energy or you can change the world for Christ with the Unction of God on your life. The difference is dependence on, and devotion to, God.

July 13, 2004 WET WEDDING

(This is another “adventure” in the series about Free Will Baptist Missionary to India, Rev. Carlisle Hanna. In India, Brother Carlisle is affectionately and respectfully called “Uncle” so that is the name I will use for him in the articles).

The problem came about because the monsoon rainy season arrived the week before the wedding. Uncle was to conduct the wedding service for two new members of his flock but they lived on the other side of the river and the monsoons had changed the normally placid river into a raging torrent.

The men who normally rowed people across the river told Uncle that no one could get across the river that day but Uncle knew no one else was authorized to sign marriage licenses except him and he had to make the trip. Several hours of earnest talk convinced the boatmen to carry their boat a long way up river so that when they began the trip they would have extra distance to fight across the raging river.

Dusk and the missionary arrived at the wedding village about the same time. The wedding couple had assumed Uncle would not be able to come that day so they had gone fishing in some of the flooded ground beside the village. They arrived back at the village with a string of fish at the same time Uncle arrived. Clothes were quickly changed, wedding vows were exchanged, and another “normal” missionary day was added to the books.

Uncle preached many sermons in India where he told the people that he loved them and that God loved them. It was incidents like this “wet wedding”, however, that caused the people to see that his concern and God’s offer of abundant life were real. Thousands of sermons are preached in America each Sunday. Most of them are forgotten by the end of Sunday’s lunch. Monday morning concern, however, is remembered long after all our words are forgotten.

July 14, 2004 RIGHT CLOTHING

When man disobeyed God and became a sinner the first result was that “his eyes were opened and he knew he was naked” (Gen 3:7). This exposure brought shame and fear. It is from this context that the term “righteousness” came to carry the meaning of “Right Clothing”.

The attitudes and actions of a sinners are “naked and open unto the eyes of God” and nothing he can do will cover him. Fig leaf fashions fail to provide a suitable covering. Good works wardrobes only amplify the fact that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;” (Is 64:6). If our human efforts are “fig leaves” and our righteous actions are “filthy rags” then how do we obtain the “Right Clothing” that will enables us to live without shame and fear? The first time the word “righteousness” is used in the Bible is in Genesis 15:6 where Abraham “believed in the LORD; and God counted it to him for righteousness.” His “right clothing” was given to him because he was willing to completely trust God’s word as the foundation for his life and his future.

If your secret life was shown on TV would it cause you great shame as your wicked works were exposed? When you meet God will you fear His judgment or will you delight in the robe of righteousness that is yours because of your confidence in and commitment to, Christ? Do you have the “right clothes”?

July 20, 2004 COMMITMENT'S COST

(This is another "adventure" in the series about Free Will Baptist Missionary to India, Rev. Carlisle Hanna. In India, Brother Carlisle is affectionately and respectfully called "Uncle" so that is the name I will use for him in the articles).

The monsoon rains had delayed Uncle's arrival at the village. The wedding ceremony and the feast that followed meant that he left for home well after dark. Walking through a jungle full of snakes and wild animals after dark is not a pleasant experience and the monsoon showers only make him that much more miserable. When he finally arrived back at the river crossing it was immediately obvious that no one could cross the raging river full of floating debris in the dark.

There was no where to go and no where to stay so Uncle simply stood on the river bank awaiting the coming of dawn. The spasmodic showers kept him drenched and miserable and prevented him from enjoying the comfort of a fire. The break in the showers only allowed the hordes of mosquitoes to descend upon him again.

When morning finally arrived he was physically and emotionally exhausted but he still had to cross the raging river and walk the ten additional miles to his home. He could have made all kind of excuses about why he could not get to that wedding but his commitment to God and to his flock meant he did his duty instead of making excuses. Jesus said to take up your cross and follow me. Uncle knew that sometimes that cross is wet instead of wooden!

Now let me see if I understand this correctly. You said you wanted to go to your air conditioned church in your air conditioned car where you would sit on padded pews in order to enjoy beautiful music and a message from the Lord but you couldn't make it because it was raining!

July 21, 2004 SENTENCE SERMONS

Having been a preacher almost all of my life, I have learned that saying a lot in a little while is tremendously prized by congregations. When they come to hear me preach they don't want me to waste their time and they certainly don't want me to extend the time of the service. That is why I'm always looking for powerful sentences that say a lot in a little time. Here are a few "sentence sermons" I have heard recently.

- Almost Saved is terribly Lost.
- God does not send people to Hell. He simply honors their choice.
- God loves us as we are. He cares too much about us to leave us that way.
- How can a moral wrong be a legal right?
- This one takes a little explanation. In Pennsylvania when they do road construction they put out a sign saying, "Temporary Inconvenience. Permanent Improvement." The speaker used this when referring to how he felt about the death of his very sick mother.
- How do you judge a good church? Sinners get saved. Christians live like they are saved. Church members tell others how to be saved!
- Some people have eyes that see not and ears that hear not but few have tongues that talk not!

July 27, 2004 BUFFALOED

(This is another “adventure” in the series about Free Will Baptist Missionary to India, Rev. Carlisle Hanna. In India, Brother Carlisle is affectionately and respectfully called “Uncle” so that is the name I will use for him in the articles).

Uncle and his family had just arrived at the mission house in Kishansanj, northern India. At this time India was still new and the sights and sounds were still strange. A long day of travel and then time spent greeting new friends had led to a night of exhausted sleep.

The first hint of daylight was just beginning to creep into the room where Uncle and his wife and little girl were sleeping when a strange sound thundered right beside Uncle’s bed. His head jerked up and his heart filled with fear. Was it a lion or a tiger or an elephant? His curiosity told him to investigate but his concern for his wife and daughter kept him in the room. In a few moments the sound diminished and a few more moments of fitful sleep led to the beginning of another busy day.

This busy day led to another night of exhausted sleep. The first hint of daylight was creeping into the bedroom when the same sound filled the room with noise and Uncle’s heart with fear. What could it be? How could he do his work and protect his family against such a fearful beast?

That morning at breakfast Uncle decided to ask his host about the noise. His host laughed and said, “That is just the village boys leading the water buffalo in from pasture. They billow their protest as they pass your wall”.

Sometimes life billows at us with things that bring fear and dread. We want to be brave but this unknown roar dislodges an ocean of anxiety in our heart. Don’t let it buffalo you! God is still on the throne and greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

July 28, 2004 NO PLEASURE

You would think that God would always be a “happy camper” and nothing would disturb Him but several times in scripture God declares that some situations give Him “No Pleasure”.

