

## 2013 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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## January 1, 2013    YOUR JORDAN

Everyone has a “Jordan”. If you can find and defeat your “Jordan” it will change your life and allow you to become the great person God intended you to be.

Your “Jordan” is the obstacle in your life that is stopping you from breaking out of mediocrity and advancing into greatness. Here are some biblical “Jordan” examples: (A) Fear of Failure- Israel came to the Jordan River but their fear of giants kept them out of the Promised Land for forty years. (B) Excuse of Affliction- Naaman was a great general but he had been afflicted with leprosy. He was told to dip seven times in the Jordan River for a cure. His pride almost cost him his healing. You can hide behind your affliction or you can do what you can where you are with what you have and be amazed at the results. (C) Cost of Commitment- When the prophet Elijah was on his way to be taken to Heaven his apprentice, Elisha, had to choose to stay at Jordan or cross over into the unknown. By crossing the Jordan River he saw Elijah’s fiery chariot and was empowered to do twice as many miracles as his master. The commitment was worth the cost.

All of us will have to “cross over Jordan” one day and meet God. Will we face Him with “Jordan” excuses or with trophies of triumph? Losers make excuses, winners get their feet wet!

## January 2, 2013    TIME FOR A CHANGE

Is it time for a change? For over a dozen years I have had the great joy of visiting in many different Churches as a denominational and/or mission representative. One Sunday I realized I was hearing things that were not being spoken.

I may be “loony” but that is not what I am referring to here. I am referring to the fact that I began to hear a Pastor’s frustrations as well as his message and it was soon possible for me to determine a Pastor was contemplating changing churches a month or more before the Pastor knew he was contemplating such a move. The three signs I became aware of when a Pastor was considering change were: 1) Beating down instead of building up (Preaching at instead of to his congregation), 2) Blaming others (Church members were scolded because of their lack of dedication or service), and 3) Blurred vision (The Pastor could no longer clearly articulate his ministry goal).

These same guidelines help reveal coming change in most people (divorce, job change, addictive behavior): You begin building walls instead of bridges. You look for an excuse to blame others instead of an opportunity to solve problems. And you find you are stumbling in the dark instead of heading toward the light.

This is a good time to contemplate change. Just be sure you understand the source of the desire and the consequences of the change.

## January 8, 2013 REFLECTIVE REST

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).

We live in a hectic world filled with gadgets that demand an increasing amount of our time- People actually have texting withdrawal symptoms when their phone is broken! Our brain is bombarded with news, weather, sports, and gossip through computers, iPads/iPhones, and TVs in every room of the house. It has gotten so bad until people think "reality" is now the artificial life of a reality TV show!

This hectic pace has bled over into church worship as people look for fast paced singing, short sermons, and a passing glance at a faraway God who is now treated much like the dreaded visit to a grandparent. Church has become "get me in, get me out, and let me return to my own little electronic world".

There is no microwave version of a relationship with God (nor with humans). It takes time to spend time with God but spending this reflective stillness time with God allows us to hear His heart and understand His mind which brings peace and purpose to our life. So power down, pray up, and experience the joy of simply resting in the arms of God as you allow Him to run the universe without your input. I am pretty sure the world will not stop during the hour your phone is off.

## January 9, 2013 CHOCOLATE COVERED LIFE

"Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you will get." (Forrest Gump).

Sadly, many people have adopted Forrest Gump's philosophy that life is simply "random chance" that is beyond our control or knowledge. As a result their life is filled with uncertainty and their future offers little real hope.

It is true that there is a certain chance to life; "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). There is also a certain amount of common catastrophe for everyone; "God makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). But chance and catastrophes do not negate the fact that there is a God in Heaven who has a plan and who possesses the power and the will to make sure that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The answer to Forrest Gump's enigma is found in a relationship with the creator of the candy! He knows what is inside each piece; He has a plan for the protection and perfection of each piece; and God loves chocolate!

## **January 15, 2013 PAID BY ANOTHER**

I was eating lunch with another preacher recently after a Sunday Church Service. Suddenly, one of the waitresses came to our table and asked if we knew anyone driving a red Toyota Camry. "Yes," I said. "That is the kind of car I am driving". The waitress then asked me to come with her into the parking lot and see if it was my car involved in an accident.

It was. A lady backing out of a parking space had backed into my car and crushed the rear bumper. Let me share the good that came from this bad situation.

The lady who backed into my car had character enough to contact the manager of the restaurant and seek to find the owner of the car. What a joy to realize there are still some decent upstanding people in society. I realize there are bad people in our world but that does not prevent me from being thankful for the large number who have integrity and honor.

This young lady provided full insurance information, her insurance company provided full repair benefits, and I even received a car to drive while my car was being repaired- Glory!

Can you see the spiritual lesson here? Our life was damaged by Satan but God provided a way for us to be made whole again; and even made us part of His family in the process. My damage, paid by another; what a wonderful God we serve.

## **January 16, 2013 SIN'S PAYMENT**

When men sin a payment must be made for that sin- either by the death of Christ or at the death of the sinner. Thankfully, God offers a choice of payment plans- believing in the payment for our sin debt through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ which bestows upon us eternal abundant life or rejecting God's gracious gift with the resulting eternal separation from God's presence and blessings. The wages of sin are death (Rom 6:23) and those wages must be paid, one way or another.

Some would wonder, "Am I a sinner subject to this sin debt payment?" Sin is not the personal preferences of self-righteous hypocrites who believe that anything they do not like must be a sin. Nor is it assigned only for really bad social or moral behavior. The Bible describes sin as "falling short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Sin can be defined as allowing your attitudes, actions, or activities to fall outside the will of God and the plan of God for your life (you miss bringing glory to God in your words, your works, your wisdom, or your wealth).

Mankind was created for God (Rev 4:11). God is the ultimate authority and everyone at the end of the day will answer to His judgment. Your choice in the matter is whether you will allow God to pay for your sin debt or you will choose to pay yourself.

## January 22, 2013 REACHING THE GOAL

A new start is not necessarily a new beginning. Habit cycles that have developed a stronghold in a life must be broken or another missed goal is on the horizon. Just as diets can be doomed by impulse eating, anxiety hunger, and outside pressure so habits in our life can find amazing sources of survival nutrition. A decision to reach a goal must join with determination to do whatever it takes to reach that goal if change is to be accomplished.

The Bible encourages us to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The principles promoted in these verses can be life changing. Goals must have a strong reason to exist (a “cloud of witnesses” was watching the runner). The goal must be worth giving up anything that holds you back. You must be in it for the long term (run with patience) and you need assurance that it can be accomplished (Jesus did it). Finally, you must believe what you are trying to accomplish is worth any sacrifice because it is so much better than what you have now.

If you have a problem, God has a plan. Follow His guidelines and train for triumph.

## January 23, 2012 BIGOTRY

Perhaps the biggest problem in the world today is Bigotry. Bigotry can be defined as being prejudiced in favor of or against one person, thing, or group compared with another; usually in a way considered to be unfair. It is demonstrated by people’s actions or attitude toward those who have a different color, culture, or conviction.

Bigotry can be taught, caught, or bought. Religious organizations, Educational institutes, and Family training are ways that Bigotry can be taught into a person’s thought process.

Bigotry can be “caught” by the impact others have on your life and circumstances. Aristotle, in his book on “Ethics”, said bias is determined by the things that give a person pleasure or pain. My wife was assaulted by a black man; my neighbors are black. Thankfully, the pain caused by one individual has not stopped me from enjoying friendship with my neighbors. We did not allow past pain to give birth to Bigotry.

As the recent elections have shown, Bigotry can be “bought”- political parties spent in excess of four billion dollars to get people to believe in one candidate over another candidate. Issues became secondary to personality preferences or political party affiliation as people were cultivated to believe in one view by developing a bias against the other party’s view.

Bigotry blurs my vision of wrong and warps my love for people. It turns me into a judge instead of a witness. It is a bias I am biased against.

## January 29, 2013 PEOPLE

People give you pause for contemplation. I have faced applause, apathy, and anger; all from one congregation of people listening to the same sermon! I have come into “easy” counseling sessions where a pit of darkness and depravity so deep and so desperate has been revealed until I cringed in the core of my soul. I have entered other sessions with dread and despair because I did not have a clue what to say only to find all that was needed was a kind word and a reassuring prayer.

People are strange animals. They are shaped by their family, their environment, their education, their experiences, their personality, and their religious beliefs (or lack thereof). They have different appetites, varying attitudes, and a tremendous ability to adapt to unusual and difficult situations. They constantly crave victory but find themselves pulling for the underdog time after time. They like the security of sameness but they have an inner drive to try something new or climb to the top of a mountain just to see what is on the other side.

Human bodies come in many colors, shapes, and “styles”. It is impossible to understand them, difficult to live with them, and immensely intriguing to watch them. They all have common needs- food, water, shelter, and security; but their greatest need is a realization of God’s love, care, and forgiveness. That is why God gives people the privilege of telling other people about the greatness of God!

## January 30, 2013 BITTERNESS

Bitterness is bad. The corroding influence of bitterness will burn into the depths of your being where it will sour your soul; alienate your fellowship with other people, and corrode your relationship with God (The Apostle Peter thought the “gall of bitterness” was so bad until it identified a person as being in the bondage of iniquity-Acts 8:23). Bitterness is a deadly personality eating cancer which kills the pleasure of your life by filling your heart with darkness and despair. Bitterness is like trying to defeat your enemy by ingesting deadly poison into your own body!

Bitterness not only destroys you but it has a caustic impact on those around you- 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). Bitterness is a joy stealer as its dark cloud hovers over your life and produces a dread, instead of a delight, when you enter a room. Bitterness pours toxic words on those close to you as your venomous torrent gushes out toward your enemy; who may never hear a word of your wrath!

Bitterness cannot be made better; it must be abandoned- Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Ephesians 4:31-32).

## February 5, 2013 BUS TO BIRD

After all these years I still feel a rush of excitement when the bus becomes a bird. Taxiing to the runway it is just a “bus” full of passengers and luggage but when the engines thrust with all their power so that we finally lift from the ground on wings of the wind and fly through the air like a huge grey bird it still fills me with wonder and awe. It is almost worth the cramped seats and the fourteen hour mind numbing flight just to experience the “miracle” of flight.

I often think that the bus becoming a bird is a lot like it will be when the Lord raptures the church. People will be traveling down the road of life weighted down by the gravity of their circumstances and feeling every little bump when suddenly they will be lifted from the earth on “wings of wind” and find themselves in a wondrous world where everything is totally different.

Paul described this time by saying, “we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Caught up in the clouds as the bus becomes a bird and we finally see Him face to face whom so long we have known heart to heart. Glorious day, anticipated delight, even so, come Lord Jesus.

## February 6, 2013 TOGETHER TRUTHS

February sixth means I have been married to the lovely Princess Paula for forty-three years. During that time we have moved nine times to three different states, traveled to visit missionaries in four different continents, and I have gone from being a rookie pastor to being the State Executive Secretary to being retired. We have battled cancer, criminals, and changing circumstances but we have always had our mutual faith in God and our devotion to each other to sustain and stabilize us.

We have been in the “people business” all our married life and I cannot imagine any other way to “make a living”. We have watched with astonishment as Christians sometimes acted like the worst of sinners but we have seen the vast majority of Christians display sacrifice and commitment and we have never lost our faith in, or love for, the people of God. As we come to the closing chapters of our lives we are not rich or famous but we can still enthusiastically bear witness to God’s love and care.

During our walk with each other and with God two truths have guided us. First, we believe our partnership is the plan of God for us. Second, we know that living together is not the same as having a life together. Simply put, God put us together and love keeps us together. Not profound truths but they have enabled us to have forty three good years.

## **February 12, 2013 DEMONSTRATION**

A Good Minister has a passion for his ministry, a plan for his methods, and power in his message. He attempts to change people through denunciation (telling them how bad they behave), exhortation (telling them how good life can be walking with Christ), and demonstration (showing Christ in daily living). Here are some ideas ministers could use to show people how to demonstrate their faith in real life situations.

**Share your food:** Several times in His ministry Jesus told His disciples to feed the crowds that had come to listen to Him. Each time someone in the crowd shared the little food they had and Jesus multiplied the meal. We do not have the ability to feed five thousand with two fish and some bread but we can bring extra snacks in our lunch to give to someone who may not have time to go to lunch or we can bring a pizza to a shut-in or give fast food vouchers to someone in need.

**Share your faith:** When people share a sickness or need let them see you write that need on your prayer list. Share a verse of scripture from your devotion. Talk about God at work in your life instead of Satan at work in others.

