

2010 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones These devotional articles were first published in local newspapers. Newspaper guidelines limit them to no more than 300 words. © Mike Jones (Permission is given to use these articles in not for profit publications). Mike@ministerministry.com

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January 5, 2010 CONTINUOUS GIFTS

Christmas is a fading memory. The bills are coming in and many people find they not only ate too much in December, they also spent too much! So much for the “all year long Christmas spirit” everyone wanted to keep.

Let me give you a few suggestions for some Gifts that “keep on giving”. Give these gifts and you will find that the illusive spirit of Christmas is indeed possible all year long!

The First Christmas was about God loving the world enough to give His only begotten Son so give the gift of Love and find a joy this year you had not anticipated. The Son of God was given in order to provide forgiveness for the sins of mankind so add the gift of forgiveness to your list and wonder at the freedom you will feel when you are no longer bound by a spirit of anger and animosity.

The Angels and Shepherds proclaimed “Glory to God” at Christmas. Make the opportunity each day to find a way to glorify God in your language and your life and wonder at the blessings that will flow back to you as you bring blessings to others.

Finally, share with everyone this year that a Savior has been born so they can now face life with help and hope. Patrick Henry wrote in his will: “I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they have that and I had not given them one shilling, they would be rich; and if they have not that and I have given them the entire world, they are poor indeed”.

Give so that others may really live and make this coming year the best year you have ever experienced.

January 6, 2010 WHILE YOU ARE LIVING

A pig and a cow met in the barnyard. The pig lamented his lack of popularity. He complained that people always talked about the cow’s gentleness and kind eyes while always using the pig’s name as an insult. The pig admitted that the cow gave milk and cream but maintained pigs gave a lot more. “Why”, the pig complained, “we pigs give bacon and ham and people even pickle our feet. I do not understand why cows are esteemed so much higher than pigs.”

The Cow thought for a minute and then said, “Maybe the difference is that cows give what we have while we are still living!”

What are you giving “while you are still living?” I am thinking of a man who decided to designate the mission work in India in his will so he could help build churches when he died. As he began to think about the needs, however, he decided not to wait until he died in order to do what needed to be done so he gave money that has already been used to build numerous churches in India. Hundreds of people worship in block buildings instead of searing sun or pouring rain because this man decided to do something while he was still living.

What a miserable time it is going to be for some people when they come to the end of life and find that instead of looking forward to treasures laid up in heaven their whole life has been spent accumulating possessions they have left to be fought over by ungrateful children and covetous tax collectors. Wouldn’t it be much better to do some good “while you are still living” in order to enjoy what you have accomplished while you are anticipating your coming reward?

January 12, 2010 BOTH SMALL AND GREAT

When I look at the mighty accomplishments of some people I sometimes feel such a small and insignificant part of the Kingdom of God. Then I remember the way God uses small things and I determine to do the best I can where I am with what I have.

An old article from the "Sword of the Lord" newspaper declared that a flea can leap 200 times its length. A man would have to jump 1200 feet to jump the same proportionate distance. A housefly takes 440 steps in a half second in order to travel 3 inches. A man would have to run 20 miles a minute to equal this feat.

It also said that Turnip seeds, under good conditions, increase their weight 15 times a minute. In rich soil a turnip seed may increase its weight 15,000 times a day. It is said that there is no force more powerful than a growing squash. A squash 18 days old has been harnessed in such a way that in its growing process it lifted 50 pounds on a lever mechanism. Nineteen days later it lifted 5,000 pounds.

The Bible declares that God "will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great." (Psalms 115:13). If I will be faithful to God and to His call on my life then God has promised to bless me in spite of the smallness of my accomplishments. That is not an excuse to do little but it sure is an encouragement to realize God will bless what I do with the same zeal that He blesses the accomplishments of "great" preachers. It is not the number of talents that God gives me but my use of those talents that God is judging. May I be faithful to do the "little things" well.

January 13, 2010 AMBASSADOR OR EMBARRASSMENT

Ambassador is a big word for a little girl but she had studied hard for her part in the Church play. Over and over she repeated on the way to Church, "I am an ambassador for the Lord". The play began and the little girl looked out at all those people looking back at her and her brain quickly "froze". Trying her best to remember what she was supposed to say she blurted out, "I am an embarrassment for the Lord" instead of "I am an ambassador for the Lord"!

I can sympathize and emphasize with this little girl because many times I feel I am more of an embarrassment than an ambassador for the Lord! No, I am not going out and getting drunk or committing adultery or things like that. But sometimes I have to really work at showing "Christian nice" when the flesh is angry and irritated. And your perceived attitude is very important because a basic principle of life is "You can say 'I love you' a thousand times and people may or may not believe you but you can give the impression you hate someone and they will believe it instantly and forever".

Every day my attitude and my actions point to the greatness of God or the failures of His servant. David wrote in one of his Psalms "Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel." (Psalms 69:6). May that be the prayer of every Christian this year as we seek to be Ambassadors, instead of embarrassments, for the Lord.

January 19, 2010 WORST THAN EXPECTED

A wife went to her family doctor and told him she was having trouble with her husband because he thought he was a refrigerator. The Doctor declared it a harmless delusion that would soon pass. "But Doctor," the woman said, "When he sleeps with his mouth open, the little light keeps me awake." Sometimes problems are deeper than they appear!

One of those "head scratching" verses in the Bible declares that the Heathen were worst toward God's people than God wanted them to be- *And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.* (Zechariah 1:15).

There are two way of interpreting this verse. It could mean that the ways of the heathen so tempted the people of God until the result was a worst punishment from God than God originally planned. It could also mean that God allowed the Heathen to be used to punish His people and the Heathen punished them more than God had intended. Either way it is a little "scary" to hear that punishment for God's people went beyond God's original plan.

In recent days I heard about a fallen preacher whose "besetting sin" (alcohol) was a possible contributor to his death. Over and over he had the opportunity to repent and change his life but he continued "playing with fire" until the heat stopped comforting him and ended up consuming him. It was not the will of God that this preacher ended up perishing instead of being productive but when you dance with death there are times death decides to lead instead of follow. Sometimes when you allow sin a place in your life it is the light instead of the refrigerator you need to be concerned about!

January 20, 2010 TWISTED TRUTH

A fictitious story is told about a racing contest between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both governments commissioned their best engineers to produce the fastest automobile possible. After much experimenting and preparation, the day arrived for the contest. The American car won by inches. This was rather hard for the Russians to handle so their leading newspaper carried the following report: "Russia and the U S competed in a long awaited race yesterday. Both cars broke all former speed records. The Soviets came in second, and the Americans finished next to the last!"

Sometimes you can misrepresent the truth in such a way until the truth is no longer the truth even though it is still the truth! We recognize this in politicians who say things in such a way until a clear statement can be explained later in an entirely different way than the way it was originally expressed. We also recognize it in Church Members who proclaim a principle one way when it applies to others and another way when it applies to them!

A statement by the Apostle Paul to the Church at Corinth shows how such twisted truths will end- Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Paul declares that God will "bring to light the hidden dark things and expose the counsels of the hearts". It is hard to twist the truth when the original motive and meaning are exposed. When this happens the truth will twist you instead of you twisting the truth.

January 26, 2010 SPIRITUAL PERSON

Rev. Earl Hendrix, one of the leading Free Will Baptist Pastors in South Carolina, published an article in his church newspaper in 1975 about the qualifications of a "Spiritual Person". It was so good until I kept it all these years so I can look over it from time to time to examine my own life. I realized recently that it might be beneficial to others also so I am sharing it with you.

The Positive Side of a Spiritual Person: He is led by, and filled with, the Holy Spirit. He studies God's Word and puts into practice the principles of God's Word. He communes with God daily through prayer and devotions. He is faithful in his love for, and his attendance at, Church. He is a soul winner and supports the efforts of his church to reach the world for Christ. He will be friendly, courteous, and joyful in his daily life.

On the Negative Side, a Spiritual Person is not critical of others, not a fault finder, not a back biter, not a gossiper, not a busy body, and not a talebearer. He does not retaliate but forgives as he was forgiven. He does not tear down but seeks to build up.

The Apostle Paul told the Church at Corinth that he "could not speak unto them as unto spiritual people, but as unto carnal (Fleshly minded), even as unto babes in Christ." 1Co 3:1. This carnal fleshly mind and attitude is much too evident in many churches today as people seek to be self gratified instead of Spirit led. May God help us to determine to be Spiritual People who will daily be conformed into the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

January 27, 2010 BREAKFAST

I realized I had made a mistake but it was too late to correct it so I asked God to cover for me. I was presenting a program at a local minister's breakfast recently and made the mistake of ordering breakfast. Before I arrived at the breakfast I remembered that I had given my wife my last five dollars the day before in order to get something to eat when she took her father to the hospital. I had planned to just skip breakfast- I'm fat so it would do me good to skip a breakfast.

When I arrived and was setting up the equipment for my presentation the waitress asked me if I wanted the special today and I told her yes. It was only after she left that I realized I had ordered breakfast. That is when I had to ask God to come to my rescue.

The breakfast was good and the presentation went well. I greeted the people as they filed out and then began repacking my equipment wondering what I was going to do about paying for breakfast. Just as I was reminding God about His promise to care for me one of the preachers came back into the room and said, "Mike, I was about to forget. I wanted to buy your breakfast today." Is there a Glory anywhere in the house?

God is a good God and I am so very thankful to be one of His servants. Sometimes He has to work extra hard in order to help me with my stumbles and mistakes but, like a Rock, He is always there and always dependable. What a joy to see His hand at work and to experience once again His unfailing love.

February 2, 2010 DOING WHAT YOU DO

In the words of Clint Eastwood, "A man has to know his limitations!" A profound statement that has spiritual implications. Multitudes of people struggle in their walk with God because they think they are supposed to do everything that needs to be done. Unwilling to accept the fact that they are just one part of the body of believers they attempt to do everything and end up exhausted and discouraged. Look at these examples of good things that great spiritual leaders did not do.

John did no miracles- And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. (John 10:41)

Jesus did no Baptizing- When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) (John 4:1-2)

God will provide everything you need in order for you to do what God has called YOU to do. It will be a great achievement in your life when you willingly accept God's plan and purpose for your life. Stop craving positions or crying over lack of provisions for something God did not plan for you to accomplish. Learning your limitations gives you tremendous potential to do what you are supposed to do instead of living with the frustration and failure of attempting things that God planned for someone else to do. When everyone does their part the Christian life is a thing of beauty.

One warning that must be recognized. Learn the difference between limitations God puts on your life and obstacles Satan puts in your path. The first you accept, the second you overcome. Blessed is the man who knows the difference.

February 3, 2010 RELATIONSHIP NEEDED

Multitudes of people falter in their work for God because they do not receive the reward or recognition they think they deserve. I have seen people who stopped coming to Church and stopped their work for God because someone at the Church failed to express love or appreciation to them in the way they expected. They did not get their hand shook, their back slapped, or their ears tickled in the way they wanted so they abandoned the wonderful fellowship of the family of God and began nursing their hurt in their shell of self-pity at home. It was horrible to watch them as their heart shriveled and the light of life dimmed into the darkness of anger and despair.

Jesus went about doing good as He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and proclaimed the good news of a great God but 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)

Sodium and Chloride can both be poisonous to the human body. Add them together in the proper proportions, however, and they become Salt which is necessary for the body. Hydrogen is extremely flammable and Oxygen is the fuel of fire but mix them together in the proper proportion and they become water which is used to extinguish fires. Do not allow Satan to use Pride and Self Pity to separate you from needed relationships. The results can be disastrous.

There is coming a day when the righteous judge shall judge righteously and all the wrongs shall be made right. On that day you will be glad you remained steadfast and faithful to the work God called you to do.

February 9, 2010 FAMILY ACTIVITIES THAT BUILD LOVE

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18)

You can talk about love or you can do something about love. Here are 35 inexpensive activities that will help bring your family closer together:

1) Have devotions around the kitchen table 2) Attend a Church softball game 3) Plant flowers or a garden 4) Take a trip on a city bus 5) Play card and board games at home 6) Fly a kite 7) Take a nature walk or bike ride 8) Take a day trip to somewhere special 9) Visit the Library or Zoo 10) Go fishing 11) Make Homemade Ice Cream 12) Do a Bible people puppet show for the grandparents 13) Wash the car together 14) Carry homemade brownies to a shut in 15) Play catch or Frisbee 16) Camp out in the back yard 17) Go roller skating 18) Look thru the family album 19) Have an indoor picnic 20) Visit the State Capitol 21) Feed some birds 22) Visit a Planetarium, a museum, the local airport, a newspaper office, or TV Station 23) Create a Bible Quiz for your Sunday School Class 24) Clean out the garage or attic 25) Walk to a neighbor's house for a visit 26) Have a fast food progressive supper 27) Have a sing-along 28) Write to a missionary 29) Cheap choice children's night [Child decides what to do but it must be cheap] 30) Children teach parents how to text 31) Get pictures and information and pray for federal and state government leaders 32) Let the kids help you pay the bills one month (it will be eye opening for them!) 33) Start a saving account with your children 34) Have a hug family members day. 35) Start a family Prayer List and celebrate the answers.

February 10, 2010 PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

The Bible commands us to make Love real in conduct and in character: Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Corinthians 13:1-7). Here are 10 Actions that will help turn love from lips into life; and make a tremendous difference in people.

- 1) Replace words (Let me know if you need me) with actions (wash dishes / cut grass)
- 2) Look for ways to encourage instead of criticize
- 3) Share a meal, and a listening ear, with someone in need.
- 4) Give Gift cards for gas and meals for no special reason.
- 5) Email or text someone a "thinking of you" message
- 6) Clean the house of the sick.
- 7) Enter into a covenant with someone to pray for their spouse, children, or financial needs.
- 8) Defend someone whom others are criticizing.
- 9) Invite visitors at church to sit on your pew or move to their pew
- 10) Turn off TV or Computer, tell your spouse they are more important than those things, and then rub their feet or scratch their back.

February 16, 2010 PAUL'S VISIONS

A vision is something your outer eye or inner heart “sees” that provides insight, motivation, or inspiration. The Apostle Paul had several “visions” that changed his life and directed his ministry.

Paul had a vision of a risen Lord that led to his Salvation (And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. (Acts 9:3-5) Paul also had visions about his Service (And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. Acts 16:9), Support (Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. Acts 18:9-10), Strength (And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. Acts 23:11), and Safety (For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. (Acts 27:23-24)

Paul's visions transformed him. May God give you “eyes to see” His plans for you and renew your life and spirit today.