1) Promising God you will do something and then failing to do it gives God “no pleasure”- Ec 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

2) Money grabbing ministers give God “no pleasure”- Mal 1:10 Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

3) The symbolic sacrifices of religion without the reality of a dedicated heart and a changed life gives God “no pleasure”- Heb 10:6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

4) People dying without accepting Christ as Savior gives God “no pleasure”- Eze 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

5) Turning away from commitment to God gives God “no pleasure”-Heb 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

August 3, 2004

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, UNCLE

Free Will Baptist Missionary to India, Rev. Carlisle Hanna, has a birthday today (Tuesday, August 3rd). I won't say how old he is but he could have retired 10 years ago!! During his over 50 years of work in India he has buried a daughter and a wife and he has sacrificed beyond anything the average person can imagine. Like Abraham, he "sojourned in a strange country" where the food was different, the culture was unfamiliar, and the water was undrinkable.

Electricity has been a luxury for most of his ministry so the majority of things we take for granted in America were unavailable for he and his family. In a land of dark skinned people he was readily identifiable as someone different. During times of religious hatred his color and his Christianity made him an obvious target. The stress of living under such circumstances would crack many men and drive them to the sheltering sanctuary of "home". Brother Carlisle trusted God, settled into a tiny rural town in northern India, and changed the lives of countless multitudes.

Because He stood fast and did his job 190 Free Will Baptist Churches meet in India today. During the Annual Indian Conference meeting this year nearly 6000 people walked for miles in order to sleep in the open so they could celebrate the difference Christ can make in a life. In a land where an open profession of faith in Christ can bring physical persecution 384 people have been baptized from January 1st to June 30th of this year.

Happy Birthday, "Uncle" Carlisle. You've shown us that one man who will be faithful to God and to the task God has given him can make an eternal difference. May God give us the vision and the strength to make the same kind of difference in an America that is slipping deeper and deeper into the sewer of sin and moral collapse.

August 4, 2004

PROVIDENTIAL PAYBACK

We live in a world in which it is suddenly "cute" to rebel against God's character and standards. TV shows prove over and over that morals and manners don't matter if there is money involved! And a small minority is now able to attack anything to do with God in public life with the knowledge that the courts will declare anything bad as right and anything right as unacceptable.

Where is God during all of this? Will the followers of evil always win? Should we despair and wring our hands in anguish? No, we should simply look at God's past proclamations about His payback for rebels. He offers mercy and grace right now. One day He will close that door and it will be a bad day for bad people who thought they could stand against God and His word!

(Deut 7:9-10) Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.

Isa 59:18 According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies;

Ro 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

August 10, 2004 A BIGGER CIRCLE

Had he been like many ministers in the United States, Missionary Carlisle Hanna would have been satisfied at Sonapur. Years of struggle and sacrifice had developed a hut into a home and an open sided shelter into a blocked wall sanctuary. Many Pastors would have been satisfied with the success and settled down into a pastoral routine. But “Uncle” saw a bigger circle.

How could he rest with the flock he had brought to the light when multitudes were dying each day in the darkness of sin? How could he settle in Sonapur when the cry of the teeming masses echoed in his ear each morning calling him to regions beyond? He had not come to India to settle down; he had come to speak out, and share the good news about Christ with multitudes who had never heard the name before. His circle had to be bigger than a little self supporting congregation that focused on itself.

For many years I was the pastor of a church in a town of around 6000. You could have drawn a ten mile circle around my pulpit and it would have encompassed 126 churches! Some of those churches had been built because the community needed a gospel witness but many of those churches were “Burger King” Churches (They wanted to have it their way!) or “Busted” churches where Christians could not get along with Christians so they moved down the road and used time, talent, and resources to build their own little kingdom.

May God help us to see a “Bigger Circle” so that one day soon every town and community in our State will have a fundamental, Bible Believing congregation. That would put a smile on God’s face and bring light to a lot of people who are dying in the dark.

August 11, 2004 DON’T VEGETATE

I have a message I like to use at Nursing Home services. Recently I begin to feel it might be appropriate for use in some church services! The message is entitled “Don’t Vegetate”.

“Vegetate” is a word used to describe people who sit around all day and accomplish nothing. Like a vegetable, they begin to rot after they are ripe if they simply sit around. Instead of vegetating why don’t you:

Meditate- Prayer and study of the Bible are a NECESSARY part of the Christian life as long as ability remains. The older I get the more application I find for the Word of God in my life; and the more deeply I realize the need of constant meditating.

Congregate- As long as health permits you should not forsake the assembling of yourself together with God’s family. You need the fellowship and the fellowship needs you.

Participate- I still cannot find the place in the Bible where it declares that a person is to stop working for the Lord. Health and circumstances may make it necessary to change the manner of your work or the position in which you work but God has a purpose for you as long as you breathe!

The world needs your witness, the Church needs the wealth of information God has given you over the years, and the Lord expects your work. Don’t sit around and rot. Do what you can, where you are, with what you have- and God will Bless.

August 17, 2004 BARRIERS TO BLESSINGS

My wife has a sweatshirt that she generally starts wearing around Thanksgiving each year. On the front of the sweatshirt is a simple message, "I like presents". I think you could consider that a hint!!

The truth is, all of us should wear a sweatshirt like this because we all like to receive presents and blessings and good things. Most people, however, struggle through life barely getting by instead of continually being showered with blessings. What bars us from the blessings of God??

A lukewarm, sinful life will not allow God to bless us- For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (Psalms 84:11). It would be pretty foolish of God to reward a person for living badly!

Our goal for getting will sometimes not allow God to bless us- But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33). God would certainly not want to answer my prayer for \$100.00 if he knew that I was going to take that money and rent a hotel room so that I could commit adultery!! When my life is controlled by my own fleshly desires then God does not want to contribute to my wrong goals.

An unwillingness to share with others will sometimes bar God's blessings from us- Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard. (Proverbs 21:13). We are blessed to be a blessing. If we, like the dead sea, always take in but never give out then we will end up spiritually desolate.

"A faithful man shall abound with blessings:" (Prov 28:20a). May you be such a person.

August 18, 2004 SEEKING GOD

Nothing in this world is more important than seeking and finding God!! Nothing- not wealth, nor fame, or anything this world can possibly offer. God must be your primary focus and the goal of your life. Without Him you have nothing; with Him you have everything!

Seeking God is your goal. How do you accomplish it?

1) You must Seek God with a Passion- O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; (Psalms 63:1). God must not be a casual desire you might like. He must be more important to you than food or water or anything

2) You must Seek God by 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. (Heb 11:6). You must believe that God will be found if you look for Him. Trying to find God so you can see if He is real will not work. You must believe your seeking will lead to finding.

3) You must Seek God until He shows Himself- Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. (Hosea 10:12). Seek God until He finds a place in your heart. Knock on Heaven's door until God Himself comes to greet you!

August 24, 2004 GOD QUESTIONS

If you had one question you could ask God, what would it be? (I am certainly not God! But if you send it to the address below and I can find a scriptural answer then I will try to answer your question in an article). I thought about asking a question of God because several times in scripture God asks questions of men. Here are a couple of those questions.

Where are you, Adam- “And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:9). God was accustomed to an afternoon walk with Adam. When He came to the meeting place and Adam was not there He was concerned so He called out to Adam in an attempt to locate him.