**Share your fellowship:** Visit coworkers in the hospital. Welcome new employees to work or new classmates to class. Do not ignore the janitor or cleaning lady. Write encouraging notes. Determine to demonstrate the divine and marvel at the impact you will make.

## **February 13, 2013 OBSESSIVE OR ADORING**

Love done right is one of the greatest joys of life. Love gone wrong is among the worst of human afflictions. The difference depends on whether the love is obsessive or adoring.

Unable to allow love to bloom and survive on the strength of its own merits the Obsessive Lover feels he must control the object of his love, condemn everyone who does not love in the same way he loves, and continuously invent new ways to dominate the one he loves. Obsessive love is based on the secret fear that the love is not really genuine so people must be made to accept it by consenting to its demands. Eventually, the obsession of the love overpowers the object of the love and the love turns sour instead of sweet.

Adoring Love is manifested in sharing the deepest areas of your being with another in such a way until both parties are better because of the relationship. Adoring Love can be fanatical without being fatal- Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment (Mark 12:30)- because adoring love gives instead of demands to receive.

Love is like fire; it can give warmth and light or it can bring destruction and pain. Just remember, love done right is one of the greatest joys of life.

## February 19, 2013 OFFENDED

Sometimes we are so busy trying not to offend everyone until we do no good to anyone. It would do ministers good to remember Jesus stated, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: ..." (Mark 14:27).

Sometimes people are offended because God does not "live up to their expectations". John the Baptist announced and baptized Jesus but when John was put in prison Jesus seemed to forget him. He sent a delegation to Christ asking for clarification. The response of Jesus was not what John expected- *Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me* (Luke 7:22-23). Translation; do not be upset because the power of God is not used for your personal benefit.

Some people are offended because they confuse personal preference with Biblical principles- *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak* (Romans 14:21).

But sometimes people are offended because they will not accept God's truth- *Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?* (Matthew 15:12). This is the group churches need to determine not to be offended because they were offended.

## February 20, 2013 THORNS

There they sit, isolated from the crowd, insulated from the message, drowning in the depth of their own despair; emanating a constant whine of negativity as they dare anyone to get close to them. They are the "thorns" in the garden of God and they make it difficult for anyone else to enjoy the "Rose of Sharon".

At one time many of the "thorns" were fruitful, faithful members but something changed and they went from fruitful trees to barren briars- *And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful* (Mark 4:18-19).

Thorns grow where there is lack of cultivation (spiritual commitment begins to fade). Thorns are produced by a "thick skin" of selfish absorption (someone at the church misused or overlooked them and hurt feelings began producing thorns of personal protection). These thorns serve as a barrier preventing anyone from getting close and this loneliness only exacerbates the problem.

A thorny problem can end up bad- *For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned* (Hebrews 6:7-8). Do not let it happen to you.

## February 26, 2013 SINS GOD WINKS AT

*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (Acts 17:30).* (In the Greek, “winked at” means “to overlook”, “to not punish”). Which brings us to the question, “Are there some sins God overlooks”?

Involuntary “sins”- *But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die: But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: (Deuteronomy 22:25-26).* The damsel had sex outside of marriage but it was forced upon her so no punishment is incurred.

Doing wrong to do right “sins”- Rahab hid the two Israeli spies scouting Jericho and lied about their location. Because she did so as a result of her faith in God’s plan she and her family were preserved and she eventually became part of the line of Christ.

Social “sins”- Sometimes the information I share sounds like gossip. I drive 77 in a 70mph zone. I make promises I forget to keep. I am still a child of God

Lest you think I seek to justify sin let me remind you it cost my Savior his life. I also know hatred is as bad as murder and looking with lust is as bad as adultery (Matt 5). I know sin is exceedingly sinful; I merely point out that grace is exceedingly gracious.

## February 27, 2013 FOUR WAYS TO AVOID SIN

I desire to be sinless; I want to sin less. The Bible refers to both- *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin [but] If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:7-8).* The Bible lists four ways to avoid sins that hinder holiness.

Remember to whom you belong - *Stand in awe, **and sin not**: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still (Psalms 4:4).* God commands us to be holy because He is holy. Dislike sin because it hinders your walk with God.

Watch your mouth- *I said, I will take heed to my ways, **that I sin not** with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me (Psalms 39:1).* A thought before a word can be a sin saver.

Practice living Godly principles - *Awake to righteousness, **and sin not**; for some have not the knowledge of God: (1 Corinthians 15:34).* Wake up and look at your life. Are you falling back into sinful habits? What guidelines would guide you to a more holy life?

Regulate fleshly impulses- *Be ye angry, **and sin not**: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: (Ephesians 4:26).* Do not allow a momentary impulse to produce permanent problems.

## March 5, 2013 WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO?

I believe it is good to do good to people. Since most physically able adults spend over one third of their time at work then helping people find joy in their job produces a positive benefit. Encouraging a person to understand why they do what they do helps them realize why they love their work or hate their job; why they look forward to Monday or Friday.

From the beginning God realized mankind needed an occupation that would challenge his mind, provide for his body, and give him a sense of accomplishment. Disobeying God's rules led to thorns, trouble, and earning a living by the sweat of your brow but God's preference is still that work be a delight instead of drudgery.

Jade is training to be an optometrist. She is an attractive intelligent young lady who has the personality and skills to do almost anything she desires. She felt God wanted her to work in optometry instead of surgery because her grandfather was an optometrist (relationships), a role model friend was an optometrist (Influence), and she hated the sight of blood (personality). She is happy in her chosen profession; she is good at it, and her job in a joy.

What factors led you to your job? Were you led there by your God given preferences? Were you trapped by circumstances? Or was gold your only goal? The difference makes a world of difference.

## March 6, 2013 BELONGING

You can be apart or you can be a part. Feeling "left out" or part of the "in" crowd is one of the most important prerequisites in a person's loyalty to a church. We call this the feeling of "belonging" and it is vital for happy fellowship and long term relationships.

If you feel left out because you are not part of the "in" crowd at your church consider this: (1) Unity does not mean everyone knows the same information- Jesus and the Father are one but Jesus said He did not know the date of His return: *But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father* (Mark 13:32). (2) Unity does not mean we have the same responsibility- *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase* (1 Corinthians 3:6). (3) Unity does not mean we operate the same. The Church is one body but *we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office*: (Romans 12:4).

My thumb "sticks out" from the rest of my body but I value it and do not want it removed. You may feel lonesome and unappreciated but God treasures you- and probably a lot more people value you than you imagine! Do not allow the feeling that you are not part of the "in" crowd to keep you from the joy of being "in Christ".

## March 12, 2013 IS YOUR BILL TOO HIGH?

A recent snow brought out the beauty of God's creation as it covered everything in a glorious blanket of white. Naturally I needed pictures to share. It was not only beautiful outside; it was also cold so I quickly returned to the warmth of my home. Almost as soon as I got back inside the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said I needed to go back outside and listen as well as look. This did not make any sense to me but the Holy Spirit has lived in my body long enough until I know He does not speak without a reason.

I walked outside again and listened as well as looked. The beauty was still magnificent and the silence could almost be felt. As I stood there trying to hear what the Lord wanted me to hear it suddenly dawned on me that I was hearing almost total silence when I should have been hearing my heat pump running.

Long story short- When I changed the battery in my thermostat recently it had reset to emergency power. This meant I was heating with only heat strips! I had blamed my recent excessively high power bill on the holidays.

If something has changed in your life that is causing you to run on your own strength instead of enjoying God's help then your emotional and spiritual bill will be too high. Time to stop, listen, and hear what God is telling you.

## March 13, 2013 PATH TO PROGRESS

A rut is simply a shallow grave. God wants our life to "be fruitful and multiply" as we continually break out of the ordinary and experience new methods and deeper meanings. This desire to learn and grow is why a child continually asks, "Why?" and it is the reason each of us should determine to institute new projects in our life on a regular basis. Here are a few guidelines to help you along your path to progress.

- Have a definite goal in mind before you begin. Starting a project prematurely can lead to disaster- *For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish* (Luke 14:28-30).
- Realize you will be a better person when you include in your goal making others better- *But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant* (Matthew 23:11).
- Do not let the problems that come with progress deter you; Shoveling manure is part of growth- *Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox* (Proverbs 14:4).

Determine to start. Determine to continue. Determine to finish. The reward for breaking out of the rut will be abundant life instead of dreary living.

## March 19, 2013 HE MADE IT PERSONAL

March nineteenth is my 52<sup>nd</sup> spiritual birthday. Claiming God as my father, Jesus as my savior, and the Holy Spirit as my guide was the most important day in my life; and will remain so throughout eternity. I knew very little about God the night I came to Him with a heart broken by sin. By faith I trusted His word, escaped His wrath, and became an inheritor of his wealth. Human words can never adequately express the love and adoration I have for Christ. He is so big and I am so small and I will never get over the fact that He loved unworthy me and allows me to walk with Him.

Her name is Trisa. She is a guide at the Roosevelt Summer Home on Campobello Island, Canada (just past the northern tip of Maine). The Roosevelt Summer Home is part of the Roosevelt Campobello International Park- the only international park operated jointly by Canada and the United States. When I asked Trisa what she was knitting as she helped tourist view the Summer Home she said she was knitting an alpaca scarf for a friend's daughter who was dying of cancer. She thought something personal would mean a lot to this young girl.

My spiritual birthday is important to me because I was dying of the "cancer of sin" when God made it personal by wrapping me in His love and inviting me to be part of His family. That is worth celebrating!

## March 20, 2013 INSPIRATION

Finding inspiration to communicate effectively is a challenging task. The word "Inspiration" literally means "to breathe in". It is used in the Bible to show that the Spirit of God breathed into the life of a writer so that the writer used his own personality to write but he was so controlled by the Spirit until the words he recorded were exactly the words God wanted to convey. God has completed the Bible so Divine Inspiration is no longer needed but inspiration is still a vital part of communication and motivation.

When you consistently write you constantly need inspiration. To me that is the most difficult; and yet the easiest, part of writing. I gather inspiration from my daily devotions, from my desire to share the "God things" which happen in my life, from interacting with other people (I ask a lot of people why they do what they do or why they believe what they believe), and from observing the way people deal with life and its varying circumstances. Phrases and thoughts from sermons and songs often key inspiration. Sometimes a thought "breathes into my brain" as I converse with God in the middle of the night- *I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches* (Psalms 63:6).

Every day is a day to make a difference in the lives that touch your life. Become inspired, be a witness, and marvel as God works through your words.

## **March 26, 2013      OBEDIENCE**

Obedience is recognizing God's sovereignty and authority and submitting to it completely; without regards to consequences- A W Tozer.

Obedience is why, when faced with the cross, Jesus said, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus knew well the catastrophe of disobedience and how it had plunged men into depravity and death. Only obedience could pay the sin debt this disobedience had incurred- For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:19).

It is easy to glamorize the cross and glorify the resurrection during the Easter season while forgetting that it began with a conscience act of obedience on the part of Jesus- Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again (John 10:17-18).

Jesus' obedience unto death did not simply save people from hell; it demonstrated that completely trusting God can conquer death and the grave. Easter is not simply about blood on a cross; it is about God calling people to trust Him completely as we obey Him always because we have steadfast assurance that if we obey Him even unto death we can be confident in His power to empty the tomb!

## **March 27, 2013      THE MASTER'S VOICE**

Many people have heard the echo of God's voice from someone else but they have never experienced the reality of Divine communication. Like Samuel, they think it must be the priest calling when God tries to communicate with them. Never was this more manifested than when God walked among men in the flesh. He performed miracles beyond comprehension, preached sermons beyond compare, and yet was condemned to crucifixion because He did not sound the way the religious leaders thought God should sound.

Many has heard the old joke about the preacher who asked everyone who wanted to go to Heaven to raise their hand. Only one man did not raise his hand. The preacher asked him why he did not want to go to Heaven and the man replied, "I want to go to Heaven but I thought you were asking for volunteers to go tonight!" It is amazing how many church members talk about longing to go to Heaven until they get deathly sick!

Jesus said His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). His voice from the cross calls us to God's love and forgiveness. His voice in the circumstances of life directs us from life's dangers and into life's duties. His voice ringing from the empty tomb comforts us as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. That is why Easter must not be an echo from a pulpit but a shout from a savior that reaches beyond our ears and into our heart.

## **April 2, 2013 SATAN'S STRATEGY**

Knowing the difference between poison pills and vitamin pills can be a life saver. In the same way, knowing Satan's Strategy can be the difference between an abysmal life and an abundant life.