February 17, 2010 GIVE ME TOO MUCH

It was a birthday party and one of the men was cutting and passing out birthday cake. Person after person would say, “Cut me a small piece. Do not give me too much.” Finally, the man's nephew came up for his cake and said, “Uncle Mac, give me too much!” Love that kid because that is just what I ask God, “Give me more than enough. Give me too much!”

I am not a greedy covetous person who begs God for too much in the way of physical blessings. I try to take the approach of the writer of Proverbs when he asked God to “give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.” (Proverbs 30:8-9). I try to be satisfied with what God is satisfied with me having.

I also try not to be proud or vain and ask God to give me too much in the way of position or privilege. I try to remember that “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18-19) My life goal is to help people; not merely to impress them.

The place I ask God for too much is in my relationship with Him. I want to be nearer and dearer to God every day. I do not want just a little bit of a relationship with God. I want “too much” of His Presence so that people will look at the Lord in my life and desire to know Him with all their being. That is when “too much” will be just enough.

February 23, 2010 CONSIDER SIN'S CONSEQUENCES

And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face. (Hosea 7:2)

God considers in wonderment the fact that men do not consider the consequences of Sin. Sin destroys Lives, divides Families, distresses God, and dooms a person to Hell. Sin produces rotten fruit, wrong rewards, a blemished testimony, and missed blessings. Sin promises you happiness but produces bondage, beatings, and burdens. Here are ten consequences to consider the next time you want to invite Sin into your life and activities.

Sin is never satisfied. One Sin leads to more sins- deeper and deeper you are drawn into its captivity.

Sin incurs God's displeasure and invites God's discipline

Time spend in sin is forever wasted

Sin widens its circle of impact to include those around the sinner

Sin limits your ability to serve God as you should

Sin blocks your Prayer Power- If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: (Psalms 66:18)

Sin leads a person to act like a fool- Then said Saul, I have sinned: ...behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. (1Sam 26:21)

Sin hardens your heart against others and against God

Sin brings God's punishment and earns God's wrath- *The Wages of Sin is death* (Rom 6:23).

Sin will find you out- *But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.* (Numbers 32:23). The consequences of Sin are certain- Thank God for the mercy and forgiveness that can be ours through Faith in Jesus Christ.

February 24, 2010 HOW TO ENJOY LIFE.

There are many "formulas" for happiness in the world today, Yet more and more people are enjoying life less and less. Here are 6 Bible principles for enjoying life that will work for you if you will work them.

- **COMPLAIN LESS-** (1 Pet 3:10) *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:* It is amazing how much more you enjoy life when you don't let your tongue get ahead of your brain.
- **GIVE MORE-** Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. (Luke 6:38) Greed and coveting shrink the soul. Giving gives back more than you gave!
- **LAUGH LOUD-** Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. (Ecclesiastes 5:19) Rejoice in the blessings of God. Celebrate life.
- **PRAY HARD-** Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:24) Pray believing; receive with delight.
- **LIVE RIGHT-** Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. (Heb 1:9) You never regret doing right. Life is good when you are good.
- **DRAW NEAR-** *It is good for me to draw near to God:* (Ps 73:28) The heart is a restless hunter seeking only God. The good life is the God life.

March 2, 2010 AMERICAN IDOLS

When God decided to give man rules to live by (the Ten Commandments) it is interesting to note that the first two of these commands were requirements that nothing be placed before our obedience to, and affection for, God- *Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.* (Exodus 20:3-6)

While most people in America do not make physical “idols” to bow before and worship, it is increasingly obvious that Americans are more and more giving their allegiance and affection to idols instead of to God. These American Idols normally come into our lives down one of three avenues: Idols that Numb our Mind include obvious things such as drugs and alcohol. Also included are the Idols of entertainment addiction and communication control (try to take a cell phone from a child!).

There are also Idols that Occupy our Hands and make us either too busy to serve God or too worn out to study God’s word or do God’s work. Have you ever noticed that people find time for everything but devotions and duty to God?

Finally, there are Idols that Steal our Heart- Sinful activities and selfish ambitions take priority over God in our life and heart. Something is number one in your life. If it is not God then it is an Idol.

March 3, 2010 NEHUSHTAN

Hezekiah removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.[A piece of Brass] (2 Kings 18:4)

God sent a plague of snake among His people because of their sins (Numbers 21). When they cried to God for deliverance God told Moses to raise up a brazen serpent and any man who looked on that serpent with faith would be delivered. The people were so impressed with the power displayed by this act until they began to worship the serpent instead of the God who used the serpent to deliver them. Hezekiah realized that a good thing had become an Idol so he had it destroyed.

I heard a preacher recently elevate the word of God above the God of the Word and I thought within myself, “Nuhushtan”- your priorities are out of order. The Bible is just another book unless it carries the authorship of God’s Spirit and the authority of God’s Sovereignty. When we begin to worship the Bible instead of the God of the Bible then the blessed book become just a “piece of brass”.

Multitudes of people have fallen into this trap and they now worship their Church instead of the God of their Church (If you do not believe it try to change something in the Church!). Or the rituals of their religion have replaced the joy of the relationship God desires. Like a child at Christmas they would rather play with the box instead of the gift that came in the box.

Don’t worship the symbols; worship the Savior. The symbols are only “Nehushtan”.

March 9, 2010 COMMITTED COMMITMENT

I was eating lunch with my nephew recently. Our conversation was about the need of "Commitments" in life and some way our conversation came to my needing to write a newspaper article. "Uncle Mike", he said. "You always have to write a newspaper article!" I laughed when I noticed my wife shaking her head "Yes!"

This is my 21st year of writing 2 newspaper devotional articles each week- that is 104 articles each year! I receive no compensation and very little acclimation and it gets to be really hard work some weeks but God put it in my heart and I will try to continue until God closes the door or tells me to stop.

The Apostle John summarized what I try to accomplish each week- That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:3-4)

Sometimes writing is like an overflowing well and I cannot write the words on the page fast enough. Other times writing is like trying to get water out of a rock; you just keep hitting your head against that rock until the rock breaks and the water flows! Regardless, the water has to flow two times each week.

Talking about the articles helped my nephew understand a little about commitment. Commitment means stepping up to the plate and doing your best every time it is your turn to bat. Sometimes you hit a home run and sometimes you strike out but you always walk to the batter's box when it is your turn. Even when God takes me out of the lineup and makes me a designated hitter I am committed to that kind of commitment.

March 10, 2010 CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOLS

The Bible declares that I am not to call a man a fool (Matt 5:22) so I am simply going to list 8 characteristics of a fool and let you "judge a tree by the fruit it bears" (Matt 7:20). A Fool:

- 1) Walks a Wicked Way with no regard for God- *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.* (Psalms 53:1). Notice the remaining Corrupt Characteristics of a Fool.
- 2) Slanders Other- *He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.* (Proverbs 10:18)
- 3) Mocks at Sin- *Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour.* (Proverbs 14:9)
- 4) Despises Instruction- *A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.* (Proverbs 15:5)
- 5) Contentious- *A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.* (Proverbs 18:6)
- 6) Meddlesome- *It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.* (Proverbs 20:3)
- 7) Self Confident- *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.* (Proverbs 28:26)
- 8) Dishonest- *As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.* (Jeremiah 17:11)

There is, however, one "foolish" thing you should take heed to- For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

March 16, 2010 THE WONDER OF THE WORD

The Bible is miraculous in its:

- Inspiration- *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* (2 Peter 1:21). In some supernatural way God moved the writers of the Bible to write exactly what He wanted written while at the same time allowing them to use their own personality and passion as they wrote. What a Great God!
- Compilation- It is 66 Books which were compiled over 1500 years. 39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament Books were written by around 40 different writers and yet harmony about the Divine purpose and plan can be traced through them all.
- Preservation-. *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.* (Ps 119:89). The Bible has existed in its completed form for nearly 2000 years. Customs and technology have changed but the Bible still remains settled as the Word of God. Many have tried to fight God's word but they lie silent in their graves while the Word of God continues to speak to multitudes each day.
- Circulation- The Bible is available in over 1000 languages with over 30 million copies printed each year. It continues to be the number one selling book year after year after year.
- Transformation- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16). Following this verse the writer tells how the Word of God dwelling in your heart changes you, your family, and your work ethic.

Do not just wonder at the Word. Let the Wonder of the Word work wonders in your heart and life today.

March 17, 2010 THE MIRACLE BOOK

If we are to "*know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.*" (Psalms 135:5) then there are three things we must be sure about- we must 1) Believe God's Word is true, 2) See God's Wonders as authentic, and 3) Fear God's Wrath is real. We must be convinced that God communicates to man, demonstrates Himself in the world, and obligates Himself to justice. Anything less is simply a "placebo" God designed by our minds to ease our pain, complain to about our problems, or offer us comfort when death, disease, or disaster comes our way.

The first thing we must believe about God is that His Word is true. Our denomination declares that "We believe the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant and that the Bible is without error and trustworthy in all its teachings". We believe the Bible is

The Originator of our Faith- So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

The Penetrator of our Heart- For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

The Regenerator of our Souls- Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:23)

The Bible is a Miracle Book about a Miracle God who can do miraculous things in your life. Do not let the wonder working power of God get dusty on a shelf. Read the Bible this week and let the miracles begin.

March 23, 2010 CROSS CHANGES

What makes you what you are? Why do you think, talk, and act as you do? Can you change? Should you change? Life questions that impact each of us.

Several factors determine who you are. The genes you receive from your parents, the language and culture you receive from your community, and the individual character traits you receive from God all combine to develop you into the person you are today. The color of your skin and the color of your eyes were passed down through your family line. Your primary language and your prejudiced world view were developed as you interacted in your family and community. Your personality traits have been sharpened or dulled by the contacts and conflicts you experienced as you traveled life's highway. A lot of things have combined to make you who you are.

Can you change? You can lose weight, color your hair, and learn another language. You can develop better manners and learn to look at people and problems from a different world view. You can educate your mind, train your voice, and improve your living conditions. You can become a better person but there are some things you cannot change.

You cannot change the sins of your past or the state of your heart. "Good People" with a good education, good manners, and nice homes molest children, commit adultery, and do harm to other people. Environmental and educational changes fail to transform the corruption of the human heart.

God knows all this so He provided a way to so drastically alter the state of the human heart until it was called being "Born Again". This is made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that is what the Easter story is really all about.

March 24, 2010 CROSS REACTIONS

Jesus hung on a cross, condemned to die because He (truthfully) claimed to be the Son of God. During His three years of ministry He had fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, and captivated the people with His teachings and parables. But He would not toe the religious establishment's "political line" so he was railroaded through the courts and sentenced to die by a "judge" who admitted he found no fault in him and was simply bowing to the pressures of the community leaders.

The reactions of people during the horrible hours Jesus spent on the Cross were amazing. Some Railed at Him- And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross. (Mark 15:29-30). The word "railed" here is the Greek work for blasphemed and refers to someone talking with contempt about another. Jesus had given them only good things and now was dying for their sins and they rewarded Him with contempt. You would not do that, would you?

Some spectators gambled for his clothes (the "what is in this for me" crowd). Some tried to give him vinegar to drink when he thirsted (the "let's pretend to help but actually make it worst" crowd). Some people just waited for Him to die (The "let's see if anything extraordinary happens that we can gossip about" crowd).

One man watched from a cross and was so impressed until he asked Jesus if he could be part of His Kingdom. Everyone reacts to the cross in some manner. I hope this man's example will inspire your reaction.

March 30, 2010 EASTER RECONCILIATION

Easter is about the reconciliation of God and Man in order for the bond of fellowship to return to their relationship. In the garden of Eden God would come down each day in order to enjoy a time of fellowship with Adam and Eve. The disobedience of sin broke God's heart and broke this fellowship. God could not ignore this rebellious act so, like anyone who loves another, God immediately began to plan a way to restore His relationship with man. This is what the Bible, and human history, is all about. And this is why the Son of God ended up dying on a cross as a substitute sacrifice for all of mankind.

One of the primary principles of the universe is the sowing and reaping rule. Actions produce consequences. This is a wonderful positive principle but it is a horrible negative standard. Everyone wants to sow and reap bountifully when there is good involved but those same people want to sow and reap nothing when there is groaning instead of gold at harvest time! The Law of sowing and reaping remains steadfast, however, in bad as well as in good. That means the wages of sin are death no matter how much God loves mankind.

Jesus did not go to the cross as a grand gesture of love. The cross was the only way to pay our sin death and deliver believers from eternal separation from God. Easter is not about wearing new clothes to church; it is about becoming new creatures for God. Easter is not about hiding eggs; it is about finding new life in Christ.

Sin claimed man at a tree in the Garden of Eden. Christ claimed victory over sin and death on a tree at Calvary. God and man can once more walk together- Glory!

March 31, 2010 IT IS FINISHED

God always has a plan. Even before man sinned in the garden God had a plan to redeem mankind and restore him to full fellowship. As that plan came to its conclusion, Jesus could proclaim to His Heavenly Father- "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4). Later, as the blood dripped from his sinless body while hanging on a cross, Jesus could proclaim to a lost world- "It is finished" (John 19:30) and die with the full assurance that His job was complete.

The Apostle Paul came to a point in his life where he could look around at a world that desperately needed the Gospel he preached and yet proclaim with full confidence, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:" (2 Timothy 4:7). There was a world of needs still to be met but Paul could gratefully say to the God who had called and sustained Him that he had completed the task which God had set for him to do.

I began preaching the gospel at the age of 14 and for 48 years I have tried to faithfully proclaim the word of God and declare the wondrous works of God. Now I feel that I can say about the Pastoral part of my ministry, "It is finished." On Easter Sunday I plan to retire from the Pastoral Ministry and concentrate on Promoting the missionary heart of God, Preaching the infallible Word of God, and Writing about the glorious wonders of God. I have not finished the book of my life yet but I have finished this chapter. I am excited beyond words to see what God will do in the next chapter.

April 6, 2010 LIFE PRINCIPLES TO KNOW

It is not what we do not know that hurts us; it is what we are certain of that is wrong! Here are some Life Principles that I know that God wants me to know.

I know Salvation is through Faith in Christ- These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13). Salvation involves a Conviction Time, A Crisis Time, A Commitment Time, and a Confession Time that acknowledges your faith in Christ.

I know God is Dependable: For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless 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. (2 Timothy 1:12)

I know I am special to God- Ps 4:3 But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself.