God is our refuge and our redemption. He longs to bring us to a place of fellowship but He cannot help us as long as we are hiding from Him so He uses preachers and churches to call out to mankind, “Where are you?”.

Where is your Brother, Cain- “And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). The first family feud ended with blood on the ground and a lie on the lips. God did not question Cain in order to reveal the whereabouts of Abel; Abel's blood cried to God from the ground! God's question was intended to reveal Cain's heart to Cain.

In the same way today, God looks beyond our religion to our relationships and makes a pointed statement before He asks a simply question, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

If God asked you today where you were in your relationship with Him what would you answer Him? How about your relationship with other people?

August 25, 2004 HEAVENLY HELP

The shipment of Sunday School Literature was already a week late and now a hurricane was coming. All day long I waited at the office knowing a truck was supposed to come but the hours ticked by with no word, no truck, and no literature. Finally, at four in the afternoon the driver called and said he was on his way.

The rains had slacked off so everything looked good; until the truck finally backed up to our door. The first words out of the driver's mouth were that his lift barely worked and it would be difficult to use it to unload the extremely heavy pallets of books. We eased a pallet load of books onto the lift and began to lower it. The lift began to creak, the books began to shift, and all my strength was not enough to keep this valuable cargo from falling off the lift and scattering all over the wet ground.

Just at that time, in walked missionary to Brazil, Bobby Poole. He had been to Virginia and stopped by to see if I had received any mail for him. With his help, I was able to keep the pallet on the lift until it could safely lower onto the loading dock.

Just one more in the many times the Lord has sent some “Heavenly Help” at just the right time. And guess what Brother Bobby was able to do while I went inside to write the check for the freight- Share the Gospel story with a truck driver who needed to hear it. God's timing is so wonderful!! Look for it in your life this week.

August 31, 2004 FATE'S FLAT

It happened near the middle of a 750 mile week-end. A law seminar in Columbia on Friday was followed by a conference meeting outside of Greenville, NC on Saturday; which was followed by an ordination service in Chester, SC on Saturday Night; which was followed by a Home Coming Service in Lancaster, SC on Sunday morning. Sunday afternoon found me headed to Charleston, SC for another appointment.

Just as I started down the ramp to get onto the interstate highway I heard a big bang and an awful rattle from the rear of our van. For a number of years I have traveled many miles in my work for the Lord. Never, in all that time, have I had a flat tire while traveling (I have had several flat tires that were discovered when I went back to a parked van). On this faithful Sunday afternoon that record was loudly broken.

Sometimes it appears as if certain things must happen to everyone. Are there a certain number of flat tires that must come your way? I don't know but I do know that God scheduled that flat tire in just the right circumstances. I had just turned off a narrow road with nothing but muddy banks where changing a flat tire in a suit would have been a disaster but now I was parked on a wide concrete area where my pants did not even get dusty!

Normally, I am really pressed for time but the Home Coming services had ended early and I had two extra hours on this faithful Sunday afternoon. The spare went on easily while a cool breeze blew on a normally hot August afternoon. A super center was located just down the road so the ruined tire could be quickly replaced and our appointment could be made on time.

Glory! If you have got to have a flat tire it sure is great to have God directing the circumstances!

September 1, 2004 THE SIN OF GOSSIP

At a recent legal seminar the speaker stressed that Churches must make their stand against the actions of people based on the fact that it is a sin rather than the fact that it is not socially acceptable in your church- For instance, Adultery must be declared as being wrong, not because we do not like the people who commit adultery, but because God's word declares it wrong.

Everyone was enthusiastic about what the speaker said until he declared that murmuring and gossip were sins and needed to be preached as such by the Church. A strange quit fell on the assembly as people considered the implications of such a statement. Is Gossip a SIN? Let's let the Bible speak for itself.

Le 19:16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

Pr 11:13 A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

Pr 18:8 ¶ The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. (This exact verse is repeated in Prov 26:22).

Pr 20:19 ¶ He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.

Pr 26:20 ¶ Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.

September 7, 2004 LITTLE ANTS

I seldom remember what I dream. If I do remember a dream then normally it will have some special significance. Recently, I woke up with a clear dream about ants coming out of my water faucet. I tried to figure out what it meant while I shaved that morning. When I finished shaving and was just about to get into the shower the water suddenly stopped flowing (Praise the Lord! That was absolutely the best time for something like this to happen. If it would have waited 2 more minutes until I was in the shower and had soap all over before it stopped it would have been a messy situation!).

For five wonderful years our water pump and well have worked wonderfully. Because of the dream I knew immediately what caused the problem. When I went out to the pump house I carried a can of ant spray and a can of pressurized air. Sure enough, when I opened the switch on the pump it was full of ants whose bodies would not allow the contacts on the switch to engage. After killing the ants and blowing out the contacts the pump went back to working beautifully (Glory!).

Jesus described Himself as the "Water of life". It is a tremendous joy as a Christian to drink of that living water each day. When the "water" stops flowing and I don't enjoy my relationship with the Lord as I should I have found that it is usually an ant instead of an elephant that is causing the problem. By that I mean it is not normally a "big sin" that separates me from the Lord. Most of the time it is something like a proud action, a bitter thought, or some juicy gossip that causes the water not to flow.

Little Ants can cause big problems. Be careful that they don't cut off the living waters in your life this week.

September 8, 2004 SIN'S RUIN

In the book of Romans God declares that man has "sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" in three specific areas. He then shows how the character of people will be ruined as a result of this sinful conduct.

First, God declares that man chose to worship idols instead of worshiping the real God (Rom 1:19-23). As a result, God allowed them to fall into all manner of sinful behavior in the hopes they would see the seriousness of their sin (Rom 1:24).

Next, Man changed the truth of God into a lie and began serving self instead of God (Rom 1:25). As a consequence God gave them up to the gross immoralities of homosexual conduct (26-27) in order that they could see the wickedness of a self-centered life.

Finally, Man forsook the very knowledge of God (28) and outlawed the true God from their government, their schools, and their society. This final sin caused God to abandon men to base and perverted conduct (29-32) that caused the very foundations of society to crumble as men lost all trust in one another. Soon every man did that which was right in his own sight with no consideration for others; or for God.

Can you see this same pattern taking place today? Can you see people pushing God to the side and acting as if personal pleasure is their only purpose? Are you one of these people?

September 14, 2004

FILLING FRAGMENTS

When my dentist cleaned my teeth recently he found a cavity and scheduled me to come back so he could fill it. I prayed before I arrived at his office and he did a great job. The pain was minimal and it was much better than your minds imagines when the dentist says he is going to fill a tooth!

The greatest discomfort turned out to be the fact that one side of my mouth was numb and I had trouble pronouncing words all morning so several preachers who came to my office to talk with me looked at me really strange! Around noon the feeling finally came back and the first thing I noticed was that numerous fragments from where the dentist had ground down the filling kept surfacing until I finally got the chance to wash out my mouth several times. Those fragments had been there all the time but I did not notice them as long as my mouth was numb.