Satan realizes he cannot defeat God but he understands how much God loves humans so he seeks to embarrass God through the unholy actions and attitudes of God's children. He brings discord and division into the body of Christ by encouraging Christians to join him as an accuser of the brethren. He seeks to bring doubt into the Church by appearing as an angel of light preaching compromise and confusion (2Cor 11:14).

Satan does not mind if a person believes in God as long as they do not act on that belief (Even demons believe in God: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" James 2:19). Satan does not object if you worship God as long as you also worship the gods of this world- "They feared the LORD, and served their own gods," 2 Kings 17:33. He is not opposed to loaning you to God on Sunday as long as you come back to serve him on Monday.

Satan is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Do not be afraid of him as you walk with God in the light; just be aware of the darkness around you- and read the label on the bottle before you swallow the pill.

## **April 3, 2013 MAGPIE MIRRORS**

Magpies (related to the crow family) often use shiny objects to line their nests. These shiny objects make the nest less comfortable but some scientists believe the Magpies collect them because they are able to recognize themselves in these "mirrors". I wonder how many people live in "Magpie mansions" filled with disorder and debt simply because they think the accumulation of things will bring "mirrors of meaning" to their life?

Jesus died on a borrowed cross (Barabbas), borrowed someone to care for His mother (John 19:26-27), and was buried in a borrowed tomb (Joseph of Arimathaea). He had nowhere to lay His head (Matt 8:20) and He died without even a shirt on His back! Possessions did not possess the Prince of Peace because He knew what had real value- though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The Devil does not want you poor and pitiful; he wants you rich and increased with goods, having need of nothing (Rev 3:17) so you will be preoccupied with possessions, profits, and pleasure instead of spending time with God. Like the Magpie, Satan wants you to believe that the discomfort in your soul is worth the shiny object in your life. I just wonder what you will we say when you hear, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20).

## **April 9, 2013 REACH 300**

During the past forty years I have had the great honor of sharing the good news about God with at least 300 people each week. This was accomplished through the use of radio, newspaper, internet, social networks, pulpit ministry, and personal contact. This is not a boast of my accomplishments; it is a confession of my ineptitude. I am greatly ashamed that the total is not higher and I have great remorse that I did not possess greater abilities so that I could have accomplished much more.

We are in a culture war in America. The morals and character of our country are under constant attack as evil is now called good and good is now called the enemy. The Devil's propaganda machine is constantly turning out new and better ways to make evil actions and abhorrent attitudes acceptable to society while the silent majority of Christians sit in churches wringing their hands and anguishing over how bad things have become.

Christians will adamantly attack a doctrinal difference with another Christian but they lose their voice when it comes to making a public stand that would make them stand out. It is time Pastors and people began actively articulating for God and arguing against evil. Otherwise, all the media and the masses will see of Christianity are the fringe fanatics who use condemnation instead of compassion to spread their vision of an angry God instead of a life changing Savior. You can make a difference if you seek to reach your 300 this week.

## **April 10, 2013 PRINCIPLES**

Sometimes it is beneficial to simply state a principle and allow a person to make the application. The Master Teacher, Jesus, knew this so He did most of His teaching with parables. Here are a few thoughts for you to think about.

The highest authority in the land is not the highest authority - "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). Even the Supreme Court will one day answer to the Supreme God. "Everyone else was doing it" will not suffice when you face God's judgment.

Doing good is not the same as being good- "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:22-23). Righteousness without relationship is simply religion.

Making sense of sin does not make sin acceptable to God- "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (1 Corinthians 3:19). Your logical excuse does not impress God.

Important final thought: Sometimes when you tell God you do not have time for Him, He listens- "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;" (Romans 1:28).

## **April 16, 2013 MIND OF THE LORD**

Thinking like God thinks is an important way to think. We are constantly bombarded with advertisements and news items that seek to control our thought process or shape the way we perceive situations. It is important that we learn to mind our mind -What a difference it would make if Christians thought like God instead of acted like Pharisees.

This is the reason Paul exhorted Christians to have the mind of Christ: "Let this mind (of humility) be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:" (Philippians 2:5). This mind of Christ, confidence in God's plan and love, seeks to learn from God instead of question God - "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1Cor 2:16).

Understanding God's mind comes from waiting on God's revelation- "And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them" (Lev 24:12). Waiting on God allows the Holy Spirit to reveal the inner, as well as the outer, circumstances- "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8:27).

Do not allow your mind to become cluttered, confused, and chaotic. Fill it instead with God's mind goals: "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, and if they have any virtue or praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

## **April 17, 2013 PROPANE PARTNERSHIP**

Sometimes as I walk with the Lord it feels as if He is "brooding" with a heavy heart as He thinks about the conduct and character of mankind. At other times you can sense His fatherly side and realize you are in for something special. One of those special times happened recently.

It was a "take care of errands" morning filled with a variety of things I needed to accomplish- make deposits for various ministries, mail sermon CDs, get paint supplies for my wife, pick up groceries, and get my small propane tank refilled. This last item is where things got interesting.

Instead of my normal refill store the Lord told me to use another. I assumed the Lord has a reason for the change so I begin planning how to get to this store. Unexpectedly, the Lord said to use the second entrance instead of the first. It was a harder exit to get to and made no sense but I agreed. As I passed the first entrance I noticed two young people, engrossed in conversation, had walked into the middle of the entrance road. Had I made the turn I might not have been able to avoid them.

Arriving at the store and getting my tank refilled I found, unknown to me, they were offering a half price special on propane refills. I love it when God takes care of the details just to demonstration His great love.

## April 23, 2013 PRAYER WORKS

Life is a success when we trust God to handle our distress, our stress, and our mess. That does not mean, however, that God wants us to sit around doing nothing expect praying- "Faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). God desires us to pray hard and then work hard as He sends manna from Heaven that He expects us to harvest.

The Bible admonishes us to perform hard steady labor as shown by the example of the ant (Prov 6:6); with the expectation of a decent livable wage ("the Laborer is worthy of his hire" Matt 10:10). But we must work instead of just talk- *In all labor there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury*- Prov 14:23.

Our Labor is more than our livelihood; it is also an effective witness of our conversion as men see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven (Matt 5:16). Our Labor is also a way God can use us to answer the prayer of others- *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth* (Eph 4:28).

The world will respect us, and God will reward us, based on the works we do as a result of our Faith. So believe God for great things- and then volunteer to be part of His prayer answering plan.

## April 24, 2013 X-RAYED HEART

Several years ago I had a procedure to determine if I had any blockages in my heart. I watched on a small monitor above my head as the doctor pushed a catheter up one of my veins into my heart and then injected dye to see how it would disperse. When the doctor was finished and I was waiting to go back to my room I told one of the nurses I finally realized the foolishness of trying to hide anything from God because I read in my devotions that morning "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Samuel 16:7).

Our spiritual "heart" is the moral character center of our personality that defines who we are and directs what we do- "keep my heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov 4:23). It is the part of a person that provides good spiritual insight- "the pure in heart shall see God" (Matt 5:8) but it can also lead people to contemplate and commit horrible actions- "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

When the "secrets of my heart are manifested" (1Cor 14:25) before God I want to hear Him say the same thing my doctor said, "Your heart is fine. I did not find anything wrong with it." What a glorious day that will be!

## **April 30, 2013 DWELLING**

Almost my entire life I lived in houses that belonged to someone else (Church Parsonages) so it was a great blessing when my wife and I got our own home. It is a double wide mobile home which means it is less expensively built than the Parsonages we lived in previously but no one (except my lovely wife) can get mad with the preacher and vote me out of this home.

As a Christian, I also want a stable dwelling place while I await the mansion my Master is building me in heaven. Here are three metaphorical dwelling places I desire while on earth.

-The shadow of His wings is a safe dwelling place (How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings -Psalms 36:7). When hawks circle looking for a chick to eat the mother hen brings them to a safe place under the shadow of her wings.

-The shelter of his arms is a secure dwelling place (The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms- Deuteronomy 33:27). A secure refuge where I can rest in dependence on God's strength.

-The secret place of his love (Psalms 91:1) is a special dwelling place close to the heart of God. This is a place where God can reveal Himself to me and I can be entirely open to God. That sounds like home to me!

## **May 1, 2013 AFTER THE DECISION**

To most people, the scariest part of becoming a Christian is living the life after making the decision. They realize that God does not simply save people to populate Heaven; He converts them to be His representative on earth. They know that Christianity does not merely rescue us from the penalty of sin; it changes a person's character and conduct -"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The good news for these people is that God does not call us to do extraordinary things beyond our ability; He challenges us to allow Him to do extraordinary things through us! Our job is to trust and obey; God's job is to enable and empower-"If the Spirit that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also bring your fleshly bodies to the life God desires by his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8:11-my paraphrase).

God loved us before we loved Him. God paid for our sins before we even knew we had a sin debt. God had plans for us before he created us and He wants very much for those plans to come to fulfillment. God wants you to succeed in the Christian life and He provides everything you need to be a successful Christian. If you will believe, God will help you behave!

## May 7, 2013 BLAME GAME

It must be tough being God. Sometimes people seem as confused about God as the man who said, "Last night, yesterday afternoon, tomorrow morning a car came by my front door back alley and ran over and killed my dead cat".

God gets blamed for the bad that good people do; but He also gets blamed for not stopping the bad that bad people do ("If He was really a good God He would not have allowed terrorist to attack those innocent people"). It is as if people want God to be in total control of all of life and its circumstances- except, of course, the things that THEY wants to do without any regard to God's plan or purpose.

Let me illustrate with marriages. Some marriages begin with hormones instead of prayer; forgetting that living with a person is more difficult than sleeping with a person. And, of course, they then blame God because their marriage does not turn out like a romantic movie.

Other marriages are escapes from locations or situations until the people involved realize they can never run away from themselves. Often, that is when the hunt for another escape, and the same cycle, begins again.

God wants marriage to be great and good. He wants people to be happy and harmonious. But if you play in the ditch or walk among thorns do not blame God for the mud on your clothes or the scratches you encounter.

## May 8, 2013 HOUSEHOLD FOES

This devotion is for all those non "June Cleaver" Mothers who do not have an ideal husband and completely well behaved children. This is for those Moms who realize that sometimes it is the things closest to us that bring us the most pain.

I have beautiful feet ("How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Romans 10:15) but my ingrown toenails are a pain! I have good eyes but most of the time when something is in my eye it is one of my own eyelashes! In the same way, we are often hurt by those near and dear to us.

So today I pray for wives with abusive or alcoholic husbands. My heart aches for the pain you endure each week. I pray for mothers who have hard headed rebellious children whose wrong actions have broken your heart so often until your scars have scars. I pray for wives who smell cheap perfume on their husband's suits and who get the "another late night at the office" phone call must too often.

A mother should be a blessing to, and blessed by, her family but Jesus said, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matthew 10:36). So I lift up Mothers whose life has been a battle instead of a blessing. You are not forgotten; and you are still loved by God.

## May 14, 2013 PRIMARY QUESTION

People of all cultures ask a basic question, "Is there a God?" Followed immediately by several other questions, "How does God reveal Himself?" "Is God actively involved in the circumstances of life?" "Does God want anything from me?"

I believe there is a God- no matter how far back you trace evolution someone had to create that first grain of sand. As a Christian, I believe God not only reveals Himself in nature (The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handy work Psalms 19:1) but He has also revealed Himself in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ- "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" (John 1:14).

I believe that God is in charge of the chaos of the cosmos. I realize circumstances and catastrophes happen that we cannot reasonably explain or completely comprehend but I trust God's plan (not even a bird falls without God's knowledge-Matt 10:19) and I rest in God's heart.

I believe God desires me to worship Him and I believe God's greatness and love deserves my homage. I believe God wants a relationship with humans; that sin broke that relationship, and only faith in the sacrificial debt paying death of Christ can restore that relationship.

My life questions are answered by my relationship with God through Christ. Wondrous peace, glorious joy.

## May 15, 2013 COMMUNICATE WITH GOD

Anywhere is somewhere when nowhere is your destination! When your goal is simply to have a goal then you have reached your destination when you begin your journey. All of these describe the pitiful prayer life of many professing Christians. They believe they should pray but they do not have a plan or purpose for their prayers except to "pray" and hope something good will happen.

Multitudes of prayers are prayed each day by countless humans all across the globe and, in the majority of cases, little or no results can be shown as a result of these prayers. Sincerely sincere people seek with authentic desire to persuade God to change their circumstances or heal their sickness. Why does God seem to ignore their pleas? Why do these prayers appear to be powerless as well as meaningless?