I know God is Steadfast- Ec 3:14 I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it. (Malachi 3:6) For I am the LORD, I change not;

I know it is best to Serve the Lord- 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,

I know that what I do for God means something in eternity- 1Co 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord

April 7, 2010 BACK TO BASICS

Here are a few things that will help you stabilize your Christian Life so you can recapture the joy and zeal you once had in your walk with the Lord.

Remember that you repented of your sinful nature and turned your life over to God. The three marks of true Repentance are:

Acknowledgement and Confession of wrong doing- Luke 3:7-10

Desire to abandon wrong actions- Luke 3: 11- 14

Willingness to make Restitution- Luke 19:8

Stop trying all the new "ideas" that sound good but do not produce Christian Joy and Growth. Billy Graham in his book "Guide for Christian Living" list 10 Rules for good Spiritual Health:

Read your Bible Daily

Learn the Power of Prayer

Rely constantly on the Holy Spirit

Attend Church Regularly

Become a Witnessing Christian

Let love be the ruling principle in your life

Be Obedient to God and His Word

Learn how to Meet Temptation

Be a Daily Genuine Christian

Live above your circumstances

Realize that you can and should live a victorious Christian Life. The Three enemies that Christians battle are The World System, The Desires of the Flesh, and the Accusations of the Devil but we know we are of God and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4).

Christianity is a great way to live. Get back to basics and let your life be an abundant life.

April 13, 2010 PASSION PRAYER PROMISES

As Jesus ate the “last supper” with his disciples He gave them four Prayer Promises that are absolutely astonishing in their implication. How poorly we live when God had promised us such magnificent blessings!

Authority to “sign the name of the Son” on the checks we present to the Father- And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14). It would change a church if the Pastor had a service where he read these verses and then gave people ten minutes to silently contemplate the implications; and then repeated the same process twice more before dismissing the people with the admonition to put this day’s sermon into practice!

Assurance to know our petitions are correct because we let the living Word direct our desires and request- *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.* (John 15:7)

Confidence in the long term results of our prayer relationship with the Lord- Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (John 15:16)

Jubilation as we see God working through our prayers to build His Kingdom and expose His Glory- *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* (John 16:24)

In His last moments with His disciples Jesus shared these Promises. Let us consider them and apply them in that context.

April 14, 2010 RECAPTURE THE BLESSING

Sometimes the burden of the burden causes us to miss the blessing of the blessing! I have seen Pastors become so burdened down by the disinterest of the lost, the dissensions among the members, and the duties of the church until they lose their enthusiasm for the work of the Lord. They become weary in well doing and it becomes increasingly easy to hear bitterness in their sermons. I think that is what the writer of Hebrews had in mind when he wrote- *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;* (Hebrews 12:15)

Do not allow the needs of people to overwhelm you. If you do you will eventually lose energy to minister because you will try to BE God instead of SHOW God. Keep your eyes on the vision God has given you and remember it is God’s responsibility to work miracles in the lives of people.

Know and maintain boundaries in your ministry. Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase (I Cor 3:6). Do what God has called you to do and allow other members of the body to do what God has called them to do. No one will be overburdened and everyone will enjoy seeing the harvest God produces.

Make spending quiet time with God a priority- *But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength;* (Isaiah 40:31). Waiting is the hardest work you will work but it will lead to the most productive accomplishments you will accomplish.

Jesus did not heal everyone or go everywhere. He simply “did always those things that please the Father” (John 8:29). Keep that as your vision and see how much better life will be for you!

April 20, 2010 DO WHATEVER HE SAYS

The last words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, recorded in Scripture are at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus when she told the servants at the Wedding Feast, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). What a tremendous sermon in such a few words!

In the early part of my walk with the Lord a major emphasis of preachers and Bible teachers was the need of complete commitment and absolute obedience. I was taught that becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ meant denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Christ (Matt 16:24). Christianity was not about how God could serve me but about how I could serve God.

Sadly, I have watched that change in recent years. Preachers now talk about God as a great "force" in the sky who exists only to provide people with Health, Wealth, and Success. Seldom is anything mentioned about sacrifice, service, and steadfast obedience. As a result, Christianity is now looked upon by many as just another motivational method or a better than normal "get rich quick scheme". Because of this Christianity is no longer respected as a Moral Compass and a Transforming Truth.

Motivation to change comes from inspiration, desperation, or stimulation. People who are trying to build their kingdom instead of God's kingdom know this and incorporate these methods into their messages. Biblical "God Change", however, only comes from regeneration which is a supernatural work of a supernatural God and demands taking up a cross instead of taking up bigger offerings!

The Christian Life is best lived by those who determine to completely and absolutely obey the directions given by the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It is world transforming when the followers of Jesus determine that "whatever Jesus says to you, do it".

April 21, 2010 EMPTY WINE BOTTLES

Sometimes Christians act more like water than wine and that is not the way it is supposed to be! During the first service of the early church the preacher (Peter) had to tell the spectators that his congregation was not "drunk with wine" because of the extraordinary events happening in the service (Acts 2:15). The Apostle Paul later told the Ephesian Church to be so revolutionary in their behavior until it would resemble being "drunk with wine" (Eph 5:18).

The problem today is that many people are controlled by the wine of the world instead of the transforming power of the "wine of the spirit". The "wine skins" of many Christians are empty and dry and their lives show forth the same emptiness and dryness.

Why does the "Wine" get out of the bottle? Two illustrations involving Jesus and wine give us some guidance: 1) At the Wedding Jesus attended in Cana the wineskin was empty because of the Demands of People (The crowd at the wedding was consuming more than expected or was larger than anticipated). 2) During a Sermon (Matt 9:17) Jesus declared that wine got out of the wineskin because of Damage to the Wineskin (The fermentation process demanded that New wine must be put into new wineskins or the old wineskin would burst).

Is that why you are acting like water instead of "wine"? Has the stress of dealing with people problems or the demands of daily life turned you into a leaking vessel instead of a bubbling believer? All Jesus had to do at the wedding was find some vessels willing to be filled and then allow the water in them to be changed into wine. Let it happen in your life today. It will change everything!

April 27, 2010 WASTE

Volcanic Ash had caused our flight from Delhi, India to Newark, New Jersey to take a route directly across Russia to a point 50 miles from the North Pole where we then headed down across Canada into America. It was a 15 hour flight with a completely loaded plane since so many other flights had been canceled. In the process of getting everyone on board my normal aisle seat had been changed to a window seat.

Now a 62 year old man who takes fluid pills was trapped on the inside of a three seat section with 2 other big men beside me. And to really make it interesting, our seats were directly against the wall of one of the toilets on the plane. In case you do not know, airplane toilets use air pressure to flush the toilet which meant that for 15 hours I heard a constant chorus of “whoosh” noise from the wall directly behind my head. It was an interesting flight!

I always try to learn something good from every situation so as I sat in misery for 15 hours listening to the “whoosh” sound behind me I began to think about Waste and its part in the plan of God. Two things immediately came to mind. Waste is a Necessary activity (God designed us to continually discharge waste from our body lest it “poison” us) and a Regular activity (ask a 62 year old man on fluid pills!).

All of us have things in our life that do not belong there (all have sinned and come short of the glory of God). It is necessary that we deal with these problems on a regular basis or they will “poison” us. Thank God that Jesus Christ provides the way to dispose of the waste of sin and make us clean again.

April 28, 2010 BLOCKING SNAKES

One morning while we were staying in India I noticed that the water was not draining out when I took my shower. I hated to trouble my host but felt he needed to know about the situation. He immediately knew that the source of the problem was a blockage at the screen wire placed at the end of the drainage pipe. He said it was a common situation and easily corrected.

Then he went on to explain the reason for the screen wire and the constant problem it presented. It seems that Kite Snakes like to swim through sewage and crawl into the house through the drain opening. Since Kite Snakes are very dangerous he preferred to unblock the sewage pipe on a regular basis rather than step on snakes in his bath room!

It is amazing to see the changes that are taking place in India. Advertisements and TV programs carry images that would never have been tolerated on my first trip to India 10 years ago. Someone took the “screen” off the sewage pipe and the “snake” has crawled into the house!

I think progress is a great thing and I am very happy to see improvements in the standard of living in India. Better roads, better water, and better food are all very positive signs. It saddens me, however, to see the morals of India headed down the same path that has corrupted America.

The good news is that I was able to meet with many men and their families who realize that Biblical Values are the only “screen” that will preserve the safety and purity they desire. These men realize that when the “snake” got into the garden it corrupted everything and they are determined to deny him entrance. May God give us men like that in America.

May 4, 2010 AUNTIE'S EXAMPLE

Missionaries to India, Carlisle and Marie Hanna, knew they were going to go to the Mission field before they were married. When they announced their wedding someone offered to buy the Wedding Dress for Mrs. Marie but she told them she hated to spend that much money in a dress that would only be worn one time and it would be helpful if they would contribute that money to their mission account instead.

Mrs. Marie then made herself a beautiful white dress that she wore on her wedding day; and for 10 years after her wedding on special occasions in her mission work in India. After 10 year the suit began to discolor so she dyed that suit navy blue and worn it for another 10 years!

In India, Mrs. Marie was always called "Auntie" by the local people; partly as a title of respect and partly because her husband, missionary Carlisle Hanna, was called "Uncle" by the Indian People. The limited financial income of a missionary and the limited available resources of the poverty stricken area where she helped minister brought out all the frugal qualities and creative abilities of Auntie Marie. The people of India still talk about her skill, her resourcefulness, and, most important of all, her tremendous love and compassion.

Preachers are always looking for "hero" women for today's mothers to emulate as we approach Mother's Day. They will find few greater examples than Auntie Marie. She buried her first born child in India and now that is where she is buried. In between she helped her husband establish the greatest mission work in the history of our denomination and raised three wonderful children who love God and have a heart for God's work. We would be blessed this Mother's Day if many in our ranks would determine to follow Auntie's example of Godly living and Christian love.

May 5, 2010 MOTHER MISTAKES

Not all mothers are perfect. The first mother (Eve) argued with the Devil when she should have been working with her husband and the world continues to pay the price. The mother of Ahaziah, a king in Israel, gave him wicked advice that led to the destruction of the nation- *2Chron. 22:2-3 Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.*

Some mothers do not know the father of their child. Some Mothers have done things in their youth they greatly regret as they grow older. Not all mothers are Mayberry Moms.

Even morally acceptable Mothers sometimes limit their social acceptance and dishonor their personal example by their Attire, their Actions, their Attitude, or their Exclamations (Words). Just as everyone who carries the name "Christian" does not always bring honor to that name so everyone who bears the name "mother" does not always wear an apron and have baked bread waiting for the family every night.

Many Mothers today have to work outside the home where they are subjected to intense stress, temptations, and pressures. Their children are raised by day care centers, under budgeted school systems, and afterschool video games and talk shows. These Mothers do the best they can with the circumstances surrounding their life but many of them lay awake at night and weep over what is happening to their children and family.

Determine this Mother's Day to pray for your mother and to show her you love her. Life has given her a tough assignment and she may not be perfect but she is your Mother and she deserves your help and encouragement.

May 11, 2010 WEEDS AND WATER

The Word for Food and the word for Rice in India are the same word. Rice is an essential part of the diet of the Indian People for several reasons. It is easily grown in the climate and soil of India so it is abundantly available. It is easily prepared and goes well with the vegetables and spices that are also available in the area. And, although it is not the most nourishing food in the world, it satisfies the hunger cravings of people who must live on limited resources.

Water is an essential part of producing rice. Not only does water provide the nutrients needed by the rice but the flooding of the rice fields also kills the weeds that normally grow in overwhelming numbers along with the rice. These weeds would choke the rice to death if they were not destroyed.

Jesus told His disciples that he was the bread of life. Like rice to the Indian People, Bread is an essential part of many people's diet. In the same way, a relationship with Jesus is an essential part of a Christian's growth and development. "Junk food" may be tastier but it ends up harming the body instead of providing the ingredients needed to develop strong bodies for the Lord.

Jesus said that a relationship with Him would produce the "water of life" in our life (John 4:14). If a Christian does not allow this water to cover their life then the "weeds" of sin begin to grow and will eventually choke the life out of their life. Some people believe they can keep the "rice" weeded with their own efforts but a rice farmer can tell you that no matter how hard you work you cannot keep up with the weeds unless they are covered by the water. Remember that this week if you are tempted to skip your Bible Study time.

May 12, 2010 FEAR AND FAITH

Faith is Expectation that leads to Anticipation because of your confidence in the Promises and Power of God. Faith is not hoping God might do something; it is firm belief that He has already accomplished the task or confident expectation that He will do what He has promised He would do. The foundation of Faith is the Word of God [So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17]. Faith is not "willing" or "wanting" something to happen so fiercely until you make yourself believe it will happen. Faith is trusting God to do what He has promised to do. It is not your will power but God's "word power" that produces results from Faith.

One of the biggest enemies of Faith is fear. When a sudden storm put their ship in peril of sinking and the disciples in panic awoken Jesus with a harsh reprimand ("Do you not care that we are about to perish?"- Mark 4:38) Jesus immediately calmed the storm and then told His disciples, "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). Jesus wanted the disciples to know that fear and faith cannot abide in the same boat.

A man named Jairus came to Jesus and asked Him to heal his daughter. Before they arrived at the home word came that the daughter was dead. Jesus looked at Jairus and said, "Be not afraid, only believe" (Mark 5:36). Jairus believed the word of God over the fear in his heart and soon was hugging his living daughter with tears of joy and jubilation.

When God makes a promise or a pronouncement then you should never let fear over whelm your faith in God's Word. Do not be afraid, God is able and you can trust His Word.

May 18, 2010 FAMILY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Tell your children how you and your spouse met and where you went on dates.

Plan, and then take a vacation together.

Memorize portions of the Bible together.

Each Parent should write a special note to each child every month and put it in a place the child will find it unexpectedly (like in their underwear drawer).

Pick a night each week in which no TV in the house will be turned on. Use that time to read a classic book (such as "Heidi") to the Children or to put together a picture puzzle.

Pray as a family FOR each other and WITH each other each day.

Eat Supper together as a family at least two nights each week, Designate a different person in the family each week to pick the menu for one of these meals.

Say POSITIVE things about your church and its leaders to your family each week.

Spend a night looking through old photos and putting them in albums

Do something as a family for someone in need.

Have a question and answer time as a family at least once per month

Call or text your husband, wife, or children sometime just to say "I am thinking of you and hope you are having a good day".

Praise your spouse or children in their presence to someone else.

