

1993 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 5, 1993 RUSHING WATERS

We always think of Jesus as the lovely little Babe of Bethlehem; or the pitiful, painful Christ of the Cross. The last description given of Him, however, shows a far different view point. Rev 1:14-16 says that "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." What a glorious description of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Within this portrait is a wonderful description of the Voice of the coming King, "his voice was like the sound of rushing waters". I asked the people of my church what that meant to them and they came up with three very good points.

First, Rushing Waters are Soothing. Sometimes God's voice is described as the "voice of thunder". That would frighten us but the sound of rushing waters has a soothing effect. Even so, the voice of Christ brings peace and assurance to troubled souls today.

Secondly, Rushing Waters are Continuing. Thunder starts out loud and then fades into the distance. The sound of Rushing Waters just continues on and on. That's like the voice of Jesus. He always has a Word for you, no matter what your circumstances.

Finally, the sound of Rushing Waters tends to block out all other sounds. All the little background disturbances fade into insignificance when we listen to the voice of our Lord.

Listen to this voice "like rushing waters". It's calling you to pardon, forgiveness, and the abundant life.

January 6, 1993 WRONG LIGHT

It was early in the day but I had already been extremely busy. Now I was on my way out of town with a long list of things to accomplish. As I sat at the stop light running through a mental list of what I had to do I found myself looking at the light that directed the cross traffic instead of the one in front of me.

When it turned red, I immediately started forward. That's when I looked up and realized the light in front of me was still red! I tried to stop but by now I was in the middle of the intersection. It was not a good feeling; and it would have been even worst had there been someone turning in front of me!

We are beginning a new year. We will find ourselves increasingly preoccupied with day to day details. In the hustle and bustle of this daily living it will be easy to focus on the wrong direction light. That could be disastrous also. So let me give you a few guidelines to help you keep focused.

First, Have a Quiet time with God Every Day- God wants to spend time with you and you NEED to spend time with Him. Without this quiet time you will start listening to wrong voices and end up heading in the wrong direction.

Second, Remember that your top priority in life is doing the will of God. The new year is full of obstacles, as well as opportunities. Without God's Direction you will feel as if you are driving blind-folded through a minefield.

Finally, Spend more time looking out the window than you do looking into your mirror. A person who spends too much time thinking only of self is in danger of ending up in the middle of an intersection with traffic coming the wrong way. And let me tell you, that's not a good feeling!

January 12, 1993 HALL SNAKES

When I pastored in Florida, I would normally walk to the Church office for my early morning Bible reading and prayer. One morning, when I had completed my devotion, I walked back to the parsonage to get another cup of coffee. While I was there I thought I'd see if my wife was awake.

As I was walking down the dark hall to the bed room I felt something move under my foot. When I turned on the light I saw a snake coiled up in the middle of the hall! I didn't have anything to kill him with so I walked back outside to pick up a hoe.

When I returned, I couldn't find the snake. After looking for a while, I found him behind the bedroom door. I tried to hit him just hard enough to stun him so I could get him out of the house because I didn't want to get a mess on the carpet.

That's when my wife awakened and asked me what I was doing. When I told her, she was not as calm as I was!!

We got the snake out of the house without causing too much of a mess but my wife never walked down that hall again without turning on the light. In fact, it was several years later, when we were moving, that I finally found the hole in the hall closet through which the snake had entered.

Snakes in the hall don't make for a happy home. There is always a little uncertainty about your safety. Think about that the next time you are tempted to allow filthy movies or dirty books into your home. The snakes of lust will always bring a little uncertainty into the joys of love. Instead of enjoying more freedom, you will find yourself having to watch every step you take.

January 13, 1993 CAT TRACKS

Since my mother in law passed away last year my wife goes to her dad's at least once a week. She cleans his house, washes his clothes, and makes sure he gets a hot meal. Like most people, my wife and her dad have uncertain schedules. I'm never sure what day she is going to his home. It's easy for me to know if she has been to her dad's, however. All I have to do is look for the cat tracks on my car!

If we have recently washed our car and she comes back with cat tracks all over it; it's somehow encouraging to me to know that the word Cat is not in the Bible!

Don't get me wrong. I'm not anti-cat. I know the cats are simply looking for a warm place to lie down. They aren't being mean or vicious; they're just following their natural instincts. But you will still have to Amen the fact that cat tracks on your car can be aggravating.

Like the cat, some people have the tenancy to aggravate others. They don't mean any harm. It's just that they don't think when they talk too loud or too long. Or they assume that everyone will see things from their viewpoint. Or they fail to consider that their warm place might be someone else's clean car!

Everyone leaves tracks. The Bible says we are to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:" (Heb 10:24). Let's make sure our tracks provoke love and good works; not aggravation.

January 19, 1993 THIEVES

When I was 8 years old I used to steal Cigarettes "Butts" from my mother's ashtray and sell them to my friends. I only stole a few and it was soon forgotten; until one night after I was saved and preaching a Revival God told me to tell about those stolen cigarettes. Guess which night my mother decided to attend that Revival!!

God has blessed our Church and enabled us to maintain a multitude of ministries; so in the process of a year thousands of dollars pass thru my hands. Notice I said "Pass Thru". I never allow any of it to stick. The reason is simple, while I respect the Law and know that they might eventually find me out, I Fear the Lord and KNOW He would find me out.

The next time you're tempted to steal from the Government because it has plenty (It doesn't. It's billions of dollars in debt!) just remember that you can fool the Government some of the time but you can't fool God any of the time. The next time you're tempted to "fool" an insurance company (After all, you think you deserve it with the rates you're paying!) think of what you'll feel like when you stand before God and He reminds you that "No Thieves...shall inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor 6:10).

Do you think the few dollars you obtained will be worth the penalty you'll pay??

January 20, 1993 MAGNIFY CHRIST

I have adopted a phrase from Philippians 1:20 "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death." as my theme for 1993. The Phrase is "Christ shall be magnified in my body".

Magnifying Christ in my body means I will have to keep my weight down so people will talk about how good God is instead of how fat the preacher has become. Magnifying Christ in my body means I must let the light of Christ shine in my attitudes and action no matter what circumstances I may encounter this year. Magnifying Christ in my body means dying to plans and ambitions for self and surrendering to the Lordship and daily command of Christ. This will affect the TV shows I watch, the telephone conversations I engage in, and the way I spend my time. But this is what I want because I want above everything else for Christ to be magnified in my body; whatever that takes.

This is the prayer I pray in connection with that desire- "Lord, give me the wisdom and will power I need so that I may live in such a way today that my body will magnify the Lord. Grant the Holy Spirit's controlling power over the foods I eat, the thoughts I entertain, the words I speak, and the actions I do. Guide my conversation and my conduct so that they would exalt Christ and show the world He is the only Savior. Keep me steadfast on the path you would have me walk so when I reach the end of life's journey you will be able to say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joys of your Lord.'"

I pray that this is the year that you too determine to magnify Christ in your body. You couldn't have a more worthwhile goal.

January 26, 1993 HAY STACKS

While traveling through Alabama recently, my wife and I passed a field that made us stop, turn around, and return for another look. Some farmer had spent much time and energy arranging the hay in his field to look like various animals and objects.

A giant caterpillar of hay wound through the middle of the field. A huge hay spider (equipped with huge wooden legs) crouched in one corner of the field. There were also hay locomotives, hay jack-o'-lanterns, hay bugs, and hay owls. Each had been arranged to look like a certain object and then brightly painted eyes, mouths, or wheels had been attached. It sure was a traffic stopper.

Can't you imagine the glee this man must feel each time he sees traffic slow or stop to admire his handiwork. Sure it took some work, but the effort turned a common field of hay into a conversation piece; as well as a place to take those special pictures that people like to show off. It also turned a dull dreary task into a time of joy and anticipation.

What a great witness Christians would have if they did their work with this same zeal. What a wonderful time of Worship the Church would have if they put this kind of energy, imagination, and enthusiasm into the worship service. And imagine the difference it would make in this world if everyone sought to find the joy in their job.

Are you wasting your life gathering hay? If you'll only look you can find a way to turn that hay into a Hallelujah; for yourself and for others.

January 27, 1993 DOING YOUR BEST

A Sunday School Teacher was having "show and tell" one Sunday Morning. Each Child was supposed to bring some object they could show the class that would illustrate an incident from the Bible. One child brought a piece of wood to represent Jesus dying on the cross. One brought a slingshot to illustrate David killing the giant. One even brought a basket to symbolize Moses being rescued from the Nile River.

On and on it went until she came to a boy who held a little bird egg in his hand. The Teacher looked at the little egg for a while before she finally had to ask the boy what truth it represented.

"Why, teacher," He said. "It represents the time the woman poured perfume on Jesus and Jesus said she had done what she could!".

That's all God wants, for you to do what you can. Sadly, many people feel like their service for the Lord is like a bird egg in comparison to what other people do. And because it's so small, they hesitate to offer it at all.

Just remember that Jesus said the woman who poured perfume on Him would be a memorial for all the world. Your bird egg may not be as big as some hens you know but you'll be amazed at how big it becomes when it's presented to God. Just ask the little boy with nothing but a few fish sandwiches for dinner. Jesus used them to feed over five thousand people!

Just keep this truth in mind. God would rather have your "bird egg" in His hand working for Him than to have a dozen hen eggs rotting in the bushes of inactivity.

February 2, 1993 THE CONTINUAL CHAIR

While giving my monthly devotion at a local nursing home recently I saw an illustrating sight. One of the Aides was helping one of the patients attempt to walk. Walking behind the patient was another Aide pushing a wheel chair in case the patient needed to sit down.

I told the Aide that she was a perfect picture of how God cares for me. He's always right there with a "chair" if I start feeling weak and begin to fall. Temptation and troubles may attack me, but as my knees begin to buckle, God's presence is always there for me to lean on.

This "continual chair" that God provides not only protects me from falling, it also provides rest when I'm weary. Sometimes it seems that I cannot go another step. That's when I find God is waiting with a place I can rest and gain strength. While I'm sitting, God holds my hand and whispers sweet words of encouragement to me. Soon I'm ready to start on my journey once again.

It may be that your journey through life is a halting hobble instead of a rigor race. Don't be discouraged. God's continual chair is right behind you. No matter how fast, or slow, you travel God is always there when you need a resting place. Rejoice in that fact.

February 3, 1993 PRESSING PROBLEMS

We are in the process of printing "Miracle Messages" Volume IV right now. Most of you know that I put these weekly devotional articles into book form so I can give them out as part of the outreach ministry of our Church. That allows them to do double duty; first they minister to you and then they minister in homes, hospitals, jails, and so forth.

It is the policy of our church and the outreach ministry to always give these books away without cost or obligation. That means that the printing, sorting, and binding work of a book must be done by the wonderful volunteers the Lord has sent our way. Since most of them know very little about the tremendous amount of work involved in publishing thousands of copies of a book, they have to learn as they go. That makes for some interesting situations.

They learn that, for some unknown reason, ink will spread much more easily on your clothes or your person than it will on a piece of paper! They find that, believe it or not, a mimeograph machine has stubborn streaks just like people. One day it will work great; and the next it would make even Job want to take an axe to it.

Through all of these "Pressing Problems", however, they find that God's grace is sufficient and the results are worth all the effort. They learn that God is not just publishing books, He's developing people. And isn't that a lesson God is trying to teach all of us?

February 9, 1993 YOUTH POTENTIAL

The Funeral Possession crept slowly down Main Street. Sadly the family drove the final mile with a wife and mother. Some cars eased over to the side of the road, while others tried to glide pass as if they didn't recognize what was going on.

Off on my right I noticed a group of teen boys playing touch football in a yard. Suddenly one of them noticed the funeral possession. Immediately they stopped their game, lined up beside the road, put their hats over their hearts, and waited in quiet respect until the possession had passed.

We hear a lot about how bad our youth have become today; and there are a lot of problem areas that need to be corrected. Its incidents like this, however, that continue to show me the promise and potential that our young people still possess.

The potential is there; it's up to adult leaders to develop it. It's our responsibility to "train up our children in the way they should go"? That means we must teach them that respect is more important than riches? They must learn to honor life's beginning by developing high moral standards and (as these boys demonstrated) they must learn to respect life's end. In between they must learn to trust God in Life and depend on Him in death.

Thanks boys, you encouraged me again to look at potential instead of problems. And thanks for your reverence, you'll never be sorry

February 10, 1993 CROSS HAIRS

I drove up behind a car at a local burger place recently and saw what at first was an encouraging sight. On the back window of the car was a huge circle with a cross in the middle. I was excited because I thought this must be a fellow Christian making a stand for God.

As I got closer, however, I was able to see that the cross was in reality the cross hairs of a rifle scope and a policeman was in the middle of the sight. The implication being that this person was advocating that people shoot the police.

At first I was angry (Yes, Preachers do sometimes get angry at what sin does in the lives of people). Then I began to think about the greater implications. Here was a young boy so full of hate and bitterness until he felt compelled to decorate his car with a suggestion to murder someone (Evidently it didn't matter who as long as they wore a police uniform).

How terribly sad that this person would use the cross as a symbol of hate and prejudice. How sad that the cross, which offers life and hope to all who trust in Christ, would symbolize death to those who uphold authority for this young man.

All of us must make a decision about the cross. Will it be a comfort to us or part of the cross hairs of our hate? Will it change our life or destroy the lives of those who oppose us?

Jesus said if we would follow him we must deny ourselves and take up our cross. This cross brings death to self but eternal life to our soul. That's the kind of cross you need in the circle of your life.

February 16, 1993 SUNDAY SNACKS

As Jesus and His disciples were walking across a wheat field one Sabbath day, the disciples reached down and picked some of the wheat to snack on. The Pharisees went into a religious frenzy. Didn't Jesus know that harvesting grain on the Sabbath was strictly forbidden?

Jesus basically told them to "Lighten up a little!" His Disciples weren't harvesting grain, they were eating a meal.

God originally set aside the Sabbath as a day of Rest from normal employment. Through the years the Pharisees had tried to regulate this rest by establishing 39 categories of actions forbidden on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was turned from a day of Blessing into a horrible Burden.

America today has turned the coin completely over. We have changed God's day of rest into a day of shopping, sports, and selfish absorption. That's a very dangerous thing to do- Remember that one of the reasons God led Israel into captivity was because they failed to honor His Sabbath.

Don't get so hung up on Sabbath laws until you're afraid to eat a snack. But don't get so liberal until you use God's day as grocery day! Pull your ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath. But if he falls in every sabbath, fill the ditch or kill the ox!