Recently I have been very busy with special meetings, a denominational change in Sunday School literature, and preparing for a mission trip to Japan placed on top of my normally busy schedule. I still pray and read the Bible and try to spend some time with the Lord but sometimes I feel “numb” when I pray. Instead of the normal excitement and joy I feel at spending time with the Lord it feels like a form I endure instead of a visit I enjoy.

Guess what? When I feel “numb” like this I began to unconsciously pick up little fragments of things in my life such as discouragement or bitterness that I don’t even notice. And, if they are left in my life, these fragments can irritate and infect and give me much trouble. That is why I have determined to “get my feeling back” and wash my self with the Word so I can be the person God wants me to be.

September 15, 2004

WHICH SERMON

Every preacher knows there are four sermons he can choose from each time he preaches. There is the sermon he wants to preach, the sermon the church wants him to preach, the sermon the devil wants him to preach, and the sermon the Lord wants him to preach. The hard part is making sure you preach the right sermon!

Preachers are human. They sometimes get mad or bitter or depressed before they get into the pulpit. If they are not very careful the pulpit will turn into a private podium used to express their personal anger or agenda instead of remaining a delivery point for the Word of God. Pray each week that God will guide and guard your Pastor as he stands behind the podium so that he will deliver God’s message instead of his personal message.

Church like to have their ears tickled. They don’t mind a preacher preaching against sin as long as it is not a sin they are involved in but it is easy for them to become anger and resentful when the sermon strikes too close to home. A Pastor knows that disturbing the peace of his members will probably result in disturbing his own peace; and may cost him his position. Pray for God to give your Pastor courage to preach God’s message without cowardice or compromise.

Preaching the right sermon each week is extremely important. Next week- the sermon Satan wants preached.

September 21, 2004

WRONG WAY RIVER

When I went to town I took the main roads in order to go by the garbage dump. As I drove over the river bridge I noticed the river was running out of its banks and the ditches beside the highway were full of river water. I immediately thought to myself, "Wrong way river". The river was filling the ditches instead of the ditches filling the river!

On the way back from town I took my normal short cut through the back roads. Bad choice on this day. The river had filled the ditches on the main road but it had filled the roads on the back roads. Several pick up trucks were ahead of me so I let them make a path through the water and I followed close behind so the water would not come into my car.

Churches are God's gift to the world. They offer opportunities for Christians to worship, learn about, and serve God. They proclaim the good news of the Gospel so that Sinners know their need of repentance and salvation. When they are doing their job correctly they are the best institute in the world. If they ever start down the wrong track they, like this wrong way river, become a dangerous obstacle.

Instead of calling the world to God's way many churches call the world's way god as they embrace attitudes and actions that are directly contrary to the word of God. Others fight over carpet colors or personality power struggles instead of standing like a rock in a storm tossed society. Like the wrong way river, they scatter trash all over the landscape and pose a danger to travelers instead of bringing nourishment to the land. May God help churches to stop being so full of themselves until they flow the wrong way.

September 22, 2004

WHICH SERMON (II)

Last week we talked about four sermons a preacher can preach- the sermon he wants to preach, the sermon the church wants him to preach, the sermon the devil wants him to preach, and the sermon the Lord wants him to preach. We began by looking at how personal feelings or public pressures can impact a sermon. Today we want to look at sermons Satan "preaches".

All of the Word of God is true but all of the Word of God is not truth. Numerous times in scripture God records sermons by Satan or his messengers and the "father of all lies" regularly uses lies in his "sermons". For instance, the first time we meet Satan in Scripture he is preaching a sermon to Eve telling her she will not surely die if she disobeys God. You know the rest of that story!

Often in scripture, false prophets would proclaim erroneous doctrine or promote wrong actions in their sermons. Because of this, numerous scriptures are given to help people identify Satan's sermons- For example: "many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." (2 John 1:7)

Satan's sermons tell people to disregard God's Word and to put human desires above the teachings of God. Satan's sermons lead men out of God's plan and away from God's pardon. Satan's sermons make man a god and God only a glorified grandfather. Don't listen to them!!

September 28, 2004

THREE THINGS I KNOW

One thing for certain is that most things don't seem to be for certain! The low carb diet was a bad diet until suddenly this year it is a good diet until recently when it began to be reported that it is again a bad diet! The buzz word in society today is that everything changes and nothing remains the same.

In the midst of this doubt and confusion let me share with you three things that I absolutely know for certain. Three things that will be certain as long as time exist.

1) I know God will never do me wrong so I can trust God no matter what comes my way-Ps 119:75 "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." I don't understand some things, and I don't like some things, that happen to me but I am absolutely certain that God loves me and I can rest in His care.

2) I know the good will eventually win and the bad will be punished- Ec 8:12 "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:" Vengeance belongs to God. He keeps good record books and He who knows every idle word we speak and every hair that falls from our head will do the right thing at the right time.

3) I know I am a believer in Jesus Christ and I can face death and eternity unafraid- 2Ti 1:12 "...I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." I have God's Pardon and Peace in this life and His dependable promise for the next life. Glory! That is a certainty that is a comfort.

September 29, 2004

WHICH SERMON (III)

We have looked at three of the four sermons a preacher can preach- the sermon he wants to preach, the sermon the church wants him to preach, and the sermon the devil wants him to preach. Today we want to look at the best sermon of all, the sermon God wants preached.

When Paul preached a Godly sermon he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come and his message was so powerful until it caused kings to tremble. (Acts 24:25)

These three ingredients are the main thrust of any Godly sermon: 1) Righteousness means telling people how to live in a manner that is pleasing to God. 2) Temperance means preaching about the need of discipline and self-control as we learn to crucify self and live our lives governed by godly values. 3) Judgment to come means the preacher clearly sounds a warning to all. To Christians he warns that they will face the judgment seat of Christ where their rewards will be based on their works. To the sinner he warns of the White Throne Judgment where all who have rejected Christ as Savior will be cast away from God forever.

The sermon God wants preached is one that will bring men to know Jesus Christ as savior and then cause them to show Jesus Christ in their changed life as they anxiously await the day they can see Him face to face whom so long they have known heart to heart. Is that the kind of preaching you have at your church??

October 5, 2004 SQUID INK BREAD

The missionary we were visiting in Japan had recently celebrated a birthday. One of her presents was a discount dinner at a local French restaurant that allowed her to bring friends with her to enjoy her discount. And she was kind enough to include us in that category. What a treat, American tourist in Japan enjoying fine French cuisine!

This particular French restaurant was famous for its hot fresh breads. At the beginning of each course of the meal a waiter would come by with a tray of fresh cooked rolls for everyone to sample. The varieties seemed endless and the taste as they melted in your mouth was beyond description. Between the pasta salad and the main course another tray of bread arrived. Upon seeing the selection everyone immediately exclaimed, "Wow. They even have chocolate muffins!".