Have a clean out the closets day and then use the money from the family yard sale to do a family voted on activity.

Make sure each person in your family knows how to become part of God's family.

Your family will work if you work with your family. Make it a priority.

May 19, 2010 DEATH'S APPOINTMENT

Death is normally not a decision we make but a destination toward which we are headed. Each of us, as we journey down the Path of Life, has an appointment with Death. Death will come slowly to some, sickly to some, and suddenly to some but regardless of the method Death uses to claim us we will all have to keep Death's appointment- "It is appointed unto man once to die" (Heb 9:27).

Plan for the time you meet Death's appointment. Make sure loved ones know where you want to be buried, how you want to be buried, who you want to help bury you, and what you want to take place at your memorial service. If you do not leave instructions then someone will make decisions on the spur of the moment, under great stress, and the results may not be good (Trust someone who has been to a lot of funerals!).

Plan for after death with even more diligence than planning for death. Death for a Christian should not be feared any more that we would fear walking through a dark shadow- *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me* (Psalms 23:4) Death for a non-believer is too horrible to contemplate.

Since Death is an appointment on everyone's calendar then everyone should plan on how they will face this appointment. "Hiding your head in the sand" and pretending death will never come does not benefit you or the people you love. The clock is ticking and every second brings you closer to your appointment with death. When your calendar expires what will happen to you?

May 25, 2010 THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

The Psalmist declared that it was impossible to find a place in which God's Presence did not exist- Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there (Psalms 139:7-8). In the universal sense of God being everywhere this is correct but in the personal sense of maintaining a relationship with God there are many ways that people find themselves outside of the "presence of the Lord".

Sin causes people to fear God and hide from His presence - Ge 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

Sin can even lead a person to walk away from the pardon of God- Ge 4:16 And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

A Christian, however, realizes that the only source of complete Joy is being in the presence of the Lord- Ps 16:11 ... in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. That is why David's main prayer when he faced sin in his life was for God to "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." (Ps 51:1).

Eternity away from the presence of God! What an awful thing to contemplate. Yet that is what the Bible declares for those who reject God's love and forgiveness- Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; (2Th 1:9).

May 26, 2010 DECLARATION

Matthew Henry was a Presbyterian Minister who wrote one of the most popular Bible Commentaries ever published. First written in the early 1700s on a busy Pastor's schedule, its simple style and moral insight quickly make it a favorite of the common people. It is still in great use today and has been an invaluable resource to many in their study of God's word.

Matthew Henry's father, Philip, is given credit for the following declaration- "I take God the Father to be my God. I take God the Son to be my Savior. I take God the Holy Spirit to be my Sanctifier and Strength. I take the Word of God to be my rule. I take the people of God to be my people and I do hereby dedicate and yield my whole self to the Lord. I do this deliberately, freely, and forever".

We live in a day and age when "tolerance" makes it imperative that a person never make a definitive declaration about their Religious Beliefs. They can sing songs about what kind of burger they like and almost come to blows about the sports team they support but society now demands that they never believe anything enough to trust it as an absolute truth.

In this kind of atmosphere it is important that the people of God come back to a solid and unswerving declaration about their belief in God. It is fine to tolerate different music and worship methods but it is imperative that there be absolutely no compromise about God and how we come into fellowship with Him. Someone has wisely said that if you believe nothing for sure then it is for sure you really believe nothing. Do you believe enough to declare what you believe?

June 1, 2010 **RECIPROCAL RETURN**

Three times in Scripture Jesus tells us that if we do something then it will be “measured back to us”. This Reciprocal Return is a very important principle in life.

When we JUDGE others we can expect to be judged- *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* (Matthew 7:2). Expect others to use the same judgment standards to judge you that you use to judge them.

When we GIVE as we should we can expect to receive in return- Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. (Luke 6:38). Throwing your resources away leaves you broke. Generously giving your resources as God directs will enable God to bless them back to you.

When we really HEAR the truth then that truth will transform us- And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. (Mark 4:24). In the Amplified Bible this verse is translated- “And He said to them, Be careful what you are hearing. The measure [of thought and study] you give [to the truth you hear] will be the measure [of virtue and knowledge] that comes back to you, and more [besides] will be given to you who hear.” Those who “have ears to hear” the truth will find the “Truth will set them free”.

With what measure you mete (give), it will be measured to you again. A life changing principle.

June 2, 2010 **SHARPEN BLADES**

Looking over my freshly cut lawn I noticed that in several places the grass looked bruised on the top. I knew immediately that this meant the blades on my lawn mower were becoming dull so I took them off and had them sharpened. What a difference! The mower struggled much less in dense grass and the cut grass looked even and beautiful. A sharpened blade made a lot of difference.

If you are bruising people instead of blessing them as you interact with them; or if you are struggling with the tough areas of your relationships, then you might need to look at “sharpening your blades”. You will be amazed at how much better life will be.

Take time to talk WITH your friends and family instead of talking AT them. The Bible declares that “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). It is often very revealing how self centered we have become or how “grumpy” we are acting when we engage in a little friendly conversation or family dialogue.

Another way to “sharpen your blades” is to determine to spend time in God’s Word each day- “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The word of God will bring comfort to our hearts but it will also pierce the self shield we try to hide behind and help us to face areas in our life we desperately need to deal with.

As you go through life today are you bruising or blessing? Might need to get your blades sharp.

June 8, 2010 TEACHER TRUTH

Many Churches are using every teacher they can “scrounge up” right now to work in VBS or to substitute for Sunday School Teachers on vacations. With that in mind I thought I would share a Teacher Truth to help these “subs”.

Always make the main thing the main thing. A basic Bible Truth- Believe and you are not condemned. Believe not and you are already condemned (John 3:18). The ultimate goal of every teacher of the gospel is to change their student’s heart by bringing them to Faith in Christ.

Use your testimony frequently. Evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread. Paul’s primary method of teaching Salvation was to give his testimony about his encounter with God and Peter wrote that we were to - *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you* 1 Pet 3:15.

Use the Truth skillfully. Faith comes when God’s Word is correctly presented. Paul told Timothy he was to study to demonstrate his skill in rightly discerning the meaning of God’s Word (II Tim 2:15). Study is hard work and it takes time but in the teaching of every class someone must suffer. If the teacher does not suffer in the preparation of the lesson then the pupils will suffer in the presentation of the lesson.

Depend on God completely. Prayer is a vital part of preparing to teach. 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 hard but accomplish little.

Jesus was a Teacher. Let His example lead you to do a great work for God with the souls that are entrusted to you.

June 9, 2010 PENDULUM PRINCIPLES

For a long time I had it on my desk but church children kept coming into my office and playing with it until finally it ended up broken. It was a simple little contraption with 5 metal balls hanging by strings attached to a metal frame. When you lifted the end ball and let it drop it would swing down and strike the next ball in line. Energy was then transferred through the balls to the ball on the other end which would then swing into the air. When that ball came back down then the process was repeated in the opposite direction. Back and forth the balls would swing simply because one ball was put into motion.

I liked to use this 5 ball pendulum as an example when I talked to people about the results of their actions. It would help them to see how their wrong actions could impact people in ways they seldom anticipated. The Bible declares that “The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Numbers 14:18). The consequences of sin can be transferred through several generations before it breaks forth into the open but when it does you realize you did not “get by with it” after all.

Thankfully, this principle also works for good in your life- “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom” (Luke 6:38). No good deed ever goes unrewarded.

Your actions impact others. Will your deeds today transfer good or evil into their life?

June 15, 2010 FATHER PRINCIPLES

As we celebrate Father's Day this Sunday and bring honor to those who give their time and energy to leading their family I thought it would be good to review some basic father leadership principles. I will begin with some negative principles and end with some positive applications.

It is hard to convince your children that attendance at church is really important when you spend most of your time on Summer Sundays at the lake or beach (Everyone is encouraged to take a vacation but vacation should not last all summer long!).

It is hard to convince your children that the ministry of the church deserves priority in their life when you allow them to put practicing or playing ball ahead of church attendance.

It is hard to convince your children to respect the leaders of the church when you constantly criticize the actions and guidance of those who give their time and energy to do the work of God at the house of God.

It is easy to talk to your family about God when they see you walking and talking with God each day. It is easy to get your children to trust God with their life when they hear daily prayers to God for provision and then celebrate with the rest of the family when God provides the items or finances that were the object of prayer.

A dog can produce puppies that turn over trash cans, bark at everything they see, and senselessly die on the highway chasing cars. A father is privileged to be entrusted with children who can become great warriors and workers for God. Dogs do what comes naturally. Dads know their need of the supernatural. Dogs die without hope. Dads expect to celebrate eternity with their family. Do not be a dog, be a dad.

June 16, 2010 PARENT PRINCIPLES

Sometimes Fathers must feel like the man who said, "I would ask my boss to pay me what I am worth but I could not live on that small of a salary!" Mothers are showered with love and adoration on Mother's Day while Dads are told on Father's Day to work harder and be better! I do not want to add to that trend so I am going to give three Parent Principles that apply to both Mom and Dad.

First, know who rules your life. Look at who is sitting on the throne of your heart because that will determine your actions, your attitude, and your eternity. Make sure the King of kings is ruler of your life.

Second, recognize who guides your going. The devil does not mind a person professing Christianity as long as they do not practice their profession. When you live in a Kingdom you give allegiance to the King, you adhere to the Laws of the kingdom, you have access to the benefits of the kingdom, and you are assured of the protection of the kingdom. Are your decisions and activities based on Kingdom principles?

Finally, be real in your religion. Do not be "righteous just for rewards". You know what I am talking about; "Lord, if you will heal my child then I will read my Bible each day" or "If you will give me this job I am seeking then I will come to church each week". You can fool some people but your family knows when you are simply playing a game.

Have no reservation about your reservation. Do not make God sick with lukewarm living. Be genuine in your godliness. Three principles that will help Moms and Dads.

June 22, 2010 MINUTES

1) Make your Minutes meaningful- Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. (Ecclesiastes 11:9). One day you will be required by God to give account of what you have done with your life. If you have wasted your time, your talents, and your treasures then you will miss the joy that life is supposed to bring and you will be ashamed when you face God.

2) Make memories of your minutes- (Psa 90:12) *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Do not allow the rut and routine of life to sap your strength and steal your joy. Take time to listen to birds sing, children laugh, and God whisper. Ten years from now your wife will not care that you made it home ten seconds early by driving like a maniac through traffic; but she will remember that you took time to pick a flower and bring it to her.

3) Remember that every minute you are closer to eternity- (1 John 2:17) *the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.* Take a minute to read God's Word; it is an eternal book. Take a minute to talk with God. He cares what is happening to you now and He is trying to build an eternal relationship.

Make your minutes matter, Make your minutes into memories, and make your minutes meaningful for eternity. Then life will be good and you will be glad.

June 23, 2010 NO EXCUSES

As soon as someone gets caught doing something wrong they begin to make excuses. Here are four common excuses that will not excuse you.

1) God does not understand the pull of my temptation- (Heb 2:18) For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Heb 4:15-16) For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

2) My temptation is different from what anyone else must face- (1 Cor 10:13) There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:...

3) My temptation is stronger than I am- (1 Cor 10:13) ...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.

4) My temptation is because God made me this way- (James 1:13-14) Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed

The Devil CAN NOT make you do it and God WILL NOT make you do it. That leaves the finger pointing directly at YOU. You are going to be tempted. But you CAN endure the temptation and come out victorious. Or you can give in to sin, blame someone else; and still end up suffering the consequences.

June 29, 2010 THE SATAN SYNDROME

The term *syndrome* is used to refer to a set of detectable characteristics that lead to a conclusion. Surprisingly, there are sometimes “detectable characteristics” of Satan’s personality in otherwise good people that lead me to conclude that they may have the “Satan Syndrome”.

Satanic characteristics are clearly seen in the following scripture- “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” (Isa 14:12-14). Note these same characteristics in some people’s thought patterns.

Some people doubt God because He does not cure all sickness or solve all problems and it is obvious to them that this is the proper way for a good God to govern. Basically, they are saying they know better how to run the universe than God! Can you hear Satan saying, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above God”?

Other people are not satisfied unless they have enough riches and resources until they can be the “god” of their own life. They do not want to trust God and live by faith. They think they must be “master (god) of their own fate” (“I will be like the most high”).

I am not saying these people act like the devil with horribly wrong actions. I am simply declaring that they are showing the same thought patterns that led to Satan’s rebellion and fall; which makes the “Satan Syndrome” something to be taken seriously.

June 30, 2010 JOHN 316 LOVE

What is love? Is it a couple in a rumbled bed? Is it a salutation over the phone, “love you, bye”? Is it a marriage commitment that disappears when one person stops liking the attitude or actions of the other person? Few seem to know what Love is but everyone from presidents to paupers desire Love.

Love is described in John three sixteen in such a marvelous way until this verse has become a favorite of children and adults alike. This is what it says, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16). This is what it means.

Love is not just a feeling you enjoy, it is a life defining characteristic. Mankind had no merit or worth that God needed but Love was such a part of God until the man who said “God so loved” later said that *God is love* (1 John 4:8).

Love transcends all natural barriers- “God so loved the world”. Love is not limited to people who look like, talk like, or act like you do. Love moves others into your circle of concern. Love is sacrificial in nature- “God so loved until He gave”. Love moves us to give up, give in, or give away in order to benefit the ones we love.

Love does not require works we cannot perform or money we do not have. Love makes it easy for those who are loved to receive love - “That whosoever believes”.

Love brings us out of rejection into relationship - “Should not perish, but have eternal life”.

Love says, “Trust me and I will change your life”. May you recognize and receive this great Love of God today.

July 6, 2010 NO KING

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25).

A basic principle that needs to be learned by families, churches, and countries is this: "When no one is in charge then everyone will seek to be in charge and the results will be chaos". (See above verse). God is a god of order. The Bible declares in Genesis 1:2 that when the world was without form and void ("without form and void" are both words describing unorganized chaos) that God created order and system. God likes His world to be in order.

Paul told the Corinthian Church that confusion about worship in the church was clearly not of God- "God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor 14:33). God likes His Church to be in order. James stated to believers that conflict and confusion in their personal relationship was an evil thing - "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." (James 3:16). God likes people's relationships to be in order.

When Jesus found it necessary to feed 5000 men with a little boy's lunch His first instruction was for the disciples to organize the crowd into groups of fifty in order to make it easy to serve each person and to ensure that everyone had an equal opportunity to receive food (Luke 19:13-17). God likes His work done in an orderly fashion.