February 17, 1993 FRIENDSHIP LETTERS

While having a meal with some minister friends recently I noticed how they talked with delight about receiving special friendship letters each Christmas. They would only hear from these friends in former churches at Christmas but that one letter would make up for all the lost time.

They would tell about weddings, births, deaths, and important events in the Church. And they would also share some personal information about how they were doing physically and spiritually. The kinds of things a former pastor longs to hear about people he has loved and ministered to.

All of us love to have enduring friendships that stand the test of time and distance. And we all love to share information from one friend to another so we can see how our lives are developing.

To a large degree, that's the simple plan of the New Testament. Most of it was written as letters to friends to encourage, instruct, or correct. Each letter normally has some doctrine to believe, a duty to do, and some personal comments or greetings.

That's why it surprises me that some people find it difficult or boring to read the New Testament; while reading with interest and delight the gossip magazines from grocery stores! Maybe it would all change if God was their friend and they read the Bible as a friendship letter. That would turn it from a Book to endure into a Blessing to enjoy.

God's friendship letters have principles to live by, answers to problems, and promises to claim. Why don't you take the time to enjoy these letters from a friend today.

February 23, 1993 SIDE DOORS

For some reason, known only to the strange quirks of human nature, people insist on coming to the wrong door of the parsonage. Several years ago I moved the Church office to the front room of the Parsonage. You enter the front room by coming to the front door (Amazing isn't it!!).

To help people understand this principle, the church spent much money putting in a concrete walk from the Church parking lot directly to the front door. Then we obtained a large sign with an arrow pointing to the front door that says "Church Office". In spite of this, fully 75% of the people who come to see me come to the end door of the parsonage.

That means they have to stand in the hot sun or pouring rain instead of finding shelter on the front porch. The reason they have to stand for so long is that when they come to the door my wife has to call me. I have to leave the office, walk through the house, answer the side door, and then bring them around the house to the office. It amazes me every time it happens.

What amazes me even more, however, is the fact that preachers have preached that Jesus is the only way to Heaven for nearly 2000 years and people still try to get to Heaven by using "side doors"- giving money, attending church, doing good works, not doing certain bad deeds, etc.

When will men learn that Jesus said, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." (John 10:1). Why do they insist on coming to the wrong door even though the right door is so clearly marked? What will they do when they knock on that wrong door and no one comes to answer them??

February 24, 1993 FORGIVING THE HELPLESS

Today we begin a Seven part series highlighting the People Jesus granted forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness of sins is the most important occurrence in any person's life. It affects your life on earth and your eternal destination. That's why I feel it's important that we look carefully at the people Jesus specifically said he forgave the sins of. It is my desire that this series of messages will influence you to accept God's Pardon for YOUR sins, or encourage you to rejoice in that forgiveness if you are a Christian.

Jesus had entered a home in Capernaum where He began to preach the Word of God. The message was so interesting until the crowd filled the room, surrounded the house, and spilled out into the streets. Suddenly there appeared four men carrying a paralyzed man on a cot. Unable to get through the crowd these men finally fought their way to the roof of the house. There they dug a hole in the clay roof large enough to lower their paralyzed friend down into the presence of Jesus.

When Jesus saw the faith of this man and his friends He made a startling statement, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." (Mark 2:5).

Here was a helpless man, unable to do anything for himself. In reality, he was more of a burden to friends and family than he was a blessing. Yet Jesus loved him and forgave him.

Many many times I have witnessed to people about the wonderful Salvation that is found in Christ. They tell me they want to be saved but they feel helpless to forsake sin and live for God. The good news is that no matter how helpless you are; Jesus will forgive you, raise you up to newness of life, and provide the strength you need to walk with Him.

God has provided the salvation you need. God will provide the strength you need. You can die paralyzed on a cot, or you can accept forgiveness from Christ today. Which will you do???

March 2, 1993 THE TRACKING TEACHER

I had the wonderful privilege recently of speaking to a group of people that included the lady who taught me in the First Grade. I remember her for a number of reasons but I especially remember her for one extremely thoughtful act.

My Class was the first class this teacher taught. And, amazingly, she continued to teach after putting up with us for a year!

Twelve years later every pupil in that first class who was graduating on time received a special card from this teacher congratulating them on their accomplishment. Unknown to us, this teacher had tracked us throughout our school career.

Through the years she had watched with sadden heart as various members of that first class failed or dropped out. Now she was able to look with pride as the seed she had sown in that first class was brought to fruit in her first graduating class. Of all the cards I received at graduation, I value hers the most.

I'm reminded that Jesus did not call us to simply begin the race. He commanded us to finish the course. And He's watching our progress all along the way. Do we sadden His heart with our failures?

Do we break His heart when some put their hand to the plow and then look back??

The Lord is tracking your progress. When it comes time to graduate from this earthly life will He be able to give you a card that says, "Well Done, good and faithful servant"??

March 3, 1993 FORGIVING THE SINFUL

Last week we saw that Jesus is ready and willing to forgive someone even if that person is helpless and has to be brought to Him. Today we want to look at how He deals with someone who is brought to him under entirely different circumstances.

As Jesus sat teaching in the temple one day, suddenly his class was interrupted. A group of scribes and Pharisees crowded into His class, dragging a frightened woman with them. The woman had been caught in the very act of adultery and now the religious leaders wanted to use her as a means of entrapping Jesus.

It had always bothered the Pharisees that Jesus was a friend of publicans and sinners. Now they thought they could use this woman to box Him into a corner. If He obeyed the Law and told them to stone the woman then the Pharisees would use that to poison His influence with His followers. If He told them not to stone her then they would brand him as a heretic who stood against the law of Moses.

You know the story. Jesus turned the tables on them by requiring them to answer for their own sins before they could throw rocks at this woman. Slowly the crowd melted away until only Jesus and the woman were left. That's when Jesus spoke these wonderful words of forgiveness to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more".

Just as Jesus was able to forgive the helpless, so He is willing and able to forgive someone caught in the very act of sin. One was brought to Jesus by his friends, the other by her enemies, but, in each case, they left the presence of Jesus with their Sins forgiven. If someone has to carry you, or drag you; make sure you get to Jesus. He is willing and able to Forgive YOU today also.

March 9, 1993 SALT SERMON

One thing the people of Grace Church have learned is to expect the unexpected! If we need a "volunteer" to do almost anything (from helping receive the offering to playing the piano to pretending to be a tree for one of the Pastor's illustrations) we pick people without respect to age, sex, or visitor status.

They find that also works in reference to sermons. Sometimes I will give them a text or a theme and allow them to see what kind of sermon they would make from it. This "Salt Sermon" is the result of such an effort during one of our Wednesday Night services.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:13 "Ye are the salt of the earth:". Tell me what salt does that Christians are also supposed to do. Here is what they came up with.

Salt Flavors (The example and Influence of Christians in Society). A small amount of Salt can have a drastic effect on the flavor of something.

Salt Preserves (When the Church is removed the Tribulation will begin). Salt Produces Thirst (The Life of a Christian should cause the world to want what we have). Salt Purifies (Just as a glass of salt water helps heal your mouth when you pull a tooth so Christians fight the infection and decay of sin). Finally, Salt Irritates (If you don't believe it put some in an open sore! It may be helping to heal but it also hurts. In the same way, many in the world dislike Christians because they would rather die in sin than be painfully reminded that they need spiritual healing).

Jesus said "Christians are the Salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its ability to produce the effects of salt it is good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trampled under the foot of men." Remember that.

March 10, 1993 FORGIVENESS AND LOVE

So far we have seen Jesus forgive a helpless man lowered to Him through a roof and an adulterous Woman dragged to Him by Pharisees. Today we want to look at a woman who not only comes to Jesus of her own free will, but who also shows us that forgiveness should spark a love in our heart that makes us willing to serve Christ in any way possible.

As Jesus sat at Supper in a Pharisee's home, a woman suddenly appeared at the end of his couch. Silently the tears began to stream down her face and fall on the feet of Jesus. After this had gone on for a while, the woman took her hair in hand and dried His feet. Then she kissed His feet before anointing them with ointment.

Instead of admiring the love this woman displayed, the Pharisee condemned Jesus in his heart for allowing a sinner to touch Him.

Jesus looked at the Pharisee and said, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You gave me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil you did not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

What a wonderful picture. What a horrible contemplation!! If forgiveness is manifested by a desire to love and serve Christ, what does that say about lukewarm Christians, slack church attenders, and people who think Christ came to serve them instead of be served by them??

Forgiveness of sins is the greatest gift God could give a person. Do you take it for granted; or does it move you to service for God?

March 17, 1993 FORGIVING ENEMIES

As we continue to look at those people who were privileged to hear Jesus say to them that He forgave them, we come to the last moments of His life. There on a cruel Cross, dying for the sins of all mankind, Jesus took the time TWICE to grant His forgiveness.

This is the first of those times; when He forgave His enemies-(Luke 23:34) Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Look at these enemies. They were representatives of all physical, spiritual, and emotional enemies. And He forgave them all.

Directly below the cross, the soldiers who had just driven the nails into his hand and feet (Maybe even taken part in beating Him earlier) were gambling over His only earthly possessions. They represent all who are so busy with the duties of life and the delights of money that they ignore the Spiritual; even if it is right above them!! To these very real enemies Jesus said, "Father Forgive Them".

Just beyond the soldiers, the Pharisees and Priests taunted Him to come down off the cross and prove Himself the Son of God. They had dogged his ministry, continually tried to trick and condemn Him, rigged His trial, and now laughed at his disgrace and discomfort. How the words of Jesus must have burned in their heart, "Father forgive them".

At the bottom of the hill the multitude murmured and milled. Many of them had shouted His praises and even used their coats to make a road for Him as their coming King only 5 days before. Now they looked at Him as some sort of freak or fraud. Not a man cried out in protest. No one even uttered a word of encouragement. Their only desire was to see how He would react to the pain and agony of death. How the cry of Jesus, that echoed off Jerusalem's walls, must have pricked their heart, "Father Forgive Them".

Forgiving our enemies. The Principles are hard to define. The Practice is Harder to live. Only the example of Jesus can bring such a dream into reality.

March 23, 1993 APPOINTMENTS

I am writing this as I wait in the doctor's office. My wife is experiencing some problems and the doctor made an appointment for her to be examined. Of course, we have to wait. That's why the people who visit doctors are called patients; they must develop a lot of patience!

Today was a very busy day for me. We are in the middle of reprinting the Revelation Study Book we give away, I begin preaching a revival tonight, and this article is due today. When the doctor called us for today's appointment it was not convenient but, since I value my wife's health, I made arrangements to keep the appointment.

All of us must deal with appointments. Sometimes they're emergency appointments, like our doctor visit. Sometimes they're repeated appointments, like renewing your driver's license every four years. Sometimes they're even continuous appointments, like going to school or work. And, in most cases, you lose if you fail to keep your appointment- your health, your driver's license, or your job.

Amazingly, even God had some appointments to keep. The Bible says Jesus was born "in the fullness of time" (Exactly at the time God had appointed). In the same way, He died in "Due Time" for the ungodly.

God made, and kept, these appointments because He knew that it is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment. God knew that man could not avoid his appointment with death. But, by keeping His appointment, God provided man with a choice. Man can accept Christ as Savior and die TO sin or he can ignore God's call and die IN sin.

You don't know the time of your appointment with Death. You just know you have one! You need to prepare for this appointment while there is still time.

March 24, 1993 DEATH BED FORGIVENESS

The final act of Forgiveness that we will note in this series on the people to whom Jesus granted forgiveness is one that thrills each of us. It's a marvelous example of God's Grace.

In those final agonizing hours on the cross, Jesus had forgiven His enemies, cared for His mother, and fulfilled prophecies. Now, as the end approaches, there is one final deed that He must do.

The cross of Jesus stood between two crosses that held men who had been convicted of death deserving crimes. As their agony increased, these men began to seek a way out of their predicament. One turned to Jesus and told Him to prove He was the Son of God by coming down from the cross; and, by the way, get us down also.

The other man realized the seriousness of the situation, rebuked his friend, and acknowledged Jesus as Messiah. Jesus then told this man that death would simply be a passage into Paradise. At the last moment, as the flames of hell licked at his feet, this man escaped condemnation by faith in Christ.

He couldn't be baptized. He couldn't join the church. He couldn't pay his tithes. He couldn't read the Bible. All He could do was pray and testify; so that's what he did. He obeyed the scripture even before it was written-That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Rom 10:9).

One foot in the grave with the other on a banana peel; and yet he obtained forgiveness. Isn't God's Grace Great!!

March 30, 1993 GLEEFUL GRIPING

I was visiting the Sunday night service of a local church recently. Before the Evening message, the congregation sang a number of choruses and hymns. One of the choruses was about praising the Lord instead of griping.

One side of the congregation would sit while the other side sang "Praise ye the Lord". Then that side would sit while the other side rose and sang "No Griping". This went on for several verses until everyone stood and sang "Praise ye the Lord" in Unison.

It was a fun little song with a pointed message. The thing that impressed me the most, however, was the amount of griping everyone did when the chorus was completed. The Church literally buzzed with people complaining about how out of breath they were or how difficult it was to get up and down. They were gleefully griping about a song that exhorted them not to gripe!

It's not a totally unusual phenomenon. I've seen Sunday Morning Congregations lustily sing "Jesus, I my cross have taken. All to leave and follow thee" when many of them knew that a golf game or a TV program would provide all the hindrances they needed to keep from returning for the Sunday Night service. Songs, like sermons, seem much easier to sing than to practice.

Are you a gleeful griper? Is it easier to complain about problems than to obey God's word in correcting them? Do you find it easier to talk about what you ought to do than to live like you know to live? Is your Christianity a life style you admire instead of a life changing faith you follow?

If it's true in the song, make it true in your life. That will turn Gleeful griping into Holy Harmony.

March 31, 1993 STUMPS

My neighbors across the street recently removed some pine trees in their yard. First, the men sawed all the branches off the trees. Then they removed the trees a little at a time by cutting them into sections beginning at the top of the tree. Finally, all that was left were some stumps sticking up just above ground level.

The men then brought in a machine that ground the stumps into small pieces. Once these chips were raked up, it was hard to tell there had ever been any trees in the yard.

Many people have sinful patterns or habits growing in their lives. Some have been there so long until they have grown into good size "trees". Just like the trees in my neighbor's yard, it will now take a great deal of skill and work to remove them without doing major damage to the good things that surround them.

When these people finally get so tired of the mess these "trees" produce in their life until they decide to remove them, they will devote a great deal of time and effort to cutting them down. Sadly, many will fail to seek help removing the stump of their problem and new branches and limbs will sprout up in a very short time.