Beware of "chocolate muffins" in French restaurants in Japan. The Japanese use the squid as a mainstay in their meals and ALL of the squid is considered useful; we had just experienced raw squid guts as part of the breakfast buffet at the hotel where we were staying that morning! A carefully worded question to the waiter revealed that the "chocolate muffins" were in fact bread made with squid ink. Enthusiasm for the "chocolate muffins" cooled instantly.

The word "hypocrite" comes from a word meaning actor and is used to describe someone who appears to be one thing but is really something else. Almost every church has a few hypocrites in their midst. And they are always well known by the sinners in the community! Just remember this. Even fine restaurants can have some squid ink bread mixed in among their otherwise delicious bread. Don't allow that fact to discourage you. The good bread is still delicious; even if it sometimes sits beside squid ink bread.

October 6, 2004 THIRSTY TRAVELERS

The morning skies were just beginning to brighten with the coming sunrise when we entered the waiting area. We were waiting for the 7:30am flight to Tokyo so we had to check in two hours early because it was an international flight. Surprisingly, the waiting area was crowded at that early hour.

My wife and I were seated directed across from the water fountain in the waiting area. As I read my Bible chapters for the day I noticed that people kept coming to the water fountain, pushing all the buttons, and then leaving in exasperation. It soon became obvious that the fountain was broken and a lot of people were disappointed because they could get no water.

The trip to Japan was to help celebrate the 50th year of our mission work in Japan. Japan is a prosperous country with extremely bright and energetic people. Most of the people in Japan practice some kind of religious activity so my first question was why we needed to send missionaries to wonderful people who have their own religion.

The best answer I could get was that broken water fountain in the Columbia airport. Thirsty travelers on the road of life don't need pretty fountains that decorate walls; they need something that will give good water for thirsty souls. And that good water comes from the fountain of living water, Jesus Christ.

October 12, 2004 SNOW ARROWS

One of the first things I noticed as we rode from the airport into the town of Sapporo, Japan were the large arrows hanging out over the road. Preacher curiosity compelled me to ask the missionary the purpose of these overhead arrows. "They are snow arrows", the missionary said. "Our highways are covered with snow for nearly half of the year and these arrows show people where the edge of the road is located when the snow covers all the highway markings.". You don't have to be much of a preacher to see the illustration here! Direction comes from above when circumstances cover the normal highway guidelines.

Often in life the fog of limited human vision has blocked my view of the path ahead and I have needed divine direction. Each time God's direction from above has provided exactly the information I needed to stay on course. Many times I have been "snowed under" by the hustle and bustle of life's duties and have found myself wandering through life like a ship in a storm without a rudder. Amazingly, each time it appeared my life would wreck on the rocks that protruded in every direction around me I would suddenly look up and see the way out of my troubles clearly marked by divine directions.

Attached to the top of each arrow was a small antenna. During a blizzard or at dusk a signal was sent from the main headquarters to each arrow causing it to turn on it's lights. At the time of greatest danger the snow arrows still provided the needed direction. Isn't that the way it is with God's guidance? Your path may be obscured and the circumstances may look extremely dark but the "light of the world" will supply the light you need and the direction He provides will always keep you safe and lead you to the right destination.

October 13, 2004 TWO JESUS CAN'T FORGIVE

Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of the only true God, died as a payment for the sin debt of every man, woman, and child that has ever inhabited planet earth. His gift of salvation is offered to anyone who will take it- "Whosoever will, may come and drink of the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17). Yet, in spite of this, there are two groups of people in the world whom Jesus cannot forgive.

The first group of people whom Jesus cannot forgive is those who do not know about Him. Jesus wants to forgive them; and many of them want to know the true way to God, but "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14).

I recently stood in an observation tower in the center of Tokyo, Japan and looked out at over 24 million people who need desperately to find forgiveness for their sins and to drink of the water of life in order to satisfy the longing of their souls. It is not a question of Jesus being willing to forgive them, the problem lies in our failure to share the gospel with them.

The second group of people whom Jesus cannot forgive are those who know about Him but refuse to trust Him as their Savior and Lord. And how awful that will be- "that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." (Luke 12:47)

October 19, 2004 RIGHTEOUS RULERS

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. (Proverbs 29:2)

Who do you vote for when the claims and counter claims of the politicians leave you in a fog? You realize your vote is important and necessary but you are not sure which people should receive your very important vote. When you walk into that voting booth and the “rubber meets the road” how do you make the best choice?

According to this verse from the book of Proverbs the answer to this question depends on the moral stand and righteous character of the person you are voting for. Recently a friend of mine told me about a lady she worked beside. This lady went on all morning about the cruelty and wrongfulness of people who aborted babies. She talked about the need to do something about killing unborn babies and how important it was to inform people of the importance of abstinence; especially among teens.

During the lunch break these two friends were watching the news and my friend was astonished to learn the presidential candidate this woman planned to vote for. He was a pro abortion candidate from a very liberal party. When my friend asked her how she reconciled her belief about abortion and moral standards with the stand of this candidate she replied in surprise, “I just like the way he looks. I never thought about his standards!”.

Who should you vote for? The character of the candidate should have a major impact on your decision. It also depends on whether you want to rejoice or mourn- When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. (Proverbs 29:2)

October 20, 2004 AMERICA'S GOD

Officially, America has no God. Everyone has the right to worship (or abstain from worshipping) who and what they please. Yet, one of the most basic laws of human nature is that everyone will worship something. There are lots of “Forces” out there vying for our attention. Let me point out several principles that are important in the God a nation chooses to follow.

1. CHOSE THE RIGHT GOD- "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." (Psalm 33:12). If I were going to chose a God I'd chose one with a proven track record of love and concern that would do me good and not harm. For several hundred years the majority of people in America have found this to be the Lord God.

2. CHOSE A GOOD GOD- "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Prov 14:34). Part of the Joy of serving God is the peace and tranquility that comes to a nation who follows the moral and spiritual guidelines He gives. Chaos comes when men disregard God and “Every man does that which is right in his own sight” (Jud. 21:25).

3. CHOSE A GOD YOU CAN LIVE FOR AND DIE WITH- A Nation's God must be respected enough to be served, powerful enough to save us from our sinful behavior and make us different people, and loving enough to provide His children a “home and a hug” in eternity. That is the Lord God; may He reign in America.

October 27, 2004 SAY NO TO DEMONS

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

It is absolutely astonishing to Christians in the rest of the world when they see Christians in America glorifying devil worship and inviting demons into their homes and lives during their annual October celebration of Halloween. Having seen the chaos and trouble caused by demons among their own people because of the worship of false gods they cannot believe that Americans would willfully participate in such activities.

Demons bring sickness into your life (Luke 13:11-16) and chaos into your mind (Mark 5) so the last thing you want to do is to give them an easy entrance. Don't let demons come into your life via the eye gate (horror movies) or the ear gate (music that glorifies the devil and invites you to yield to his control) or the mind gate (TV shows about demon worship). Instead of inviting Satan and his demons into your family with decorations that tell Satan he is welcome in your home you should heed the admonition in the word of God to "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

The good news is that you do not have to live your life in fear and frustration running from the devil. Submitting to the Lord is the other side of the resisting the devil coin. Demons in control of your life bring sickness and chaos but putting God in control brings healing and happiness. Yielding your life to God brings pardon for your past, provision for your present, and peace for your future- Glory!