Over and over I have seen families and churches dissolve into chaos because parents or pastors refused to make the hard choices demanded of a leader. And if there is a leadership vacuum then someone will appoint themselves king who should not be king.

July 7, 2010 IS GOD IN YOUR RELIGION?

Many people seem to embrace religion without embracing God. It does not make a person a Christian because they feel an overwhelming need to be forgiven, or because they want to escape the wrath of God, or because they desire a better place to live when they exit this world. I imagine that even the demons would desire these things if they could obtain them without the need of renouncing self and bowing in submission unto God.

To most people Christianity is testifying to a "belief" that Jesus Christ died for their sins which resulted in the opportunity for them to become a child of God by their "faith" in this event. Like the demons James talks about (James 2:19), the "faith" of these people does not produce allegiance and obedience to God. They are pacified with the declaration that their sins are forgiven and they are on their way to heaven but they develop no real desire for fellowship with God. They are willing to "pay their dues" each Sunday Morning by attending a church service but they had better be released from that "torture" by noon so they can beat the crowd to the restaurant and get back home in time for the afternoon's sporting event or the preacher will face condemnation as they go out the door and he will be "roasted" at dinner.

All this time God is waiting for someone to become aware that the sermon and the songs were all supposed to bring people to Him. How His heart must ache as He sits lonely again in the sanctuary hoping someone will notice Him. But everyone is so busy worshipping "faith" until they have no time for the God who is the author and finisher of that Faith.

July 13, 2010 ANGEL MESSAGE

If God sent an angel to speak to the Church you attend this Sunday what do you think would be in the message? The Angel Message to four of the seven churches that received the last written communication from God was to “Repent” (Messages to the Seven Churches in Revelation two and three).

When Jesus began His preaching ministry He did not begin by a great display of miracles. His opening salvo of sermons was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17).

Repent means to “Turn from your self guided ways and begin again to follow God’s plan for your life”. Normally, Repentance begins with a renewed knowledge that we have committed wrong actions or developed wrong attitudes. This knowledge condemns our heart because we realize our actions and attitudes have hurt God and those within our circle of influence. Not wanting to continue to do wrong we “turn away” from our wrong actions and seek to do right things.

God called the Revelation Churches to repent of Leaving their first love {Ephesus- 2:4-5}; Compromising Religious Principles and moral purity {Pergamos- 2:14-16}; Halfhearted works for God {Sardis- 3:1-3}; and Lukewarm living resulting from over confidence in riches {Laodicea- 3:16-19}. These are not normally the subjects that Pastors “rail against” in their Sunday Morning Sermons. Which could be the reason so many people leave Church with the same spiritual enthusiasm they had when they arrived!

If an Angel visited your church this Sunday would he see the same zeal in Love for God and Living for God that was once a part of Church worship? Or would he stand at the end of the service and say, “God’s message to you today is to Repent”?

July 14, 2010 HEARING WITH THE HEART

“When we hear God’s Call and respond appropriately, there will be no limit to what God can and will do through His people” (Henry Blackaby).

Over and over when Jesus told important information to the crowds that followed Him He would end with the statement, “He that has ears to hear, let him hear”. Jesus wanted people to know that this information needed to be heeded as well as heard.

When I was a Pastor I would listen in utter amazement as people would come to me after a church service and say something like this, “Preacher, when are you going to schedule a revival at the Church? We have not had one in a while and I think it is time we put one on the schedule”. The amazement was the fact that the upcoming Revival (scheduled to begin the next Sunday) had been announced in the Bulletin, from the pulpit, and on the announcement slide presentation for the three weeks prior to this Sunday and had been really pushed in all of these outlets on this particular Sunday! And these people had been at all of these services!

Maybe the reason so many churches are powerless in their ministry and ineffective in changing their community is because they hear the Word of God each week but never really hear the Word of God! They see the preacher moving his lips but they do not hear the words coming out of his mouth so they drift through another week doing the “best they can” when God wants them to do something divinely empowered that would change their world.

When we hear God’s voice in our heart there is no limit to what God can and will do in our life. Try really listening this week.

July 20, 2010 PAUL'S MENTORS

I have been extremely blessed to be associated with many positive people who have helped shape my character and my conduct. I have rubbed shoulders with leaders in my denomination and with many home and foreign missionaries. In my formative years I received encouragement to write from the Poet Laureate of South Carolina and developed a Biblical Life Principle from a second grade school teacher. The Lord knew I needed a lot of help and He has sent some of the best people in the world into my life to guide and develop me!

Remembering the mentors in my life led me to look for mentors of great men of the Bible. One of the greatest personalities in the Bible is the Apostle Paul so I began to look for people who helped shape his life and make him into such a great worker for God. Three people of influence are immediately evident in Paul's life.

I believe that Stephen, the Deacon whom Paul helped to execute, had a tremendous impact on Paul's life. As Paul listened to Stephen preach and then die with forgiveness and faith on his lips, I believe Paul was profoundly influenced.

Ananias, the Disciple who came to Paul and led him to faith in Christ helped shape Paul's theology and character. Ananias was willing to help someone shunned by others to see Christ and that became the theme of Paul's ministry.

Barnabas, the Dedicated follower of Christ, came to Paul at several critical times in his life and used his influence to introduce Paul to the right people and to point Paul in the right direction. Without the help of Barnabas Paul's ministry would have been much different.

Take time today to thank God for the positive people He has brought into your life. You owe them more of a debt than you may realize.

July 21, 2010 EPAPHRODITUS

"Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me." (Philippians 2:25-30)

Coming into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ is a life changing experience. Take the case of Epaphroditus found in the book of Philippians. He came from a pagan background (His name means "devoted to Aphrodite", the pagan god of sex) and his mentor (Paul) was presently living in a jail cell in Rome. He had every reason to be less than the best but notice how Paul described him.

He was a "brother" (part of the family of God because of faith in Christ), a "companion in labor" (co-worker in the ministry), a "fellow soldier" (active in the fight against evil), a "messenger" (trusted with a very important communication task), who "ministered to Paul's wants" (Willing to serve those in need). He also had great compassion ("longed after you") and a worthy reputation.

May the Lord give us communities filled with Christians like Epaphroditus!

July 27, 2010 CELEBRATE TODAY

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” (John Wesley)

“As yesterday is history, and tomorrow may never come, I have resolved that from this day on, I will do all the business I can honestly, have all the fun I can reasonably, do all the good I can willingly, and save my digestion by thinking pleasantly” (Robert Louis Stevenson)

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”. (Jesus Christ- Matthew 6:33-34).

Are you tired of reaching the end of each day feeling joyless and listless? Do you look in the mirror while you are brushing your teeth at night and say, “Surely, life was meant to be better than this”? Does life seem like a slippery slope of despair instead of a joyous journey of discovery? Here are a couple of suggestions to ensure a better day.

Stop looking at the agony of your day and begin looking at the author of your day- *This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.* (Psalms 118:24). There is no circumstance or situation in your day that God is not aware of and has made adequate preparation for you to handle. You can be a “whiner” or you can be a Winner today; your choice.

Begin looking at the opportunities instead of the obstacles in your day. You walk with a great God who is able to do great things in your life. Expect the extraordinary and rejoice in the miraculous; and have a great day today.

July 28, 2010 TOMATO SANDWICH

After my nephew came to live with my wife and I he came home one night and asked what we had eaten for supper. I told him my wife and I had eaten lunch that day so we had just eaten a tomato sandwich for supper.

“Tomato sandwich”, he said. “That is just a vegetable wrapped in bread!” “True” I told him, “but when you put mayo, salt, and pepper on it then it becomes a gourmet delight!”

Fast forward a couple of months. I had just picked up my wife from staying with her sick father. When we arrived home I asked my nephew if he had eaten any supper yet and he replied, “Yes. I was not very hungry so I just ate a couple of tomato sandwiches!”

With due respect to my friends from up north; I often ask when someone begins to question why a person does certain things, “Why do Yankees talk like Yankees?” The answer, of course, is because they spend so much time with other people who do not speak the language of the South.

The first two verses of the first Psalm declare, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

Eventually, a person will begin to take the characteristics of the people he spends time with. When you sing the world’s songs, watch the world’s shows, and talk the world’s slang, you will eventually begin to think the way the world thinks.

By the way, did I tell you my wife and I sometimes eat tomato sandwiches?

August 3, 2010

EAGLE EXAMPLE

The Bible uses Eagles as two extremely different examples. The Eagle is first used as an example of reaching your maximum potential- *But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.* (Isaiah 40:31)

Secondly, Jesus uses the eagle as a buzzard gathered around a corpse waiting for it to become stinking decaying flesh- *For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.* (Matthew 24:28)

One Eagle was majestic and magnificent as it soared through the sky toward heights of glory. In fact, the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John both used the Eagle as one of the four symbols of the “beast” representing the 4 characteristics of God- *And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.* (Revelation 4:6-7). The other Eagle was despised as a symbol of death and decay. What a contrast!

God has given each of us the opportunity to be an “Eagle”. God has declared that by being born again through faith in Christ we can become a child of God and develop the best qualities of the Eagle. On the other side of the “eagle coin” we can reject God’s offer and find ourselves hanging with the crowd that flies in circles seeking decay and rot. What kind of Eagle will you be today?

August 4, 2010

HOW TO SHARE A DREAM

I am surprised at the number of Churches who seem to think the reason for their existence is to “meet, greet, eat, and get through with the sermon as quickly as possible”. Everyone pretty well expects that each Sunday the same crowd will show up to sit in the same pews where the same songs and sermons will produce the same results week after week. I just do not believe that this is what Jesus suffered and died for!

Pastors need to remember the old adage about growth, “Have a dream, tell the dream, and then do the dream”. Without a guiding dream, a church or an individual will simply drift from one week to the other with no destination in mind and no victories to celebrate. I know it takes courage to share a dream but remember that sometimes silence is golden; but sometimes it is just yellow.

When Moses needed to move the children of Israel from Egypt he used several principles in sharing his dream. He reminded the people about the pain and problems they faced if they remained in Egypt. Then he told them he wanted to take them to a land flowing with milk and honey where they could enjoy freedom and growth. Then he invited them to join him in this journey. Finally he let them know he would be with them to help them overcome any problems they encountered as they moved forward in the fulfillment of the dream.

Christianity is about setting captives free and helping them get to the Promised Land. It is about seeing God feed you and watching God fight for you as you journey. Share that dream and watch your church bloom with vitality this Sunday.

August 10, 2010 CORRECT CHANGE

Our Relationship with Christ produces changes in us but changes in us do not produce a relationship with Christ. Just because we stop doing some things and begin doing other things does not make us a child of God. A man can stop seeing other women, move in with his girlfriend, and begin doing all the social and sexual activities of a married couple but that does not make them married. The Bible declares that you must be “Born Again” in order to join God’s family and this can only take place by repenting of your sins and placing your faith in God’s pardon and provision- *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

A relationship with Jesus Christ sets us free from the burden of Sin’s debt and the bondage of Sin’s captivity. This relationship should make you, like me; pray each day that God would make you Pure, Passionate, and Productive for the Kingdom of God. This relationship can only begin, however, when it begins. I cannot bypass the “birthing process” and go directly into the living like a child of God life style.

The Bible declares that if we try to get into God’s House by any means except the Door (Jesus Christ) then God sees us as a thief and robber- *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.* (John 10:1)

What a horrible thing it would be if you stood before God and He declared you a thief instead of a son because you had lived a good life but were never born again!

August 11, 2010 DISCIPLE DEFINED

“A disciple is a person who has made a commitment to Jesus as Lord and Savior; who is learning and following His teachings; who is identified in a meaningful relationship with the Body of Christ, the Church; and who participates in its mission of spreading the Gospel” (Win and Charles Arn in “The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples”).

Discipleship is first of all about commitment- *And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.* (Luke 14:27). A person should seriously consider the kind of commitment he is making when he accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. If you are not willing to pay the cost, do not make the commitment. This is not a commitment to make in the heat of emotions or under the pressure of family or friends. Although both of these can have a part in pushing a person toward a commitment to Christ, they should never be the primary reason a person forsakes the broad way of the world and begins to walk the straight and narrow with Christ. The primary reason must always be an awakening to the horror of sin’s power and a belief that the shed blood of Christ can repay the debt of this sin and break sin’s bondage.

Discipleship is also about relationships. A life changing relationship when you welcome the Holy Spirit into your life as Comforter and Helper. A priority changing relationship when you take your place of service in the body of Christ.

Finally, Discipleship is about sharing God by sharing the Good News about God’s Son, Jesus Christ. A disciple will naturally talk about the message and the Master that he has committed his life and energy to follow.

August 17, 2010 **EVALUATING THE ENEMY**

The devil seeks to deceive the unsaved, divide the church, and devour the new Christian. Jesus said that Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44). Based on this statement, Jesus thought the devil was dangerous, deceitful, and a degenerate. And this from a God who is described as love!

D L Moody, the great evangelist, said this, "Now it seems as if there are three wiles of Satan against which we ought to be on guard. In the first place, he moves his entire kingdom *to keep us away from Christ*. If we come to Christ then he devotes himself to get us into *Doubting Castle*. If, in spite of all this we come to Christ and have a clear ringing witness for the Son of God, Satan will do all he can to *blacken our character* and tarnish our testimony". This great preacher of the Gospel did not sound as if he wanted to "peacefully coexist" with the devil!

The Apostle Peter described the devil as *a roaring lion walking about seeking whom he may devour* (I Pet 5:8). Peter evaluated the enemy as a dangerous opponent whose main intent was to devour and destroy.

Christians must never forget that they are at war with a fierce foe who is out to corrupt your morals, pollute your mind, and claim your soul. The battle is brutal and the enemy is vicious but never forget that "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4). Rest in, and rejoice in, that fact.

August 18, 2010 **HELP IN HARDSHIP**

Here are 7 attributes of God that should bring peace and stability to your life in time of trouble. Remember, Faith is like a muscle. The more you use it the stronger it becomes.

- 1) The Integrity of God is trustworthy- You can count on God to always make the right choice at the right time. *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.* (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- 2) The Power of God is unstoppable- *For with God nothing shall be impossible.* (Luke 1:37)
- 3) The Faithfulness of God is legendary- *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;* (Deuteronomy 7:9)
- 4) The Stability of God is Rock Solid- *For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.* (Malachi 3:6)
- 5) The Character of God is without blemish- *The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.* (Psalms 145:9)
- 6) The Wisdom of God is beyond comprehension- *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* (Romans 11:33)
- 7) The Love of God is eternal- *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38-39)

August 24, 2010 PRAYER PROMOTION

During my 40 years as a Pastor I recognized the tremendous importance of Prayer very early in the ministry. I realized that prayer in my life and prayer in the daily lives of the congregation were vital for spiritual growth and power.