The principles of religion are normally all you need to cut down your "trees". But the stumps can only be removed by the power of God at work in your life. Don't continue to stumble over these stumps. Let God's power do His complete work on your problem. You'll be pleased with how nice your "yard" looks when the trees are removed; stumps and all.

April 6, 1993 CHRISTIANS AS ENEMIES

More and more the liberal news media is changing the way they portray Christians. For a long time they have pictured Christians as mainly back woods unsophisticated who are unwilling to come into the modern era of art and morals. Now they are increasingly attempting to picture Christians as a deadly threat to society.

When Christians stand against the killing of unborn babies they are now viewed as terrorist. It's alright for society to believe murdering babies is right and killing killers is wrong. These people are held up as models of a free thinking society. But Christians should never be allowed to express their thoughts and convictions if this thinking is different than that of the press.

When the world drives prayer and religious teaching from school, while promoting a complete breakdown of moral values, that is considered by the press as progress. If Christians attempt to be involved in the process by voting on school boards and monitoring the literature their Children are using, the press considers this guerilla warfare and willingly advocates that Christians no longer be allowed to vote, hold office, or speak in public.

Reminds me a great deal of the way it was 2000 years ago. The leaders decided that Jesus must be stopped because He was healing and feeding people without their approval. Society had a system that promoted man as God; and they wouldn't tolerate a man who tried to show them the real God.

Christians have worn crosses and displayed crosses for years. The time may have arrived for us to bear our cross. Are you that kind of committed Christian.

April 7, 1993 SIGHT UNSEEN

Several years ago we began receiving phone calls telling us we had won a prize at a resort complex. We ignored them for a while because we knew they were simply a sales gimmick. But the people wouldn't give up. Their calls were a daily annoyance. One day they caught me in just the right/wrong spirit and I told them I would be up the next day; simply to collect my prize!

When we arrived the salesman began his wonderful sales pitch. I let him rattle on until he came to a place to catch his breath. Then I told him that I had only come to collect my prize so they would stop calling us. He was not a happy camper. He became almost violent as he said we could only collect our prize if we viewed the land they had for sale; and we could only view the land if we signed a paper agreeing to purchase it!

I'm dumb but I'm not stupid. I told him I hope he didn't think I was crazy enough to buy land without seeing it. Finally, he gave us a box of warped bowls and we parted company.

Sometimes people act as if God is this kind of salesmen. They think God is trying to trick them into giving up the fun in life in order to "buy" a home in Heaven, sight unseen. Part of the wonder of Easter is that Christ went through the door of death so we could see that God's word is true and His promises are real.

Christ's resurrection shows that the descriptions of Heaven in the Bible are more than pie in the sky promises; they're a picture of the place Christ has gone to prepare for us. A place I'll gladly sign up for, sight unseen.

April 13, 1993 LIFE'S LAWS

Life isn't fair. Most of the time it's not even partly cloudy!!

Recently I drove pass the home of the man who taught me Physics in high school. It reminded me of a problem we had to solve in his class. He asked us to use the laws of Physics to figure out the angle a rifle at school must be held in order for the bullet to hit his home. It was a pretty straight forward problem and, in the cockiness of youth, I said I could not only hit his home; I could hit the vase inside his front window!

Wouldn't it be nice if we could face the changing circumstances of life with that same assurance? Wouldn't it be great if life had laws that you could apply to every situation? Then every marriage would be happy, every child would grow up strong and healthy, and the good guy would always win.

Life doesn't play fair, however. The law of physics that tells you where to hold the gun doesn't know about the stray bird that will fly in front of your bullet, or about the sudden gust of wind that will cause the bullet to miss the vase in the front window and hit the child playing on the front porch! Life's laws work great in perfect conditions; it's just that life never gives you perfect conditions.

I don't know how people face the chaos of these changing circumstances of life without trust and dependence in God's Love and Care. I'm glad I know that even the changes in Life's Laws are subject to God's control. That gives me Peace, no matter what the problem.

April 14, 1993 MORE THAN ENOUGH

While depositing some money in the bank recently I noticed a sign beside the teller window. It proclaimed that my deposit was insured for up to \$100,000 dollars. That's a lot of insurance on a \$100 dollar deposit!

As I was thinking about that a Bible verse came to mind- (Ephesians 3:20) God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

It reminded me again that I can pray big prayers. Just as the bank has more insurance than it needs to cover my small deposit, so God has much more than I need to cover any prayer request I might make. The failure is not in God's ability to answer my prayer; it's in the smallness of my faith.

In fact, God's ability is even greater than anything I can imagine- (Jeremiah 33:3) Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.

The next time you try to cash a check from Heaven's Bank keep in mind that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Let His power work in you so that when God opens the windows of Heaven and pours you out a Blessing it will be so great until you won't even be able to receive it (Malachi 3:10).

Just take your eyes off your meager deposit and put your faith in God's abundant supply. It will amaze you how much God really wants to Bless you.

April 20, 1993 HARMONY CEMETERY

We were traveling down a road outside of Kingstree recently when I realized how sarcastic I get sometimes. We passed a cemetery called "Harmony Cemetery". Immediately I said, "Dying is the only way some people ever get in Harmony!" Sometimes I'm so bad it makes me wonder.

I'm blessed with a wonderful church where the member can agree to disagree agreeably. But they don't always see things the same way; or they would be dead. That's because the kind of artificial peace that many people want is only found in a place where no one thinks, feels, or develops an individual personality.

Real people, in real life, look at things from different perspectives. All of us are influenced by things you learned, or failed to learn, in your childhood, by age (Let a teen and a dad try to find a radio station that both agree on), by sex (Men and women do look at things from different perspectives, don't they?), and by a host of other influences. Part of our development is the smoothing down of our rough places by the friction of these encounters.

Harmony is not the absence of differences; it is the blending of differences into a pleasing tune. Just look at the way Harmony is used most often, in music. When the Alto, Soprano, Bass, and Tenor all blend together in Harmony it is a wonderful sound. That's because everyone is singing the same song; just using a different perspective.

I'm glad we don't have to be in "Harmony Cemetery" to be at peace. We just have to make sure that the body has one head, Jesus. Then the different parts will work toward a common goal. The foot might have a different job than the hand but if everyone is obeying the head we will get the job done; in perfect harmony.

April 21, 1993 ANSWERED PRAYER

Early in my Christian life I found a Bible verse that has greatly guided and blessed me. Mark 9:23 "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." I believe it says what it means and means what it says.

I know there is a great danger of people misusing and abusing the principle in this verse as they try to make God a big "Santa Claus" in the sky that obeys their every whim. I've found that it doesn't take God long to set these people straight, however. They'll be exposed as they make fools of themselves with outlandish prayers or refuse to acknowledge their failure in the heat of their fanaticism.

With that in mind, let me assure you again that I firmly believe the principle in this verse is absolutely true and workable. For years I have received the means to minister to thousands of people based entirely on the application of the principle in this verse. And I recently received another tremendous example of the power of this kind of prayer.

For several years I have driven an old car with nearly 150,000 miles on it. Recently the Lord told me to dispose of it and assured me that He would provide me another car. For over a month I have thanked God in my morning prayer for the new car He was going to give me; even though I didn't have the slightest idea how He would provide it! I simply knew that I had full assurance in my heart to believe and "all things are possible to him that believeth".

Following the Easter Sunday Morning service, the Church asked my wife and I to go outside. There on the Church yard was a new car with our name on the title! Now I can see under my garage by sight what I had only seen for a month by faith. Isn't God Great??

April 27, 1993 DIVERSE DISCIPLES

Andrew and Peter were blue collar fishermen. Matthew was a white collar worker who held the hated job of tax collector.

Simon the Zealot was a political activist who believed so strongly until his party became part of his name. James and John had political ambitions of sitting in the top spots in Jesus' cabinet.

Bartholmew was known for his naive character (Jesus said he was an Israelite in whom was no guile) and his Prayer life (He is first seen praying under a fig tree). Thomas will forever be tagged as the doubter, even though he was willing to die with Jesus when Lazarus was sick. Philip was the most liberal and social conscience of the group as he attempted to bring Greeks (An unheard of compromise in his day) to meet with Jesus. And we all know that Judas was a thief and the betrayer of Christ; even though his reputation was so good until he claimed the treasurer's position over an expert in money like Matthew.

It sure was a diverse group that Jesus attempted to train as His disciples. Almost as diverse as the members of a local church!

Thank God He doesn't call cookie cutter robots to be his disciples. He finds a place for every kind of personality to function in the Body of Christ. So don't try to make everyone become a parrot of your personality. Christ, the head, must be one but the body has many parts with many jobs. Just make sure you do yours.

April 28, 1993 THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN

In writing about the tremendous pain and suffering that Christ endured for us, Isaiah the prophet explains why sin is so difficult to control and so dangerous to allow to continue unchecked. The description is found in verse 6 of Isaiah chapter 53 "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

First, Sin is serious because it is PART OF OUR NATURE- "All we like sheep have gone astray". You don't have to teach sheep to wander, you must provide a shepherd to guide them. In the same way, sin is not the result of environment, peer pressure, or inadequate education. Man is born with a sin nature and will go astray at the first opportunity; and every opportunity after that. Love for family and respect for the laws of the land can defer man from many open acts of sin but the sin nature remains within.

Second, Sin is serious because it is AN ACT OF REBELLION- "We have turned every one to his own way". Not only is it our nature to do wrong, it is our will to satisfy self above all else. We want to BE God; not SERVE God. We would much rather waste our inheritance in the far country than live under the authority of the father's house. We are determined that rules will not rule us.

Finally, Sin is serious because of THE PRICE OF IT'S DEBT- "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all". The wages of sin is death. Death is not just ceasing to exist in this life. This death is eternal separation from God, who is life, in the place of punishment designed for those who rebel against God. The good news is that Jesus paid the price of these sins on Calvary's cross. We can now come to God and receive pardon for past sin, Strength for present living, and promises for eternal bliss simply by Faith in the Sacrifice of Christ. Glory!

May 4, 1993 MAD MOTHERS

I'm sitting here trying to remember if I ever saw my mother really mad. I've seen her aggravated because my hard headed brothers wouldn't do right! I've seen her exasperated because my dad, in his own special way, determined to do something; without consideration of cost or consequences. I've seen her cry tears of sorrow; and smile that special smile of commendation, but I don't ever remember seeing her really get mad.

Mothers seem to need all their time and energy to care for their family, they don't seem to have a lot to waste in something as useless as anger. Maybe that's why I still have a little hope for our country.

Mothers today are told to hate men (does that include their husband and father??) because they have exploited them in days gone by. They are told to kill their unborn children because they are inconvenient to personal pursuit and "self-fulfillment". Finally, they are told that their career is more important than their children and they should become mad that everyone in society doesn't see it that way.

I've never seen my mother mad. In spite of hard headed children and a stubborn husband. I think the only thing that would really make her mad would be for someone to tell her that she should have thought only of herself and never had a husband or children. That would probably put some steam in the tea kettle!

I'm glad mother was more interested in being a Mom than in being Mad. That's what made her special; and that's why she deserves to have a great Mother's Day.

May 5, 1993 NO STRAW

Sometimes things get worst in order to get better.

When Moses came to Pharaoh and commanded him to free the nation of Israel from Egyptian Slavery, Pharaoh answered by commanded that the Israelites continue to make as many brick as before but without having straw supplied to them. This greatly increased their work because they now had to gather straw as well as make bricks.

Many of the people of Israel grumbled against God and Moses because it seemed they had made things worst instead of better. Instead of bring them freedom; Moses' ministry had made their slavery more difficult.

I don't know that anyone has a greater glow than the mother of a new born child. Somehow they believe the wrinkled bundle of flesh they hold in their arms is the sum of all blessing. Time after time, I have heard mothers wish their children would stay in that huggable, lovable, infant stage. During that stage a child seems to be 99 percent pure love.

Alas, time passes and they learn to walk, to break things (Including mother's heart), and to want less and less of mother's control. Trying to do right by the child becomes as difficult as building bricks without straw- You never seem to have the wisdom or wealth you need to do what the child wants or needs.

Just remember, the straw less bricks were simply the first step in God's deliverance of His people. Mother's may feel overwhelmed with their responsibilities but God loves them more than they love their children. And beyond the bricks are the Blessings. So Hold to God and follow His plan. You may even see it turn straw into flowers this Mother's Day.

May 11, 1993 STUCK DOLLARS

A friend of mine owns a car wash in Scranton. Several times a month he encounters the same problem. Someone is convinced that if they find a way to paste a dollar bill in the change machine then the machine will give them unlimited change.

They have tried pasting the dollar into the slot with Super Glue, chewing gum, and anything else they can think of. Each time they only succeed in losing their dollar; and clogging up the machine.

These potential thieves fail to realize that the change machine will only give change if it accepts the dollar bill. Something it can't do if the bill is stuck to the slot. Like most criminal acts, the fatal flaw in this plan ends up costing the person time, money, and the possibility of a jail sentence.

Isn't it sad that some people try to treat God just like this change machine? They continually try to find ways to get God to think they are committing everything to Him; while all along they retain a tight grasp on their "dollar".

They want to enjoy the benefits and blessings of the fully dedicated life; but they are determined to retain control in case God asks for real sacrifice. They think somehow that pious prayers and outward righteousness will fool God into giving them the power and promises He has pledged only to them that dedicate themselves completely to God.

Either you trust God or you don't. Put your "dollar" into God's work without any thing attached. Don't hold back, commit yourself completely to Him. He loves you, and He'll change your "dollar" of dedication into a joyful abundant life; worth far more than anything you could ever cheat Him out of.

May 12, 1993 GAS MONEY

I had just turned Sixteen and had gotten my night license. Now I could go off at night without having to bum a ride or ask my parents to carry me.

A Church in Florence asked me to come up and speak for the night service and I was excited about speaking as well as the adventure of driving by myself at night. That is, until I looked at the gas gauge when I was about half way to Florence and saw that it was already on the empty mark; and so was my wallet.

One of my brothers had used the car for a date on Saturday night and had failed to put any gas in the car. Now I didn't know if I could make it to Florence, and I was sure I couldn't make it back. I felt it was time for prayer.

I made it to the Church and we had a good service. Following the service I talked with several people about how good God was; all the time wondering, in the back of my mind, how I was going to get home. Finally I started to get in the car and see how far God would take me.

Just at that time one of the deacons walked up and told me how much he enjoyed the message. As he shook hands with me he passed me two dollars. Back then two dollars would buy you six gallons of gas!