The only real instructional question recorded in the Bible from the disciples was, "Master, teach us to pray." Jesus then revealed to His disciples that success in prayer was not a matter of the number of words or the amount of wisdom but of faith to believe and perseverance to continue (Luke 11). Prayer's secret is finding God's heart, holding God's hand, and being specific in your request.

My prayer dairies contain many divine answers to direct prayers. Prayer works when you work at prayer, when you pray with faithful expectation, and when you can clearly answer Jesus' oft repeated question, "What would you have me do?"

## May 21, 2013 NEAR LIPS, FAR HEARTS

When your lips say you are close to God but your heart is actually far from God then your religion is a burden instead of a blessing- "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9) [The word "vain" comes from a Greek word meaning "unsuccessful search". When your doctrine of the divine is manmade rules then you are on an "unsuccessful search" for the peace of God].

It is easy to worship God with words but God desires relationship over resonant. Yet, Sunday after Sunday, Churches are filled with people who sing a few songs, mumble a few prayers, and think they have made God happy. In reality, God has no greater place on the throne of these people's heart than He had before the person came to church- which is why Christians act so badly at restaurants on Sunday even though they have just come from "worship of God".

When our heart is close to God we love holy living, telling sinners about the life changing Grace of God, and spending time with God. If we only honor God with our lips we look for excuses to avoid God's word, His worship, and His work. So ask yourself, "Is my heart as close to God as my lips declare I am?"

## May 22, 2013 SILENCE

Secret sins silence many saints. We know we should speak up but our fears and our failures lock our lips and bring about a deafening silence instead of a destiny changing debate.

The fear of the "common sin judgment" silences many saints- For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? (Matthew 7:2-3). Sin failures make stone casting hazardous duty- {Jesus} lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her (John 8:7).

Doubt silences many believers. Some believers doubt that their "hot house" church beliefs can withstand the harsh assaults of knowledgeable critics who are supported by the media and the masses. Often believers doubt their ability to handle confrontation or adequately answer educated opposition.

Apathy muzzles the mouths of many believers. Fatigued bodies, exhausted minds, and bruised hearts close many lips. We call this the "don't care, too tired to care, or too hurt to help" syndrome.

Sadly, silence is not golden when it comes to sharing God- "if he dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezekiel 33:8).

## May 28, 2013 CULTURE CHANGERS

The primary goal of God's plan is the redemption of mankind from the dominion of Satan and the damnation of hell in order that men might become children of God and enjoy God as Father and worship Him as Lord. These redeemed individuals become part of God's Church where their changed lives help change the culture of the community and thus build the kingdom of God.

If the media and the evil powers at work in society today get their way and remove the "salt of saints" from culture then a rot and decay will set in that will stink to high heaven (Jonah 1:2). When Christians are no longer allowed to shine their light into the depravity of mankind then society will grope in the dark and anarchy will rule the land as every man does that which is right in his own sight.

Spiritually blind people tend to be blind to their blindness. They think they are enlightened by education beyond the "superstitions of religion" as they ignore the cancer of sin that is eating away at their life; destroying their moral standards and making them captives of sin (Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Ephesians 4:18).

One day People will find that freedom from religion leads to a sick society ruled by the wicked and the wealthy. And they will long for the light they extinguished.

## May 29, 2013 CAPTIVES FREED

In His first sermon Jesus preached about God sending Him to set the captives free (Luke 4:18). He wanted men to have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10) and He knew this could not happen as long as men were enslaved under the captivity and cruelty of sin. His message of deliverance from captivity is still needed today.

Addiction (for example, drugs and alcohol) begins with a pleasure to cover an inward pain but eventually brings people into captivity to the very thing they thought was setting them free. They discover that Sin is a slave master who allows you to be a "little god" in the playpen of Sin's choosing in order to get you to serve well until "payday" comes and you realize the cost of your captivity- "they promise them liberty but they are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19).

The good news of the Gospel is that the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of a Christian enables them to "recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (2 Timothy 2:26). Churches are filled with people who have been freed from the shackles of sin and are now the parents and productive members of society that God intended. This is the power of the Gospel as it changes lives and sets captives free.

## June 4, 2013 HIS NAME'S SAKE

The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe (Proverbs 18:10).

There are many things done by God to glorify His name. For His name's sake He Saves (Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known- Psalms 106:8) and preserves His people (For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people- 1 Samuel 12:22).

For His name's sake God leads His people to live right (He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake- Psalms 23:3) so His name will not be dishonored by His children (For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another- Isaiah 48:11).

Christians bear His name, pray in His name, trust in His name, and recognize the tremendous power of His name. For that reason they do not use His name lightly as a by-word- "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

The Name of the Lord is a strong tower where we find redemption, refuge, and refreshment. Honor it, cherish it, and find deliverance in its power.

## June 5, 2013 PROMISES

One event [we die and meet God] happens to everyone (Ecc 2:14) but Stupid happens to a lot more people than admit it (Ecc 2:15). Life and luck happens to all people (Ecc 9:11) but sometimes bad happens to good people and good happens to bad people (Ecc 8:14). That is why it is important to have promises to cling to in the ups and downs of life.

God promised to meet my needs [God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus- Phil 4:19] and even grant my wants [Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart- Ps 37:4].

God did not promise I would never have problems but He did promise His protection [Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me- Psa 50:15] and His presence [I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee- Hebrews 13:5] in those problems.

My greatest fear is not that God will fail in performing His promises [Being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform- Romans 4:21] but that I will fail to live up to the promise of His promises [Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it- Hebrews 4:1]. God is faithful to His word; may I be faithful to faith in that word.

## June 11, 2013 MINIMIZING CHRISTIANS

The main story in a recent newspaper was about how weird it was that a small Christian School taught its students to believe the Bible is the Word of God. Christians are considered bigots today because they believe Biblical behavior is more correct than the personal preferences of a small minority of people? Why has it suddenly become popular to minimize Christianity in America?

I could bash all the self-righteous, glory-seeking media hypocrites who have come to believe that having the privilege of talking into a microphone confers divine wisdom on their pronouncements but I will let God take care of those ants who believe themselves elephants. Instead, I am more concerned with “casting the beam out of my own eye so I can see clearly how to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye” (Matt 7:5).

As a member of the Christian community I believe the Church has failed God and the people of America with our behavior, our beliefs, and our biases. The actions, attitudes, and attire of many “Christians” in America strongly resemble that of their “heathen” neighbors. Christian beliefs not only do not shape Christian behavior; in many cases, they seem to not even impact church beliefs! And most churches are still all white, black, or brown as if God loves everyone the same, differently!

Minimizing Christianity is not unprecedented but it should be undeserved. May God help us to be worthy of persecution.

## June 12, 2013 EXAMPLE

A man in my neighborhood has a well-kept yard and well maintained home. I have noticed that others in the neighborhood are now trying to emulate his presentation, his perspiration, and his inspiration. Riding by his “example” each day causes others to want to live up to the high standard he has set and, in doing so, he has made our entire community a better place to live.

The pastor of the church I attend recently introduces several young men as the newest members of the Church Board. These young men observed the example of service and dedication in the lives of older men serving on the Church Board and they became convinced that Christianity is about serving God as well as about believing in Christ. It is amazing to see the dedication and hard work freely given by these young men because they witnessed that same kind of attitude in the mentor men of our Church.

There are no perfect fathers (even God’s children do not always act the way their Father desires or dictates!) but every man is an example that someone is watching. Much of the time that observation is done in the mundane drudgery of daily living instead of in a historic or heroic event.

The Bible calls children “arrows in the hand of a mighty man” (Psalm 127:4). These arrows hit the mark according to the father’s directive hand. I pray God will give them wisdom to aim well.

## June 18, 2013 MID LIFE CHRISTIANS

Multitudes of Christians need to break out of their mid-life crisis and begin to dream again. Many small churches are largely populated with people whose loss of energy and vision has led to a church dying in apathy and complacency. Gripping about the loss of the way things were has replaced presenting the Gospel in order to change the world into the way God desires it to be.

Huddled together in a sea of empty seats these churches moan about their smallness while continuing to perpetuate it. They long for young people to attend their church but they steadfastly resist any efforts to modernize their appearance or adapt to modern technology in the proclamation of their message.

Dying in the desert, the children of Israel were told by God to go into the promised land and claim the bounty He had promised them- Notwithstanding they would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD: (Deuteronomy 1:26). They found the comfort of a familiar desert more appealing than a land of milk and honey that involved conflict and change.

In the same way, God invites His people to enjoy His power and blessings today. Instead, many Churches have become lazy-boy escapes from a changing world instead of a launching pad for kingdom building disciples. Most people lose energy as they grow older; it is a shame when they also lose vision. And where there is no vision, people perish.

## June 19, 2013 SOFT WIND STORMS

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, ...Paul admonished them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon (Acts 27:9-14).

These verses tell us how good men go wrong. They (1) Put Expert Opinion over God's Word (Centurion believed the master of the ship over Paul); (2) Crave immediate comfort (Haven was not commodious to winter in); (3) Are motivated by the "mob" (The more part advised to depart); and (4) are guided by Favorable Circumstances (The south wind blew softly).

Soon, however, a tempestuous wind seized the ship. Favorable circumstances vanished, comfort was gone, the Experts did not know what to do, and the mob was going mad. Soft south winds beckon us gently but seldom lead to a secure port.

## June 25, 2013 PASSWORDS

God is in the physical, as well as the mystical, part of life. Much of what is done in America today is done electronically. If someone steals your Password and gets into your electronic world it can produce destitution and make it difficult for you to care for your family or give to help build the kingdom of God. That puts a spiritual importance on your Password.

Most people are terribly inept about their password. They often use something associated with their name, address, anniversary, or birthday. In the present time of cyber-attacks by foreign countries, as well as by the geek down the block, it is important to be more secure about the private and financial details of your life.

My "life verse" is Psalm 16 verse 11. It is something familiar to me but not to others. It is over eight letters long and can easily contain symbols and numbers- PS@lm1611 (First two letters are capitals, then a symbol for "a", then two small letters, and then numbers). You should always use at least one symbol but many security systems cannot handle \$< >&^![] so be creative with what you have left. A Password phrase could be- 1Luvmy#W1fe. (1 replaces "i", love is spelled differently, it mixes capital and small letters, and a symbol breaks up the flow).

Finally, remember that God has got your number! Nothing you do is hid from Him and everything you do is accountable to Him. And the password into God's Grace is J-E-S-U-S.

## June 26, 2013 CONSUMED IN VANITY

Mud on my face. My brother recently completed his second novel. He wanted me to review it one final time before publication. He sent it to me in Word format which I then sent to Kindle to be converted and placed on my Kindle. I read through five chapters and told my wife that I could not find a lot he had changed from the last revision and I was confused because he had spent a lot of time editing. Finally I went back to the original document he sent me and found that, for reasons that are still not clear to me, Kindle had retained the old edition instead of putting the new edition on my Kindle. I had spent a week editing a version I had already edited!

My devotional reading for this week included "therefore their days did God consume in vanity" from Psalm 78:33. I had asked God to explain how a life could be "consumed in vanity". When I discovered the error with my brother's book I knew exactly what God was talking about. Because I had the wrong work source I had spent several days doing work that had no meaning; this time in my life had been wasted on "vanity".

Be careful that you do not spend your life building sand castles on the beach and then watch the tide of time wash them away. Make sure you and God are on the same page about life.

## July 2, 2013 GREAT CHURCH

Great is great but mundane is miserable. The word “Great” is used about the Church eight times in the book of Acts and it was this Greatness that exemplified the early Church. It showed Great Power in its testimony and manifested God’s Great Grace in its ministry (Acts 4:33). It produced Great Fear in the world as it demonstrated the justice of God (Acts 5:11) and it had a Great Company of religious leaders who proclaimed its message (Acts 6:7). It suffered Great Persecution from the government because it put God first (Acts 8:1) but it had Great Joy among its members as it walked and worked with God (Acts 8:8). This was not an egotistical greatness of self-exaltation but a Godly Greatness as a result of believing and behaving as God intended.

Sadly, a church can lose the greatness that enables it to turn the world upside down and settle for the mundane life of “meeting, greeting, and eating”. Instead, we need Churches who will realize their potential as they become lights in a dark place which display God’s character, demonstrate Christian behavior, denounce unholy living, and demand biblical teaching and preaching from their leaders. It is a Church choice.