Don't play with demons who are out to destroy you and all you love. Submit to God and find out how great life can be when you have an abundant life made possible by the promises of God and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in you.

October 28, 2004 A SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN

One of the most important questions anyone can ask is, "What will enable me to be a successful Christian?" It is the most important question first because it implies that you have already made the most important decision in life by repenting of your sins and accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior. It is important secondly because it shows you realize the most important priority in your life is to become the person God wants you to become.

Three things will help you become a successful Christian:

1. Commitment- Jesus did not mince words. He repeatedly told would be followers that they must make a definite commitment to Him if they were to be His disciples. Jim Bonham, a lawyer from S.C. left the Alamo to appeal to Colonel Fannin for help. Once he delivered his message he rejoined the 150 men in the Alamo (Who were surrounded by over 2000 men from Santa Anna's Army.) That is the kind of commitment God wants from us.
2. Assurance that you are capable of handling the Situation- No matter what life puts in your path you are more than a conqueror in Christ. Knowing you can overcome any situation makes it easy to be successful!
3. Recognition of Rewards Awaiting you.- It is not what you give up: it's what you gain that makes Christianity such a joy. Trials here seem trivial when compared with the rewards awaiting us.

May God help you to be a successful Christian this week.

November 2, 2004 LEAVE A MARK

It seemed simple but it took several minutes. The Executive Secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, Rev. Keith Burden, was speaking at the 50th Anniversary of Free Will Baptist Mission work in Japan. In his sermon he said he was thankful that we could “leave a mark” for God in Japan.

The translator hesitated for several moments and then asked Brother Keith to repeat what he had said. Still he could not find words to translate “leave a mark” into Japanese. Finally, the translator asked several of the other people in the room for help. Between them they worked out a phrase that conveyed “leave a mark” in such a way until the Japanese listeners would understand what the speaker was saying. I thought, as I watched the scene, that sometimes “leaving a mark” is as hard to translate as it is to do!!

There are multitudes of “famous” people in the world today. Many of them will be unknown to the next generations because their fame is simply a fleeting moment of publicity. Like a finger withdrawn from a glass of water, there is soon nothing to mark their passing.

I hope your goal in life is to “leave a mark” for God. It will require dedication and determination as you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus. But what a joy it will be if one day you look back and see a multitude of believers following the marks you left as you journeyed toward eternity with God.

The Psalmist talked about how we live our life as a “tale that is told” (Psalm 90:9) and we are soon forgotten as people hurry on to other activities and involvements. May God help you today to determine to “leave a mark” for God on your family, at your job, and in your community.

November 3, 2004 WRATH PRAYING

Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah. (Psalms 59:13)

It is astonishing how many songs (Psalms) David wrote imploring God to take vengeance on those who opposed God's work. He was very specific as he asked God to “break their teeth” or “take their life like an aborted baby”. It sounds strange in our culture today but David was jealous for the Lord's honor and he wanted those who stood against God to suffer in such a way until others would see the error of their ways and return to God.

I thought of this recently when I changed to “Old Testament Praying” for a situation. Someone owns some land beside a Church that is greatly growing for the Lord and they appear to be much more interested in money than they are in souls. For a long time I have prayed for God to gently nudge them with his mercy and grace so they would do the right thing. Now my patience has run out and I am asking God to “do what it takes” to bring this person to the realization that God rules and eternal matters are more important than temporal money.

Thank God for His goodness and grace. I am so glad He extended mercy to me when I deserved wrath and judgment. May I never take His goodness for granted and end up with someone praying for God to consume me instead of excuse me.

November 9, 2004 POTTER PREACHING

Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. (Jeremiah 18:2).

The parable of the potter is well known to regular church goers. God brings Jeremiah to a pottery factory and then uses the work of the potter to explain His dealings with the nation of Israel. The sermon is intriguing and has been greatly used by preachers through the ages to explain how God works in the circumstances of our life but I want to look beyond the sermon today.

I love to write. Almost all of my ministry I have written church newsletters or self published books. The past 15 years I have also written at least 2 newspaper devotional articles each week (rain or shine, sickness or health) as I tried to share my faith and show the wonderful works of God in my life. Most of the time the devotions are more about the "potter's house" than about in depth sermons. Partly that is because of space limitations (300 words per article) but mainly it is because I found in my study of the Bible that God used illustrations as sermons almost as much as He used sermons as sermons.

It is not unusual in scripture for God to "take a person by the hand" and say to them, "Let me show you something so you can really understand what I am trying to say". The words should have been sufficient but sometimes a "picture" is actually worth a thousand words.

If you are a preacher or a teacher and you have a message that people really need to hear then you might consider bringing your audience to the "potter's house" where they can really hear your words. Maybe then they will change from a polite congregation into committed disciples. And isn't that what you really want to see happen?

November 10, 2004 PRESIDENTIAL PONDERING

I write this article during a very difficult time. Because of press deadlines this article must be at the newspaper before election day. That means that I do not know who won the election yet. I do know this much, if the polls are anywhere close to being correct (and I have my doubts about polls), then half of the people in America are disappointed at the results of the elections.

This means that some people will be discouraged because of their doubts about the winner, some will be disillusioned about our election process, and some will be down right angry that people could not see things their way and vote for their candidate. Here are a few things that may help you keep things in perspective.

1) The ruling authority in a country is set in place according to God's Plans- "The Powers that be are ordained of God" Rom 13:1. God has a program to either punish or promote our country and the president is part of that plan.

2) The president's policies can not alter my commitment to Jesus Christ. His policies may break my heart or cause me to be persecuted but they will not change my absolute allegiance to the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

3) The day after the election, I am going to pray for the president, regardless of his name, because God told me I was supposed to do that- I Tim 2:1-2. I can't change the election but God can change the President's Heart! Glory!

November 16, 2004 FIND YOU OUT

Nu 32:23 But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

Moses was admonishing several of the tribes of Israel about their responsibility to faithfully discharge their duties to God. He ended by declaring that if they failed to do what they were supposed to do then God would count their failure to do right a sin (A principle continued in the New Testament- “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” -James 4:17).

At the end of this grave statement, Moses makes a “scary” declaration, “Be sure your sin will find you out”. What a sobering thought to realize that sin will always “Find you out”.

Sin will find you out in your prayer life by limiting God’s willingness to answer- Ps 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Sin will find you out in your Power with God- The Holy Spirit has to cease His work through us in order to order to work on us so that we will again be a clean vessel sanctified for the Master’s use.

Sin will find you out in your Public Worship- David found that sinful actions stole his joy and turned worship into a dreary service instead of a jubilant song.

Sin will find you out in your Persuading sinners to accept Christ- Sin steals your confidence and your compassion so you cannot boldly tell others about the difference Christ has made in your life.