Knowing that prayer is important is one thing but getting people to actually pray is sometimes a more difficult undertaking. Here are some of the ideas I used in my ministry to help people remember to pray and to make those prayers more effective.

One church of which I was the Pastor had 168 members. The month of this promotion had 30 days. I made up a calendar with 6 names on each day and asked people to pray for those six names on their appointed day. This system gave two extra days in the month (168 divided by 6 equals 28). On the middle day of the month I asked people to pray for family, church, our nation, our missionaries, and the unsaved. On the last day of the month I asked everyone to praise God for His blessings and for the great work He was going to do in the lives of the people we had prayed for that month.

At another Church I gave each family a Prayer Book I had made up that taught them how to pray. Also included were pages for specific prayer needs and then a place to record how God answered those needs. It was amazing to hear people rejoice in answered prayer once they began keeping a record of their prayers.

Prayer works if you work at prayer. Find a prayer plan that works in your life this week and get ready to see marvels and wonders as you stop talking about prayer and actually begin to pray.

August 25, 2010 GOD'S PROVISION

My wife and I knew when I retired from Pastoral Ministry that we would be "financially challenged" but we believed the same God who led us to this decision would also care for us in the decision. We try to live as prudently as possible and then expect the Lord to bring in extra when needed.

Part of the reason I "retired" was to spend more time working on "Minister Ministry" (a ministry of writing books and providing materials to help Christians and Ministers) and to devote more time to helping the ministry of "Friends of India" (An organization seeking to help support and continue the ministry of Missionary Carlisle Hanna in India). I try to work hard and do all I can but many aspects of these ministries require funds in order to function.

Recently someone asked to talk with me about a burden God had placed on their heart. When I met with this individual they said God had led them to give \$1000 to help Paula and I. They also felt led to contribute \$10,000 to the ministry of "Minister Ministry" [Is there a Glory anywhere in the house?!] What an overwhelming display of the provision of God.

My wife and I have always believed that tithing was part of God's plan so we have always paid tithes personally and have tried to make sure any church we served also paid tithes of their income. Believing that God honors generous giving then the tithe from this gift was \$1,500- which is what was needed to buy a much needed Motorbike for a pastor in India.

The morning this transpired God laid on my heart to pay for the breakfast at our monthly minister's fellowship (\$110). Obeying God with money I hardly had led to a 100 fold increase. God is so good!

August 31, 2010 MOTIVATIONAL TIDBITS

Sometimes a little saying can be a great source of motivation. Here are some “motivational tidbits” that I have collected in recent years.

Do not Die Dead (Non believers are described as “dead in trespasses and sins” in Ephesians 2:1. Please do not die as a non believer!).

Serve God Boldly. And another tidbit like it- serve Christ with the same zeal, dedication, and devote you used when you served Satan.

Changed people change people. The world will want what you’ve got when you’ve got something the world can see they should want. I am God’s project and God never fails. Obedience is learned through obeying. Life is a battleground, not a playground. Spiritual growth occurs when we cooperate with, and trust God in, our circumstances. A star is best seen at night. What you are is God’s gift to you. What you make of yourself is your gift to God.

Sin never elevates; it always degrades and defiles. Sin leads from the plenty of the Father’s house to the poverty of the Hog Pen.

A song I heard one time said “My heart is God’s home, His Temple, and His throne.” May I make God at home in my home. May I yield my spirit to the Spirit so the temple of my being will be a place God delights to come for praise and worship? And may I enthrone God on the throne of my heart to such a degree until the King of kings will have complete control of every fiber of my being.

One final tidbit- A follower of God should be a fisher of men, not a caretaker of a museum. Tell the good news gladly so men will gladly hear the good news.

September 1, 2010 THOUGHTS

I collect Thoughts. I read a lot and listen to a lot of sermons and speeches. Often the speaker will say something that I will translate into a brief sentence or he will express some thought that I want to meditate on more fully. Here are some of those thoughts from some notes I recently scanned before I disposed of them.

Do not take yourself so seriously; no one else does. What other people think of you is none of your business. If a relationship has to be secret, you should not be in it. Time heals almost everything. Give time, time. Faithfulness matters; no matter how you feel, get up, dress up, and show up. Hold yourself responsible to a higher standard than anyone else. Never excuse yourself.

A young man once told a preacher, “I do not think I am a sinner”. The preacher then asked him if he would be willing for his mother and father to know all he had done or thought. After a moment, the young man replied, “No, indeed. I certainly would not have them know for the entire world. I guess I am not as perfect as I thought!”

“If God is your Partner, make your plans big” D L Moody. “If you do not know where you are going you will likely end up somewhere else” Yogi Berra. “The road to the next level is always up” John Maxwell.

And a final thought that motivates me to work when the body is tired and discouragement sets in because of the actions and attitudes of people I am trying to help: The problem is not the darkness; the problem is that the light is not shining as it should.

September 7, 2010 DEATH DETAILS

Most funeral homes wish you would write the answers to these questions on a sheet of paper and put that paper in a place known to all your family. 1) What funeral home would you desire to be in charge of your burial arrangements? 2) Where do you expect to be buried? 3) Are you an organ donor? 4) Do you desire a traditional burial or cremation? 5) Do you have special instructions about the burial service (songs, speaker, open casket, etc)? 6) Where do you anticipate the money to pay for your funeral will come from?

Most spouses wish you would write the answers to these questions on a sheet of paper and put that paper in a place known to them. 1) Have you answered all the questions in the previous paragraph completely so I will know what to do when you die? 2) Have you listed all bank accounts, safety deposit boxes, and insurance policies so I will know my financial status after you are gone (These can be placed in a sealed envelope if necessary)? 3) Do you have a list of all email and internet account user names and passwords so I can deal with these accounts? 4) Is there anything you want me to know after you are gone (sealed envelope)?

Most preachers wish you would write the answers to these questions on a sheet of paper and put the paper in a place known to your family. 1) Have you written down your testimony about your relationship with God so I can read it at your funeral? 2) Are there special instructions you want me to know about your funeral service?

One question God wants to know at your death. Are you ready to meet me?

September 8, 2010 INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARENTS

Parents have a tough job and need all the prayers and help they can get. Here are four areas they should consider in raising the precious children that God has entrusted to their care.

A) TRAIN THEM- *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it* (Proverbs 22:6). In the Hebrew this verse reads like this "Train up a child in the way he should develop in keeping with his individual gifts and character inclinations and when he is old he will not depart from it". Parents need to recognize the God given abilities and inclinations of their children and then train them to use those talents to build a life of fulfillment and purpose.

B) TEACH THEM- *...My father, thou art the guide of my youth?* (Jeremiah 3:4) Teach them to worship God in Family Worship ["And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 3:15). Teach them to handle life with practical skills such as cooking and carpentry. Life is built on character. Character is based on decisions. Decisions are made on values. Values are built on Foundations. Foundations are established by Life Inputs (family, friends, and society).

C) TOUCH THEM – Physically with hugs of appreciation and mentally with family discussions about vital issues

D) TRUST THEM- *Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.* (Psalms 131:2). Give them wings as well as roots. Allow them to develop into people of courage and confidence.

With God's help you can be successful as a parent. My prayers are with you.

September 14, 2010

CONTACT OR CONTAMINATION

One of the great challenges people in the medical profession face is to be in constant contact with disease and yet not become contaminated by the disease. I know that the constant chore of putting on new clean gloves and constantly keeping areas sterile gets tedious and wearisome but I know hospital patients greatly appreciate the fact that they are not exposed to potentially harmful materials and instruments.

Christians feel the same way about sin that medical professionals feel about disease. Jesus knew that we had to be IN the world but He did not want us to become OF the world so He declared, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). In other words, keep them in contact but deliver them from contamination.

My situation has changed in recent months and I have probably watched more TV at night (I still cannot bring myself to waste time with TV during the day) in the past month than I did in the previous six months. It astonishes me the things that people find "funny" and entertaining. But my venture into "TV Land" has given me great insight into the reasons behind the moral and language decline in America. People have become so anxious to play with the "disease" until they have forgotten it brings sickness!

The Bible declares that we can be sure our sins will find us out (Num 32:23). People in America are being "found out" in their deadened conscience, in their defiled character, in their dirty conversation, and in their despicable conduct. The boat is not just in the water but the water is filling the boat. Someone throw out a life line before it is too late!

September 15, 2010

GOALS THAT WORK

Sometimes it is good for Parents and Pastors to step back and re-evaluate their purpose and plans. It is easy to do things the same way for so long until all your actions and advice become a life limiting rut. And a rut can become nothing but a shallow grave!

Take the time to look at what you are trying to accomplish in the lives of the people entrusted to your care. While basic foundations and principles always remain the same it is good to remember that if you do what you have always done then you will get what you have always got.

Here are Four Goals that have helped shape my life and ministry. 1) I want everyone to accept Christ as Savior and become a child of God. 2) I want everyone to understand Scriptural Principles so they are constantly learning to talk about the Lord and include Him in their thoughts and plans? 3) I seek to get people to participate in Church community and Christian conduct by encouraging them to regularly read the Bible, pray for God to work in their life, and become involved in Church attendance and activities. 4) Finally, I want people to commit to living out Christian values in daily life. Are they becoming less of a gossip and critic? Are they aware of sin's nature and consequences?

I have taught these values for so long until it becomes easy to dull people into sleep instead of stirring them into action with the most important information they will ever hear! Just as it is easy for a parent to constantly see the wrong their children are doing instead of teaching them the right you want them to do. May God help us to make our message so meaningful until we constantly see its impact on those we lead.

September 21, 2010

WORRY LESS FAMILY

Recently, I overheard a lady tell her son, "If I would have known you would have turned out so good I would have saved myself a ton of worry while you were growing up."

It is hard not to worry about children in today's society but I believe God gives us some great guidelines in Psalm 127 to enable us to worry less.

1) Look to God for guidance in raising your family- "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Use God's rules and expect God's Results.

2) Trust God to take care of your family even when they are not under your protection or your roof- "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

3) Remember that Children are a Reward to Bless you; not a punishment to destroy you- "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

4) Your children have tremendous potential for good, or evil, depending on how they are guided- "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth."

5) Strong family relationships build unity (like arrows in a quiver), pride (not ashamed), and confidence (able to look the enemy in the eye because you know someone always has your back)- "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."

God WANTS to give you the wisdom you need so you can worry less and enjoy your family more. Let him.

September 22, 2010

COUNTING STARS

God telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names (Psa 147:4).

There are approximately 1 sextillion (1,000,000,000,000,000,000) stars in the galaxies of the visible universe. And God knows the name of each of them!

It used to bother me when I thought about the fact that on Sunday Morning millions of people, in thousands of church, were all praying to the Lord at the same time. But that is no big deal to a God who knows the name of one sextillion stars.

I used to wonder if I could ever "slip through the cracks" with God since there are over six billion people on the earth. Would it be possible for God to forget me, or fail to protect me from Satan's attacks, or miss a need that I have? A Billion only has 9 zeros but God knows the name of a sextillion (21 zeros) stars! He won't forget me or lose me.

Are you discouraged or depressed today? Do you think no one cares; and even if they did care they could not help you? Look at the verse before our key verse- (Psa 147:3-4) *He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. {4} He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.*

God does not just have a wonderful memory about numbers; He has a loving heart for people! He is concerned enough about you until He knows the number of hairs on your head. He even knows each time a sparrow falls to the ground; and you are much more valuable to Him than sparrows (Matt 10:29-30). So the next time you feel down and wonder if you can count on God, look up at the stars; God knows them, and you, by name.

September 28, 2010 RECOGNIZE GOD

We live in a world filled with information. World events and problems are broadcast into our homes, phones, and computers as soon as they happen. We know a lot more than I want to know about celebrities and people who are willing to do almost anything in order to be famous. Surprisingly however, people seem to know less and less about God and His plan for this planet.

Do not get me wrong. People know more than they have ever known about the “gods of this world” and the wacky ravings of false prophets and weird preachers. The problem is that the real and true God is hidden by the trash and tumult emanating from these false gods and prophets. As a result, God is looked upon by some with disdain instead of delight.

Part of the reason for this confusion is that most Churches now teach and preach much more about prosperity and inner happiness than they do about who God is and how to have a real relationship with Him. Think of it this way, if I only talked to you about the wonderful food my wife prepares then you would only think of her as a cook instead of realizing all the other amazing attributes she possesses.

People need to know about man’s ruin, God’s redemption, Christ’s return, and their eternal residence. They need to understand that God loves them enough to spank them as well as spoil them. They need to be aware that their desires are not necessarily God’s delights. They need to recognize there are some things they believe are right but God declares them wrong. Most important of all, they need to recognize the true God among all the clutter of information they are receiving. That would be good news for everyone!

September 29, 2010 ETERNAL LIFE

Ask the average person about eternal life and they will talk about Heaven where they will worship God and visit with family and friends forever. Ask Jesus about eternal life and He will say, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3). Jesus defined eternal life as a presence instead of a place.

Please do not take that statement as an endorsement of a “mystical Heaven” or as a declaration that there is no glorious place with streets of gold and mansions built by God for His children. Certainly, Heaven is real and it will be the dwelling place of the people of God for eternity. The point I am trying to make is that eternal life is not a destination you seek to attain but the presence of God you learn to enjoy. Jesus declared that the “Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). The Apostle Paul declared that your body was the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19) and if the Spirit did not dwell in you then you did not belong to God (Romans 8:9). God is dwelling with the Christian NOW. We do not have to wait until the end of our journey before we enjoy being with God.

If God is inside you then there is no temptation you cannot overcome, no problem that God can defeat that you cannot defeat, and no obstacle that God cannot give you the wisdom and ability to overcome. The average Christian fails in these areas because He thinks about God as a distant destination instead of a present presence. Do not make that mistake in your life.

October 5, 2010 WHEN THE ROAD DISAPPEARS

After a long day of travel and tourist activity we were headed through Pittsburg toward home. Suddenly, our GPS told us to take a different interstate highway. In the middle of traffic and with a split second to make a decision, I told my brother in law who was driving to obey the GPS. After we were settled onto the new road we pulled into an exit in order to figure out where we were going. It appeared the GPS was taking us wrong so we looked at a map and saw the road which we had exited on led through town back to our original interstate.