America is a great country that needs a great church to demonstrate great things to manifest a great God. We live in a country that gives us the freedom to be great; let us have courage and convictions to accomplish that greatness.

## July 3, 2013 THE MESSAGE

I took it off the wall this week. The letters (written with the use of a stencil several years before my first computer) were badly faded and the paper had finally begun to crumble from old age. It had survived many trips to the pulpit in my notebook and had been posted on the wall of every office I occupied during my years of ministry but it had finally reached its end.

The message on this piece of paper is just as important, maybe more so, than when I painstakingly colored it years ago. Over and over through the years I gazed at this paper and used it as a “plumb line” to make sure I was building my life and my ministry correctly. When pride came to visit this poster humbled me. When depression’s long dark shadow brought a chill to my bones and despair to my mind this poster reminded me of my real success goal.

America is a great nation but its foundation is quickly crumbling as each successive week brings more news about moral decay and increasing intolerance of anything that is not part of the liberal / anti-Christian agenda. I think the only way to change this is for the Christian Church to rethink their goals, renew their vision, and constantly remind themselves of the cry from a hurting world that I hand printed on this crumbling piece of paper- “We would see Jesus”.

## **July 9, 2013    HOT AIR HOLE**

Hot air can give false impressions about what is really happening. Let me illustrate. The thermostat for my heating/air has two numbers. The top number sets the heating/air to the temperature I desire and the bottom number shows the temperature in the room and triggers the heating/air on and off. Recently I noticed a strange phenomenon. At night and in the morning everything worked well. In the afternoon the AC would never cut off and it would become unbearably cold in my home.

Here is the interesting fact; when I would look at the bottom room temperature on the thermostat it would be ten to fifteen degrees above the actual temperature in the room. This was causing the AC to run even though it was cold in the room. But it only happened in the afternoon.

Finally, I looked behind the thermostat mount and noticed that the installer had cut an exceptionally large hole in order to run the thermostat wires. This hole was allowing hot air from the attic to come down this non insulated inner wall and feed into the thermostat giving the thermostat a false room temperature reading.

Do you get the message? The heat from life's problems sometimes feeds false information into our life and causes us to react incorrectly. We think we need to "run" more to cool things down when we actually need to allow Jesus to fix the "hole in our heart".

## **July 10, 2013    SEEKING FOR SIGHT BLINDLY**

I am legally blind without my glasses. As a result, my glasses are the last thing I take off each night and the first thing I put on each morning. I laugh when people tell me they "lose their glasses". Other than at night, mine can always be found perched on my nose.

One morning recently I reached over and accidently knocked my glasses off the night stand. I had to gingerly get out of bed and then use my hands to search all around the night stand until I finally felt my glasses. While I was doing this I thought about a verse I had read in my devotion the night before- "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:" (Acts 17:27).

Paul used this statement as he attempted to explain God to the intellectuals of Athens. He knew they were blinded by sin and he would not get them to see God until they could feel their need of God. Paul knew men seek God because of spiritual conviction instead of mental convincing. This awareness of sinfulness leads people to look beyond themselves in order to take the "leap of faith" necessary to believe that only Christ can help them.

Feel after Christ until you will find Him. When you do you will see everything differently.

## July 16, 2013 TWO WORLDS

My life is two constantly competing conflicts. On one hand I am a simple man beset by human weakness, moral wickedness, and mental weariness who can relate with amazing clarity to Paul's self-assessment in Romans chapter seven- "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (vs18-19). Some wrong I do is an innocent mistake; some an ignorant mistake, but sometimes I am amazed at the thoughts I think, the talk I talk, and the dark spots I see in my soul.

On the other hand, I am a son of God and a servant of the King of kings who has been redeemed from the bondage of sin through faith in God's gracious grace and who is a daily recipient of the marvelous mercy of a loving Heavenly Father. The power of God's Spirit energizes my work, the provision of God's promises supply my needs, and the peace of God's presence keeps my heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

Two worlds collide in my life. The "god of this world" and the Lord God constantly ask for my allegiance. The one I bow before controls my conduct. What I "will" to do determines what I will do.

## July 17, 2013 WORTHY WORK

Jesus said the laborer should be worthy of his wages (Luke 10:7) and Paul said we should walk worthy of the vocation to which we are called (Eph 4:1). This means the occupation which enables you to earn your living should be God's provision for your needs and God's place for your service.

You should not be too lazy to work (this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat-2 Thessalonians 3:10) but provision should be provided for you if you are unable to work (For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land- Deuteronomy 15:11).

Here are some tips to help you "walk worthy" of your occupation. Be productive (Jesus constantly commended people who used their "talent" instead of hiding it). Be prayerful for those you work for and with. Be pure in words and behavior. Be prudent when dealing with others (Realizing the evil that infects men's minds and morals, Jesus told His disciples to be wise as serpents even while walking harmless as doves- Matt 10:16). And, finally, be a pattern for Christ that people will want to embrace and emulate.

Work provides focus in your life, funds for your wellbeing, and fruit to glorify God. Working your work worthily will please God and make your life better.

## July 23, 2013 CHARACTER AND INTEGRITY

Character is who you are in the dark. Integrity is what you do under duress. Character is who you are when you are out of public exposure. It is the TV shows you watch at midnight. It is the websites you visit when you are alone and the private tab is used on your browser. It is the book you hide under the other books. It is what you think, say, and do when public perception does not control your conduct.

Integrity is the person you are under pressure. Let me illustrate. The twenty-five members of my Sunday School class are captured and put into a room where they receive only water for a week. At the end of the week a person comes in with food for five people that he chooses at random. He then says he will be back each day with food for only five people and lets you know he can be bribed about who gets that food. Integrity is shown in who would share, who would steal, and what people would do in order to get that food.

The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them (Proverbs 11:3). Character and Integrity; who are YOU in the dark and under duress?

## July 24, 2013 PREPARATION

You must “dig the well before you are thirsty” if you want to enjoy life in the hot times. Preparing ahead is an important part of a happy life- ask the ant (Prov 6).

Hopefully, everyone knows they should “Prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12). As a prepared Christian, I look forward to that event with great anticipation. The unprepared person, however, can expect a bad meeting and a horrible aftermath (And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire- Revelation 20:15).

In addition to preparing to meet the Lord you should also prepare for life- Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house-Proverbs 24:27). Translation- Have a safety net as well as a “nest”. Every home should have at least a week’s supply of food and water, a month’s supply of money (in case you get sick or laid off), and a “go” bag with at least a day’s supply of fresh clothing, basic toiletries, and some money.

Many reading this are saying, “Wouldn’t I love to have a month’s supply of money!” Try this; for the next six month change the places you go and the meals you order with the goal in mind of putting aside your “month money”. You will be surprised.

A little bit of preparation can save a lot of future pain. God is preparing for your future; are you?

**August 6, 2013**

**JONAH WITNESS**

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times; it was a time that determined men's souls. Jonah led one of the greatest revivals in Biblical history but Jonah was one of the worst Prophet examples imaginable. Jonah began a three day Evangelistic tour of Nineveh and his preaching was so powerful until after the first day the entire city became so concerned about God's coming judgment until even the King left his throne and put on sackcloth and ashes (Jonah 3). Historians estimate that as many as 250,000 people lived in Nineveh and this revival delivered them from God's destructive judgment. I call that a successful ministry!

On the other side of the coin, Jonah was a man who ran from the work God had called him to do and then relaxed in slumber while other people struggled because of the storm he caused. He was revealed as a rebel against the will of God and required to bodily endure the "belly of hell" in a whale before God had him vomited out to resume his ministry.

And in one of the most amazing Biblical statements recorded, "it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry" (Jonah 4:1) that the people had repented and God had stayed His Judgment.

If God can use someone with as many problems as Jonah to save a city; He can use you to change a community. Especially if you are willing to witness without going the way of the whale.

**August 7, 2013**

**VISITATION**

Seldom do seed walk out of the bag and into the ground. Seldom do fish jump into the boat of the fisherman. Yet the average Church member seems to think that sinners will simply walk into Church and beg to become a Christian. It does not work that way- you must go if the church is to grow. God did not merely say, "Sit and learn"; He commanded us to go and tell. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind:

1. Have a schedule- most people plan to go but they let the opportunity slip by week after week. Set a "visitation appointment" in your schedule; and then go!

2. Have a Plan- Why are you visiting? There are several types of visitation and you need to know which you are attempting- (a) Soul Winning: attempting to win people to Christ. (b) Sunday School Recruitment: Inviting new people and absentees to attend Sunday School. (c) Bringing comfort and support to the Sick and Shut-ins. (d) Door to door Survey (Casting a Net). (e) Enlisting people in a Bible Study time each week (Home or Church). (f) Reconnecting with Strayed members (Seeking lost Sheep).

3. Go as an ambassador for Christ; not as a salesman for your church. Invite them to living waters and the bread of life and tell them you will be with them at the table.

Seed in sacks produces no crop. Sow seed everywhere and watch God bring in a bountiful harvest.

## **August 13, 2013    POWER PARTNER**

Life can grind you down or gobble you up if you do not have the inner strength of God to sustain you. Facing the perplexities and problems of life without the power of God at work in your life is like trying to empty the ocean with a pitchfork; you will work yourself to death and accomplish very little.

The Spirit will not help you if you insist on doing wrong (this grieves Him) nor will He continue to empower you if you ignore the life changing good He is leading you to do (this quenches Him). The Spirit is not a power you use; He is a God-person (part of the trinity of God) who indwells you in order to bring you to higher levels of possibilities. Your body is meant to be the Spirit's temple; not Satan's playpen.

The Bible calls the interaction with the Spirit being "filled" with the Spirit and (interestingly) uses the comparative illustration of how a person acts when they are drunk! A drunk talks different, walks different, and loses much of his fear. These same characteristics are given for a person filled with the Spirit- They have a song in their speech, act better in their home and work place, and are enabled to become "devil defeaters" because they are clothed with the whole armor of God (Eph 5-6).

Do not allow life to grind you down. Partner with the Spirit and turn life's grind into glorious accomplishments.

## **August 14. 2013    PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Whether it is a test at school or an assessment review at work, most of us know the anxiety we feel when someone is looking over our shoulder and judging our performance. Christians will one day face such a "performance review" as we give God an account of our life- For we shall all stand before the Judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, as I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God- Rom 14:10 12.

This accounting is for rewards, not redemption, but I believe this accounting about the resources entrusted to us by Christ will determine our position and privileges in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ reigns on the earth- Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities (Luke 19:16-17).

God gives each of us time, talents, and opportunities. When we waste our time, squander our resources, and miss our moments we limit our life and lessen our treasures in heaven. Christians are not simply seeking a "happy moment"; they are building an eternal kingdom. In the end, life is not just about getting to heaven; it is about glorifying the God who inhabits heaven and hearing Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

## August 20, 2013 MARRIAGE SPARKS

Years ago people would call going on a date “going sparking”. It derived from the fact that men would carry a torch (from which sparks would fly) in order to see their way down the path to the lady friend they were visiting. Thankfully those days are over, but I still believe a happy marriage must have some “sparks” in the relationship.

A good relationship has development sparks- Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:17). Opposites attract so sometimes they “rub each other the wrong way”. This iron sharpening iron produces some sparks but if it is done in love then both parties will be sharper (and better) as a result.

A good relationship has intimacy sparks- I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. (Song of Solomon 7:10). The Hebrew word for “beloved” is “to be boiling”. It indicates the burning passion that causes two to become one and bind their lives together. Husbands and wives learn how to “make the sparks fly” in their sexual relationship with constant communication, consensual experimentation, and consistent consummation (1Cor 7:3-5).

A good relationship avoids speaking sparks- Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! (James 3:5). The most dangerous weapon in a home is the tongue. Sometimes it will spark a fire that can burn a home down.

Put the right kind of spark in your marriage and enjoy the relationship.

## August 21, 2013 PRIME DIRECTIVE

God’s prime directive was to have sex, have kids, and rule the world- And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Genesis 1:28). Yet the least preached on subject in most churches is about the powerful force of sexual desire.

Someone taught the mother of Jesus about sex. When told she would give birth to the Son of God she responded, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1:34). In some way Jesus knew that sex was not just a prostitute problem so He could say, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7).

Men are told to flee fornication (1Cor 6:18) and youthful lusts (2Tim 2:22) but they are not told to pretend sexual emotions do not exist. Instead, they are told that in order “to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband (1Cor 7:2). The following verses communicate how the wife and husband are to consistently and completely meet each other’s sexual needs. A lot of Church member family problems could be solved if these scriptures were preached and practiced.