Sin will find you out in your family, in your finances, and in your future rewards. Keep your heart and guard your mind so that sin will not trip you up. Playing with sin always end up with paying for sin; and when sin finds you out it is never a pleasant experience.

November 17, 2004 MORAL VALUES

The debate has begun in earnest in America. If “Moral Values” were a key in electing a President then determining the values that are moral is a major task in outlining the future course of America. The Democratic challenger used pulpits (illegally it appears) each week to promote his moral campaign themes. The majority of the country, however, thought his ideas about morals were wrong and voted for the present President.

Is this the way morals should be decided? By majority vote of the country? Or has God put in place “teachers” who will show us clearly the moral anchors for our country? Thankfully, God knows how important this is and has given us good guides.

1) The Holy Spirit teaches us the good- But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)

2) The Grace of God teaches us how to overcome the bad-For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; (Titus 2:11-13).

America’s Moral compass must be solidly anchored in God’s word. The stakes are too high to trust in anything else.

November 23, 2004

TROUBLE THANKSGIVING

On a recent mission trip to Japan my wife fell and broke her foot. Two months of adding her care to my already overloaded schedule would seem to leave little room for thanks but several items of praise immediately come to mind.

First, I am thankful for WHO had the trouble, it was my wife who broke her foot and not me! Now, before you think I am extremely selfish, let me explain. I weigh nearly twice as much as my wife. It has been a job for me to lift my wife but it would have been impossible for her to lift me! Thank God that if one person in the family had to have a broken bone that it was the one who could be helped by the other.

Secondly, I am thankful for WHERE we had the trouble- my wife broke her foot in Japan. Because of my wife's continuing battle with cancer we are unable to obtain health insurance for her so if she would have broken her foot at home it would have been a tremendous financial burden to us. My credit card offers travel insurance for a very small fee and since I travel so much I include that in my annual fee. We are not sure how much this insurance will pay but so far it has paid the first \$1,500.00 in medical bills- Glory! That is money we would have had to borrow and repay had this trouble not happened in Japan.

Finally, I am thankful for WHY we had this trouble- I am not sure of the exact reasons this trouble has come into our life but I am absolutely sure that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28). Our mission trip to Japan was provided by the Lord in a supernatural way so we know this broken foot is part of God's bigger plan so we can rejoice in what God is doing (even if we do not understand it all).

Even if you are having troubles you can still thank the Lord this thanksgiving. After all, He is still God and you can still rest in His love.

November 24, 2004

THANK GOD

Thank God for being good to me. I sit in church services many times and hear people requesting prayer for dreadful disease, catastrophic circumstances, and heart rending hurt and I cannot help but say a silent prayer of thanks for God's blessings on me.

I am fat and bald and ugly, but somehow God worked out the circumstance so that I got to marry one of the most beautiful women in the world. My lovely wife quarrels at me regularly because I don't take care of myself and I work very long stress filled days week after week but I am very seldom sick enough to stay out of work. And when I go to work it is to tell people about Jesus Christ and try to help them become more involved in serving God-I have got to be one of the most blessed men in the world!

You may be dealing with disease, debt, or disaster today so you find it difficult to count your blessings. Let me assure you that God's love for you is still real and His plan is still in place. God has not forgotten you; nor has He forsaken you, so lift up your down cast eyes. Don't let your present circumstances hide the light of God's love and cause you to doubt or despair.

Thank God that we do not have to live this life without God. I am not a tadpole that climbed out of the muddy mire with no more hope that a hog! Thank God I am a child of God with a Father who loves me and a Heavenly Home prepared.

November 30, 2004

SOMETIMES SCRIPTURES

Sometimes you do not always feel and act the way you should. Here are some scriptures that will help you during these "sometimes" moments.

Sometimes you don't understand what God is doing- For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 55:8)

Sometimes you feel rebellious- If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. (Isaiah 1:19-20)

Sometimes you do the best you can do and nothing seems to happen- So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

Sometimes you are really tempted by temptations- There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Sometimes you tend to be critical of others- For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. (Titus 3:3)

Sometimes God seems so far away- But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13)

Sometimes you just need to get back into the Bible and let the word of God show you once again that God is still on the throne and your sometimes should all of the time lead you back to the feet of our soon coming Savior.

December 1, 2004 A DOZEN DUTIES

My greatest goal is to become the best follower of Christ possible. How am I going to accomplish this goal? Here are a dozen Bible admonitions to help me.

- 1) Present yourself a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service.
- 2) Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
- 3) Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.
- 4) Abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good.
- 5) Be not slothful in business.
- 6) Recompense to no man evil for evil but provide things honest in the sight of all men.
- 7) If possible, live peaceably with all men.
- 8) Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good.
- 9) Love your neighbor as yourself
- 10) Make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.
- 11) Seek the things which are above.
- 12) Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, body, and strength.

A dozen duties that will delight the divine and stimulate a saint to be the best he can be for God.

December 7, 2004 THE LITTLE HAND

I wonder how it must have felt the first time he wrapped his little hand around the finger of Joseph? So tiny and so trusting, it must have stirred Joseph's heart to its very core. The fingers were so delicate until they could hardly be felt by Joseph's work hardened hands. It was almost impossible to imagine that this was the hand of God.

Throughout the Bible mankind had thought of God's hand as being destruction or dreadful. They would never have conceived of God's hand as being tiny and delicate. They could only think of God's hand as being an adult hand with awesome power that could crush them if they failed to meet His expectations. To think of God's hand as being so small until it would not reach around the finger of a man was almost blasphemous to them.

Many times we are like these Old Testament people, we put God in a bigger box that He wants to be in. We have no problem calling on God for cancer or a heart attack but we can't conceive that God would care about the small things in our life. Isn't it exciting, however, that Jesus grew up to preach a sermon declaring that God was so concerned with the small things in our life until He counted the very hairs of our head! (Luke 12:7).

Rejoice today. Because of the fact that Jesus came to earth as a new born baby He is able to understand a baby rash as easily as He can a brain tumor. Reach out your finger today and let Jesus wrap His tiny little hand around it. You will find that even a small touch will change your life.

December 8, 2004 WORD WALKING

There are many people in the Bible who had a special relationship with God. Enoch was a man who walked with God until one day he "strolled" home with God. Noah was a man who found grace in the eyes of God at a time when God was angry with the entire world. Abraham was called the friend of God because of his faith and fellowship with God so God used him to father a chosen nation. David was a man after the heart of God because of his devotion and love for God who expressed the emotions of God in songs and poems.

All of these men helped us to see God in special and unique ways but they could only point to God's greatness within the limitations of their own human weakness. Everything they could do only conveyed a pale shadow of the real nature of God. Something had to be done beyond mere words if mankind was to really know God.

That is why the "Word was made flesh and dwelt among men and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." God knew that mankind needed more than a representation; they needed the "real thing", so the Son of God, Jesus Christ, left his haven in Heaven and came to display God by walking among men.