I think of those two dollars often as I travel and trust God. He knows if the sparrow falls. He knows how many hairs are on my head. And He knows exactly how much gas is in my car and how much money is in my wallet. And as long as I'm going for Him, I believe He'll find a way to make sure there is gas in the tank.

May 18, 1993 CHRISTIAN WORKER

Here are 10 Guidelines that will help you become the best Christian you can be:

1. Study the Bible- II Tim 2:15
2. Practice Prayer- Luke 18:1 Do it; don't just learn about it.
3. Cull your Companions- They determine your language, your thought patterns, and your reputation.
4. Be Faithful to the Church- Heb 10:25 Where they teach the Book, the Birth, and the Blessed Hope.
Keep your heart warm by staying close to the Fire of Christian Fellowship
5. Develop your mind- What you think, you are- Prov 23:7. Watch what you watch! and read, and think on.
6. Begin to do now what you plan to do later in life. Start NOW
7. Stay as far from sin as possible/Stay as close to God as you can. Don't spend your life asking "What can I get by with?"; instead, ask yourself, "How can I get closer to God?".
8. Learn how to give- Give your Self, your Service, & your Substance
9. Set Goals for your life- The average Christian's greatest weakness is that they simply want to go to Heaven instead of Serve the Lord.
10. Discipline yourself- Do what you don't want to do! Jesus continually celled his followers by demanding they chose between the easy course and the Cross. If you are to accomplish anything for the Lord it will be because you live for Him in the Valleys as well as on the Mountain Top
God wants to help you grow as a Christian. Do your part

May 19, 1993 RABBITS AND ROCKS

Evangelist Bobby Jackson tells a story about Rabbits and Rocks that illustrates a life principle we all need to know. The Jack Rabbit of north Texas is big, tough, and fleet of foot. It can out run most of its enemies and looks with contempt upon the puny speed of men.

Hunters tried hunting the Jack Rabbit with several breeds of dogs but the rabbit was able to out run them all. Finally, the hunters found that two grey hounds worked just right. They would release the first grey hound and the Jack Rabbit would go streaking out across the plain. Dodging, weaving, running, the Jack Rabbit would finally wear the grey hound down.

About that time the hunter would release the second grey hound. That's when the Jack Rabbit would realize he was in trouble. In wearing down the first grey hound the Jack Rabbit had also worn himself out. Now he proved easy prey for the second grey hound.

There are also cotton tail rabbits on the plains of north Texas. They are so slow and so small until the grey hound would be able to catch them with hardly any effort. Few of them are ever caught, however. When they hear the grey hounds coming, instead of running for their life, they run for the nearest rock. Burrowing under the rock allows them to frustrate all the grey hounds attempts at catching them.

Some people think they are smarter and faster than Satan. They think they can play with sin but always escape before they get caught. They fail to realize the hounds of Hell work together to catch and destroy them. They had better learn that the only place of safety is found in running to the rock, Jesus Christ.

May 25, 1993 BLOCKED DOORS

With confident steps she approached the doubles doors. She steps on the pads in front of the doors and waited for them to open. Nothing happened. She stood there puzzled until she heard laughter behind her. There stood one of her friends pointing to a large metal plate on the wall that you were supposed to push in order to open the doors.

The friend pushed the plate; but nothing happened. Now both of them were puzzled. What could possibly be wrong?? The girl walked back to where her friend stood and they tried pushing the plate again. Now the doors immediately swung open.

Only later, when they were talking with a nurse, did they find out the problem. The pads were connected to the switch that opened the door so that if anyone was standing on them the door would not open. That was to prevent the door from swinging open and hurting someone standing on the pads.

That reminded me of what Jesus said about the religious leaders of his day. He said they not only failed to enter the Kingdom of heaven themselves but they also prevented the people from entering who wanted to go in. They rigged their religion in such a way that even when you pushed the right button the door wouldn't open. And instead of backing away and looking more closely at the situation, people would believe the Pharisees preaching that something was wrong with the doors.

Maybe you are one of these people. Maybe you tried to live right or "do better" as a child but the abundant life never opened to you so you accepted the explanation that the doors wouldn't open. Don't die within sight of the doors. Back away from whatever is blocking the door and try pushing the button of prayer again. And then rejoice as the doors swing wide open to welcome you inside.

May 26, 1993 UNTIL THE DEATH

On this Memorial Week-end, as we remember those who have died for their country, I thought it would be good for Christians to re-examine their dedication to Christian duty. Many American citizens have given their life to preserve life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. God calls for that same type commitment from Christians. But it seems this poem describes the commitment many people have.

IS THIS CONSECRATION??

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,

Real service is what I desire;

I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord-

But don't ask me to sing in the Choir.

I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord,

I like to see things come to pass:

But don't ask me to teach girls and boys, dear Lord-

I'd rather just stay in my class.

I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord,

I yearn for the kingdom to thrive;

I'll give you my nickels and dimes, dear Lord--

But please don't ask me to tithe.

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,

I'll say what you want me to say;

But I'm busy just now with myself, dear Lord--

I'll help YOU some other day.

Is your Christianity a religion you talk about or a life you live? Are you willing to serve God, not only when it's convenient, but even unto the death? That's the kind of commitment Christ calls for. And it's the only kind of commitment that will really change your life.

June 2, 1993 WINDOW ROCKS

Slowly the sounds of activity ceased in the house. Soon all she could hear was the creaking and groaning of the house at it settled under the cool night air. Anxiously she lay in the bed, cover pulled up over her fully clothed form.

Suddenly, with a sound like thunder to her listening ears, came the “plunk, plunk, plunk” of pebbles hitting the window pane. Immediately she threw off the covers and sprang to the window, which she gently raised so she could look below.

There stood the love of her life with a ladder and a suitcase. Silently he raised the ladder to her window. Then she grabbed her bag, edged over the window sill, and climbed down into the arms of her soon to be husband. It was the next morning at breakfast before her family realized she was gone.

I believe in the rapture of the Church. I believe that one day the Lord will secretly return for His Bride, the Church. This Bride will be removed in the twinkling of an eye; so fast until the people who remain will not understand what happened. And while those who are left are going through horrible tribulation on earth, the Bride will be preparing for the marriage supper in Heaven.

I don't know when the rapture will take place. I just know He's coming. So every day I pack my bags and prepare to leave. And one of these days, maybe today, I'll hear the “window rocks” gentle patter on my window pane. I can hardly wait; because then I shall see Him face to face whom so long I have known heart to heart. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

June 3, 1993 EMPTY CONTAINERS

Some friends and I were enjoying breakfast in a local restaurant recently. When the waitress brought refills for our coffee one of the men reached for the saucer containing the single servings of half and half so he could put some in his coffee. He picked up a container and started to open it. That's when he noticed how light it was. He looked at it carefully and found that someone had used the milk out of it, put the top back on, and placed it back in the saucer.

Immediately several lessons came to mind. This empty container was like some so called Christians I know; having a name to live but empty inside. They can't help people in need because they're just an empty shell. They look alright but they are shown up for what they really are when a real need arises.

Empty Container Christians are not only aggravating, they are also dangerous. My friend just threw the empty container he found away. Empty Christians, however, mislead people about the joys and Blessings of the Christian life because they think normal Christianity is to be empty like they are. Unwilling to admit they're empty they pour out humanistic philosophy based on what they “feel” is right. In simple terms, they try to convince the person that there is really cream in their coffee even though it's still black and bland.

Are you an empty shell or a spirit filled Christian? Is Christianity a religion you wear or a life changing relationship in the depth of your heart? Christianity changes into the Abundant Life when we stop thinking of it as a sponge that we must squeeze the life out of. In reality, it's a bucket that God keeps filling to overflow; and the overflow is what brings blessings to the world

June 8, 1993 TV-LESS TUESDAY

Many people are hopelessly addicted to TV. They deny it vehemently (The first sign of addiction) but see what happens if you come between them and their TV. When you talk to them they say they only watch the news or the Braves games or something like that; but, somehow, they always seem to know everything else that happens on TV (Of course, they just caught it as they were scanning thru the channels!).

I am promoting a program in our Church that I think would be beneficial for you also. Make every week a "TV-Less Tuesday". That simply means you don't turn on your TV on Tuesday. You'll find you haven't missed a lot of new news; and the Braves always seem to lose on Tuesday anyway.

Make Tuesday a night for the family to sit at the same table, at the same time, and eat a meal together (sounds strange doesn't it?). Actually spend time talking to one another; maybe even playing a game together (I know this is sounding far out, but stay with me). Finally, go to bed before 10pm (I can hear you hollering now).

Think about it. One night a week in which a family could actually communicate. A night in which positive family values could be talked about; and put into practice. And a night in which you could finally get enough sleep (Wouldn't it be great to actually feel like getting up each Wednesday? Wouldn't it be great to work all day without feeling worn out before 10am?)

Make this Tuesday, and every Tuesday, a TV-less Tuesday. You might even find time to read some of those Bible chapters you always say you are going to read; and that could really make a difference in your life.

June 9, 1993 GRUMBLING PROPHETS

I was eating lunch with several pastors recently and I told one of them I was going to rename him the "Grumbling Prophet". We hadn't even asked the Blessing on the food before he started complaining about a problem he was facing. I told him it was bad enough that he had a problem without giving the rest of us indigestion also!

Now let me fill you in on some of the background. This Pastor was sick enough that if he had been one of his members he would have stayed home from work and called his pastor to pray for him. Instead, his day began before daylight as he went to a hospital in Florence to be with a family while a member was having surgery.

Now he was hosting a pastor's lunch while wrestling with a problem beyond his control. Someone had goofed in the design for the new Church and now a major decision, that involved going back before the church (with all the fear that evokes), was going to have to be made in the next few days. It was not his fault; but he would end up taking responsibility to get it cleaned up.

Sick, tired, and facing a stress filled situation beyond his control all added together to turn his smile upside down. It was enough to make even a pastor grumble. We prayed with him, gave him the benefit of our limited wisdom, and left him feeling better.

It's good to remember that prophets are still people. The situations of life can bear down on them until even the good ones grumble sometimes. That's why the Apostle Paul always ended his church letters with a plea for prayer. Which is a good thought to end with, Have you prayed for your pastor today??

June 16, 1993 GLEAMINGS

We recently published another book from our Church entitled "Grace Gleamings". It is a collection of Testimonies, short stories, and poems written by members of Grace FWB Church. What a Blessing it has been already.

The name comes from the fact that Jesus said we were to let our light shine before men so they would glorify Him. That's what the articles in this book are intended to do. They seek to "gleam" the light of God's work and Grace to everyone who reads the book.

Just as God works in different ways in different people's life so these stories show how God uses varying circumstance to bring people to a place of complete commitment to Christ. The death or sickness of a parent showed some people how important a real relationship with God was. Several related how near brushes with death brought about "out of body experiences" which in turn drew them close to God. Several told about sickness or catastrophes in their life that revealed their need of God's strength.

Then there are stories about how God heals a boy in order for him to go to Sunday School. Or about how God uses even "big feet" to show his stability. And even one about how a childhood coat symbolizes the goodness of God.

Finally, numerous people tell how the Grace of God brought Salvation in their life, and about the changes that came as a result of being pardoned from sin and given a new life.

These "Gleamings" show God at work in extraordinary ways in ordinary people. But isn't that what Christianity is all about anyway?? Isn't that what God want YOU to do?? Be a light by sharing with others what God is doing in your daily life. There are a lot of people in the darkness of sin and despair that need to see the gleam of that light.

June 23, 1993 PRECIOUS PROMISES

Christianity is a life of Faith. We are saved by faith, we live by faith, and we die with Faith in the resurrection power of God. This faith is not wishful thinking, it is based on the Word of God -Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

This faith enables us to deal with the difficulties of life in such a way as to bring honor and glory to God. We can look up no matter what comes down the road. That's because Christ promised us certain things; and He cannot lie. Here are some of the precious promises we claim as we travel through life.

NOT JUST LIFE BUT ABUNDANT LIFE-John 10:10 I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

NOT JUST PEACE BUT PERFECT PEACE-Isa 26:3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

NOT JUST JOY BUT FULLNESS OF JOY-John 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

NOT JUST FORGIVENESS BUT FORGETFULNESS-Jer 31:34 I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

NOT JUST GRACE BUT SUFFICIENT GRACE-2 Cor 12:9 My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

NOT JUST HEAVEN BUT HEAVEN WITH HIM-John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

June 29, 1993 BREAD ON THE MOUNTAIN

While on vacation in the mountains recently God manifested His provision in a very special way. We were traveling with my wife's family in three different cars. We planned to spend one day doing nothing but touring the Blue Ridge Parkway. We knew there are no stores on the Parkway so we packed one cooler full of soft drinks and another full of sandwich material. It was then that we discovered we were out of sandwich bread.

That didn't appear to be a problem since we would pass numerous stores on the way to the Parkway. In the excitement and anticipation of the day, however, it totally slipped my mind until we turned onto the Parkway and one of the children said they were already hungry.

Now our day of fun was going to be spoiled. At least one car would have to drive back down into the valley, purchase the bread, and return. They would take at least an hour and put all of the day's plans into disarray.

I believe in prayer. I believe that God fed 5000 men with two fishes and five loaves of bread; surely He could provide a single loaf of bread for 14 people on a mountain. So I prayed, and looked up with faith that a "Sunbeam" truck would come down the Parkway any minute.

Instead, God decided to use a wonderful woman to meet our need. We had stopped at an overlook trying to decide what to do. That's when Miss Linda Tarver walked up and asked us if we needed Bread!

What a rejoicing time we had as every member of the family got a sandwich to eat; and a demonstration of God's love and provision for His people. Thanks, Miss Linda. You showed us again that God always has a person ready to help in every problem we face; even if its providing bread on a mountain!

June 30, 1993 CONCERT IN THE COVE

We recently enjoyed a vacation with my wife's family in the Smoky Mountains. The mountains are my favorite vacation place-- I enjoy having time to bask in the beautiful views from the parkway as well as climb mountains and explore waterfalls.

One of my favorite locations in the mountains is Cades Cove. This little hamlet, nestled in the heart of the Smokies, is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen. Since it is a cove, it is surrounded by mountains and offers a breath-taking view in every direction.

It also contains a number of old cabins and churches for people to explore. As we were touring these relics of by-gone days we came to the Primitive Baptist Church. Normally we would have spent five minutes walking in and looking around before we went to the next place in the cove. What we didn't know was that God had a special Blessing awaiting us in that church.