Sex in God’s time, in God’s way, with God’s person is beautiful. Do not let it be confused and corrupted in your life.

## August 27, 2013      DECEPTION

“All warfare is based on deception” (Sunzi in the Art of War). “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Paul told Timothy to “war a good warfare” (1Tim 1:18) and told the Church at Ephesus that “we wrestle [war] not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12). Yet many Christians think Christianity is about feeling good instead of about fighting the good fight.

Christians need to recognize that Satan wants to control them, corrupt them, and compromise them. He tries to control their mind with problems, pain, persecution, and perplexities. He attempts to corrupt their actions thru depravity, discouragement, debt, and doubt. He seeks to compromise their heart with lust, loot, and lies. And he does this while lulling the sheep to sleep singing, “Don’t be afraid of the big bad wolf, the big bad wolf!”

Is it any wonder so many Christians are constantly defeated in their own lives? Is this the reason for the constant downward spiral of society? Has Satan deceived the church into believing that life is a playground instead of a battleground?

Christians must realize they are at war with a devil of a deceiver. Deaf sheep happily ignore the roar of the lion but they also make excellent lion lunch!

## August 28, 2013      GROWING FAITH

If your faith falters you will lose favor with the Father- Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him (Hebrews 10:38). That makes guarding and growing your faith a primary aim.

Faith must be guarded against the wrong goal (Paul told Timothy that Love of money causes you to err from the faith- 1Tim 6:10). Faith must also be guarded from wrong guidance (false teaching which seeks to turn men away from faith-Acts 13:8). If you fail to do this you can actually be led to depart from the faith (1Tim 4:1).

Paul told the Thessalonian Christians that he thanked God because their “faith was growing exceedingly”. I realize that God hath dealt to every man a certain measure of faith (Rom 12:3) but I believe God has also given us means to grow and develop that faith.

Faith grows by reading the word of God (So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God-Romans 10:17). Seeing God at work in His word expands our belief in his abilities and care.

Faith also grows when see the wonders of God. Recently some unusual circumstances caused me to be late for Church so I sat at the back of the church. After church, several people in need of guidance had time to talk with me because I was among them. My faith about the providential leadership of God is stronger now.

Do not falter in your faith; grow in your faith.

## September 3, 2013 FAILURE FAULT

Sometimes a church's failure is not the Pastor's fault. Sometimes marriage is a mess because a good woman married a sorry excuse for a man. Sometimes good parents raise two peaches and one rotten apple.

Sometimes soil determines what happens to the seed. Jesus said seed in good ground produced fruit but other seed became bird food on trampled trails or developed no roots because of stony ground. Some even started out good but the thorny challenge of life choked their growth. Good seed on bad ground produces failure instead of fruit.

Sometimes people's attitude determines growth- And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:10-11). A church with no desire to grow, a husband with no desire to work, and a child with the desire to rebel (The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it-Proverbs 30:17) can turn the best instruction and intentions into headaches and heartaches.

Sometimes beating yourself up is punishing the wrong person. God can change anyone except the person who will not be changed! And you are not more powerful than God.

## September 4, 2013 SUCCESS

Can success be a success without being a success? One of the most intriguing Bible verses about Success is Mark 4:20 "And these are they which are sown on the good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred." Same Sun, Same Soil, Same Seed; Different Results.

In the success oriented society we live in today it is important that we grasp this principle. Equal effort does not always produce equal results. It remains true that while one plants and another waters; it is still God that must give the increase (1Cor 3:6).

Some very good Pastors labor in obscurity and adversity in small struggling churches which see little success or growth. Other Pastors, who are no better; find fortune, fame, and popularity at a growing developing church. They preach from the same Bible, serve the same God, and exhibit the same zeal; but one reaps only thirty "bushels per acre" while the other brings in a bumper crop of One Hundred "bushels per acre".

When God counts your crop it won't be based on bushels per acre but on faithfulness in the field (We give account for "talents" but we trust God for "fruit"). Don't be discouraged into leaving your seed in the Barn. Sow with all your might and rejoice in whatever the seed produces. After all, Thirty Bushels per acre is much better than no seed sown!

**September 10, 2013**

**PRAYER PARTNERS**

It is a great honor to partner with someone in prayer. The request for partnership can come from prayer requests at Church or from interaction with an individual. It can be for sickness healing, spiritual help, special needs, or for God to change the circumstances a person is encountering. Whatever the reason, the person requesting prayer is seeking help with a situation that is beyond their abilities or wisdom and this makes it very important.

I pray for prayer requests in Church immediately. As the Pastor or a person expresses the request I try to silently pray for that request in my pew. This enables me to more meaningfully pray for a request

Individual request are treated differently. While I try to “pray without ceasing” my intercession prayer time has to be limited by needed physical activities and personal prayer time. I cannot pray for everyone or every need in the world on an individual basis! I also limit my intense intercessory prayer by seeking to discern the faith of the person giving the request. I do not need to waste time with a person who does not expect God to answer prayer.

When I join a person in praying for a request I pray for wisdom to know what to do and for the ability to do what God directs us to do. I then expect God to do a “God thing” as we pray to a loving God who delights in hearing the prayers of His children!

**September 11, 2013**

**SAMPLE PRAYER**

Prayer should be a supplication, an expectation, adoration, meditation, glorification, unification (of your will to God’s will), and deification (making God the god of your life). A simple prayer could go like this.

Father, I humbly bow before you today acknowledging your greatness and glory. I confess the sins I have done and the service I have failed to do. I recognize the pain and problems my failures have brought to you and to others. I admit my unworthiness and ask your forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

I rebuke the spirit of discouragement, doubt, and disobedience that has kept me from becoming the great person you want me to be. I claim the power of the Holy Spirit to work in my life so that I can accomplish great and mighty things for you.

My eyes are on you, my heart is open to you, and my body is completely available to your work and your will. I know you will never deliberately harm me so I totally submit myself to your plan for my life.

I long for your kingdom to come and your will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven. My vision is filled with fields white unto harvest and my mouth is dedicated to telling everyone about your forgiveness and love.

I claim your provision, your peace, and your power. I love you, I thank you for loving me, and I long to be in your presence.

## September 17, 2013 THE BIG THREE

The big three of Christianity are Faith, Hope, and Love. Faith is the key to God's Kingdom and an indispensable part of the Christian life—"without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). Faith believes that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Faith is built on the testimony of God's past works and the declarations found in God's Word. Faith reaches out to God with full assurance that God is there and He is reaching out to you.

Hope is joyful and confident expectation. Hope is trust in the promises and provisions of God. Faith believes God can; Hope believes God will! Faith believes God's word; Hope believes God's Heart. Losing Hope cuts our anchor and sets us adrift in the storms of life.

Love is the "cement" that holds everything together. Love is affection for God and man shown in our actions toward others and our attitude toward God. Real love is not an emotion we work up; it is a God inspired "spark" we work out as the Divine love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

The big three: Faith, Hope, and Love. But one day it will only be the big One. Faith will become sight, Hope will be completely fulfilled, and only Love will remain as we bask in the presence of the God whose very nature is Love. Come, Blessed day.

## September 18, 2013 TESTIMONY

The most wonderful and exciting adventure imaginable began when I repented of my sins and trusted Jesus Christ as my Savior. The journey has been joyous, the fellowship with God's family has been fabulous, and the destination is out of this world. Rather than write my testimony (read it at [www.ministerministry.com/testimony.html](http://www.ministerministry.com/testimony.html)) I thought I would encourage readers to write out their testimony and share it with others.

Writing down your Christian testimony (be natural, be brief, point to God) helps you get over being shy about sharing something as personal as your walk with the Lord. Writing out your salvation experience produces peace in your heart as you bring the reasons for, and the results of, your faith into focus. And, most importantly of all, writing down your testimony expands your ability to "go into the entire world" with the message of Christ.

Put a copy of your testimony in letters and cards. Give a copy of your testimony to your Pastor to read at your funeral so your family and friends will know the importance of your faith. Ask your Pastor to give you five minutes to read your testimony during a Church service. Think web, email, Facebook, blog, and so forth.

The most important event in my life was the day my sins were forgiven and I became an heir of heaven. If you feel the same way, then write it down and pass it on.

**September 24, 2013**

**BOATS**

There are various boats afloat; big boats, little boats, fishing boats, pleasure boats. Each boat has its place in life; some are for recreation, some are for work, and some are even "house" boats.

People are a lot like boats. They come in various sizes, shapes, and purposes but they always have to find a way to get from one place to another. They do so by using one of four primary methods of movement.

**FLOAT BOAT People-** They simply get in the boat and allow any current to take them anywhere; and hope they are in for a good ride.

**ROWBOAT People-** They can only go as far and as fast as their own abilities will carry them. They are always tired and can never venture far from home.

**SAILBOAT People-** They use the wind as power. This gives them greater ability but it also subjects them to the whims of the wind. When they have a favorable wind they accomplish great things but ill winds cause them to sit still, go in a different direction, or use their energy fighting the wind instead of succeeding in life.

**STEAMBOAT People-** They have an internal power which enables them to travel for great distances without regard for the winds of circumstances or their own abilities. This is the kind of "boat" Christians are supposed to be. The Holy Spirit within enables them to keep going forward no matter what life throws at them.

Which Kind of Boat are you?

**September 25, 2013      GOODNESS AND GOD**

Does it do God good for humans to be good? Or as the Bible asks "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" (Job 22:3)

Most people know their own efforts can never be good enough to meet God's standards- "all our righteousnesses [good works] are as filthy rags;" (Isaiah 64:6). Yet, there is this "back of the mind" thought in most people that once they become a child of God their good works keep them righteous. How deluded we are!

The good works of a Christian allow them to do their duty- "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). And they are a way to glorify God in a sin darkened world- "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Good works also benefit the Christian by enabling them to avoid God's Chastisement (Heb 12:6) while, at the same time, moving them under God's "blessing umbrella". But never assume that He who sees the motive, as well as the method, of our good works is enriched by our feeble abilities.

God is completely complete in Himself without any of your efforts. Goodness is good for you but only God's grace makes us good for God.

## **October 1, 2013      REBELLION ACCOUNTABILITY**

Love overlooks failures but it does not overlook rebellion. When a child spills a glass of milk you encourage him to be more careful, hug him to show an accident did not negate your love, and help him clean up the mess. When a child deliberately looks you in the eye and knocks over a glass of milk then the child experiences “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6).

People are abandoning God today because the only aspect of His love they hear about gives them the impression that God’s love will allow them to be rebellious without any accountability. People want a God who will treat them right, make things right, but stand firmly for what is right. They want a God who will say, “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 1:19-20).

I believe the love of God brought Jesus to the cross. I believe the wrath of God against a wicked rebellious world will bring tribulation wrath. I believe God’s love wipes up spilled milk but I also believe He is a righteous God as well as a loving Father. And I believe no one really respects a God who talks tough but who treats rebellious people like spoiled grandchildren.

## **October 2, 2013      WHEN GOD IS DEAF**

Several times in scripture God declares that He will not hear prayers. I cannot imagine a worse situation! God does not always answer my prayers in the way I desire or on my time schedule; but I know He always hears and considers my prayers. What a horrible situation when you hear God say, “You have made your bed, now sleep in it” when you pray!

Here are the two times God states He will not hear our prayers:

1) Because of rebellious choices a person makes: “And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day” (1 Samuel 8:18).

2) Because of hypercritical worship by evil living people: “And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15).

Note that in both cases it is God’s people who are told their prayers will not be heard. God hears the repentant prayer of a sinner and His mercy and Grace fulfills some petition prayers of sinners but He is not obligated to them. A Saint who prays can depend on his family relationship and love relationship with God. When situations in his life cause “God to go deaf” that is a matter for great repentance and remorse.

## October 8, 2013 HATRED HARM

(1 John 2:11) *But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.*

We all know that Hatred destroys relationships with others (Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: 1 John 3:15) and with God (If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: 1 John 4:20). But did you know that hatred harms you also?

Hatred is a hard master. It impacts your health, your attitude, and your joy. It also affects the way you live (“Walketh in darkness”) and the motivation of your life (“Knoweth not whither he goeth”). But hatred does something even worst- it brings you to blindness (“because that darkness hath blinded his eyes”).

In a cave in the Smoky Mountains are some blind trout. When people began using the cave they thought it would be good to stock it with trout. Later they found trout who live in the darkness of a cave all the time actually lose their sight.

When a person allows hatred to live in his heart he is in danger of becoming like these trout. Hugging hatred to his heart increasingly causes him to walk in darkness. And how utterly horrible it will be to one day find you have allowed the darkness of hatred to blind your eyes for so long until you can no longer see.