If you ever wonder if God cares for you just think of what He did so you could know Him as the Word instead of in mere words.

December 14, 2004

THE COST OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas is expensive. Yes, it cost most people more money than they have but I'm not talking about that kind of expense. That first Christmas exacted a cost to all those who were involved that is flabbergastingly above anything financial. Let's look at part of the bill for that first Christmas.

Joseph lost his reputation and his standing in the community when he obeyed the angel's voice and remained engaged to a lady with child of the Holy Spirit before they were married. He lost his job and his home in the move to Bethlehem that Christmas demanded. Joseph paid a high cost for Christmas.

Mary paid her bill for Christmas in pain and suffering. Can't you just picture her riding those rough roads of Israel when it was almost time for her baby to be born. What anguish she must have suffered as she lay in a stable looking around at the feed trough that was soon to hold her child and wondering how she and Joseph could deliver this child on their own. And when finally the agony of birth was over and she thought she could get some rest a bunch of rough neck shepherds came barging in waking the baby and tracking mud all over the stable. Mary also paid a high cost for Christmas.

But what of the child born that first Christmas Day? Suddenly to be clothed in flesh and to be totally at the mercy of Mary and Joseph after ages of angel adoration and the comfort of complete power. To feel pain, hunger, and temptation as a man so that He could eventually die for mankind. Such love overwhelms me. It is beyond the comprehension of normal thought. What a cost Christ paid that first Christmas.

At Christmas we think much of buying presents and little about being in His presence. The pressure of buying gifts for people who don't need anything makes us forget about the one who gave everything. What a different attitude we would have if we just considered the cost of Christmas.

December 15, 2004 CHRISTMAS OFFENCE

I'm offended that the press makes a big deal over the fact that the President sent out a Christmas Card honoring Christ instead of the Republican Party. I think the press owes the majority of the American people an apology for thinking their anti-religion is more important than everyone else's celebration of the birth of the Son of God.

I'm offended that courts allow businesses to make BILLIONS of dollars off of people buying gifts to give at Christmas but then declare that kids singing about the original gifts given to Christ at His birth is unlawful. I think the courts should declare Christmas buying illegal and state that they themselves will not celebrate Christmas in any way (You know that is tongue in cheek!).

I'm offended that we can celebrate our freedom as a nation even though we have millions of people who are visiting in the United States who do not share our same viewpoint but we are not supposed to celebrate our freedom in Christ because someone in the neighborhood may not have that same freedom.

I'm offended that Christmas has suddenly become a winter holiday in which we can be taught to worship our ancestors but we are not supposed to worship the Son of God who came to earth to save our ancestors from eternal destruction.

I don't know what you will do this year but as for me and my house, we will celebrate the birth of God's Son; and be extremely thankful for the privilege.

December 21, 2004 WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

My wife generally gets me some clothes, some aftershave, and some candy for Christmas. My mother normally gives me some money since she is no longer physically able to walk around and shop. Other family members who still bother to keep me on their list generally give me chocolate covered pecans or some gadgets they think I might find useful. I appreciate all of these things but do you know what I really want for Christmas?

I would like for Society to receive what the angels proclaimed on that first Christmas morning, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men". By that I mean that I would like for society to stop trying to ban God from everything and, instead, start giving glory to God with their lips and their lives. What a joy it would be for me this Christmas if people simply let God's peace guide them into showing good will toward other men.

I would also like for everyone to hear the same good tiding of great joy that the shepherds heard that first Christmas morning, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.". Christmas is not simply another holiday. Christmas is about the birth of a baby who came to change the world and give us access to God. The greatest gift anyone could receive this Christmas would be for them to accept God's gift of eternal abundant life through faith in Jesus Christ.

I'm easy to please. All I want for Christmas is the same thing that was talked about on the very first Christmas. And if I can get it then it will surely be a MERRY CHRISTMAS.

December 22, 2004 EXULTATION

In the second verse of the Christmas Hymn, "O Come, All Ye Faithful" the writer declares that angels are to "sing in exultation". What a neat thought; when you think about the birth of Jesus Christ you are to sing with "Exultation".

"Exultation" is usually defined as jubilation or exuberance in the celebration of an event. Country people from South Carolina, however, would define "exultation" as getting so filled with the Blessings from the Lord until you have to loudly holler, "Ain't God Good.".

Does Christmas fill your heart with so much joy until you want to sing in exultation or does it fill your life with so much stress and activities until you secretly cannot wait until it is over and done with? Have your songs of exultation turned to whining about traffic and complaining about crowds? There is a simple solution that will put the "exultation" back into your singing.

The shepherds were griping and complaining about missing all the excitement in town and about their lot in life until angels suddenly appeared and declared that God had become a man and the world would never be the same. Exultation singing seemed the only fitting course of action after that! Guess what? If you can get past the tinsel and the toys and hear the real message of Christmas this year it will do the same thing for you. And Christmas will indeed be Merry.

December 28, 2004 DISAGREEING AGREEABLY

Christmas thrills have turned into Christmas bills and your money has ended before the month has come to a close. The joy of being together as a family has turned into a very bad case of cabin fever as everyone has started fussing and fighting and griping and complaining. How do you stay agreeable when it seems everyone else is looking for a reason to fight?

First of all, remember that Friction is a normal part of development and can even be healthy under the right circumstances- Pr 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Instead of spending all your time and energy fighting the fight why don't you look for the reason behind the fighter's anger. It might show you something you really need to know.

Secondly, realize that most people are more interested in the argument than they are in the answer. Many times they don't want you to solve the problem nearly as much as they want you to share their hurt. That is why trying to be reasonable is like throwing gas on a fire. They are not looking for a victory nearly as much as they are looking for a way to vent their anger.

Finally, react to the anger with love and you will always be a peacemaker instead of part of the problem. Sometimes you need to react with tough love and sometimes with tender love but always know that Pr 10:12 Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

Don't let disagreements destroy you. Instead, endeavor to be a reconciler knowing that Mt 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

December 29, 2004 JOSHUA'S JOY

Mother has arrived at that age where the really young children are now the great grandchildren. Knowing how impatient they can become when they have to watch other people open presents Mother decided to allow the great grandchildren to open their Christmas presents first. Joshua is the youngest so he went first. As the wrapping was torn from the package and he could see the contents of the present he was almost beside himself with excitement. "Boy, Oh Boy, Oh Boy", he kept exclaiming as he pulled the toys from their wrapping. At that moment in time I do not know of anything that could have made him more happy.

Later that day, as I carried Mother back to her home she said over and over, "Joshua's joy made my day today. He really liked the present I got for him.". Joshua's joy had transferred across the generations to become my mother's joy.

That night as I prayed and thanked the Lord for giving us such a good day together as a family I told Him that I wanted to have the same excitement and appreciation for His goodness toward me in the coming year as Joshua had in the opening of his present. May each of us have that same desire. What a difference it would make to those we live and work with if we were genuinely appreciative and publically grateful for God's goodness toward us.