When we arrived several people were standing in the pulpit area. As we watched they took out their song books and began to sing. With nothing but their beautiful voices, they blended harmony in such a way until it made the hair rise on the back of your neck! Soon the church was almost full of people rejoicing in these songs of praise to our wonderful Lord.

When I had the opportunity to talk with the singers I found they were a family on vacation. This was their way of witnessing for the Lord as they traveled. It was a great idea and a wonderful experience. And it re-affirmed something I say all the time, "There is always a door of testimony open for those who want to share the Lord." Remember that on your vacation this year.

July 6, 1993 TRAM LAW

Did you know that Wal-Mart spelled backward is Tram-Law? And you say you never learn anything useful from these articles!!

My wife was having some dental work done so I went to the Post Office to mail our Church newsletter and to the bank to arrange for the money to pay for the dentist! When I returned to the dentist office a song was playing on the radio about the names of God.

While I sat and listened to the song conclude, I looked in the mirror. My car was situated in such a way that the mirror framed the front of the local Wal-Mart. That's when I noticed the tremendously helpful (?) information that Wal-Mart spelled backward is Tram-Law.

The Bible says, "If any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; but when he leaves the mirror he forgets what kind of person he is." (James 1:23-24).

The problem with looking in mirrors is that you see things backwards! That gives you the wrong perspective on life and the problems you face. This can lead to wrong actions and thought patterns as you seek human answers for spiritual problems. Just like I'd get in trouble if I asked people in town for directions to the local Tram-Law store!

Do you look at life thru a mirror; or thru the window pane of the Word of God? It makes a difference.

July 7, 1993 COUNSELING CENTERS

When I went to get some medicine for my wife recently I noticed a sign on the counter. Formerly the sign said, "Drop off prescriptions here." Now it had been changed to "counseling center".

I knew there had to be an interesting story behind the change so I asked the druggist. He said that current government regulations required him to council those people who received government sponsored medicine before he dispensed the medicine. This was the reason for the sign change.

That same sort of change took place with my attitude toward Church. Before I became a Christian I thought of Church as a place to dispense medicine; and I never did like the taste of medicine. It seemed that every time I attended Church the preacher spent all his time telling me I needed medicine for my sin-sick soul. I thought that his medicine was too expensive; and I figured my home remedies would work just as well, anyway.

Finally, the sickness in my soul because so serious; and the ache in my heart hurt so much, until I decided to take the preacher's prescription. What a joy to find Christ had already paid the price so I could get the "medicine" for free. Even better, what a great relief I found when God filled my hurting heart with His Love and Peace.

After I became a Christian, I found Church was not just a place to get prescriptions filled; it was also a place of comfort and counsel. In Church I now find answers to even the most difficult of life's problems. It has truly changed from a prescription place to a counseling center; a place where I'm not just saved FROM my sin but a place where I'm learning to live FOR my Savior. What a wonderful change.

July 13, 1993 OUTSIDE SWITCHES

While waiting for a friend recently I decided to use the Rest Room in the building. When I opened the door to the Rest Room it was very dark inside. I felt all over the walls trying to find a light switch but failed to find one. Frustrated, I went back outside. There, on the wall beside the door, was the switch.

That reminded me of a basic Bible Principle- The only way to allow the light to come into the darkness of your soul is to look to a power outside of yourself.

Multitudes of people spend their life in the dark; frustrated, frightened, and desperate for help. They expend tremendous energy trying to discipline themselves out of the dark. Or they spend much money in self-help programs attempting to find the switch within. But all they find is that they still have a need and it's still dark.

Quit groping around in the dark. No matter how hard you look you will never find a way to turn the light on from within. Look to Jesus for the light you need. He's right outside the door and he's waiting to give you light; the light that will enable you to dispose of the wasteful part of your life. Then you can live a life of purity and productivity. And isn't that a lot better than stumbling over trash cans in the dark all the time??

July 14, 1993 BEING SEEN

Most people attend funerals to be seen by the family; not to be comforted by the sermon. They want the bereaved to know they thought about them so they go to the Church, and then to the cemetery, just to be able to speak a few words to the family.

Sadly, a similar motive drives many people to church each Sunday; but without the benefit of bringing comfort to those in need. They are seen in Church each week simply because some pressure requires them to make an appearance.

It could be that their business contacts demand they attend a socially acceptable church. So they attend church with the same motive that drives them to be part of the local civic clubs- appearances.

Sometimes they show up because of family tradition. Their family has always been one of the leaders in their church and it would look bad if they didn't make an appearance to continue the tradition.

Or it might be prestige in the community. It would look bad, and people would talk, if you failed to attend Church. They might even think you were not a "good" person!

It must really take an effort when the only reason you attend Church is to be seen by other people. I would think you would spend a lot of time looking at your watch and fidgeting in your seat as you wait for the preacher to finally dismiss and allow you to do what you really want to do.

It would do you well to remember that, while all those other people see you make an appearance, God is seeing straight into your heart. And He is not impressed that you simply show up in Church a couple of hours a week.

July 20, 1993 SENTENCE SERMONS

Sometimes the best sermons are the shortest sermons (Did I hear an earth shaking "Amen" sweep across the land?!?). With that in mind, I want to share some "sentence sermons" that I collect as I read through magazines and books. I hope their short messages will create a powerful impact with you.

It is a good rule to never look into the face of man in the morning without first having looked in the face of God.

Always have business with Heaven before you have any business on earth.

The question is not how much I have of God; it's how much God has of me.

A man lies broken and bleeding on the highway. The Ambulance driver picks him up. That's his JOB. A stranger stops, loads him in his car, and carries him to the hospital. That's KINDNESS. His mother sees him on the road. She cleans his wounds with strips torn from her own clothes, as she hold his bleeding and bruised body in her lap. She gives him more than care; she gives him COMPASSION. Which type Christian care giver are you??

God is seldom early but never late.

There should be no unemployed Christians.

The secret to coping is hoping in God.

There is no interest without something invested. What have you invested in the worship service lately??

God judges our actions, not our intellect. Why then do Christians think Christianity is simply going to Church to learn about God??

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

July 21, 1993 JAILBIRD'S JOY

One of my favorite books in the Bible is Philippians. Time after time I find myself stopping in Philippians just to "browse" through some scriptures that are so familiar until they seem like old friends.

Part of the reason for this familiarity is the fact that I once dedicated a month to reading the book of Philippians each day (It's only 4 chapters). I almost had it memorized. Then I began reading it in other versions and spending time studying the meaning of the words in the original Greek. As I studied and meditated, it seemed that each verse held another treasure to be discovered.

Philippians is not only interesting because of its content, it's also interesting in its origin. It was written by the Apostle Paul from a jail cell where he awaited a trial before Caesar. It was written to a Church which had its beginning when Paul and Silas were placed in a Jail cell for casting a demon out of a girl. So it was written from jail to a church that began in jail!

Now here is the amazing thing, the theme of Philippians is Joy. Isn't that great? Even Jail couldn't negate joy. Is it that way with you? Are you able to rejoice in life instead of being bound by your past or held captive to your circumstances? You can if Christ is the center of your life. That's what made Paul such a joyful Jailbird.

July 27, 1993 CELEBRITY CHRISTIANS

While attending some classes at Billy Graham's Training Center in Ashville I looked at a scale model of their present facilities and their future plans. One building immediately caught my attention because it was situated in a place completely isolated from the rest of the buildings.

I assumed it was some sort of support facility until I asked one of the attendants. He said it was a special training center they were attempting to build for "celebrity Christians".

When someone who is famous in sports, politics, or entertainment becomes a Christian they immediately become "celebrity Christians". Churches, talk shows, and entertainment evangelist immediately schedule these people in order to use them as examples of the power of God to save even sinful celebrities.

They fail to remember that these people are new born babies in the faith; many with little or no background in Bible basics. Put into a position in which multitudes of people are hanging on their every word as if they somehow are the fountain of all knowledge, they fall back on their human wisdom. Which, of course, leads to confusion and wrong doctrine.

Paul told Timothy that new Christians should not be put into places of leadership. They need time to grow in their own faith so they will have the proper foundation when they attempt to help others develop their faith. This is what this "celebrity Christian" training center was seeking to accomplish. It would be a place where people could grow as Christians without the strain of being Celebrities.

When you see a 40 year old man Born Again into the Christian faith remember that he is physically 40 years old but he is spiritually a new born baby. Don't expect him to be full grown immediately. Give him a chance to grow.

July 28, 1993 TURNED AROUND

On the way to the post office recently a young lady ran through the main intersection and hit my car. It threw my car through the intersection and turned it completely around; so I ended up facing back the way I was coming. The Sunday sermons I was working on at the time were about Repentance; turning away from sin and turning toward God. Now I had a perfect illustration for that principle.

Not only did I have a good illustration, I also had an added ingredient that is seldom stressed when we talk about Repentance. The reason I turned around was because something came along to force my car to turn. In the same way, God generally has to shake us out of our satisfaction before we will repent and go in the right direction.

That means that one of the most serious problems we face today is Satisfaction. Satisfied Saints make God sick (Rev 3:16) and Satisfied Sinners have no desire to turn from their sin and accept Christ as Savior. Something must come into the normal course of their life that will force them to realize they need to go in a different direction.

This outside force can take many forms. It can be Holy Spirit Conviction that brings misery to your soul until you acknowledge your need of asking Christ to forgive you and come into your heart. God can also use Sickness, Circumstances, or Chaos to get our attention. He's even been known to allow His people to go into Captivity in order to get them to abandon sin and return to serving Him.

So when you get a bump on the road of life, stop and think about what is happening. It just may be that God is attempting to get your attention so He can turn you around and point you in the right direction. Don't ignore the warning.

August 3, 1993 RATS

While piloting his single engine plane a pilot heard a scratching sound behind him. He checked all his instruments but could find nothing wrong. Still the scratching sound continued.

Finally, the pilot realized the sound was a rat munching on something in his plane. He looked around the best he could from his seat but failed to see anything. He figured the rat was behind the panels and he would have to find a way to dispose of him when he landed.

Suddenly, the instrument panel began to blink and his gauges began to go crazy. Immediately he realized the rat must have eaten through some of his instrument cables. Now he knew he was in trouble. If the rat continued to eat on his cables he would lose all his gauges; or, even worst, power to his engine.

He was nowhere near a landing field and he couldn't leave his seat to remove the panel and hunt for the rat. All the while the scratching noise of the rat's eating continued.

Suddenly, it dawned on the pilot that if he couldn't go down he could go up! He hooked up his oxygen and began to climb as high as possible. Finally, the thin air had its desired effect and the scratching noise stopped.

Many Christians go through life with "rats" of sin gnawing on the lifelines of their soul. If they could only learn that the answer to their problem is to go up higher. Rats thrive when we live low but they can't live in the thin air of Heavenly places. Move up closer to God and you'll leave the rats behind.

August 4, 1993 WRONG DOOR

I was seated in the side stands of the Coliseum during the National Meeting of Free Will Baptist recently. Directly across the Coliseum was a door leading into the Ladies Rest Room.

During a break in the meeting I decided to go to the rest room. Since the Woman's rest room was located across the Coliseum I assumed the Men's room would be directly behind the seats on which I was sitting. In order to get to the rest room I had to walk down and go behind the seats I was sitting on.

Rather than step back under the seats and read the sign above the door I just assumed that I was entering the Men's Rest Room and walked right in-- straight into another ladies rest room!!

Several things became immediately obvious. First, the Lord does indeed take care of fools, there were no ladies in the rest room at this time. Second, ladies have nicer rest rooms than men (I've always wondered about that but I would have picked a better way to find out). Finally, there will always be a friend standing right outside the door when you beat a hasty exit from an embarrassing situation (I had to live with remarks about going to the Ladies Room the rest of the convention).

I assumed I was entering the right room but ending up in trouble because I didn't read the sign over the door. I wonder how many people will find themselves in a similar situation when they stand before God. Many people assume that any door is all right, as long as you're sincere. What will they do when they hear Jesus say, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1).

It's embarrassing to enter the Ladies Room; it would be disastrous to die and find you've entered the wrong door.

August 10, 1993 FLIES AND BOLOGNA

Once a fly buzzed into a picnic area and happened upon a half-eaten bologna sandwich. He ate until he was so full he could not fly. Seeing an old plow leaning against a tree, he crawled up on the handle to rest in the shade while his food digested.

Suddenly two young boys ran into the picnic area and startled the fly from his sleep. Forgetting how full he was, he attempted to fly. Instead, he fell to his death.

The moral of the story is simple. Don't fly off the handle when you are full of bologna!

The Bible puts it this way-James 1:19 "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:" .

Just like the fly, it's easy to get full of bologna (wrong information) from what we find lying around. Most rumors begin with VERY little hard information; only a willingness to readily believe the worst about people. And it's surprising how ready people are to eat their fill of false information or gossip.

Like the fly also, when we are startled, we tend to act without thinking (Have you ever wanted to grab words that have just exited your mouth?). And these rash actions can lead to disastrous results.

Jesus told us to learn about trust in God by watching the sparrows. I hope you will also learn about spreading gossip from bologna filled flies.

August 11, 1993 SITTING DURING SERMONS

A very wise man once said, "The ability of a congregation to understand is in direct proportion to the length of time that they have been sitting"!

While attending our National Meeting recently I understood anew the relevance of this statement. After sitting for business meetings all day, sitting during a prolonged song service, and listening to some very long sermons, I found that the more tired I became the less my mind retained. The singing was excellent and the sermons were superb but it had already been a long day; and as the week progressed, each day seemed to get longer. My spirit was willing but the flesh sure was getting weak!

The ability to hear a Sermon is dependent on many factors. The sermon must not only be relevant to people's needs, people must also be able to hear it. That's why churches have PA systems for amplification; and nurseries to keep down distraction.

But no matter how good the sermon or the people's ability to hear it, people can't concentrate in discomfort. This is why, through the years, churches have added padded pews and air conditioners. People talk often about how good the services were in the old days under tents and with slat pews; but I have never seen a Church vote to do away with modern conveniences and return to hard pews and hand fans.

Blessed is the Pastor who can remember that he is not only dealing with hard hearts, he is dealing with hard pews. And may his sermon get beyond your discomfort, past your ears, and into your life.

August 17, 1993 COURTROOM CONVICTIONS

I was recently called to serve as a Petit Juror in our fair city. Like most people, I have a very busy schedule. I prepare and preach three sermons each week, as well as teach a Sunday School class each week. I am my own secretary so I also must write numerous letters and take care of church correspondence. And, of course, there are the normal pastoral duties of visiting the sick, seeking the lost, exhorting the backslidden, and tending the church "sheep".