## October 9, 2013 ATTENDANCE GOALS

He who aims at nothing has no problem hitting it! If you do not know where you are going any road will get you there! Without a path to follow you will wander in the wilderness seeing the trees while never knowing the grandeur of the forest.

Everyone needs goals in their life. A GOAL is defined as something to aim for- something to give direction to your work and effort. Here are a few goals that will help you have a better church attendance experience.

1) BE INVOLVED -A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: (Proverbs 18:24). Do not just attend, blend in. Get actively involved in Church and ministry each week. Involvement allows you to grow (precept must be upon precept if consistent growth is to happen) and it nourishes relationships (Friendship flourishes through familiarity and personal contact).

2) BE JOYFUL - I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD (Psalms 122:1). Sing with enthusiasm and worship with wonder. Do not ignore life’s problems; just trust God to give you victory over anything so you can rejoice in everything!

3) BE A WITNESS - Be a positive advertisement for God and your church each week. Do not fake it (No one enjoys every song or sermon) but do not talk bad about the good news. Remember a witness is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find the bread of life!

## October 15, 2013 SMELL TESTIMONY

I was walking from a motel room to the ice machine when it suddenly hit me. A rank putrid smell that almost made me gag. It was so overwhelming until it made me stop in my tracks.

As I was looking around for the source of the smell I heard a noise. Looking toward the noise I saw the local garbage truck turning onto the highway. That explained the unpleasant aroma that still permeated the air.

I often visit businesses and homes. I wander in, conduct my business or visit with the people in the home, and then “breeze” out. Behind me I leave an aroma of influence.

If my character, my conduct, and my Christian example are what they should be then I leave people with a smile on their face and joy in their heart. If my business dealings have been quarrelsome or my home visit has been negative then I leave a garbage truck aroma behind.

I pray this week that you will be aware of your “smell” testimony. Your “smell” is not something you notice but those around you are very conscious of it! Conduct yourself in such a way until your “smell” will be pleasing to God and man- (Phil 4:18) *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.*

## October 16, 2013 WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING

I stopped at the intersection because the light was just changing from green to yellow. As I stopped I noticed a truck in the lane across the intersection. He saw the light turn yellow but he decided to go through anyway. The light turned red as he entered the intersection but the truck was so big until everyone knew to let him have the right of way.

The problem came with the car behind the truck. The lady driving that car was following so close behind the truck until she could not see the traffic light; so, unbeknown to her, she was going through a light that had been red for a significant amount of time.

Everyone on the cross streets were busy watching the truck so they could go as soon as it got through. They didn't know about the car that was trailing close behind the truck. No one crashed, but it was close, very close.

The lady in the car made two classic mistakes. She was following someone she didn't know and she was so close to the truck until she could not see the light.

Can you see the spiritual principles here? If you are going to follow someone then you better be able to trust their leadership. And never allow the person you are following to block your view of the “light”! Life is dangerous when you violate these principles.

## October 22, 2013    WAYS WE DENY GOD

The word Atheist comes from a Greek word meaning "No (a) God (Theos)". It was originally used for those who deny the existence of a Supreme Being. The word "Atheist" is not found in the Bible but the idea of "Denying God" is. Three Ways People Show they are Atheist.

**In their Mind-** *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts* (Psalms 10:4). Which brings about this result: *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;* (Romans 1:28). In the list that follows (Rom 1:29-32) God shows that people who deny God in their mind Dishonor themselves, Disrespect their Family, Corrupt Society, and take pleasure in sinful behavior.

**With their Actions-** *They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate* (Titus 1:16). This results in God getting blamed for a lot of things He had nothing to do with.

**From their Heart-** *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good* (Psalms 14:1). If there is no God to obey then every man does that which is right in his own heart.

Atheists deny God in their practices as well as in their pronouncements. Do you?

## October 23, 2013    LEAP OF FAITH

My business is getting people to take a leap of faith. I call people to leave the chaos, conflict, and condemnation of their present life and make such a radical change until Jesus said it was being "born again". I call people to believe that an event which happened on a cross two thousand years ago enables them to become guiltless before God and ensures them all the benefits and blessings of being a son of God. I call them to not merely have faith but to let Faith have them!

I am not an entertainer; although I do travel around giving a 30 minute monologue about God. I am not a sport's figure; although I do tell people how to be winners and encourage them to run with patience God's race of life. I am not a financial expert; although I do tell people they can trust God to meet their needs and that following Godly principles gives God the opportunity to bring prosperity and blessing into their life.

I realize that Faith comes by education (Rom 10:17) but I am not simply an educator. I realize educating people about faith can change their mind without changing their heart. I must get them to recognize that Faith is not coming to a cliff and admiring the view; it is jumping off that cliff with full assurance that God's love and grace will be there to catch them!

## **October 29, 2013 ANIMAL PREACHERS**

God's message is so important until sometimes He uses animal preachers to preach His preaching. He used a talking donkey to warn the prophet Balaam. He used the inside of a Whale to lead the prophet Jonah to repentance. He used a Dove to tell Noah when it was time to leave the ark. [Notice the differences- It is a supernatural thing for a donkey to talk; it is a natural thing for a whale to eat something in the water but it was a supernatural thing for him to preserve Jonah alive in his body for 3 days and then vomit him up on the shore {God had Prepared Him- Jonah 1:17}; and it was a completely natural thing for a dove to return to the ark until the ground was dry enough for man to live on].

God used a Crowing Rooster to convict the Apostle Peter (Matt 26:75) and "lockjaw lions" to preserve Daniel and show a foreign King His power (Dan 6:25-27). He even used a powerless snake to promote the Apostle Paul so he could bring a great revival to an island (Acts 28:3-10). Christ used fallen sparrows to proclaim God's constant care (Matt 10:29) and during the future tribulation God will use locust who can sting like scorpions to show men the wickedness of their ways (Rev. 9).

Do not let the fact that God speaks in unusual ways make you miss His message. It is the most important communication you will hear today.

## **October 30, 2013 NO MASK PLEASE**

This is the time of year when people put on costumes and pretend to be something they are not. Most churches are familiar with this concept! They see it each Sunday as people put on their Sunday face and come to church expecting God to dish out the "treats".

The most important decision anyone will ever make is their decision about receiving Jesus Christ into their heart and life. This decision is not a costume change; it is a character transformation. It is not putting on a mask and pretending to be something on Sunday; it is learning that because Christ died you can live with yourself on Monday.

We live in a society of shallow sex and fast passing fads where, although most movies, TV shows, and ads are about sex, the empty eyes of people testify that because a person opens their legs does not mean they open their heart. People come to church because they are hungering for something beyond a momentary pleasure; something that will touch their soul and bring hope to their life.

Churches proclaim Jesus because He is the real deal. He genuinely loves people and wants to help them fill the empty place in their heart with the joy of working for, and walking with, God. His followers know that a mask will not matter because Jesus is aware of every flaw in their character and conduct and He loves them anyway. Life is good when you can be real.

## November 5, 2013 HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

Sometimes God talks without a tongue. Most of the time He uses humans, sometimes He uses animals, but occasionally He uses other methods.

God is a gardener (One reason He created Adam was to care for the Garden of Eden) and He often uses Plants as a communication device. He used a Vine to convict Jonah (Jon 4:-); A fig tree to preach to Israel (Matt 21:19-21; 24:32-33); and a burning bush to call Moses (Exodus 3:2-6). Today Weeds remind us of sin's penalty (Gen 3:18) and the lilies of the field speak of God's Care (Matt 6:28-30).

A Star led the Wise Men to Jesus and the heavens should preach to everyone about the majesty and mercy of God- Ps 8:3-4 *When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

God used Dreams to warn the Wise Men to depart another way (Matt 2:12); to warn Joseph not to settle in Judea (Matt 2:22); and to tell Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:28) and Pharaoh (Gen 41) about the Future.

Jesus said if His disciples ceased praising Him then the rocks would cry out (Luke 19:40). And Proverbs declares that wicked men speak with body language- *He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers;* (Proverbs 6:13).

Sometimes God speaks to our ears and sometimes He talks without a tongue. Are you listening?

## November 6, 2013 MOUNTAIN VIEW

I knew when she said it God would probably do something. At a Friday night meal several of my wife's sisters talked about upcoming trips to view the fall foliage. On the way home my wife sighed that sigh (Husbands know what I am talking about!) and said she sure would love to go to the mountains also.

Saturday morning as I was praying the Lord reminded me that I still had 30,000 unused points from a credit card I had canceled several years ago. A quick trip to the internet disclosed that 30,000 points would get us a free night in a motel in Ashville, N C. Sunday I spoke at a special service at a church which gave me a one hundred dollar honorarium.

Early Monday morning Princess Paula and I were in our car headed to the mountains. We drove to Blowing Rock, NC where we entered the Blue Ridge Parkway and traveled south to Ashville where we had our free night's reservation. Passing time with the hotel clerk I mentioned that we were viewing the leaves and allowing my wife some time away from caring for her ninety-three year old father. The Clerk stopped and said she had just buried her ninety-three year old father in law so she wanted to upgrade us to a suite- is there a glory anywhere in the house?

Gas and food for the two day trip cost us ninety-seven of our one hundred dollars. It is wonderful to walk with God and watch how He works when He wants to bless His children!

**November 12, 2013**

**DREAM DIALOGUE**

Some people seem to think that God desires to communicate through dreams when a sermon goes boringly long! I do not recommend this approach but here are several occasions when God communicated through dreams: a dream warned the Wise Men to depart another way (Matt 2:12) and warned Joseph not to settle in Judea (Matt 2:22). Dreams also told Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:28) and Pharaoh (Gen 41) about the Future.

Usually God communicates with leaders through dreams while angels communicate with “common people”- The Wise Men had a dream while the shepherds heard directly from an angel. The Wise Men were following God so they understood their dream while Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh had to have a man of God interpret their dream.

God said He would use dreams to communicate to a genuine prophet- “If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream” (Numbers 12:6). But being given this gift necessitated great responsibility- “The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:28).

God promised in the last days the Spirit would enable “old men to dream dreams” (Joel 2:28 and during Peter’s Pentecostal sermon- Acts 2:17). In a day when multitudes seek a clear vision of God we desperately need men to be filled with the Spirit so they can “dream dreams” and faithfully illuminate the reality of God to a world sleep walking through life.

**November 13, 2013**

**WHAT MOVES YOU?**

In cold northern waters an interesting phenomenon takes place. You can look out at the ocean and see one sheet of ice moving in one direction and another portion of ice moving in the opposite direction. The direction is determined by what is moving the ice.

Ice floes are sheets of ice that float on top of the water. They are moved by wind and waves. Ice bergs are huge chunks of ice which have as much as nine-tenths of their volume hidden under the water. Ice bergs are moved by the deep ocean currents without regard to the wind and the waves.

We live in an age where many people are like ice floes; they are moved by waves of common thought or winds of circumstances. They may appear a lot like ice bergs but when you see what moves them then you know the difference.

Winds and waves buffet each of us-sickness, financial needs, depression, Society or family approval, and so forth. They will drive us in a direction we do not want to go unless we have allowed ourselves to go deep down into the current of God’s love and leadership.

The Bible declares that our words (Luke 6:45) and our actions (Prov 23:7) originate from our heart. Whatever controls our heart is the directing force of our life. That is why we must “Keep our heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23) if we are to always move in the right direction.

**November 19, 2013**

**VISUAL SERMONS**

I have great compassion for those who are blind. I have less compassion for those who have eyes to see and see not- Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house (Ezekiel 12:2).

Most Sunday School kids will never forget a teacher putting drops of food coloring into a clear glass to represent the stain of sin and then pouring bleach from a glass labeled Christ into the colored water and watching the water turn clear. What a lasting illustration about how Christ cleanses us from our sins.

Jesus knew the importance of seeing, as well as hearing, a sermon. He used a Roman coin to preach about paying taxes, He used birds to illustrate God's constant care. He used broken bread and a cup of wine to perpetually illustrate His broken body and His shed blood.

Jesus told His disciples to lift up their eyes and look on fields ready for harvest as an illustration about evangelism and He used a serpent lifted above the crowd as an illustration of salvation. He also used a harlot who washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair as an example of forgiveness.

God preaches to your eyes as well as your ears. Get a vision of what God is saying today and let it change your view of life.

**November 20, 2013**

**CONTRASTS**

Some people take a shower before they go to work; others after they return from work. Those who shower before work run the world while those who shower after work make the world run.