We decided to take this road and get back on the original course. Bad decision! Road construction everywhere and people leaving a Pittsburg Pirates ball game made it extremely difficult to drive at night in Pittsburg. I was driving now and my passengers were trying to make some sense of the map and the street signs in Pittsburg. In the middle of bumper to bumper traffic traveling at high speed the road suddenly split into two directions, neither of which had the number of the road we were traveling in order to reach our destination! I will not bore you with the details of wandering lost through the streets of Pittsburg late at night.

Later I was talking to some people about their relationship with God and it was obvious they were simply traveling life's highway hoping things would come out good. What a horrible thing it is going to be when they reach a point in their life when the road they are traveling simply ends without warning. Wandering the streets of Pittsburg is nothing compared to wandering in eternity without God.

October 6, 2010 MONGOOSE MISTAKE

Rev. Chris Edwards, youth pastor of Lebanon FWB Church in Effingham, recently shared a story with me he had learned while on a mission trip to the Virgin Islands. During the days when the island was mainly plantations the plantation owners wanted a way to deal with the huge rat population that was devouring their crops. Someone suggested that they import some Mongoose onto the island so the Mongoose would eat the rats and solve their problem.

Two mistakes soon became evident. First, the Mongoose hunts during the day and the rats came out at night. Second, because of their thick fur and quick reflexes the Mongoose can enjoy eating snakes just as much as hunting rats and snakes come out during the day. Soon the snake population of the Virgin Islands was down to almost nothing and, since the rats had no natural predator, the rat population greatly multiplied. Now, when you arrive in the Virgin Islands someone will shake a palm tree and let you see all the huge rats scurrying around in the top of the tree.

Sometimes the pain or aggravation of life is so intense until we think that a "Mongoose" (drugs, alcohol, sexual affair) will solve our problem but we end up destroying the wrong things and find ourselves living with the very rats we had hoped to destroy. We thought our way was best but we must realize that God works ALL things (including pain and problems) together for the good in our life.

For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (Proverbs 1:29,31)

October 12, 2010 DOUBLE HONOR MINISTERS

October is traditionally Pastor Appreciation month in many churches. October became a time to show appreciation to Pastors because in past years when the crops were gathered people wanted to share some of the blessings of their harvest with the man of God who was laboring in their midst. Most people no longer farm but October is still a good time to remember, and honor, Pastors for their sacrifice and service.

When the Apostle Paul was writing to Timothy about the responsibilities and duties of a Minister he included the fact that “the elders that rule well should be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Timothy 5:17). Two things immediately stand out about a good minister- His leadership (rules well) and his labor (in the Bible and in basic beliefs). Paul declared that these characteristics deserve double recognition.

The word “honor” in this verse is a Greek word meaning something of value or something that demonstrates high regard. This should give you some ideas about ways you can show proper appreciation to your Pastor- Something of value such as a bonus, a raise, or an increase in retirement benefits and / or something that demonstrates high regard such as a Plaque or words of encouragement and praise via email, text, phone, letter, or testimonies.

Some Pastors are lazy and some are lukewarm. Paul declared, however, that a Pastor who was doing a good job was worthy of “Double Honor”. I will let you decide if your Pastor is someone who is laboring in the word and doctrine. If he is then you should double the honor you bestow on him and let him know what a blessing it is to have him as your spiritual leader.

October 13, 2010 PAUL REVERE HELP

Did you know that Paul Revere had to have help? When we visited the “Old North Church” in Boston, Massachusetts recently to observe where the two lanterns were hung signifying that the British were coming by sea we found that the bell tower of the church is barely accessible and has no window. In order to give the signal a lantern had to be waved at two separate windows in the eve of the church directly below the bell tower. Historians believe Paul Revere actually had two friends who waved the lanterns from the two windows so he could see the signal across the river and sound the warning.

The mission undertaken by Paul Revere was important and provided a needed warning to the people. In the same way, the work of a good Minister of God is important as he insures that the light shines so people will know how to avoid the enemy and live for God. And, like Paul Revere, the Minister of God needs help if he is to do his job correctly.

Every church needs a good Minister full of spiritual insight, standout inspiration, and solid integrity. But a good church is not a “one man show”. If the light is to shine as it should then the Minister needs help from his congregation. I am firmly convinced that the people God leads to a church are needed by that church in order for it to function as it should. Sometimes I feel like it is not an exaggeration to say that there are a thousand things that need to be done in a church. If I am close to being correct then everyone should be able to “find a window” this week and do all they can to make sure the message of the light gets to everyone.

October 19, 2010 DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS

And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: (Matthew 15:30)

One of the most marvelous examples of the deity of Christ is found in this verse. Here Christ is shown to have not only restorative powers but also creative powers. Jesus does not simply restore to wholeness people who were lame, blind, and dumb but He also healed those who were maimed.

The word for maimed here is the same Greek work that is used later by Jesus when He said, Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire (Matthew 18:8). "Maimed" in this verse refers to a missing part of the body so we have no reason to believe it does not also refer to a missing part of the body being replaced when the Bible declares Jesus healed the maimed.

The scripture declares in this verse that, in addition to restoring missing parts of bodies, Jesus also healed people who were unable to walk (lame), unable to see (blind), and unable to talk (dumb). This is not a charismatic leader using positive thinking or suggestive mind games in order to get someone to "claim" healing. This is the Son of God using divine power to heal and restore bodies.

His works and his words proved that Jesus was the Son of God who could create divine changes (both physical and spiritual) in a person. Let Him produce those changes in you today.

October 20, 2010 MAGNIFICENT MANIFESTATIONS

In Isaiah 44:24 God talk about two of His creative miracles- People and Places: Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; (Isaiah 44:24).

Recently I had the great privilege of touring the mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire and driving along the magnificent coast of Maine. View after view was simply breath taking as I marveled at the variations in landscape put on display by God. As I watched my brother in law take a picture of his beautiful wife (that should get me an extra piece of pie when I visit them again!) against the backdrop of the rugged Maine coast I thought about the creative genius of God in the varying manifestations of man (or woman in this case) and nature. God could have created every place and every person the same but He went to a great deal of trouble to make each person and each location wonderfully different.

I am not completely sure how God intervenes in the miracle of birth and the magnificence of nature's development to ensure that the world is not a dull drab place filled with the same dreary scenery and "cookie cutter" people but it is obvious that God is a powerful God with a creative nature that is "out of this world". I sure am glad I am one of His children.

October 26, 2010 MISPLACED GOD

Recently I listened as a Pastor told about how the church where he ministered had suddenly grown stagnate and beset by all types of problems. I listened to him talk about failed programs and people problems as he tried to figure out what had gone wrong.

When he finally ran out of breath I took the opportunity to ask him a simple question, "Can you name two things that have happened at your church in the past month that can only be attributed to the work of God?" After a few moments of awkward silence I placed my hand on his shoulder and said, "Friend, you have misplaced God and things will not improve until God is invited to work in your church again."

Mary and Joseph became so busy with church activities until they lost Jesus and did not even realize it until they had traveled a day's journey without Him (Luke 2:44-45). Samson became so pleasure driven until he did not realize the power of God had departed from him. When he tried to go out and do the things that he had done before he was defeated and mocked (Judges 16:20). The children of Israel refused to obey God's orders to conquer the Promised Land so God told them they would be punished by wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Seeking to do too late what they should have done earlier, the children of Israel decided to go into the Promised Land but Moses said, *Go not up, for the LORD is not among you;* (Numbers 14:42). Defeat followed because they tried to do God's work without God's Presence.

If things are not going as they should in your church, or in your life, then you need to look for God. If you cannot find Him then you have found the source of your problems.

October 27, 2010 HELP DURING LEADERSHIP CHANGE

How is a church to cope when a popular Pastor resigns or dies? Here are some principles that will help during leadership changes.

Keep your eyes on the Goal- Times like this show how many people were worshipping the Pastor and how many were worshipping the Lord. People's actions will reveal if your church was built on the charismatic personality of a man or if it was founded on the Rock which will not allow even the gates of hell to prevail against it (Matt 16:18).

Rest in God's care and provision. Do not let the suddenness of the situation shake your faith in God's Plan. No circumstance or situation takes God by surprise. The Disciples faced a leadership change when Jesus ascended to Heaven and left the Disciples on earth to build His church. Their actions are a good model for us during a leadership change.

First of all, they stayed together (Acts 1:12-14). They realized they needed each other now more than ever. Secondly, they took care of necessary business so order and structure could continue (Matthias was elected to replace Judas{who was the treasurer}).

Thirdly, they spent a lot of time in prayer and supplication as they awaited direction from God- *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication,* (Acts 1:14)

Finally, they did not start anything until God gave them clear direction through the coming of the Holy Spirit. Because of this their preaching and teaching brought community transforming results- *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.* (Acts 2:41)

The first church grew greatly after the loss of its leader. May you witness the same results.

November 2, 2010 DIVINE INTERVENTION

A Miracle has been described by several commentaries as "a divine intervention displaying the power and goodness of God". "Intervention" means that God overrules the normal laws or circumstances of nature in order to show His power and His love. We are facing a crisis time in America. Morals are down, money is scarce, and many are depressed. We need a "divine intervention" in the people and politics of America.

The authority to govern a people derives from "divine intervention" - Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. (Romans 13:1)

The ability to rule is based on "divine intervention"- ...to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men (Daniel 4:17). And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Daniel 4:32).

Due to this recognition of the need of "divine intervention" in the government of a people then they should pray constantly for their leaders- *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty* (1Timothy 2:1-2).

God is still a miracle working God who is able to turn America back to goodness and greatness. May we be faithful in doing our part in this "divine intervention".

November 3, 2010 PRAYING FOR MINISTRY

Christians are people of prayer. Sometimes, however, their prayers become rituals and forms instead of dynamic interchanges with a divine and all powerful God- note the difference between someone praying a church dismissal prayer compared to that same person's prayers over a very sick child. This is why we need to take a fresh look at our prayers for the church we attend and the ministry in which we are involved.

Newspaper editors like news articles to revolve around six essentials- who, what, when, where, how, and why. Your prayers concerning God's work should ask the same questions.

Who are you asking God to bless? Do you pray for the education, children's ministry, and musical personal as well as the pastoral staff? Do you pray for the people in the church who irritate or antagonize you with the same zeal you pray for your family and friends?

Why should God bless your church? Is there a reason God should do something special in your church instead of doing it in a larger church down the road?

What should God bless about your church? What is God doing in your church that needs to continue and expand? What are you doing in your church that needs to cease or adapt to God's plan?

How should God Bless your church? Does God need to move in the preaching, the music, or the character of the people?

Where should God begin to bless in your church? If God gives a supernatural moving of His Spirit and twenty five new people come into your church and accept Christ as savior next week is your church willing and able to handle this influx?

When should God begin to Bless? God is ready now; are you?

November 9, 2010 3 ANTS

Sometimes people go on picnics and let 3 ants spoil the day for them and for everyone else. I heard of a situation recently where the Pastor delivered a church changing message about the future of the church and its impact on the community. Several people noticed one of the members in the church weeping after the message and thought, "This message must have greatly stirred their heart so that their emotions are overflowing".

Finally someone asked this person the reason for their tears. The person replied "Did you not see that the person who gave the announcements at the end of the service did not have his shirt tail completely tucked in!" Sometimes a person's preoccupation with 3 ants can spoil the picnic for everyone.

I am a detail person. I believe God is not the author of confusion (1Cor 14:33) so I want things to be done decently and in order (1Cor 14:40). I am also a devoted Christian who believes that when God shows up in a special way in a service then you slip your bulletin under your Bible, follow God's order of service, and enjoy the moving of the Spirit instead of worrying about shirt tails.

In case you would like to know the "rest of the story". The man with the shirt tail problem had been leading Children's Church that day. While this member was sitting in a comfortable pew (supposedly) listening to a powerful sermon this man had been very actively leading singing, playing Bible games, and participating in children's activities. I told him it was a wonder to me he still had a shirt on that needed to be tucked in!

When you attend Church this week you can look for 3 ants or you can enjoy time with God. Just remember, what you look for will determine what you find.

November 10, 2010 CHARACTER CORRECTION

Recently, during a heavy rain storm, I noticed that water was gushing with great force from one of my carport gutter pipes but hardly any water was coming from the gutter on the other end of the carport. Something was obviously wrong so I got my ladder out after the rainstorm and checked the gutters. Sure enough, the gutter with little water coming from it was covered with a broken piece of roof shingle.

One of the reasons I had been watching the water gush from the gutter during the rain storm was the fact that I was taking a break from my work of trying to develop a way to help Christians defeat habits and character flaws that blemish their testimony. I believe these tainted testimonies are the number one problem in the church community today. The world finds it difficult to accept the God we proclaim after they see how He is expressed in the anger, gossip, and hypocrisy prevalent in the lives of so many church members.

When Jesus was talking to a woman who was unable to maintain lasting loving relationships he said to her, "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). In other words, the peace you are seeking is not found in passionate pleasures but in allowing the life of Christ to flow through your life.

Can you see it? When people revert back to old habits and passions it is because something is blocking the flow of God in their life. Unstop that blockage and you change that person!

November 16, 2010 CONTINUE OR CONQUER

When sin comes into a person's life there are two things that happen; the person looks for a way to continue in the sin and to cover over the sin. When Eve ate of the forbidden fruit she wanted to continue in her sin so she immediately attempted to gain "social" approval for her sin by asking her husband to join her in her sin. Then she and Adam looked for a way to cover over the sin and fig leaves suddenly became fashionable.

Temptation is a common problem- *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:* (1 Corinthians 10:13) Mankind inherited a sin nature from Adam and every person has to contend with the tendency to temptation.

Temptation is a varying problem- *every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* (James 1:14) One man's worm may be another man's bait! Sinful activities that may have no pull at all on your neighbor may be a source of tremendous temptation to you (I have absolutely no desire to drink alcohol but other people fight a daily battle with the desire to drink).

Temptation is a conquerable problem- 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). God always provides a way to not only get away from the temptation but to also endure the pull of the temptation.

You can continue in sin, try to cover up sin, or conquer sin. Only you can make the decision about what you will do when temptation knocks at your door.

November 17, 2010 MOVING A CITY

And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? (Matthew 21:10). [The word "moved" in this verse literally means "To Rock". When Jesus came to Jerusalem He "rocked the city"!]]

The word "moved" in this verse is the same Greek work for "quake" used in Matthew 27:51- And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

This same thought is used in Acts 17:6 - And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.