In addition to Church duties I also administer a large Outreach Ministry. This involves writing at least two newspaper columns each week, preparing audio and video tapes of our services for distribution, and taking care of all the financial, supply, and correspondence work connected with such a ministry. I also write and publish a newsletter of my sermons every other week that goes into nearly 800 homes in 20 different states. Finally, I write and publish numerous Devotional and Bible Study Books for free distribution.

As I said, I have a very busy schedule; but I was willing to do my duty and serve as Juror. One of the first questions the Judge asked, however, was whether any of us were opposed to the drinking of Alcoholic Beverages. Of course, I immediately stood up and said yes (What surprised me was that of the 40-50 people there only 5 of us said we were opposed). Since most of the cases to be tried involved DUI circumstances it was not long until I was on my way back home.

This was a case where my convictions got me out of the courtroom and back to my work. How about YOU?? Do your convictions convict you or set you free??

August 18, 1993 BALLOON BOY

The business session was hot and heavy. Millions of dollars in budgets were being voted on. Great and intense moral issues were being discussed and debated. Anxiety lines creased the face of many of the delegates.

A noise drew my attention to the rear of the convention center. There a young boy was happily hitting a balloon into the air, watching it come down, and then hitting it again before it got to the floor. He didn't care if the budgets passed; or even if the moral principles were correctly interpreted. All he was interested in was hitting that balloon before it got to the floor.

Jesus said something interesting about Children- "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." (Luke 18:17).

It is necessary to conduct business. It is important to be serious about serious situations. But sometimes I wonder if the best thing a convention (or church) could do would be to toss a balloon around for a little while and laugh like a little child.

Somehow, I can almost picture Jesus right in the middle of a group like that laughing and rejoicing. He wouldn't stop healing the sick or preaching to the lost, he would just take time to rejoice in the goodness of life.

The Bible says it this way- "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God." (Eccl 5:19).

Budgets and Beliefs are important; but sometimes Balloons might be the best way to reach a world that desperately needs to see Christians enjoying the Abundant life in Christ.

August 24, 1993 UNSTOP THE SINK

Doctors of old times tested the insanity of a mental patient by the following test. The patient was placed in a room with a sink. With the stopper in, the faucet was turned on causing the sink to overflow.

The patient was then handed a mop, told to clean up the mess, and left by himself. If the patient had enough sense to shut off the water, pull the plug, and then mop up the water, he was considered capable of going home. Otherwise, he was held for further treatment.

This seems to be a silly thing, and yet there are many Christians showing signs of the same mental illness. They spend all their time mopping up the mess made by the sins in their life but they never unstop the sink or turn off the faucet.

Isn't it time we stop talking about how bad sin is and remove the stopper of pride and self-effort that allows it to flood our life? Even better, isn't it time we used the power of the Word of God to turn off the flow of sin into our lives?

Don't act crazy. Unstop the sink and turn off the water. It just doesn't make sense to spend all your time mopping up instead of living a life of liberty.

August 25, 1993 PUT OUT TO PUT ON

After we had been married for a few years my wife made a life changing declaration to me, "You don't have a bit of sense about what to wear!". I always thought I dressed kind of cool. It was devastating to learn that I was a clod instead of cool. Needless to say, since that time I have learned to let her put out what I am to put on.

This is the same kind of lesson that followers of Christ must learn. We have certain plans and preferences picked out for our life that we think are really "cool". We must learn instead to look to God and allow Him to put out what we put on.

We hear preachers wax eloquent all the time about the Vision of God that Isaiah the prophet saw that caused him to exclaim, "Here am I, Lord. Send me". The indication they give is that Isaiah went on to have a tremendously successful ministry.

Let me tell you the rest of the story. Here is what God Put out for Isaiah to Put on. The verse following his famous declaration reads like this, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." (Isaiah 6:9). Isaiah preached to a rebellious people determined to go their way instead of God's way. Eventually, they ended up putting Isaiah in a hollow log and sawing the log in two!

This is not the course that Isaiah would have chosen but, by putting on what God put out, he earned a place in God's Hall of Fame (Heb 11:37). And isn't that the purpose of Christian living; to use your life for God instead of self.

So if you want to please God, put on what He puts out. Then you'll really be cool.

August 31, 1993 CABIN BOY CAPTAIN

The summons came quite unexpectedly. He had heard all the alarms going off and was looking for his life boat station when the call came for him to report to the captain. He couldn't understand what the Captain would want from a lowly Cabin Boy when something was seriously wrong with the ship.

When he arrived on the ship's bridge it looked like someone had kicked over an ant hill. People were coming and going in all directions. He saw the Captain in a corner talking with a number of senior officers so he approached the group and waited for the captain to notice him. As he waited, he heard the Captain telling the senior officers to make sure the evacuation was orderly but it needed to be done swiftly.

Finally the Captain dismissed the officers and motioned for the Cabin Boy to follow him into his cabin. There he made a startling announcement to the Cabin Boy, "I have heard that you wanted to become the Captain of your own vessel one day. Today is your lucky day. All of my officers have responsibilities and I'm going to be busy so I am appointing you as Captain. And, by the way, the ship is sinking and it's the Captain's responsibility to go down with the ship!"

That's when the young man found he would rather be Cabin Boy than Captain! Is that the way you will feel when the Lord returns and you realize you have invested all your time and energy trying to be Captain of the world; a world that God will destroy with fire. On that day you'll find you would rather be a Cabin Boy in Heaven than Captain of the whole world.

September 1, 1993 DIVINE DELAYS

Suddenly the tranquility of daily life was interrupted by a messenger. Jesus had retired into the wilderness country of modern day Jordan because the Pharisees were trying to kill him. Then his friend, Lazarus, became gravely ill. Knowing the power of Jesus, the sisters of Lazarus sent a messenger to Jesus requesting that he return and heal Lazarus.

Can't you see Peter's reaction? As soon as he heard the message he probably went thru the camp yelling at everyone to pack and prepare to leave. In fifteen minutes he stood outside of Jesus' tent and proudly reported that everyone was almost ready to leave. Jesus just looked at him and said, "We're not going anywhere."

For two more days Jesus went about his work as if the messenger had not come. In small groups, inconspicuously as possible, the disciple would meet as they waited and wondered. Was Jesus so afraid of the Pharisees until that kept him from returning? Did he really not care for Lazarus after all? Why did he delay?

Finally Jesus told the disciples to pack up so they could go see Lazarus. As kindly as they could the disciples told Jesus that it was dangerous; and probably too late. Then Jesus said something Marvelous, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, in order that you may believe."

Jesus delayed in order for Lazarus to die. Then when Jesus raised him from the dead it established faith in the Disciples. And that was Jesus' purpose the whole time.

You may wonder many times why God fails to answer your prayers. It may not be rejection. It may be the delay is to Glorify God and build you. So don't doubt during delays. God still cares, and He knows exactly what time it is.

September 7, 1993 CHASM JUMPERS

The most dangerous thing in the world is to leap a chasm in two jumps. -David Lloyd George

Faith in Christ is an “All or nothing” situation. It’s like the decision Julius Caesar made when he landed on the shores of Britain with his Roman legions. Ordering his men to halt on the edge of the Cliffs of Dover, he commanded them to look down at the water below. To their amazement, they saw every ship in which they had crossed the channel engulfed in flames. Caesar had deliberately cut off any possibility of retreat! Now that his soldiers were unable to return to the continent, there was nothing left for them to do but to advance and conquer! And that is exactly what they did.

The Leap of Faith we take when we accept Christ as Savior is like this. It’s burning your bridges behind you. It is declaring that Jesus Christ is your only hope; and all your hope- Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Chasms can’t be crossed in two jumps. Either you are able to get across with one jump or you fall to your destruction. Crossing the chasm that separates you from God requires this kind of confidence and commitment. You must believe that God CAN get you across and you must fully commit to making the jump.

Have YOU made that leap?? Remember you can’t stop half way. Jump with determination to land on the other side. Even if your strength is small God bears determined jumpers across on wings of grace wrapped in arms of love. But it’s important that you jump; because destruction is found in remaining where you are just as it is in jumping half-way!

September 8, 1993 PERFECT PEACE

We live in a world of troubles and trials. Families are breaking apart, violence is escalating, government is out of control, and we can’t even do something as simple as finding our car keys! Wouldn’t it be great if there was a way to face all of life’s circumstances with peace and stability? Thank God, God has provided just such a way.

Isaiah 26:3 gives God’s prescription for a life of perfect peace- Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. See if it helps to read it in the Amplified Version- You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mine [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on You, because he commits himself to You, leans on You and hopes confidently in You.

This verse contains a Promise, a Prescription, and a Provision. The Promise is very straight forward. God WILL keep you in a state of perfect (constant) peace. And that is what we are all looking for.

The Prescription to obtain this Promise involves changing your thought process. You used to think only of self and circumstances. Now your mind is centered on God; His power, His Presence, and His Providential oversight of life’s circumstances.

The Provision of this Promise is a constant confidence in God. You trust that God is working all of life’s circumstances for your good and His glory.

People get seasick when they start thinking about how the boat is rocking and then they start watching the waves. Unable to find stability, the mind triggers sickness in the body. Anytime I would start getting seasick I would lift my eyes to the horizon and find a place of stability. That’s also how you find perfect peace.

September 15, 1993 COMMITMENT

A Bum stumbling down a street one day met a Christian passing out gospel tracts. Lonely and desperate he asked the Christian if Christ could really change his life. The Christian gladly shared with him about the saving and changing power of Christ. Finally, the Bum bowed his head and asked Christ to forgive his sins and make him a new creature.

After a time of rejoicing, the Christian encouraged the bum to really commit his life to the Lord and they went their separate ways. The Bum began thinking about what commitment to Christ really meant as he walked down the street. That's when he came to a Salvation Army collection kettle.

The attendant had walked away for a few moments but he had left a sign on the kettle to encourage people to continue to contribute. The sign read, "Christ gave His all for you. What have you given for Him?" This caused the Bum to pause and think.

Finally, he reached into his pocket and pulled out all the money he had- 34 cent. First he gave a dime and started to walk away. Somehow that didn't seem enough since the sign said Christ had given all so he gave another dime. Again he started to walk away but still felt uneasy about his gift. Looking at the 14 cent remaining in his hand he finally just turned his hand over and let it all slip into the pot.

Still, when he began to walk away, the thought of Christ giving all for him rang in his mind. When the attendant returned to his pot several minutes later he was surprised to find the bum sitting in the pot!! The Bum finally figured out what commitment really means. Have you??

September 21, 1993 KNOWING AND DOING

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17)

Jesus lists two very important ingredients here about living life. If you want to KNOW then you must be willing to DO.

Many times I find myself with so much work demanding my attention until I come to a stand still trying to figure out where to begin! The battle begins to rage in my mind- "Should I do that first? That's too long and it will take too much time. I'm too tired to tackle all this work." And I end up arguing with myself instead of accomplishing anything.

But the Principles Jesus talked about in this verse really work. I know I need to visit people for the Lord but can't figure out who to begin with. All I have to do is pick someone, anyone. While I'm on the way to visit them I will always pass a home or remember a person that I need to see and then I will find things falling into place.

I know that Sunday is coming. I know that sermons have to be prepared. I can sit and wonder what to preach or I can take my Bible into my prayer closet and find out what God wants so I can begin making preparations.

Knowing something needs to be done is not enough, you have to start. Remember that about the changes you want to make in your life. Remember that in witnessing and working for the Lord. And especially remember that when it comes to making your decision about eternity. It does no good to know Christ can save you if you aren't willing to Do anything about it.

September 22, 1993 SUCCESSFUL FAILURES

There is a lot we can learn from the successful failures. Like Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. Ty Cobb was thrown out more times trying to steal than any other man in baseball history. Babe Ruth struck out more times than any man in baseball history. Hank Aaron, who broke Babe Ruth's record, has struck out more times than 99% of the players who make it to the major leagues. Nobody - but nobody - considers them failures and few people even remember their failures. Virtually everyone remembers their successes.

Thomas Edison's teacher called him a dunce and he later failed over 14,000 times in his efforts to perfect the incandescent light. Albert Einstein and Werner von Braun both flunked courses in math. Henry Ford was broke at age 40. Vince Lombardi became the most revered coach since Knute Rockne, but at age 43 he was a line coach at Fordham University. And the list goes on and on.

It may be today that you are discouraged in your Christian life because there are areas in which you continue to fail. Remember Peter- He denied the Lord, went back fishing instead of remaining faithful, and was even rebuked of Paul years later because of his failures as a pastor. Remember that Paul was called the Chief of sinners and that his quarrel with Barnabas broke up a great missionary team.

Failures are not fatal, unless you allow them to cripple you. Forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before. Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:13-14). Don't stay in the hog pen of despair. Come back to the Father and find that failures can be simply stepping stones to success.

September 28, 1993 HOLY SPIRIT MINISTRY

Jesus said He would not leave us alone. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us. Many people are confused, however, about what the Holy Spirit is supposed to do in our life. Rather than find the answer they live lives of doubt, discouragement, and defeat. I want to help you today by sharing very briefly the Seven Fold Ministry of the Holy Spirit.

1) CONVICTING- The Holy Spirit brings sins to bear on our heart and mind in order to show us our need of Christ. And without this conviction we will never see the need of salvation.

2) REGENERATING- The Spirit convicts us of Sin. Then He Calls us to Christ. Finally He Converts us into new creatures when we place our faith in Christ. Conversion is not turning over a new leaf; it is getting a new life through the power of God.

3) SEALING- The Holy Spirit is God's "Brand" on His children. The Bible plainly says that if we do not have the Spirit then we do not belong to God. This seal is God's way of showing Satan that we belong to God.

4) RESTRAINING- The Holy Spirit keeps Satan from destroying God's People and God's Plan by placing restraints on what Satan can do- remember Job. That's why Peter calls Christians "Peculiar" people. The word means surrounded by God's protection.

5) BAPTIZING- The Holy Spirit places us into the Body of Christ and gives us a gift to benefit the work of the body.

6) INDWELLING- The Holy Spirit makes our body a temple set aside for God's Glory. He stresses that we keep this temple undefiled.

7) FILLING- Every Christian is commanded to continually be filled with the Spirit. This will put a song on your lips and submission in your life.

God has help for you today. It's not pie in the sky Hope but the real Help of the Holy Spirit. Let Him Minister in your life today.

September 29, 1993 DEBBIE'S DUTY

One of the greatest workers in our church is Miss Debbie. She is bound to a wheel chair and subject to seizures but that doesn't hinder her help in the least. In fact, she has been a major helper in reaching thousands and thousands of people with the Gospel of Christ.