Contrasts are an important part of our learning process- good, bad; light, dark, wise and foolish. God often used contrasts as a way to illustrate a principle or a problem. One such contrast that stood out to me recently was when I read Ezekiel 16:30-34.

In this passage God told Ezekiel that the difference between a Prostitute and an Adulterous woman is that the Prostitute expects to receive gifts from her lover while the Adulterous woman gives gifts to her lover. It confused God that Israel would actually contribute to her spiritual lovers who were defiling and destroying her.

I wonder how God feels today when movie stars who support every liberal and morally bankrupt cause imaginable receive great wealth from Christians who attend their movies? I wonder how He feels about Christian teens who pay exorbitant prices in order to purchase clothes designed by or worn by rock stars whose morals would make a dog ashamed?

America would be a better place to live and a country God could again bless if Christians lived outside the church what they talk about inside the church. It is bad to do wrong; it is worst to pay the person you are doing wrong with for the privilege of doing wrong!

**November 26, 2013**

**JOY QUOTIENT**

It is difficult to be thankful or publish your praise when you have lost your joy- *How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?* (Psalms 137:2-4). The Thanksgiving /Christmas holidays are the most exciting time of the year to some people and the most depressing time of the year to others. The difference is the "Joy Quotient" in their heart.

Satan delights in stealing Joy from people. He does this is by giving out misinformation (he is the "father of lies" -John 8:44) to disturb our trust, mischievous information (gossip) to destroy our tranquility, and misleading information to confuse our thoughts. Believing wrong can turn a blessing into a burden.

He also encourages people to complain. Complaining displeases God (Numbers 11:1) because it demonstrates that we doubt, or are unhappy with, God's care for us. Because we complain to other people complaining destroys other people's joy as well as our own.

David said joy renews in us when we deal with our sins (Psalm 51:12). Isaiah said Joy refreshes us when we drink the water of life (Isa 12:3). And Jesus said joy remains in us if we keep His commandments (John 15:10-11).

Satan wants you weak, worried, and wicked. God wants to give you "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3) so you can enjoy the abundant life. When the "Joy of the Lord is your strength" your joy quotient will cause you to bubble over with praise.

**November 27, 2013**

**A GRATEFUL HEART**

Someone prayed "Lord, you have given me so much, give me one thing more; a grateful heart." People have different amounts of problems, pain, and property but each of us should have a grateful heart.

We should not be proud in our praise (the Pharisee gave thanks that he was not like other men- Luke 18:11) but we should be consistent in our praise (Daniel knelt and gave thanks to the Lord three times a day- Dan 6:10). We are to publically praise God (So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, Nehemiah 12:40). This public praise moves from the church to life when we praise God for His provisions (Jesus took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples-Matthew 15:36). [In my part of the world we call this "asking the blessing" and we cannot imagine eating without thanking God for the food].

Anna, the prophetess, gave thanks when she saw Christ (Luke 2:36-38) and we should always "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise:" (Psalms 100:4). No matter what life throws at you always remember "the LORD shall comfort Zion: ... he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody" (Isaiah 51:3). You will always be grateful for a grateful heart!

## **December 3, 2013 THE CORE**

The Bible is history from no earth to a new earth; from no man to the God man; from a garden to a golden city. It reveals very little of what happened before creation and very little about what will happen after the present earth's story is complete. It largely ignores the rest of the universe and most of earth's history and inhabitants except as they relate to a chosen man who became a chosen nation from which God became flesh and dwelled among men.

The writers of the Bible speak about near events which have distant meanings and they hide golden nuggets among dreary details and difficult names. Many portions of the Bible provoke more arguments (Cain's wife, Saint's sufferings, and Sin's allure) than answers but it is written in such a way until even "fools shall not err therein" (Isaiah 35:8). As we read the Bible we find its words transform into living water that quenches our inmost thirst.

The core of the Bible is that God's heart is touched by men's needs. Death at a tree moved God to provide eternal life by dying on a tree. When mankind cried out, "God, you just do not understand". God replied by becoming a man and "walking a mile in our shoes". When man said he just could not do it God said, "Let me help" and now we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. The Bible centers in Christ because His coming changed everything.

## **December 4, 2013 CHANGE**

What you believe determines what you do. Cola and car companies have used this principle in their advertisements to build empires. As Christians, we also know the power of belief. In the beginning of the Bible we learn that dealing with Satan is not a Power encounter, it is a Truth Encounter. In the Garden of Eden Satan did not attempt to overpower Eve; he simply used deceptive words to build unbelief. And this change of belief caused Eve to change her behavior; which has had eternal consequences.

In order to change behavior you must find a way to change a person's beliefs. If you use force or intimidation (threats or nagging) to change a person's behavior it will have short term results and bring you to despair as you see your way fail over and over again. A teen must believe that picking up their clothes is a good thing, and not simply a way to get you off their back, if you are to bring about lasting change.

The wonder of Christianity is that the Word of God produces Faith within a person's heart which, in turn, causes a change of behavior. Christians should not sit idly by and allow the wicked to produce wicked laws that promote wickedness but we should never believe that a good law can take the place of God's love. When people believe right they behave righteously. Christians change the world by showing and sharing their Christian beliefs.

## **December 10, 2013 PURPOSE**

Serving God demands passion and purpose. It must be more than a logic we learn, an emotion we feel, or a standard of society. The Passion part is easy (We love him, because he first loved us-1 John 4:19) but having a purpose to our passion is more difficult.

When I talk with people about developing purpose I ask this- "If you had abundant money and unencumbered time what would you do?" The honest answer to this question reveals the perceived purpose of their life.

Because people often say what they want to do instead of what their heart is leading them to do I ask four follow up questions - "Is this purpose in your heart so much until you can never be happy unless you do it?" "Is it in your abilities to accomplish?" "Is it God's will for your life?" and "Is it part of God's preparation for your life?" I write about God all the time because writing is in my heart, it is within my abilities, I know it is God's will for my life, and God has continually worked circumstances in my life to enable and empower me to write. On the other hand, I want to sing but you do not want me to sing!

Pursuing your purpose brings the excitement of constant challenge to your life and the peace of a "smiling God" to your heart. God has prepared you for life and called you to a purpose; now do something great with God.

## **December 11, 2013 COMPLICATED CHRIST**

Christ's coming was complicated. Jesus said He came to divide families, push back the dark, and bestow abundant life (For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law-Matthew 10:35. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness-John 12:46. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly-John 10:10).

The Apostle John said Jesus came as a devil work destroyer: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). And Paul preached that Jesus came to save sinners- "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

There are many religions in the world; most of which are noble and noteworthy. All require man to sacrifice something for their god and then live by a complicated set of commandments. Only in Christianity does God sacrifice His son for mankind and say, "I paid the debt you owed, now just trust me."

The coming of Christ is complicated because it changed everything. Yet the coming of Christ made a relationship with God very simple because it changed everything.

## **December 17, 2013 A BABY CRIED**

For four hundred years God remained silent. Disease, war, and desolation devastated the earth. World changing empires began and ended. Israel again traveled the road into bondage oppression and the people of God continued to cry for God to show Himself and bring relief. But no new word was heard from God. The light of faith flickered and faded among the people of God as evil prevailed and hope seemed but a shadow.

Then one night the voice of God was heard as a baby cried in Bethlehem and God became flesh and dwelt among men. The shepherds became aware of His birth by angelic announcement and it changed them from sheep herders into savior seekers. Wise men found out about His birth via a star message which drew them across the miles to upset a king before they worshipped the King of kings.

This baby's cry echoes through the halls of time and has brought hope to my heart, meaning to my life, and peace to my future. I serve a king whose kingdom is not of this world. I worship a God who was killed by man but would not remain dead. I have a mansion that is being prepared and a Master that is soon coming back.

Kingdoms still wreak havoc and men work wickedness but a baby cried and God opened His arms to invite mankind into His family. It is indeed a time to celebrate!

## **December 18, 2013 MISERABLE CHRISTMAS**

I hate being "out of season". I hate it when my message has no melody and my life is "bah humbug!" I dislike "December depression" when it gets dark way too early and cold way too much. But then I consider that first Christmas.

What a miserable Christmas it must have been. The government decided to conduct a tax census and the entire family had to relocate many miles away where the housing market was so tight until the only place available to stay was a sheep stall! This also meant Joseph was unemployed while Mary was expecting their first child at any moment.

One has to wonder why God would allow these difficult circumstances to surround the birth of His Son. I mean, couldn't God have at least made a reservation for a room at a local hotel? Christmas is supposed to be fabulous; not frantic!

Sometimes the pain or slow progress of God's plans puzzles us. We want life to be wrapped as a nice gift with a beautiful bow on top; not presented to us in a used cardboard box. We want it to always be good for the good.

Consider this, the shepherds probably would not have been allowed into a hotel to worship and announce the new born Savior and the Wise Men's visit to Herod moved Jesus to Nazareth where He could recruit disciples instead of Pharisees. Christmas shows us the broadness of God's plan as well as the depth of His love. That turns a miserable Christmas into a merry Christmas.

## December 24, 2013 SHEPHERD SYMPHONY

The cold wind whipping across the meadow only added to the discomfort of the shepherd as he hugged the fire and tried to stay awake. Behind him the sound of bleating sheep intermingled with snoring shepherds.

At first he thought the sudden brightness was the wind flaring the fire until he slowly lifted his head. Tremendous fear gripped him as he saw an angelic being hovering above his camp. He sensed more than saw his fellow shepherds stirring also but he was too fearful to take his eyes off the wonderful being that radiated light and glory.

The voice was strong and yet soothing. The words were astonishing, "I bring you good news of great joy that shall be unto all people, for unto you is born this day in Bethlehem a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Suddenly, the entire sky was filled with angelic being singing the most beautiful song human ears have ever heard. The melody washed over his soul and filled him with hope, peace, and love as they touched the very core of his being, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men".

Then it was over and the angels were gone. But the shepherd knew he had heard the greatest symphony in human history and he, like his friends, could not wait to go into Bethlehem and see the wonderful child the angels sang about. I pray this Messiah melody will also hum in your heart this Christmas season.

## December 25, 2013 CHRIST'S GIFT

In the hustle and bustle of Christmas it is easy to overlook how much Christmas cost Christ: (Philippians 2:5-8) "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

This passage describes Four Things Christ gave up when He exchanged a mansion in Heaven for a manger in Bethlehem.

1. HIS ROYALTY- He left the splendors of Heaven for the squalor of a stable so that you and I could have a mansion in Heaven. The King became a common man so common people could become children of God.

2. HIS REPUTATION- He became of no reputation so that we who have a bad reputation might be restored to God by the grace of His imputation.

3. HIS RIGHTS- The Son became a Servant. He gave up His royal rights so that men who were wrong might be made right.

4. HIS LIFE- He who is life became obedient unto death so that those who were dead in sin could have eternal life. He gave us the present of His presence so we could have the pleasure of His pardon.

Christmas is about Christ giving the greatest Christmas present possible. Open it today.

## **December 31, 2013 PSALM ONE PRINCIPLES**

I believe that parents should require their children to memorize, and repeat back to the parent at least once each week, the first Psalm. Its warnings about the evils of worldly pressures, the benefits of reading the word of God, and the consequences of a wicked life are foundational principles that should be instilled in every person.

A look at the first half of this Psalm will give you an idea of what I mean- "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. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Psa 1:1-3).

The first thing you notice is that life influences come from people who you listen to, who you fellowship with, and whom you seek to impress. Who you are is largely determined by who you allow into your inner circle.

This negative influence should be replaced by constant contemplation of Devine directives. This meditation will provide correct soul nourishment which will result in fruitful living and life success.

Make this a Psalm One year as you anticipate the most fruitful year of your life.

## **January 1, 2014 RESULTS OF READING**

Many people will begin reading the entire Bible in a year today. Great idea; I commend you. Here are some things you can expect from your consistent reading of God's word.

A CLEAN LIFE: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psa 119:9). The Word of God in your heart establishes purity principles which guide your moral decisions- "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa 119:11).

A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE: "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psa 119:104). This understanding of what is really important will show you the "Path of life" ("Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" Psa 119:105) and bring Peace to your life- "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psa 119:165). Jesus described it as building your life on a rock so that life's storms could not undermine your foundation.

Bible principles also give you a way to ANSWER YOUR CRITICS: "So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word" (Psa 119:42). Culture and personality difference will cause people to see actions and attitudes from different perspectives. Let God's Word be the final decision.

The Word will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the word. Make the Bible's life changing instructions a part of your daily living.