The Presence of Jesus in a City "moved the city", the Death of Jesus on the cross "rocked the earth", and properly proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus "turned the world upside down". When Jesus is practiced as He could be and proclaimed as He should be then He is impossible to ignore.

If your idea of Christianity is a group of old people scattered around a nearly empty auditorium singing "Amazing Grace" slightly off key then you do not have a clue about what real Christianity is all about. Christianity is not simply a righteous resolution to try to do better; it is a dramatic life changing decision that impacts you and the world around you. It changes demons possessed men into disciples (Mark 5), promiscuous people into preachers of the gospel (John 4), and lost sinners into children of God.

Ask Jesus into your heart today. He will "rock your life" and turn your world upside down. You will find that Christianity is the adventure of a life time; and beyond.

November 23, 2010

PRAISE FOR MINISTERS/MINISTRY

Recently I had the privilege of visiting a church where I had previously been Pastor. During the service I watched the children and grandchildren of the congregational core when I was the Pastor of this church perform leadership task in the service. What a tremendous spirit of praise and thanksgiving filled my heart as I watched these previously whinny babies and rebellious teenagers fulfill their positions as men and women of God.

The next night I drove 300 mile in order to share a thirty minute message with a church conference as they honored two ministers who were retiring from active pastoral ministry. As Pastor after Pastor stood and testified about the blessing to their life and ministry by these two ministers I thought to myself what a blessing it would be if the nightly news could share the good things about these faithful servants of God instead of their usual reporting about the faults and failures of a fallen minister.

God still has churches that are impacting generation after generation by proclaiming and practicing Bible truths and principles. Sunday after Sunday these body of believers meet to worship God, to educate one another in the word of God, and to listen to a man of God proclaim a life changing message from God. And all over this country men are still answering the call of God to a life of sacrifice and purity in order to publically proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of the time their wages are low and their labor is hard but the fire of God burns in their heart so each week they faithfully do their job for God. Thank God that the church of God and men of God are still making a difference for God.

November 24, 2010

WHEN THANKS WHITHER

Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. ... even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men. (Joel 1:11-12)

Famine and desolation in the land because joy was “withered away” among the sons of men. What a reveling revelation about what happens when joy and thankfulness “dry up” from the lips and the lives of godly people.

The ROOT Hebrew word for the phrase “withered away” means to be ashamed, confused, or disappointed. What an apt description for the explanation of why people cease to be thankful. People stop praising when they are ashamed of the way they live, when they are confused by the attitudes and actions of others, or when they are disappointed about the circumstances in which God has placed them.

The RESULTS of this drought of thanksgiving can be catastrophic. In his great sermon about the downward spiral of the morals of mankind in the first chapter of Romans Paul lists a departure from thankfulness as one of the primary problems. When people stopped glorifying God with their thanks (Rom 1:21) then sinful actions and attitudes led them into greater and greater depths of depravity.

The REASON anything begins to “wither away” is the lack of a continuous supply of moisture. Heat from above and hardness from the ground below (Mark 4:5-6) brings drought and despair. A right relationship with God brings showers of blessings into our life which overflows into a needy world through our thankful lips.

Do not let Joy wither away from your life. Let the praises of God rain from you lips.

November 30, 2010

COMMITMENT

I do not believe that Committed Christianity is nearly as bad as many people want you to believe! I am thankful beyond words for the forgiveness of my sins through faith in Jesus Christ and for the opportunity to serve as His servant. This faith has not made my life miserable or hard; in fact, it is the very best thing that has happened in my life.

Time after time I hear sermons proclaim that a person should be completely dedicated to God but in the next breath they warn that such a commitment will invite Satan to attack you with all of his power. I know the “marines” are looking for a few good men who are willing to commit to battling an enemy instead of rocking on the porch but even the “marines” would not join if they were told they would continually be battling an enemy who was much stronger than they were and they would receive no assistance in the battle!

I believe that greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world (1John 4:4) and that each day of my service for the Lord I grow stronger and stronger (Job 17:9). In redneck English I believe that my heavenly father can whip Satan and anybody in his house (*God increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies* Psalms 105:24). I respect the cunning and might of Satan but I am not afraid of him and I certainly am not afraid to openly make a public stand for and with God.

I would rather make Satan mad with my commitment than to make God sick with my lukewarm living. I believe that if God calls me to dedication then He will keep me and bring joy to my life because I am trying to do my best for Him.

December 1, 2010 OBSERVATIONS

I am tired of being told that living the “abundant life” means you miss all the “fun” of life. It would be difficult for me to stand in a pulpit each week and invite people to forsake good times and joyous living in order to “endure” the Christian life. I know Christianity means you must take up a cross of commitment and be willing to die for your faith but I also remember that when the disciples faced persecution and problems they “were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 13:52).

I am tired of Preachers who blame their small crowds on “persecution” because they are preaching the correct message instead of acknowledging the real reason may be because they did not spend the time in prayer, and the effort in preparation, for their sermons that were needed to make it a meaningful moment in the life of people.

I am tired of small church Pastors claiming that the only way to be a big church is to compromise principles and preaching. Do they really believe that God does not honor a big vision and an organized plan of growth? And why, if they think “bigness” is so bad, do they brag so much when they have a big crowd on a special Church day?

I am tired of really good Preachers delivering much needed sermons to empty pews and “the faithful few” except when a meal is being served or a singing group is performing. It breaks my heart that society today seems to believe the message of the church is irrelevant unless it comes with meals or music.

I want God’s man and God’s message to be honored and respected. May we proclaim it and practice it in such a way until that happens.

December 7, 2010 SNEAK ATTACK

Today we remember the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor that ushered America into World War Two. In light of that I am listing several thoughts that may “sneak up on you” and make you think.

It seems as if we are doing all we can to get the world to come into the church rather than challenging the church to do all it can to go into the world. We ease our conscience by paying staff to do evangelism while the members simply assemble for enlightenment and entertainment.

The church is the only fellowship in the world where the one requirement for membership is the unworthiness of the candidate. The good enough are not good enough to be good enough for God. Church members, like cars, usually start missing before they quit. Most church members believe the only cross they need to carry is the one of being cross with other people at church because something did not go exactly as they think it should have gone.

Following Jesus costs more than anything; except not following Jesus. When Jesus was on earth men followed Him because of the Miracles He performed, the Meals He provided, or the Messiah He proclaimed himself to be. Why are you following Him?

The most faithful attendee at church is Satan. God may not always be there (He said He would come when two or three were gathered “in His name”- Matt 18:20) but Satan will always show up. Of the twenty-two civilizations that have appeared in history, nineteen of them collapsed when they reached the moral state the United States is in now.

Mother to grocer: “I sent my son for two pounds of apples and you only sent a pound and a half”.
Grocer: “Madam, my scales are correct. Have you weighed your son?”

December 8, 2010 THE PRECIOUS STONES

When Jesus wanted the Pharisees to understand how serious it was to fail to recognize Him as the Messiah He used the illustration of the destructive force of a stone- *And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.* (Matthew 21:44). Here are several other times that stones ended up being destructive.

Stones are destructive when you stand against the People of God- So David prevailed over the Philistine (Goliath) with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him. (1 Samuel 17:50)

Stones can be used to try to hide the Person of God- And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre. (Mark 15:46)

Stones can be destructive when used to try to stop the Preaching about God- *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* (Acts 7:59)

Christmas is about recognizing that *the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner* (Matt 21:42). Christ is not just a little baby born in a stable; He is the Son of God come to redeem the world in order that He might reign in glory over the earth. Christ is the “stone” that can either grind us into powder or remake us into Precious People of God- *Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded* (1 Peter 2:6). Recognize Christ as King as well as babe this Christmas.

December 14, 2010

THE CHRISTMAS WORD

(John 1:1,14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

When God wanted to talk “People” He sent a person! Man’s sinful rebellion had brought different dialects to the earth (Gen 11). How could God communicate to all these different languages and cultures? God knew the only way was to speak to hearts instead of ears; so God, the Word, was made flesh and dwelt among men.

This means that Christmas is not just a celebration; it is a communication. It is God talking about the three things that most need to be talked about in any language or culture: Love, Redemption, and Hope. Love for man caused God to leave the comforts of Heaven and come to the cruelty of earth. Love beyond expression. Love beyond comprehension. Love that could only come from a God who is Love.

Redemption is the reason Love acted. God’s Love was not some mushy sentiment meant to make us feel good. He knew we were slaves to sin, captives to corruption, and bound for Hell. So His love brought Him to earth to die as our Redemption.

Because God’s Love was demonstrated and His Redemption was manifested then our heart hears Hope and shouts for joy. No longer must we labor each day attempting to be “good enough” for God. The “Word” has arrived from God proclaiming the truth of Grace!

What a Word God gave us at Christmas! Let Him sing, “Joy to the World, the Lord had come” to your heart today.

December 15, 2010

CONSEQUENCES

Two young lions went to the same water hole to quench their thirst. Arriving at the same time they fell into a heated argument concerning who would drink first. Soon they became so angry until a fight broke out. Ceasing their strife for a moment to catch their breath they looked up and noticed a flock of vultures hovering overhead waiting for the loser to fall. They decided to both drink and then go their way. Sometimes it is helpful to stop and look at the consequences of our actions.

What will the consequences be if Christmas turns into a mad rush to purchase gifts instead of a celebration of the gift of God’s Son to be the savior of the world? What will people think about the importance of Christmas if churches start scheduling all their Christmas Celebrations at the beginning of December in order to get them “out of the way” before everyone gets involved with all their personal Christmas plans?

What will the effect be on young people if Christmas becomes all about getting every gadget and game they desire instead of about celebrating the fact that God’s Son loved the world so much until He gave up everything in order to demonstrate God’s concern and compassion for a lost and dying world? What will our anticipation of Christmas develop into if all we think about is spending money we do not have to buy presents that people do not need in order to keep up a gift giving social standard that started like a snowball and how has become an avalanche of stress and debt?

Maybe it is time we started following the star to the manger instead of the crowd to the mall. Then we might see angel wings instead of buzzard wings overhead.

December 21, 2010

GRACE AND TRUTH

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

You cannot say that God did not give man ample opportunity. For thousands of years God allowed mankind to seek with all his wisdom and might to be right with God by living under the guidelines of the law. Throughout the world great men of wisdom would arise and enlist many to follow them by the wisdom of their words and the austerity of their lives. Yet, no matter the language or the learning of the religious leader, mankind remained sinful and morally bankrupt. In fact, when God directly declared His law to Moses on the top of a mountain it ended up being broken before Moses could reach the bottom of the mountain!

Paul saw the futility of attempting to be righteous by keeping the law and declared *the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith* (Galatians 3:24). It was only because Jesus was willing to die in order to fulfill the law's demands that mankind could finally come into a right relationship with God. That is why John declared that "Grace and Truth" came by Jesus Christ. The Grace of God displayed by Jesus persuades us by its exhortations, instructs us by its examples, frightens us with its warnings, excites us by its miracles, enlightens us by its wisdom, and saves us by its mercy. The Truth of God declared by Christ teaches us we need a mind with a sincere fear of God, a heart with a genuine love for God, and a life "zealous of good works" for God.

Jesus came so we could stop trying to do right and start trusting in His Righteousness. Learning that fact will make this a very Merry Christmas indeed.

December 22, 2010

DEITY DECLARED

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:18)

The picture that most people have of God is that of some gentle grandfather who invites everyone to sit in his lap and would never hurt a fly. In reality, God is such a holy and pure deity until it would actually kill a person to behold Him in His pure state- God said (to Moses), *Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live* (Exodus 33:20).

How are we then to really know God and develop a vibrant relationship with Him? The answer was simple for God; He sent His only begotten Son to earth in human form in order that He could display His power, His precepts (guidelines), and His passion for a lost and dying world. Jesus was born in order for God to show God to the world!

The birth of Jesus demonstrated the confidence God had in mankind as he entrusted a virgin girl and a small town carpenter with the total care and education of His Son. The birth of Jesus displayed the commitment of God to doing exactly what He had declared through the messages of His prophets- a virgin would be with child, which would be born in Bethlehem but would be raised in Nazareth. The birth of Jesus declared the conditions of relationship between God and man had not changed since original sin in the garden; a sacrifice only God could provide was required.

Jesus came to declare God. Listen to what He has to say as He reveals God's heart and invites you into God's home.

December 28, 2010

COMMIT TO CHANGE

God did not call me into the ministry in order to change people. He called me to tell them about Jesus who is able to change them. I can persuade them of the need of change, point them to the power of God to assist them in changing, and provide principles that will help them change but only their commitment to work with God can produce real and lasting change.

God forgives our sins in a moment but He develops us into Christians in a lifetime as we allow Jesus to live out His life in us. God does not make us into "righteous robots" who cannot do wrong. He fashions us into New Creatures who yearn to do right and who are transformed into Christ like people because they grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

The new creature you will become is a destination you are journeying toward because of a decision you made. That decision changes who is in charge of your life and gives you new priorities and life principles which will produce different actions and attitudes in your life. The struggle of the Christian life is learning to walk the narrow way under God's direction instead of following the broad way to destruction urged upon you by selfish desires and Satanic deceptions.

This means you need to commit to regular attendance at a Bible Teaching Church where you can get weekly instructions on how to live the joyous Christian life. Living with God, and for God, is the most exciting life possible. May this be the year you quit looking for a quick fix and commit to growing in the abundant life through a constant relationship with Christ.

December 29, 2010

PASTOR PLEA

If I could encourage Pastors as they prepare for a new year of ministry I would share these desires.

Give me a message from God that will stir my heart instead of tickle my ear. Do not just tell me how to be alive; show me how to have a life. Do not encourage me to survive; show me how to really thrive as I walk with God.

Do not ask me to spend my time and energy trying to manufacture a ministry of success and popularity for you. Enlist me to help build the kingdom of God as we prepare for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and as we develop into the people God intended us to become. Stop simply telling me how bad I am and challenge me to do great things for a great God.

Teach me that the Abundant Life is not a script I follow but choices I make; and then show me how to make the right choices. Hundreds of voices reverberation at me each week demanding that I buy certain products, wear certain clothes, and escape from reality within their music or movie. Help me to hear the voice of God in the midst of this den of distraction so I can walk with God each day.

Life is scary right now. Each day is a struggle to survive financially, mentally, and emotionally. Politicians are posturing, terrorist are threatening, and job security is a thing of the past. Even at church I sometimes find conflict and change instead of peace and stability- Help!

If God has called you to make a difference then start by making a difference in me. Show me God and I will follow.