Our Church puts together and distributes thousands of books each year and Debbie helps her mother put together many of them. She can't walk around the table as the books are put together but she holds the books on a tray on her wheel chair as they are put together. Later, when we fold and staple the books, she again used the tray of her wheel chair to hold books until they can be put in boxes or on shelves.

She is not only a great worker in our church; she also is a constant source of inspiration. Her smile can turn the most difficult day into sunshine and bright lights. Her constant enthusiasm turns the most dreary job into a marvelous ministry that you feel honored to have a part in. And her laughter and good nature lift up even the most discouraged souls.

We pray for the Lord to touch Miss Debbie nearly every service we have but I sometimes wonder if her gain wouldn't be our loss. I know there have been many difficult days in Debbie's life but somehow they have developed her into something very very special. God gave her a difficult duty in life and she has come out like a champ. I just pray I can do the duty God has given me as well.

October 5, 1993 COUNTERING DEFEAT

We had almost completed our Fellowship Building and everyone was anxious to put it to use. One of the final steps was the installation of a counter top on the food bar. We had put this off until last so the construction work would not mar or scratch it.

The counter top was ten feet long so I knew I couldn't put anything that long in my car. Finally it was decided that one of my deacons and I would borrow a big truck from one of the local farmers and go to Darlington to pick up the counter top. The Deacon took off a half day from work and I rearranged my schedule so we could get this job done.

Imagine our surprise and chagrin when we got to the plant in Darlington and found the counter top rolled into a little tube that I could easily carry under one arm. We never thought about rolling it up; we just assumed it would have to be placed on something at least ten feet long!

Many problems in life are like this counter top. We dread dealing with them because we think they're much more difficult than they really are. And when we finally decide to tackle them we make much more preparation than is actually needed.

Sort of like David and Goliath. Saul tried to get David to fight the battle with all kinds of armor. Instead, David realized he simply needed the shield of faith. And this giant of a problem, that had kept an entire army defeated for days, was solved with a shepherd boy's sling shot.

If you are faced with a life problem that is defeating and discouraging you then look beyond what you see to what is so. You will find that giants aren't so big when God is on your side.

October 6, 1993 THE POWER

When the weather begins to turn cool it reminds me of what a blessing it is to have Central Heat in a home. It is simply marvelous to be able to walk to a thermostat and get the heat you need to warm your home. It hasn't always been that way.

I remember the hard work, and hot days, that went into cutting trees and splitting wood to ensure we would have a hot stove to back up to in the winter time. And no matter how much you cut you knew it would never be enough.

For a long time this back breaking work was done with axes and cross-cut saws. It was extremely discouraging to see how slowly the wood pile grew when you considered the amount of work we were doing. Finally a marvelous change took place. I remember it so well. Dad got a big table saw, borrowed a tractor, hooked a belt between the tractor and the saw, and cut blocks of wood ten times faster than the way we had been working. It was great to see the difference a little power made.

Many Christians today are defeated and discouraged in their Christian life because they continue to use "axes and cross-cut saws". What a difference it would make if they could only realize God has the power available to help them face life's problems and perplexities. It's simply a matter of hooking your life to God's plan.

Jesus said if we would find life we must first lose it. In the same way, if we are to find power to cope with life we must admit we are powerless within ourselves. Then we will be able to say, like Paul, "I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST who strengthens me".

Don't wear yourself out with an axe. God has all the power you need; no matter how cold a winter you face.

October 12, 1993 PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

While I was out visiting recently my wife asked me to pick up a birthday card for her to send to a friend. I knew I had a dollar or so in my wallet and I assumed that would be more than enough for a birthday card.

As most of you know, I generally pray about parking places. If I'm picking up something for the church or something very heavy the Lord normally gives me a parking place close to the door of the store. Otherwise, He assumes I need the exercise involved in walking. This time I found a place about half way down the line.

When I got out of my car I looked on the pavement and there were 3 shiny new pennies. I said, "Thank the Lord", and picked them up. I went into the store, found the Birthday card, and went to pay for it. Was I ever surprised when the clerk rang up the card. It took both dollars I had in my wallet plus all the change I had in my pocket. Guess who would have come up 3 cent short if he would not have found 3 cent just before he entered the store!

I'm glad God knew exactly what the card would cost and exactly how much money I had on me. That doesn't surprise me, however. The Bible says God knows the number of hairs on my head (Even if my accountant angel can only subtract!) and even when a sparrow falls to the ground. What a joy to serve a God who provides pennies from heaven when we need them.

October 13, 1993 WEIGHING WORRY

One of most persistent thieves of joy and energy in a person's life is worry. The Dictionary defines Worry as "feeling uneasy or concerned about something; to be troubled". Jesus used a word for worry that meant "Anxious Care" and He told His followers not to allow this "anxious care" to control them.

Several principles show us how wrong it is to allow worry to weigh us down:

1) Worry won't do any good. Jesus said that worry would not help us grow or provide our needs. It's not wrong to anticipate needs but it is wrong to allow anxious thoughts about these needs to control you. Instead of accomplishing anything, worry deprives us of sleep, ruins our appetite, and makes us hard to live with.

2) Worry implies doubting God. Jesus said if God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers then how can we believe He will not care for His own children. Worry says you believe that God does not know, or does not care, about your situation.

3) There are more important things than the things we worry about. Jesus said we were to seek the kingdom of God first and all the things we worry about would be added to us. Instead of enjoying life and letting our life shine for God we allow worry to sap our strength, dim our vision, and stop our work for God.

The answer to worry is found in First Peter 5:7 "Cast all your worry upon the Lord for He is truly concerned about what happens to you". Don't let Worry weigh you down. God is still on the throne and the answer is on the way.

October 19, 1993 THE LOCKED DOOR

I was called for jury duty recently. During a break in jury selection I went to get a cup of coffee from a coffee maker beside the judge's chair. While I was there I noticed several devotion books on a table. I'm always looking for opportunities to share our "Miracle Messages" books (Collections of newspaper devotional articles) so I went to my car to get several volumes to leave on the table.

When I returned to the courtroom I found that the outside door I had exited through locked when it closed and could not be opened from the outside. It looked like I was going to have to walk around the building and enter the court by the main entrance. Just as I was leaving I saw someone pass a window beside the door. I hastily knocked on the door and they opened it for me.

That reminded me of what Jesus said to a Church in the book of Revelation. He said he was standing at the door, knocking for entrance, and waiting on someone on the inside to release the latch.

Preachers are good at using this verse to illustrate Jesus standing at the door of a sinner's heart asking to come in. In reality, however, it shows Jesus outside the door of the Church; with the door locked. He had once been inside but something has forced Him outside. Now He will only enter if someone inside the Church unlocks the door.

What a strange situation. The head of the church, the reason for its existence, is locked out. Yet the people on the inside are so preoccupied with themselves until they don't even miss Him. They think that as long as the church program is still functioning everything is all right.

Surely someone will notice Christ is gone. Surely someone will hear His knock and let Him in. Will it be you??

October 20, 1993 SOUL SEASONING

While shopping in a local store recently one of the ladies in my Church saw a bottle of "soul seasoning" among the various spices. She said it was worth the expense of buying this spice just to see my face when she gave it to me. She also said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was really a "Soul Seasoning" you could sprinkle on a new convert so they would always live right and do right?"

Later I had the opportunity to look at the ingredients in "Soul Seasoning". It contains Salt, Black Pepper, Red Pepper, Garlic, Onion, Spices, and Paprika. Sounds interesting and I plan on trying it on something very soon.

In the same way that this seasoning used a variety of ingredients to give food a special taste so the Lord uses a variety of opportunities and obstacles to build our life as it ought to be.

Jesus said that Christians were supposed to be salt in this world. Even so, the young Christian is greatly influenced by the attitudes and actions of fellow Christians. They will either help his life to develop as it should or, as salt that has lost its savor, they will provide no help or comfort to this young convert.

Black Pepper represents the battle the young convert must face as he learns to deny his sinful nature. If he allows this sinful nature to grow unchecked his life will be like a bowl of soup that someone dumps a cup of black pepper in!

The Red Pepper represents the fiery trials he must face. He doesn't like them but they add greatly to his strength and testimony.

The Garlic, Onion, and Paprika represent the things that now separate him from the world. Just as it doesn't take long to smell these on a person's breath so it doesn't take the world long to see if a person really means business about serving the Lord; and to separate themselves from him!

Do you have "Soul Seasoning" in your life? It may be just what is needed to draw the world to taste the wonderful life you are living.

October 27, 1993 HALLOWEEN

It began as a day to honor “All Saints”, it became a night to honor witches and ghosts. Some people in the Church felt that special days set aside to honor certain Saints caused other saints to be neglected. It was decided to set aside the first day in November as “All Saints Day” to honor all the Saints who did not have their own special day. The Evening before this special day was called “Hallowed Evening”; eventually corrupted in old English to Halloween.

The customs associated with Halloween come from the Celts. The old Celtic calendar began the New Year on November 1 (The year ended with the harvest of their crops) and the night before became known as a time when witches and goblins roamed around trying to hold back the new year.

People began having New Year’s Eve parties (just as we do today). At these parties they would dress up as witches or goblins to placate the demons. Eventually the serfs began to go to the main house demanding an offering (treat) from the landowner in exchange for protection from the demons during the coming year (or I’ll trick you).

There are several reasons our Church has changed Halloween to Family Fun Night. We don’t believe its right to promote witches and demons. We don’t think it’s right to teach children to demand a treat under the threat of a “trick”. And, in the sick world we live in, it’s just plain dangerous to allow Children to accept candy from strangers.

We make it a Family time at the church where they can dress up as “good” people, eat all the candy they want, and enjoy a good time of games and fellowship. We think that’s the Christian way-defeating bad by making it good.

November 2, 1993 WRITTEN IN WATER

Here lies one whose name was written in water- John Keats.

What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away (James 4:14).

After a great deal of observation and consideration I have come to the conclusion that most people leave just 3 things at their death- their Mess, their Money, and their Memory.

Their Mess- It doesn't seem to matter if death comes totally unexpectedly or after a prolonged illness. Either way, People always seem to leave a great deal of details to be dealt with. And there is always trash that they never had the time or courage to throw away that someone must now sort through. Most people mean well, it's just that death came today and they were going to do these things tomorrow.

Their Money- The Bible says we came into the world naked and we'll depart the same way. All the money and material things that people prize so greatly today will be left for others to use and enjoy. Bank accounts, social standing, and worldly popularity all cease to matter when you breathe your last breath. And, as one of the richest and wisest men in history (Solomon) once said, who knows if the people you leave them to will use them correctly or destroy in a day what it took you a life time to build.

Their Memory- Some memories of you will be good and some will be bad. Some will fade like the flowers by your grave while others will linger for a life time. Some will have their names inscribed in history or upon marble statues while others will join the man who had his name written in water.

Death is an appointment we all must keep. And what you leave behind is not nearly as important as what you send ahead. After death comes the judgment. That's when it is important that your name is written in blood in the Lamb's book of life. Regardless of whether it is written in marble or in water in this world.

November 3, 1993 MORALS AREN'T ENOUGH

Good Morals will keep you out of jail but it takes Salvation to keep you out of Hell. That's the first lesson Jesus taught Nicodemus when he came for an interview.

Nicodemus was one of the main religious leaders of his nation. The Scriptures do not relate a single failure in his moral character. Yet, the first thing Jesus told him was, "You must be born again." In other words, Good Morals make good people but they don't get you to Heaven.

If morals aren't enough, what is?? If doing the best we can is not enough then what is enough? If meeting the standards society sets in order to be acceptable is not good enough then what do we need to do? What is this business about being Born Again?

First of all, it is agreeing with God that you have sinned and come short of God's Standard. It is admitting to God that all of your human work, wealth, and effort simply aren't enough to satisfy a perfect God.

Secondly, it is coming to God on His terms. You not only admit your sins, you acknowledge your inability to do anything about the situation apart from God's Grace.

Then, it is coming to God by the cross. It is accepting the fact that Jesus Christ died for your sins and acknowledging that His shed blood is the only payment that God will accept for our sin debt. As the song writer says, "Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to the cross I cling."

Finally, it is beginning a new relationship with God. You were separated from, and enemies of, God. Now the blood of Christ has cleansed your past and the Holy Spirit is making you a new creature in Christ. Now your life is lived for God. You have good morals but they are the result of your life; not the reason for your living. You've learned that morals aren't enough; but God is.

November 9, 1993 WHY HIM??

Why does God heal some people and not heal others?? I have been in countless hospital rooms and have prayed for thousands of people. Some have dramatic changes in their health and are soon back home. Some slowly get better under the care and medicine of the Doctors. And some die.

The example given in John's Gospel makes it even more confusing. John tells about a pool called Bethesda. Legend said that an angel came and troubled the waters of the pool from time to time and the first person into the water after this would be healed. That in itself seems dreadfully unfair- those who needed curing the least would be able to get to the water before those who needed it most.

One Day Jesus comes to this pool and sees the great multitude of sick and dying people. Out of all this throng he chooses to heal one man; a man who had been sick for 38 years. That's commendable but confusing.

When Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed he expressed total disbelief that it could happen. In spite of this Jesus healed him anyway. Faith healers would say he developed the faith needed to be healed. Later that day, however, he was questioned about who healed him and said he didn't even know the name of his healer!

Still later, when Jesus saw him again and revealed himself to him, the man went running to the enemies of Jesus and gave them evidence to use in persecuting Jesus!!

I have many questions to ask God while we live together in eternity. One of them will be, "Why Him?"

November 10, 1993 WHEN SEEING HURTS

Jeremiah, the Prophet, sat weeping over the horrible results that sinful living had brought to his nation. The armies were defeated, the people were killed or sold into captivity as slaves, and the temple of God was desolate. In the midst of this destruction and disaster, he wrote the wonderfully dreadful little book called "Lamentations".

Anyone who has never thought about the consequences of sin should read Lamentations every day for a week. It goes beyond painting a picture of sin into showing the heart ache and agony that comes with God's Judgment upon sinful living.

One verse from Lamentations describes the anguish Christians are enduring in the sinful world we live in today- Lam 3:51 "Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city." What a horrible situation when what our eyes see hurts our heart.

But it's not an unprecedeted situation. When Lot was living in the sinful society of Sodom and Gomorrah the Bible says "This righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;" (2 Pet 2:8). What he saw tortured his soul.

It is indeed a wicked society that tortures its people with the sinful living it practices. Worst that this, however, is a society in which people accept sin and perversion as normal and it does not cause them anguish. That society has deadened it's conscience and is on the road to destruction.

By the way, when is the last time people committing adultery on TV caused you to cry instead of laugh??

November 16, 1993 THE CHRISTLESS CHRISTIAN

One of the ladies in our church was real busy one morning as she prepared for work. She ran by the microwave and put a cup of water in to heat for some instant coffee as she finished getting ready. When the bell went off she ran and got the cup out of the microwave and tried to drink it as she ran from place to place. It was only after the water had cooled for a while that she realized she had been drinking hot water! She had forgot to put the coffee in after she heated the water and only after it cooled did the truth finally dawn on her.

Sadly, some Christians are that way. They are so busy "living the Christian life" until they don't realize they haven't put Christ in that life. Their morals are good. Their reputation is good. They may even be active in church or church work. But if you ask them about their relationship with Christ they give you a blank look or a curious stare.

Prayer to them is telling God about something they need or want. It never involves praise or personal communication. If they were locked alone in a room with Christ they would be extremely ill at ease after 5 minutes of polite conversation. After all, hearing about Christ is not the same as having a real relationship with Him.

The Bible to them is not a love letter from God. It's a bunch of boring historical information mixed in with deep theological truth that the average guy is not supposed to understand anyway. After all, that's why they pay a preacher; so he can figure out all that stuff.

Won't it be sad one day when they slow down long enough to realize they only have hot water!!

November 17, 1993 GAMBLING WITH GOD

The latest fad with governments is gambling as a means of raising revenue. Like other "sin taxes", this one tries to manipulate the greed and weakness in human morals to allow the government to collect more money from the people. It is simply another step in the downward slide of America into the ash heap of once great nations who have died of the cancer of uncontrolled indulgence.

That's bad enough. Even worst, however, are the people who gamble with God all the time. They believe that no matter what the Bible says about life principles they can somehow beat the odds and have their cake and eat it too. They ignore God's warnings about premarital or extra marital sex; believing they will be the lucky ones who never face disease or divorce. They fill their minds with hours of filthy TV programs or gossip and then expect a Holy God to visit them with a divine prescription for peace and joy as they drift off into sleep.

To these people Prayer is made to God who runs the big Casino in the sky. Sometimes you win and He gives you what you want; but most times you don't get answers to your prayers. To them it's all a matter of luck; not following God's directions or seeking God's face.

The most fatal gamble of all, however, believes God will make an exception to His declaration that "You must be born again." Every day you gamble that you won't die that day; or if you do die, that God will give you enough warning until you can get everything right. Hell is full of people who have gambled and lost on that one.

Why gamble when God has offered you a sure thing? Trust Christ to forgive your sins. Trust the Holy Spirit to empower you to live the Christian life. Trust God to receive you into Heaven one day. Put your Faith in God; not in gambling.

November 23, 1993 BEYOND DITCHES

The world is so full of care and sorrow that it is a gracious debt we owe to one another to discover the bright crystals of delight hidden in somber circumstances and irksome tasks.--Helen Keller

Driving down the highway one day on my way to the hospital I began to look at all the trash and litter along the road. There were beer cans, busted bags of garbage, and the remnants of fast food meals. The more I looked the more depressed I became.

Suddenly the voice of the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "If you'll get your mind out of the ditch you won't feel so bad!". That's when I looked up and saw a beautiful blue sky all around me. Floating in that sky were fluffy clouds of every shape and description. Beneath the clouds were gorgeous trees with flaming shades of orange and gold set off by the enduring beauty of the evergreens.

I went from deep depression to excited exultation!! A few minutes before I felt like crawling under the car. Now I wanted to run along the road singing the praises of our God and His wonderful creation. The difference came when I got my mind out of the trash and put it on the treasures all around me.

I don't think it's good to look at trash and pretend there is not a problem. But don't let the trash keep you from admiring the treasures. Anyone can find something bad to say about a situation or a person. What we need are people who will lift up their eyes to see beyond the problems. That will brighten your heart, which will in turn brighten those you come in contact with.

God inhabits the praise of His people. Get your mind out of the ditch so God will have a place to stay.

November 24, 1993 THE BEST WORD

Rudyard Kipling at one time was so popular that his writings were getting ten shillings per word. A few college students however didn't appreciate Kipling's writings; they facetiously sent him a letter enclosing ten shillings. It read, "Please, send us your best word." They got back a letter from Kipling, "Thanks."

The Best word indeed is "Thanks". Have you used it recently?

When is the last time you told God Thank You for loving me enough to send your own son to die in my place?

When is last time you thanked God for faithful Christians who prayed for your salvation, paid to keep the church doors open so you would have a place to meet God, and pleaded with you to turn from sin to the savior? When have you last thanked God for the wooing and convicting work of the Holy Spirit? When have you last thanked God for His long suffering with you while you wallowed in the hog pens of the world and squandered His wealth on the devil's delights?

When is the last time you spent ten minutes adoring and praising the Great God Jehovah for the blessings of life instead of complaining about all the things you don't have? When is the last time your family and co-workers heard you lift your voice in praise to God instead of grumbling and griping?

When is the last time you hugged God's neck and told Him you loved Him? After all, even to God, the best word is THANKS.

Psa 107:8 Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

December 1, 1993 BLUE LIGHT PRAYERS

My brother-in-law had to work late so it was nearly 11pm when he brought my nephew to spend the night with us. Since he had to drive all the way back to Columbia we didn't spend much time socializing. As soon as he left and we started looking for night clothes for my nephew we realized my brother-in-law had forgotten to leave the suitcase with his clothes.

I ran out of the house to try and catch him and I could see him just turning onto Main Street. I stopped immediately and prayed for the Lord to make him remember the suitcase and turn around. Instead, he headed off toward Columbia.

I knew we had to have that suitcase so I ran back into the house, got my car keys, and went tearing down the road after him. That's when the blue lights started flashing in the mirror. In my haste to overtake him I was exceeding the speed limit.

Well the patrolman was very nice and only gave me a warning ticket after hearing my tale of woe. By then I knew I would never catch my brother-in-law so I found a roadside phone and called my wife to tell her I would have to go on to Columbia. That's when she said my brother-in-law had remembered the suitcase and had already brought it back.

Now I'm sitting by the road with a warning ticket in my hand and egg on my face. I asked the Lord to do something and instead of giving Him time to answer my prayer I went barging off in my own strength.

Remember this foolish preacher the next time you pray and then run off to try and answer your prayer in your own way. There may be a Blue Light waiting on you also.

December 8, 1993 ARMLESS EFFORT

During a time of war in Argentina the call went out for all men to report for duty. The call was so urgent until every single man below 60 was required to report. One of these men was a miner who had lost both of his arms in a mining accident.

He made his way to the reporting point with the assumption that as soon as they saw he had no arms they would tell him to go back home. Instead, he was sent to boot camp with the rest of the men. As soon as he arrived at camp he requested to see the commander.

"Why are you keeping me here," He asked. "Without arms I can do nothing to assist in the war effort."

The commander looked at him for a moment and then told him to report to the top of the hill and tell the man who was there pumping water when the pails were full. "You see," the commander said, "he greatly needs your help. He's blind!"

Multitudes of church members think that because they can't do great things then they don't have to do anything in the work of God. May they learn that the shepherds brought only their praise to the new born Christ child but that is remembered just as much as the gold of the Wise Men. It's amazing what you can do without arms if you're willing to form a partnership with a blind man!

December 14, 1993 WHAT IS CHRISTMAS??

To most people Christmas falls into one or more of the following four categories.

GIFTS: I talked with a number of people in November who were convinced they had to have all of their Christmas shopping done by Thanksgiving!! Gift giving has become tremendously pressure packed and expensive. You no longer buy a gift to show your love and appreciation for someone. Now you are given a list that must be matched to perfection; even if that means going to five different malls in four different towns. Relax a little, Jesus didn't get his "birthday" gifts until nearly two years after He was born! (The shepherds didn't bring gifts and it was over a year later before the wise men came).

GLITTER: It appears the legacy of Jim Bakker will live forever as more and more people are determined to make their home a miniature Las Vegas during the Christmas season. It has become almost an obsession for people to have a home so much brighter than their neighbors until it becomes a tourist attraction. Just remember that the blinding light on the first Christmas came from the Glory of God; not the Glitter of man.

GOING: As a pastor, I have to get most of the Christmas activities "out of the way" before we get too close to Christmas. Everyone is so busy with shopping and activities until they can only squeeze in a few moments for God every now and then (And He better not run overtime or they will leave so they can get back on THEIR schedule!).

GOD: Just remember that the reason for the season is the birth of the Son of God. Satan tries to get you so interested in the wrappings until you forget the gift. Don't let that happen.

December 15, 1993 DIVINE DIET

One of the great prophecies about Christ coming to earth is found in Isaiah chapter seven. The nation of Judah was threatened yet again by an invading army. God told the prophet Isaiah to meet Ahaz the king and comfort his heart with the news that God would defeat this army and for Ahaz to continue to have faith.

God could see that Ahaz was not convinced so He told him to ask for a sign from the Lord. Ahaz refused to do so and angered God. That is when these marvelous words were spoken, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good" (Is 7:14-15)

God promised that He would provide His own Son as a sign and His name would be Immanuel "With us is God". This is a great truth, and the heart of Christmas. Another truth I noticed, however, was the diet of this divine one- Butter and honey.

Thickened milk flavored with honey was one of the staples of the poor shepherds who wandered in the desert. It was a sign of poverty. It was also a way that God said His Son would know to make correct choices; choices made based on people instead of profit.

In the midst of the glitter and gold of the Christmas season remember the diet of the divine Son of God. A diet that enables us to know "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

December 21, 1993 CARRYING THE TUNE

The Choir from our Church recently went with me to help as I gave the devotions as a local nursing home. Following the Devotion we decided to sing down the halls of the home so those who could not come to the services in the cafeteria would get to enjoy the songs of Christmas.

The Choir was using a sound track and a “boom box” to help them with their singing. Since my inability to sing is legend in our church they asked me to be of service by carrying the “boom box”. When we finished singing one of the men said that I should feel proud; after all, I had finally been able to carry a tune! Isn’t it wonderful to have people who appreciate your talent?!

That’s one of the good things about Christianity (No, not the fact that you can make fun of the Preacher!). It’s good that everyone can take part in the work of the Lord, whatever their ability.

That was doubly clear during our visit to the Nursing Home. Many of the patients have physical disabilities and are unable to do many of the normal things people in Church do. Instead, I request them to become Prayer Warriors for our Church and its ministries. If they become effective doing this during the free time they have while in the Nursing Home then they will accomplish more in a week than most people do in a year!

All of us can’t sing in the choir. Some of us can only carry the tune by carrying a “boom box”. In spite of that fact, I think I got just as much of a blessing in the Nursing Home as the Choir did!

December 22, 1993 ISOLATION

Recently I had to carry my mother to an oral surgeon for some test. While we were waiting on him to begin I sat in the room with mother to keep her company. As we were talking I noticed the chair she was sitting in. It can fully recline with all sorts of gadgets to assist the doctor as he worked.

The thing that caught my eye, however, was the platform the chair was sitting on. It was a heavy sheet of metal resting on rubber insulators. I commented on it when the doctor came in and he told me it was made that way to meet governmental requirements. Isolating the chair from the floor prevented any chance of shock should the motor that operated the chair short out.

That reminded me of a special truth during this Christmas season. God is a holy and righteous God. His holiness isolates Him from the sin that has short-circuited mankind. Christmas shows that He went beyond this isolation in order to become a man. Becoming a man enabled Him to feel what we feel when we are tempted. It enabled Him to understand the weakness and weariness of being a human. But, most important of all, it allowed Him to die and pay a sin debt that we could not pay.

God could have remained isolated and we would have been helpless and hopeless. Instead, God became flesh and dwelt among men and we beheld His Glory. No wonder this is the time of year everyone wants to say, “MERRY CHRISTMAS”

December 28, 1993 SUSPICIOUS MINDS

I did something I seldom ever do recently. I was recording the check for the groceries we had just purchased and I began to look at the register tape. Almost immediately several things came to my attention. One, the cost of groceries is almost unbelievable. Two, the store had charged me for the same item twice.

I know I could have gone back to the store and they would have refunded my money but it was a small item and I would have burned out almost as much gas as I would have received back just to go and get it straight. Besides, everyone makes mistakes every now and then so I decided to just let it pass.

This week when we went back for more groceries I made a point to check the register tape. Sure enough they had charged me for four cans of soup when we had only gotten three. Now I figure it's time to call the manager and register a complaint. I was as nice as I could be but I still let him know that I was unhappy with the situation.

I was even more unhappy when my wife came up right after I got off the phone and told me she had found the fourth can of soup! Nothing to do but call right back and apologize.

A single seed of suspicion had made me find trouble where there was none. Sadly, this seed of suspicion exists in many churches today. Someone makes a mistake (real or imaginary) and now others EXPECT to find another error. Just remember, sometimes when you're dishing out doubt you end up eating crow! If you don't believe it ask me about grocery tickets.

December 29, 1993 SATAN'S ATTACK

As we approach a New Year we need to not only have a vision for the future but also learn some lessons from the past. An often quoted statement is very true, "They that forget the past are doomed to repeat it."

As you determine to do better in the year to come let me remind you of some of the reasons you failed in 1993. By doing so I hope you will be more aware of how Satan attacks and how you can come out victorious in the battle against this enemy of your soul.

Satan's attacks normally come in one of four areas:

1) TRUST- Satan comes as an angel of light but he's really a wolf in sheep's clothes. He may be a child abusing priest, a glory hungry pastor, or a gossiping church member; but, whichever he is, he destroys people's confidence in God and His work.

2) TALK- The Bible calls Satan an accuser. His Accusations are fourfold: Us to God, God to Us, Us to Others, and Us to our self. Satan is a liar and the father of lies but his continual lies lead some to start thinking he's true.

3) TEMPTATION- Satan tempts us to disobey God and become gods ourselves. He makes us believe that the desires of the flesh are the most important thing in the world. And then he says that if God really loved us He would let this desire be fulfilled. He fails to tell us that fulfilling that desire will give us a moment of pleasure and a life time of pain.

4) TRIALS- This is active persecution. It is painful and undeserved. It is Satan's way of seeking to destroy what he could not delude. What Satan doesn't realize, however, is that gold comes out of the fire!!

Don't let Satan sneak up on you. He's out to destroy your life and doom your soul. Hold to the Rock; Jesus Christ. That's the place of peace and Protection every year.